

Doing what belongs to oneself: Justice and the principle of functional differentiation

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Justice (δικαιοσύνη) is surely the most important theme of the *Republic*; justice of a city is defined as doing what belongs to oneself (τὸ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ πράττειν ; understood as doing one's occupation *for which one is naturally suited*) and not meddling in what belongs to others (μὴ πολυπραγμονεῖν ; not doing other people's occupation; *Republic* 433a1-b5). As many have noted (Waterfield (1993), et al.), the definition of justice is based on the principle of social specialization (or, of differentiation of functions in general), which has been established from 368a ff. According to the degree of conformity (or, lack of conformity) with the same principle, a series of degenerated forms of ruling are explored in the later stage at 543a1 ff., which culminates in the tyranny that lacks justice and the unity in terms of the principle of functional differentiation.

As the Athenian history testifies and as e.g. Critias in the *Charmides* exemplifies (given the correspondence between Critias as the dialogue character and as the historical person), the actual tyrants used the same expression (τὸ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ πράττειν) as one of their political slogans, though it is named as temperance (σωφροσύνη).

How could this happen? How is 'doing what belongs to oneself' used by such a tyrant, who is unjust, as a part of his propaganda? In short, there is a kind of verbal interface (and so-called polysemy) which allows one to use, and to understand, the same phrase differently, as the phrase 'doing what belongs to oneself' is in itself indeterminate. It doesn't have only one single *univocal* meaning independent of the context.

So, I go through the passages in which the verbally same phrase is used in different ways (even within the *Republic* 369e3-370a6; 433a1-b5; and *Charmides* 161b3-162b6); and clarify how to understand its different occurrences precisely. (It would be misleading to say simply that the phrase is discarded in one passage, but not in another. Considering the dramatic device and interactions, I attempt to show the author's ultimate intent of the usage in the given contexts.) All in all, tyrants' using the phrase (doing what belongs to oneself) as their slogan is in itself a limiting case which testifies and instantiates their injustice and incongruity in terms both of their intellectual understanding and actual political practice –and in reference to the principle of functional differentiation.

In the end, this again involves the principle of functional differentiation which is assumed to be evident in the course of dialogue. But to what extent can it be justified? How is it legitimately rooted in Plato's understanding of the nature and reality –the way the world is? (Kosman (2007), in Ferrari (2007), et al.) These are the fundamentally philosophical questions that I explore further on in the paper.

Selected Bibliography

Waterfield, R (1993), *Plato: Republic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ferrari, G.R.F. (ed) (2007), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Preference of format: shorter (20-minute presentation in a "parallel" session)