

Jason Gordon

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Bernard Yack

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### Paper #1-Minding One's Predetermined Business

Throughout Plato's *Republic*, a fictionalized Socrates discusses the meaning of justice and what a just society would entail, as well as discussing whether or not it is worth it to be just. The direct meaning of justice is first used as a question to begin the conversation, for its meaning will define exactly what a just society would entail. Without a definition of justice, there is no basis for judging whether a society is just or not. Later, it is found as part of the exploration into a just society. Plato defines justice as "the minding of one's own business and not being a busybody"<sup>1</sup>—essentially, ensuring that you will not interfere in others' lives and instead focusing on what you are to do. However, Plato seems to contradict himself, for while he argues that justice is minding one's own business, he also argues for a supposedly just society where the commoners are told what their business is. Here, it can be argued that this is contradictory, as the leading class is meddling in the business of others by telling the commoners what their business is. However, this is inaccurate, as Plato argues that we do not have the right to determine what our own business is because it provides no direction, and the choice to decide what one's own business interferes with others' business. His rationalization of this seemingly contradictory statement is not contradictory, for he is arguing for a just society, not a free one.

Notably, the argument of not being able to choose your own business is closely linked to Plato's critique of democracy in Book 6 and Book 8 of *The Republic*. Democracy, from Plato's perspective, allows for choice to do what you want, as well as choice with regards to leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd ed., 1968, 111.

While this allows freedom, Plato also argues that it becomes unjust by his own definition of justice. In Book 6, Plato compares a society of self-choice to sailors on a ship: “The sailors are quarreling with one another about the piloting, each supposing he ought to pilot, although he has never learned the art”<sup>2</sup>. In a society where each person chooses what their business should be, there can be people clamoring for the same position, for they believe that the position is their business. However, it is possible—and even likely, according to Plato—that none of them should be in that position, for none of them are qualified. While having the ability to choose your own business permits freedom, it is not just through Plato’s definition of justice, for the people involved are neither minding their own business nor not being a busybody. They are instead intervening in others’ business and, by definition, being a busybody. From this analogy, Plato can more effectively argue his point that one’s business should be pre-determined. If it was left up to the people to determine what their business would be, there would be chaos and disagreement. However, authoritatively dictating everyone’s business should ensure that people can mind their own business effectively and not interfere with others’ business.

Moreover, Plato also argues that the way of life in a democracy—where one can choose their own business—is inherently unjust. While democracy is certainly a free and equal society, it is also directionless, as one does not have a specific business to adhere to. According to Plato, someone who is striving to be the most equal “shakes his head at [all possible desires] and says that all are alike and must be honored on an equal basis”<sup>3</sup>. The so-called fairest man cannot decide on one thing, he must try them all and honor all on an equal playing field, regardless of personal preference. Thus, he is directionless and unjust, as he has no specific business to mind and instead busies himself in many things that may be others’ business. The fairest man serves as

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<sup>2</sup> *The Republic*, 168.

<sup>3</sup> *The Republic*, 239.

a counterargument to democracy's perceived justness by providing an alternative view on what democracy does. Instead of being a just society, it breeds busybodies and thus becomes the opposite of what Plato's definition for just is. Pro-democracy supporters would argue that a free and equal society is a just society, and thus democracy in its purest form is inherently just. However, Plato establishes a different definition for justice, and democracy's opposition to it is strengthened in the fairest man. Plato is arguing to make a society where everyone minds their own business and interferes with no one else's business, and with no business to mind and having to try everything equally, the people in a democracy are instead interfering with others' business, which Plato categorizes as unjust.

It can also be argued that there is a simple fix to this issue in democracies, which would be to put a system in place to help citizens understand what their business is. Such a system would be able to discern what people's business should be, thus making the democracy more just. There are certainly issues with this idea, the first one being that if the citizens are not able to choose their business, then it is no longer free nor equal. Some businesses will be better than others, and multiple people will want something that only one of them can get. If this was an optional mechanism, then people would disregard the results if they did not like it, thus reverting to the directionlessness plaguing the democracy before. Moreover, taking that decision out of the hands of the people can be argued as no different than what the Guardians in Plato's just society do, as they place people into the places that best suit them.

Furthermore, Plato would also argue that his just republic would be fair, even without the agency to choose one's business, as in his just republic, everyone is told to believe that they are born of the earth. Specifically, Plato equalizes everyone by stating that "When the job [of forming the person] had been completely finished, then the earth, which is their mother, sent

them up. And now...they must think of the other citizens as brothers and born of the earth”<sup>4</sup>. This noble lie immediately argues that everyone is equal and should be treated as such. Because they are all born of the same mother, there is nothing familial discerning them, allowing people to move social status much more quickly than if families existed. Plato then creates three classes within this, based upon a supposed metal in their soul. With that, it is possible to discern people and to tell them what their business is without there being sufficient argument, as it is supposedly a physical difference between the ones who rule and the ones who are ruled. Doing so also gives legitimacy to the ruling class, even though it is through a lie. It also allows for classes for people to move between, for this half of the lie, combined with the first half, allows anyone to become the rulers, while still marking them as the rulers.

In order to discern what one’s business is, there must be a system to help the citizens understand why they were chosen to do their business. Without a physical characteristic, someone could reject the role the society has given them and instead attempt to subvert the system. With this noble lie, that is not possible. Instead, the noble lie allows for a feeling of equality and fairness while still also allowing those in charge to decide on what one’s business is and is not, enforcing Plato’s definition of justice.

Another challenge for Plato is to pick a type of person to decide what one’s business is. For Plato, someone must judge each person fairly, and a philosopher is the one who can most accurately judge someone. As he puts it, “[A philosopher] would rub out one thing and draw in another again, until they made human dispositions as dear to the gods as they admit of being”<sup>5</sup>. Here, Plato argues that a philosopher would continue to pursue divine perfection of everyone until they got as close as one could be. Essentially, they have good judgment and will pursue

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<sup>4</sup> *The Republic*, 94.

<sup>5</sup> *The Republic*, 181.

perfection until they find it. Moreover, this assumes that philosophers know what this perfection is, and can compare humans to it. For Plato's argument, this makes them the only ones capable of leading, and by that position, determining what one's business is. In contrast to the chaos of the ship analogy, Plato's idea of a philosopher-king is incredibly orderly. While the ship has many people fighting for one position, while none of them being qualified, the philosopher draws and re-draws someone until they are essentially perfect, ensuring that they will be the best to serve at a certain position. This idea takes all choice out of what is one's business and instead delegating it to someone who will know what someone's perfect business is. However, such an argument has its flaws. Plato is speaking as if the philosopher-king knows perfection, which is incredibly idealistic at best. He also describes removing someone from their circumstances as incredibly difficult, but possible. This again idealizes the philosopher-king, thinking of him as more than just human, even with training.

Therefore, Plato is not contradicting himself when arguing that justice is minding one's own business and not being a busybody while also arguing that in a just society, someone else should determine what one's business is. He instead argues that determining one's own business is unjust itself, as it would lead to directionlessness and being a busybody to others' business. This argument is closely tied into his critiques of democracy, where he argues that democracy not only promotes directionlessness but also allows people to compete for jobs they are not qualified for—leaving the job up to the person who is best at convincing, not the one that is best for the job. While Plato's just society is not democratic, it is just and equal. The noble lie ensures that familial ties do not exist while also allowing for a ruling class, allowing for social mobility and a class structure to move upon. Having that class structure allows the ruling class to effectively select what one's business is, thus providing direction and limiting busybodies. Moreover, the

ruling class is intended to be philosophers, which, in Plato's eyes, are effective at disregarding circumstances and focusing on ability alone. Furthermore, this argument against choosing your own business essentially sets the argument against democracy in his meaning of justice. Without it, the democratic society would be much more just than it is. However, democracies become unjust because they directly contradict what Plato defines as justice.

## Bibliography

Allan Bloom. *The Republic of Plato*. 2nd ed., 1968.