A major component of Platonic theory, as espoused in the *Republic*, is the division of the human soul into three distinct parts. Despite the initial clarity of Plato’s theory of the tripartite soul, many commentators have put forth the committee thesis, a view which argues that for his position to be consistent with other views put forth in the *Republic* his theory of the soul can contain no fewer than nine distinct parts, as the three parts Plato outlines are reduplicated into each of those three parts, creating what has been called the homunculus problem. Multiple justifications have been given for this move, and by exploring the argument from analogy in part I, the argument against perverted reason in part II and the argument from rational assent in part III, I will contend that all are motivated by a misreading of key components of the *Republic* and that the underlying inconsistency can be readily dealt with simply in the context of a three part soul. After refuting each of these arguments for the committee thesis, I will conclude by describing and building up a defense of the strong unity thesis, which makes sense of the seeming tensions in the *Republic* while maintaining no more than a tripartite soul.

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249 Julius Moravcsik (2001). See p. 40 for his distinction between the Strong Unity and Weak Unity theories. Later he refers to the Weak Unity theory as the Committee thesis, which is the term I will use here.

250 This actually indicates that Plato can allow no fewer than twelve parts to the soul, as the three he explicitly adheres to have added three in each, so nine new ones on top of the three previously existing. Nonetheless, the literature suggests that this view forces Plato to accept no fewer than nine.
I. Argument from Analogy

1. A just individual must be structurally identical to a just city.

2. If a just city contains three classes, each containing individuals with three parts to their soul then a just individual must have three parts to her soul, analogous to the classes, and each of those three parts must contain three parts, analogous to the individuals within the classes.

3. A just city does contain three classes of individuals with tripartite souls.

4. Therefore, a just individual must have three parts to her soul, analogous to the classes, and each of those three parts must contain three parts, analogous to the individuals within the classes.

The argument above is a logical depiction of Annas’ defense of the committee thesis. In order to respond to this defense, I will deny the first premise, which is a very weakly defended assumption on her part. Additionally, I can grant the first premise and show an additional difficulty with her argument at the level of premise 3. According to Plato, “a just man won’t differ at all from a just city in respect to the form of justice” (435a9-b1). On this view, Annas and I agree, but a disagreement arises when exploring what it means for the form to not differ. Annas reads same form as implying structural identity, such that any structure existent in a just city must also be existent in a just individual. This is the motivation behind her key assumption, stated in premise 1 above, but I find very little evidence for this reading of same Form. Annas rightly reads into the discussion of the same Form the appeal to the Theory of the Forms, but improperly understands what that

\[251\] Julia Annas (1981), 148-149.

\[252\] Ibid.
There is a form of a table, which all particular tables share in. A wood table, a stone table, a plastic table, a table with four outside legs, and a table with a single leg that fans out are all particular types of tables that, despite their lack of structural identity with each other all partake in the same form of a table. When deciding whether things are of the same form structural identity is not sought in any instance, but instead the focus is on necessary parallels. All tables, it seems, must have a flat surface and some sort of support system, but they do not need to be structurally identical. Plato seems to indicate as much when he tells us "we customarily hypothesize a single form in connection with each of the many things to which we apply the same name" (596a5-7). Obviously his use of "customarily" indicates that this process could just be wrong, but in the context of the beginning of book X, his statement is referring to the same process Socrates and his interlocutors have been using the whole time, as it regards the parts of the soul and justice itself.

Additionally, there is prima facie reason to reject Annas' assumption, as it flies in the face of the explicit claim Plato makes as regards the parallels between the just city and the just individual. Plato does not argue for structural identity in his link between city and soul, but rather is content that "if an individual has these same three parts in his soul, we will expect him to be correctly called by the same names as the city if he has the same conditions in them" (435b7-c). He is not concerned with the link between the city and soul being infinitely regressive so that all structures found in one must be in the other. He explicitly cuts the link off at the three parts, and does not wish to travel any further down the line, as Annas wrongly claims he must do. Thus, there is reason to both urge

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253 It has been brought to my attention by Andre Archie that Annas may be understanding "structural identity" in the Aristotelian sense of identical function and purpose rather than material structural identity. I do not see any reason to assume this in what she has written, and if this is how she understands structural identity then all the problems that she claims arise from her view wouldn’t actually arise.
Annas to defend her assumption as well as deny such an assumption. But, the assumption can be granted while further problems can be found with her argument.

Premise three contends, rightly, that the city is made up of three classes of individuals each with tripartite souls. This premise, itself, is unproblematic, but it’s necessary implication is troublesome. If structural identity is necessary then any structure found in the city must be in the individual. This produces a few more troublesome results. First, each class contains a large amount of individuals each with tripartite souls, so it would seem that to be structurally identical the individual wouldn’t just have reason, spirit and appetite reduplicated into each of the three parts of her soul, but would instead have a tripartite soul, each part containing multiple reduplications of the three parts all working on the same level. This seems especially problematic at the level of reason, insofar as the city contains multiple philosopher-kings ruling at any given time, but to parallel that structure in the individual would imply a group of homunculi that rule by committee using their rationality, which is also perhaps made up of even more homunculi doing the same thing. Once they reach an agreement they pass it up to the larger scale Reason and then that provides psychological motivation for whatever the decision is reached. While Annas may simply agree and argue that this is precisely her point, that Plato must be committed to such odd conclusions, it is clearly not her argument that the individual soul would be this much of a mess.

Finally, if premise three is followed through and the tripartite soul is reduplicated into each part of the soul, then the city is no longer made up of three classes of individuals with tripartite souls but rather of three classes of individuals with a nine-part soul. This, in turn, requires moving back to the individual and amending his soul to take account of that change in the city, requiring an additional reduplication to maintain the structural identity. This process must continue ad infinitum if the goal is structural identity, but it also clearly indicates that structural identity is an impossible burden to meet. If structural
identity is *prima facie* incorrect, and there are particular reasons not to accept it based on Plato's understanding of the Forms, and if assuming it is true creates an impossible situation to resolve, then Annas’s argument for the committee thesis has been defeated.

II. Argument against Perverted Reason

1. The rational part of the soul only has two desires: to rule, and to seek the Truth.

2. The unjust individual does not seek the Truth nor have her rational part ruling.

3. The unjust individual does require rational calculation to function properly.

4. If reason isn’t seeking the truth nor ruling, then it cannot be rationally calculating for the unjust individual.

5. Therefore, each part of the soul must have its own rational capacity.

The above argument is one example in favor of the committee thesis from the argument against perverted reason. The general thrust of the argument is that since Plato does argue that reason is concerned with seeking the truth and ruling, it cannot rationally calculate towards ends that are not good. Thus, the oligarchic man cannot make use of reason to rationally calculate the correct interest to charge because that is not an end that reason would form from Truth. If reason were to do this type of rational calculation it would be reasoning against the Good, which it supposedly is unable to do. This argument assumes that an unjust person does still *have* a rational part of the soul and, therefore, it must be either inoperative, which leads to the argument above, or else it must be capable of reasoning for perverted ends, which doesn’t lead to the committee thesis but is apparently a misrepresentation of
the rational part of the soul. This dilemma is justified, and my
goal here will be to defend the opposing horn of the dilemma,
by denying both premise 1 and premise 4, for similar reasons.

In Book IX of the Republic Socrates is credited as saying
that “It is obvious to anyone that the part by which we learn is
always wholly straining to know where the truth lies” (581b5-
6). This appears to be a pretty clear indication that the rational
part, that by which we learn, cannot do anything but strain for
the truth. But of course if this was truly what Socrates meant,
then the desire to rule, which he assigns to Reason in Book IV
would be impossible, unless it could be somehow shown to not
be another independent desire but rather an extension of
striving for the Truth. 254 Cooper, who inevitably supports the
committee thesis, does not seem to find a tension between
these two different claims, and thus understands Reason as
having two desires: to seek the truth, and to rule in accordance
with that truth. 255 But this still leaves the same issue of
perverted Reason. Since Reason only rules in accordance with
the truth, it cannot be the case that the unjust person can make
use of Reason’s desire to rule to have it rationally calculate to
unjust ends, while shutting down its desire to seek the truth.

It appears that Socrates either misspoke when he said
that Reason seeks the truth and rules in accord with it, or he
never meant for that to be exhaustive of its capabilities. Books
VI through IX seem to make a thorough case for Reason being
able to calculate towards unjust ends. Before examining those
key passages, however, it is important to refer back to Cooper’s
discussion of Reason for additional support, in clear
contradiction to his later conclusions. He argues, though
without appeal to textual evidence, that “Socrates admits that
not every person feels [the desire for the truth] as strongly” as
others, “but it must be active to some extent in everyone’s
life”. 256 He seems to be referring to Plato’s claim in Book VI that

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254 See, e.g., 441e4, 442c5, 552c6 and John Cooper (2001).
255 Cooper (2001), 95.
256 Ibid.
“everyone wants the things that really are good and disdains mere belief here... Every soul pursues the good” (505d8-e1). He is most certainly correct in this statement, for if Reason became inactive in anyone they would cease to be human, as human nature is defined by its tripartite soul and the desires that accompany such a soul. Nonetheless, this admission by Cooper doesn't quite get to the conclusion I want. Just because the desire is always active does not imply that Reason can rationally calculate towards unjust ends, it merely indicates that even the tyrant occasionally has the desire for the truth.

Many passages in the Republic can be appealed to in order to argue for this stronger claim. The general thrust of my argument against premise 1 is that although it may be the case that Reason only has two desires, to seek the truth and rule in accord with it, this does not indicate that Reason only has those two abilities. Just as spirit desires victory but can be subordinated to Reason so as to get angry at injustice, it is possible for Reason to be subordinated so as to use its abilities for ends not of its own making. First, while making use of the Allegory of the Cave, Plato argues that “the virtue of reason... never loses its power but is either useful and beneficial or useless and harmful, depending on the way it is turned... its sight isn't inferior but rather is forced to serve evil ends” (518e-519a4). This helps explain why the belief among common Athenians was that philosophers were either vicious or useless. It isn't that these people are true philosophers, but rather they are people with a high level of rational faculty who either haven't been nurtured appropriately or have for some reason turned away from what is best for the philosopher. Nonetheless, Plato argues that the most vicious of people must be more akin to the most just people in ability, including the rational parts of their soul, for the ability to do so much good is just the other side of the ability to do so much evil (491c-d7). Thus, it appears that it isn't merely the case that Reason can be turned towards unjust ends, but for those ends to be extremely unjust and vicious it must be Reason at work, and not merely spirit and/or appetite.
Plato additionally makes it clear that Reason is operative in the oligarchic person, working towards ends not of its own making: "He makes the rational and spirited parts sit on the ground beneath appetite, one on either side, reducing them to slaves. He won't allow the first to reason about or examine anything except how a little money can be made into great wealth" (553c7-d3). It is very clear, here, that the sort of reasoning going on is mere means-end calculation but it is certainly being done by the rational part of the person’s soul, not the appetitive part. Additionally, in his discussion of the Tyrant, Plato asks "mustn't his soul be full of slavery and unfreedom, with the most decent parts enslaved and with a small part, the maddest and most vicious, as their master?" (577d2-4) This is another indication that Reason hasn’t merely been made useless but in fact is working, as a slave, for ends not of its own creation. Thus, there is the clear recognition, especially throughout the discussion of the timocratic, oligarchic, democratic and tyrannical person, that Reason doesn’t merely have the ability to seek the truth and rule in accord with it, even if that is what it desires, but is capable of much more.257

This argument against premise 1 should be sufficient to prove the argument from perverted reason false, but premise 1’s truth can be granted and the argument defeated at the level of premise 4. Here my argument will be similar, but I will put more pressure on the notion of appetitive rationality. According to premise 4, since Reason cannot be the part of the soul doing the rational calculation it must be the case that the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul also have the ability to rationally calculate, at least at some level. This is the claim put forth by Cooper when he refers to basic means-end rational calculation taken in accord with the interest of a particular appetitive goal, such as to drink, as not arising within the rational part of the

257 For discussions of each type of person, see: 548-550c (Timocratic), 553-555b (Oligarchic), 558d-562 (Democratic) and 571-576-d (Tyrannical).
This would indicate, then, that while the appetitive and spirited parts may have no ability or desire to seek the truth, they nonetheless have some ability to rationally calculate how best to achieve the desires present in those parts of the soul, such as victory and wealth.

The first tension with this claim is that Plato explicitly denies its possibility. In his initial discussion of the tripartite soul, when referring to Reason and appetite he argues that there is “something in their soul, bidding them to drink, and something different, forbidding them to do so” and “that which forbids in such cases come into play... as a result of rational calculation” (439c5-d). His use throughout the Republic of the term rational calculation, in fact, is always the same in the original Greek (logismou), which provides prima facie reason for supposing that whenever it is used it is used in the same way, to indicate a calculation that occurs in the rational part of the soul. This is even clearer when it is realized that each time Socrates uses the phrase “rational calculation” or similar phrases based on rationality he always uses the same root of logismos. Just a few lines later he is even more explicit that the appetitive part of the soul is not merely incapable of seeking the truth, but is in fact wholly irrational: “We’ll call the part of the soul with which it calculates the rational part and the part with which it lusts, hungers, thirsts, and gets excited by other appetites the irrational appetitive part” (439d4-7, emphasis added). So, again, this does not function as a knock down argument against appetitive rationality but certainly functions to provide prima facie reason for denying it.

Past this claim of prima facie truth, additional pressure can be put on premise 4 based on what it appears to entail. If premise 4 is taken as true, it commits the theory to some kind of rational capacity in the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul. The actual kind of rational capacity is unclear, and it appears there is no principled way to determine whether it is merely some sort of means-end calculation, as Cooper argues, or if it

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258 Cooper (2001), 99-100.
actually can seek the truth in some way. Obviously if the theory of reduplication is correct then it would appear that it must be the latter, insofar as the artisans actually can seek the good as well, just perhaps not to as great of a degree as the philosopher-kings. It doesn’t seem principled in any way to give rational calculation to the appetitive and spirited parts without giving them at least some basic conception of the Good, or ability to reach such a conception. But following this path means truly going astray from what even the defenders of the Committee Thesis think Plato wants the soul to look like. Therefore, it appears that premise 4 necessarily leads to a contradiction with an assumption that my opponents still agree with – that only the rational part of the soul seeks the truth. Thus, the argument from perverted reason fails to justify the committee thesis.

III. Argument from Rational Assent

Thus far, I have shown both the Argument from Analogy and the Argument from Perverted Reason to be, at least, indefensible and most likely false. But in the process of such arguments I have also established the necessary tools to dismantle a final motivation for the committee thesis. The argument from Rational Assent makes use of the analogy as Annas does but also makes use of the defense for appetitive and spirited calculation found in the Argument from Perverted Reason. The argument can be sketched as follows:

1. Justice in the city and the individual are of the same form.

2. Adherence to the rule of the Rational class comes about through the Rational Assent of the other two classes.

3. If the individual has the same form of justice as the city, then adherence to the rule of Reason comes about through the Rational Assent of the other two parts of the soul.
4. Therefore, spirit and appetite must have rational capacities.

This argument does not necessarily rely on the assumption of structural identity found in Annas, although it may get close and as such may fall prey to some of the same arguments discussed above. Thus, I will object to premise 1 on the same grounds that I objected to premise 1 of the Argument from Analogy, insofar as it functionally argues that the structure of adherence to rule in the city must also exist in the individual. But, again, this may not be a necessary assumption of the argument, as it does appear that Plato talks as if Reason rules because the other two parts of the soul rationally assent. In such a case, our attack must take another route. Therefore, I will deny premise 3 on two grounds. First, I will refer back to the final claim made against the Argument from Perverted Reason, that there is no principled way to determine just how much rational capacity each part has. Second, I will examine a metaphorical interpretation of Plato’s use of assent to rule that, if true, takes account of what is said without appeal to appetitive and spirited rationality.

Against the Argument from Perverted Reason, it was argued that not only is there no principled way to determine just how much rationality the spirited and appetitive parts have, if any, but also that it appears at least more principled, based on the analogy with the city, to assign them some capacity to seek the truth. I also concluded that because even defenders of the committee thesis do not wish to assign the ability to know the truth to the appetitive and spirited parts, there is a contradiction in such an argument. Now I can strengthen such an argument to show that if appetite and spirit have to rationally assent to Reason’s rule, then they must have an ability to know the Truth, again leading to a contradiction. According to the rational assent view, spirit and appetite are not subordinated by force but rather by recognizing that the

259 See, e.g., 437d7-c10, 437c8-10, 439a9-b6 and Moravcsik (2001), 46.
The best state of affairs is one where Reason rules, just as the artisans and auxiliaries recognize that the just state requires the rule of the philosopher-kings. But it is important to remember, here, that the artisans and auxiliaries can rationally assent because they do, in fact, have a conception of the Good. Again, it may not be as great as the conception possessed by the philosopher-kings, but it must be active, as per Cooper’s analysis above. The artisans and auxiliary must be able to recognize what truly is just, to some extent, to be willing to suppress their unhindered desires to the rule of the philosopher-kings. The same would have to be true of the appetite and spirit for this argument to hold. It cannot be that appetite and spirit simply agree to be ruled based on the sort of means-end calculation some would assign to them. That sort of calculation cannot alter desires but merely find a way to fulfill such desires. Thus, unless appetite and spirit have a desire to be ruled by Reason, which would completely change the entire interpretation of the Platonic soul, there is no way means-end calculation could allow appetite and spirit to assent to Reason’s rule.

Thus, there is once again a clear contradiction, even for the defenders of the committee thesis. On one hand, only Reason can seek the Truth, but on the other appetite and spirit must be able to seek it to some extent, if they are to truly assent to Reason’s rule. This results in a problematic position. On one hand, it is literally true that Plato says spirit and appetite agree to Reason’s rule, but it is clear that that cannot be the case. To reconcile such an issue, Plato’s statements can be reinterpreted metaphorically. While such an interpretation would normally require a strong defense, being prima facie wrong, if such a plausible interpretation is combined with the arguments against the presumptive right interpretation then that should suffice as a strong defense of the position. If it can capture all the necessary features of the literal interpretation, while avoiding the pitfalls, then it can be said to be strongly defended.

In Plato’s discussion of the battle between appetite and reason, he makes use of the notion that Reason, at times, will
dissent to appetite’s goal of achieving its particular desire (437d7-c10). It is then, if interpreted literally, Reason’s job to persuade appetite to give up on the desire and assent to Reason’s decision. This seems to fit well with Annas’ notion of structural identity, insofar as the philosopher-kings do persuade the rest to adhere to the constitution of the Kallipolis. However, it creates an even stronger homunculi problem. Now, it isn’t merely the case that the tripartite soul has been reduplicated, but that these little humans actually all have cognitive abilities and determine action for the whole human only after a mini-democratic meeting where no less than unanimous consent will do. Instead of the tripartite soul being a description of conflicting and interacting desires in a single agent, the individual is now composed of at least three separate agents. This doesn’t seem to be in any way what Plato means to argue for, as his discussion about the initial conflict between Reason and Appetite seems to indicate. First, the discussion of why there are these two separate parts comes about in context of conflicting sources of desire, not conflicting agents (436b7-c). It is not as if, for instance, Leontius is schizophrenic and one personality in him wishes to look at the dead bodies and another personality opposes such a thing, it is that Leontius has conflicting desires, and since a single thing cannot will and not will simultaneously, it must be that there are two sources of desires in him that are conflicting. Nonetheless, it is always just Leontius who is the agent (439e-440b).

Reading the passages about assenting and dissenting metaphorically, the assent and dissent do not occur in any particular part of the soul, but rather in the soul as a whole. As Moravcsik argues, “the point of the metaphor is to take our ordinary narrow and purely intellectual conception of consent and widen it so as to represent the whole response of the soul” such that “it is what the soul does that is in practical contexts analogous to assenting in the purely mental, cognitive sense.”

This seems to fit better Plato’s overall aim with his discussion of

\footnotesize{260} Also see Moravcsik (2001), 46-47.

\footnotesize{261} Ibid., 46.
the tripartite soul. His aim was to explain the sources of our often conflicting desires, and if the tripartite soul is reimagined as something akin to the brain, with different parts being the sources of different desires, it isn’t the case that our temporal lobe *decides* to interpret the semantics of speech all on its own, and the rest of the brain assents. The person *decides* to interpret and the source of such interpreting is the temporal lobe. So, while this case may not hold to the literal language of Plato’s *Republic* it does appear to better fit his overall aims in the dialogue and in his theories in general. Therefore, there exists an alternative reading with good reasons for adhering to it. As such, premise 3 need not pose a problem because of its literal reading of the text.

IV. Conclusion

I have now defended the theory of the tripartite soul against three major motivations for the committee thesis, and its necessary homunculi problem. It is not the case that the just individual and just city are structurally identical, although they are nonetheless of the same Form. Additionally, such an interpretation collapses into a contradiction if structural identity is assumed. Furthermore, I have argued that even if it is the case that Reason *desires* only to seek the Truth and rule, it does not entail that Reason doesn’t have other abilities. As such, it can be turned towards perverted ends, and in fact in the most vicious people it is necessary that their Reason is functioning at a high level, because according to Plato no person with sub-par cognitive abilities could ever do great harm. Finally, I have shown the collapse of the Argument from Perverted Reason and the Argument from Rational Assent into a contradiction as well, while providing an alternative reading that has no such problem.

Thus, I have concluded what I am arguing *against* but it is important to reconcile the many arguments above into a thesis I can argue *for*. According to the Strong Unity Thesis,
Reason is always operative and has the ability to rationally calculate for both good and bad ends. When it is ruling it is seeking Truth, although it may also seek Truth when it is not ruling but only to a lesser degree. A part of the soul comes to rule not by assent of the other parts of the soul, but by force and subordination. Just as Reason is “enslaved” by the tyrant, among others, spirit and appetite are enslaved, but in an overall beneficial way, in the just person. Reason seeks the Truth, builds up ends for each part of the soul based on that knowledge, and then imposes such ends on the other parts of the soul. This is best fleshed out in Plato’s use of the imagery of the spirit as a guard dog, released by Reason to fulfill certain ends Reason wants fulfilled, and then again leashed as it heels at the foot of Reason once more.262 This leaves no more than three parts to the human soul, as rational calculation need not be transposed into the spirited or appetitive parts of the soul for any practical reasons, and the analogy with a city does not force such a transposition either.

With this conception of the tripartite soul, it gives greater defense to the view that what is at the heart of the Republic is not the ideal state, but rather the theory of human motivation. The analogy between city and individual is only beneficial insofar as it helps bring out the motivational theory of the individual, and in places where a perfect analogy may oppose the theory of motivation Plato wishes to argue for, he has taken account of it and come down on the side of the individual, not on the side of the city. The largest alteration this may make on interpretations of the Republic, however, is in its recognition that Reason most certainly can calculate towards bad ends, even if it never desires to. As such, Reason is demystified as the perfect part of the soul and put in its proper place as just another component, even if the most important one, of Plato’s theory of human motivation. Thus, in the end, the homunculi have been exorcised from Plato’s tripartite soul and returned to a single individual with multiple sources of desires.

262 See, e.g., 440a7-440b, 440c and 440d for three separate instances of spirit being unleashed by Reason.
This is an interpretation most in line with Plato’s explicit claims, most consistent with his tangential theories, and least problematic for fully understanding the Platonic theory of human motivation.

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