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MAJOR INTERPRETATIONS OF PLATONIC JUSTICE

BAŞLICA PLATONCU ADALET YORUMLARI

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ÖZ: Günümüzde "Adalet nedir?" sorusu ihmal edilmektedir. Çağdaş filozoflar, adaletin yapısını anlamadan adaleti gerçekleştirmeye çalışmaktadır. Fakat Platon, *Devlet*'inde oldukça kapsamlı bir adalet tanımı vermeye çalışmıştır. İlk bakışta tanımın değeri anlaşılamayabilir; fakat dikkatlice incelendiğinde onun kapsamlı karakteristikleri görülecektir. Bu amaçla, Platon'un *Devlet*'indeki adaletin başlıca okumaları gösterilecektir. Platoncu adalet yorumları ana hatlarıyla üç gurupta sınıflandırılabilir. *İlk grup* Platon'un formel adalet tanımına odaklanır ve Platoncu adaleti *iyi-işleyiş* olarak anlamaktadır. Gerasimos Santas bu işlevselci yorumu sistematik olarak savunmaktadır. *İkinci olarak*, Gregory Vlastos işlevselci okumayı eleştirir ve adalet tanımının ikinci formülasyonuna kulak verir: "birisinin kendisinin olana sahip olması ve [kendine düşeni] yapması" (433e-434a). *Son olarak*, sıra dışı ancak elverişli olan bir adalet yorumu verilecektir: Platoncu adaletin Aristotelesçi okuması. Kenneth Dorter, Platoncu adaleti Aristotelesçi bir çerçeve içinden yorumlamaktadır. Dorter, Platon'un adalet anlayışına *Nikomakhos'a Etik*'in merceğinden bakmaktadır. Dorter, Aristotelesçi orta yol öğretisinin Platoncu adalet anlayışı ile uyumlu olduğunu iddia eder; böylece, Platon için adalet *ifratla tefrit arasındaki orta yoldur*. Makalede, bu üç farklı yorum değerlendirilecek ve Vlastos'un okumasının en doğru ve meşru okuma olduğu öne sürülecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Platon, Aristoteles, Adalet Tanımı, Devlet, etik, siyaset, şehir-devleti.*

ABSTRACT: The question, "What is justice?" is ignored in our time. Contemporary philosophers seek to realize justice without understanding the nature of justice. In the *Republic*, however, Plato attempted to give a definition of justice which is comprehensive enough. At first sight, the definition may not be appreciated; but if it is examined with caution, its far-reaching characteristics would be seen. To this end, main readings of justice will be shown in Plato's *Republic*. Interpretations of Platonic justice can mainly be classified in three groups. *The first group* focuses on Plato's formal definition of justice and understands Platonic justice as *well-functioning*. Gerasimos Santas systematically defends this functionalist interpretation. *Secondly*, Gregory Vlastos criticizes the functionalist reading and pays attention to the second formulation of the definition of justice: "the having and doing of one's own" (433e-434a). *Finally*, an unusual but favorable interpretation of justice would be given: an Aristotelian reading of Platonic justice. Kenneth Dorter

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interprets Platonic justice within an Aristotelian framework. Dorter observes Plato's conception of justice through the lens of *Nicomachean Ethics*. Dorter asserts that the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean is in accordance with Platonic justice; so, for Plato, justice is *the mean between excess and deficiency*. In this paper, these three different kinds of interpretations would be assessed and proposed Vlastos' reading as the most accurate and legitimate.

Key Words: *Plato, Aristotle, Definition of Justice, the Republic, ethics, politics, the polis.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The question, "What is justice?" is ignored in our time. Contemporary philosophers seek to realize justice without understanding the nature of justice. In the *Republic*, however, Plato attempted to give a definition of justice which is comprehensive enough. At first sight, the definition may not be appreciated; but if it is examined with caution, its far-reaching characteristics can be seen. To this end, in this study major readings of justice will be examined in order to find the strongest and most correct interpretation of Platonic justice.

Interpretations of Platonic justice can mainly be classified in three groups. *The first* group focuses on Plato's formal definition of justice and understands Platonic justice as well-functioning. Gerasimos Santas systematically defends the functionalist interpretation. *Secondly*, Gregory Vlastos criticizes the functionalist and pays attention to the second formulation of the definition of justice: "the having and doing of one's own" (433e-434a). *Final interpretation* is an unusual but favorable interpretation: an Aristotelian reading of Platonic justice. Kenneth Dorter interprets Platonic justice with an Aristotelian framework. Dorter examines Plato's conception of justice through the lens of *Nicomachean Ethics*. Dorter asserts that the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean is in accordance with Platonic justice; so, for Plato, justice is the mean between excess and deficiency. In this paper, these three different kinds of interpretations would be assessed and proposed Vlastos' reading as the most accurate and legitimate.

Since Plato tells his ideas in the dialogue form, it is a tough job to understand Plato's theses in his works. Although the Socratic method pave the way for teaching and investigation, it can be deceptive sometimes. Careful and critical reading is necessary to comprehend implicit meanings in Plato's works. Since the *Republic* is one of Plato's mature philosophical works, these prerequisites strongly needed. In this study, thus, the analytic method is preferred in order to grasp the meaning of Platonic justice accurately, but not satisfied with it. The synthetic

method is also employed when necessary. This inquiry is therefore based on analysis as well as synthesis.[1]

The main discussion of the paper is carried out in the *Republic*; because Plato examines the problem of justice comprehensively in this book (indeed justice is the major question discussed throughout the work). In case of need however other works also called for the analysis, such as Plato's *Statesman* and *Laws,* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. For the sake of argument, the inquiry is limited by these works.[2]

2. THE FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH

The foundations of this approach can be found at the end of Book I of the *Republic*: Socrates argues that each thing has a virtue related to its task which is *what it does best* or *nothing can do without it* (353a-b). For instance, thinking is the work of reason and the virtue of reason is wisdom. Thinking is the work of reason alone. Reason is an example of a peculiar task of something and a soldier can be an instance of a function which is best suited. That is to say, a warrior can do other jobs as well, but its ideal function is fighting against enemies. His nature is best suited to battle, and his virtue is courage. "Optimal function" is preferred for man-made mechanisms, and "exclusive function"[3] is used for natural things. In the following lines, Socrates connects this idea to everything (353b), i.e., *psyche*, *polis*, and even *cosmos*. Each organism has a function, and all parts of an organism have

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[1] *The philosophical analysis* that is employed here depends on the analysis of arguments. To understand and examine the rationale behind the philosophical interpretations, we need to break it down into its parts (assumptions, conclusions, and the line of reasoning). Then these components should be questioned whether they are legitimate or not. If the interpretations pass the validity test, next we should examine whether they are faithful to the text or not. See especially chapter 4, "Argument Analysis," in David Kelley, *The Art of Reasoning*, 4th ed., W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York and London 2014. The other method that is used in this paper is *the philosophical synthesis*. Some philosophers call it "the method of composition." In this method, known parts are synthesised in order to show the meaning of the unknown. At the end of the synthesis, if the conclusion is true, it follows that antecedents are also true. If the conclusion is false, one of the antecedents is at least false. However, since this investigation is a textual analysis, we should first test its faithfulness to the text. For the methods of analysis and synthesis see Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *Logic or the Art of Thinking,* trans. and ed. by Jill Vance Buroker, 5th ed., Cambridge University Press, New York 1996, pp. 233-240.

[2] For the ancient Greek ideas of justice particularly before Plato, see Eric A. Havelock, *The Greek Concept of Justice: from its Shadow in Homer to its Substance in Plato*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1978.

[3] Gerasimos Santas, *Understanding Plato's* Republic, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2010,p. 63.

June 2018 Volume 20 Issue 1 (55-80)

a function as well. Take a university, for instance. The structure of a university is divided into two parts: academic and administrative. Academics are concerned with academic tasks: lectures, seminars, workshops etc. Managers and officers are related to administrative work: campus services, buildings etc. An academic cannot do administrative tasks well enough and an officer cannot give a lecture. The best function of an academic is related to teaching and research; and the optimal function of an officer is administrative works. Officers are good for academics, and academics are good for students; because, officers are responsible for providing appropriate conditions for education, and academics are responsible for teaching. If the academic and administrative parts do their functions well, the university does its function well; and if the university performs its function well, it is a good university. The functional theory "tells us that things with functions are good of their kind when they perform their function well; and also that whatever causes them to perform their function well is good for them, and what poorly, bad for them."[4] Thus, the primary aim of an object is the best fulfillment of its function: "a good one does all these things well" (353e). This approach is natural in the sense that everything has a function which is more proper to its nature. For instance, academics are for teaching and doing research with students; so, the nature of an academic should be appropriate to this function. Officers in a university are to provide the required environment for education; therefore, their nature should be fitting to this kind of works. Hence there is a "natural division of labor matched to those parts"[5] as an organic form. Each part of a structure – whether it is man-made or not – has a distinct function and all of them contribute to the same end. The functionalist approach relies heavily on the "*one man, one art*" (370b) argument which Socrates describes in Book II of the *Republic*:

> Now, what about this? Must each one of them put his work at the disposition of all in common—for example, must the farmer, one man, provide food for four and spend four times as much time and labor in the provision of food and then give it in common to the others; or must he neglect them and produce a fourth part of the food in a fourth part of the time and use the other three parts for the provision of a house, clothing, and shoes, not taking the trouble to share in common with others, but minding his own business for himself?' —And Adeimantus said, 'Perhaps, Socrates, the latter is easier than the former.' —'It wouldn't be strange, by Zeus,' I said. 'I myself also had the thought when you spoke that, in the first place, each of us is naturally not quite

[4] Ibid., p. 65.
[5] Ibid., pp. 64-5.

> like anyone else, but rather differs in his nature; different men are apt for the accomplishment of different jobs (369e-370b).

Here, Plato's Socrates justifies the division of labor depending on different characters of people and efficiency. Since human beings' nature differ, their job which they do best will diverge as well. So specialization is a must. Functionalist interpreters of Plato infer that persons have to mind their own business which they do best. A baker should not try to be the ruler of a *polis* or a warrior should not attempt to be a baker. Each person has to do the work which they are best at and that is proper to their nature. Specialization makes living easy and economic. Specialization brings forth expert knowledge, but this knowledge is not *episteme*. *Episteme* is the knowledge of the rulers of the city: rulers' "knowledge is different from the knowledge (*episteme*) of the carpenter, the farmer, and the smith because, in its relations with itself and with other cities, it looks out for what is best for the city as a whole."[6] The knowledge of the rulers provides good governance (428b-d). On the other hand, the craft knowledge aims at the good of its subject matter only. That is to say, the craft knowledge is just the knowledge of its art (*techne*). The craft knowledge is about "the affairs connected with some particular thing in the city," but the knowledge of the rulers is "about how the city as a whole would best deal with itself and the other cities" (428d). Experts thus should perform their own arts in line with their expertise. They should not go beyond their expertise. Function A is best realized by worker A, function B is best fulfilled by engineer B. If someone wants worker A to do function B and engineer B to do function A; they decrease the efficiency at least. What is more, the order of the *polis* is disturbed. In addition to that "one man, one art" means that engineer B cannot do function A and function B simultaneously. Engineer B can do function B alone (434a).

So far, this is not an extraordinary idea; but besides, Plato suggests that a person's doing various jobs is unjust. In other words, if persons seek to do a job which is not suitable to their nature, they do injustice to themselves: "it is located in the principle of specialisation that has guided the discussion of the just city from its inception. Thus the definition of justice is summarized as 'everyone performing its own task'."[7] In Book IV of the *Republic*, Socrates defines justice in the *polis* in accordance with the "one man, one art" rule. Socrates refers justice to the above-mentioned best function rule which is required in a well-functioning city:

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[6] Richard D. Parry, *Plato's Craft of Justice*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1996, p. 96.

[7] D.J. Sheppard, *Plato's Republic*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2009, p. 61.

> That rule we set down at the beginning as to what must be done in everything when we were founding the city–this, or a certain form of it, is, in my opinion, justice. Surely we set down and often said, if you remember, *that each one must practice one of the functions in the city, that one for which his nature made him naturally most fit.*'—'Yes, we were saying that.' —'And further, that justice is the minding of one's own business and not being a busybody, this we have both heard from many others and have often said ourselves.'—'Yes, we have.' —'Well, then, my friend,' I said, 'this–*the practice of minding one's own business–when it comes into being in a certain way, is probably justice* (433a-b, emphasis added).

If the functionalist plainly reads this passage they do not infer anything other than what is apparent. So, according to the functionalist, *justice* means every person's *doing their own job* which their nature is best suited to and absent oneself from other jobs which are not proper to. In this way, everyone performs their best function that provides the well-functioning of the structure. This principle, *minding one's own business*, which is the formal definition of justice, makes everything just. Plato, first, discovers this idea in the structure of a city and then he again finds the same principle in the human soul. Afterwards he conceptualizes this principle as the definition of justice. The functionalist concludes this passage in this way: "the concept of optimal function indeed is the best explanation of what Plato means by the formula of social and psychic justice, 'doing one's own work,' one for the optimal function of each citizen in the just city and one for the optimal function of each part of the just soul."[8] Plato derives this conception from the analysis of the *polis*. It has three main functions: 1) administration 2) defense and 3) provision. Administration is fulfilled by the rulers. Defense is performed by warriors. Provision is supplied by merchants and artisans. Each function is satisfied by the relevant class. This differentiation results from their diverse natures. Rulers have "inborn high intelligence;" soldiers have "inborn high spirit;" and merchants and artisans have "inborn abilities for arts and trades."[9] All things considered, a well-functioning city arises out of these circumstances: "a city is just when it is organized so that those of high intelligence (and appropriate education) are assigned to rule, those of high spirit (and appropriate education) to defend, and

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[8] Santas, *Understanding Plato's Republic,* p. 75, n. 12; Guthrie also interprets "doing one's own" as "each one performing the one function in the community for which he is by his nature best suited." (W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Volume 4: *Plato, the Man and His Dialogues: Earlier Period*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1975, p. 166).

[9] Ibid., p. 90.

those of artisan abilities (and appropriate education) to provision the city."[10] This is the full definition of justice in the *polis*, which originates from the *one person-one job* principle. At the end of the foundation of the *polis* according to this principle, Plato's Socrates claims that there is a similarity between the city and the soul. He argues that the characteristics of a city stem from the characteristics of the people who reside in that city:

> isn't it quite necessary for us to agree that the very same forms and dispositions as are in the city are in each of us? I said. Surely they haven't come there from any other place. It would be ridiculous if someone should think that the spiritedness didn't come into the cities from those private men who are just the ones imputed with having this character, such as those in Thrace, Scythia, and pretty nearly the whole upper region; or the love of learning, which one could most impute to our region, or the love of money, which one could affirm is to be found not least among the Phoenicians and those in Egypt (435e-436a).

Socrates contends that these countries are described with these virtues because of the persons which have these excellences. For instance, ancient Greece is titled with the virtue of wisdom because of the philosophers who lived there, and ancient Thrace is identified with the spiritedness because of the brave warriors who lived there. Therefore, Plato draws an analogy between the *polis* and the *psyche* and asserts that the soul determines the nature of the city: "to discover justice and the other virtues in the human soul Plato thus proceeds on the assumption that justice in the human soul is 'the same' as justice in his completely good city, or that the just soul is isomorphic (the same in structure) to the just city."[11] So, functionalists observe justice as the ideal performance of one's own function in the human soul as well. Let us examine the human *psyche* in order to see the concept of justice again: "Socrates gives a long argument to show that there is indeed such a natural division of the human soul into psychic parts and a division of psychic labors that match the parts uniquely. This argument takes for granted that there are distinct psychic activities"[12] concerning the parts of the soul. That is to say, the *rational* part of the soul is proper for ruling (441e), the *spirited* part of the soul is convenient for fighting (442b), and the *desiring* part is appropriate for the satisfaction of bodily needs (439d). Gerasimos Santas says that "the optimal function of reason is to rule the person, of spirit to defend, and of appetite to

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[10] Ibid., p. 90.
[11] Ibid., p. 76.
[12] Ibid., p. 80.

provide for bodily needs."[13] Their nature is fit to satisfy the related functions. If the desiring part attempts to be the head of the soul, or tries to manage the spirited part, then there will be a conflict in the *psyche* (440b). For this reason, each part of the human soul has to do its own job which its nature best fits. If each part of the soul performs its unique function, then justice is well-established in the entire *psyche*. "Therefore, a soul is just when it is so organized that reason is assigned to rule the person, spirit to defend it, and appetite to provide for one's bodily needs. This is the full definition of psychic justice."[14] In this way, the well-functioning of the human soul is secured. Nonetheless, someone could object that minding one's own business, which is the core of justice, is a selfish rule; because each part is just doing its own job and not interested in the others' functioning. But Plato takes step for this objection. He puts the irrational parts of the soul under the rational part's order: "justice in the soul obtains when reason rules, spirit helps reason execute its commands, and appetite obeys. Justice is a holistic virtue – it pertains to the functioning well of the whole soul, as justice in the city is a holistic virtue."[15] Since reason is master and the other parts are servant (441e), such conflicts or troubles do not come out. Each part of the *psyche*, as well as the *polis*, works in harmony. Justice provides this harmony, because virtue exists in all parts of the soul: each doing its optimal function in accordance with other parts. As a result, Plato achieves the same concept of justice in the human soul: "we surely haven't forgotten that this city was just because each of the three classes in it minds its own business." … "Then we must remember that, for each of us too, the one within whom each of the parts minds its own business will be just and mind his own business" (441e). The definition of justice appears again in the soul: justice is every single being's performance of its distinctive optimal function. This definition had been seen in the city in the same form. In the human soul, reason rules, spirit defends, and appetite sustains the body; in the city, rulers govern, soldiers defend, and artisans produce the necessary provisions. The function of the corresponding part is identical. If leaders, warriors, and artisans perform their functions well, then the city is just. If the rational part, the spirited part, and the desiring part of the soul perform their functions well, then the human soul is just. Plato thus observes this principle as valid in the city and in the human soul; and from the functionalist reading of Plato, *justice as doing one's own job* is necessary for a well-functioning city.

[13] Ibid., p. 90.
[14] Ibid., p. 90.
[15] Ibid., p. 89.

3. VLASTOS' CRITIQUE OF THE FUNCTIONALIST INTERPRETATION

The functionalist approach received strong criticisms from preeminent scholar of ancient philosophy Gregory Vlastos. He argues that functionalists misconceive and mistranslate the famous expression of justice, "doing its own job," in Book IV of the *Republic*. According to Vlastos, the correct translation of the phrase should be "does its own" (441d). Words like job, function, or work—added by translators—do not exist in the original text. The phrase "doing its own," to Vlastos, "translated in this baldly literal way, makes awkward English. But this is not an unmixed evil. It will serve as a constant reminder that what we get in the original is an idiomatic, formulaic, expression which is expected to suggest, rather than state in full, what is in Plato's mind."[16] So adding these words (function, job, work etc.) leads to misunderstanding of the meaning of justice. That is to say, the literal translation of the phrase is more correct than "mind your own business" or "doing one's own job." Additionally, Vlastos claims that if Plato "wanted to be more explicit he would have filled out "its own" with *ergon* ("work" or "function")."[17] Hence, for Vlastos, Plato should have referred to another idea. The sole firm evidence for functionalists is in Book II of the *Republic*, but Vlastos says that the phrase "doing one's own job" is misinterpreted by them:

> Plato had not so used it in any earlier passage—not even in the *Republic*. The same words occur in 370a4 but there they carry only the ordinary, commonplace, sense of 'doing one's own work,' and the clause I have cited [433a5-6] is being used to designate the unspecialized, jack-of-all-trades, activity (the very opposite of Platonic *dikaiosune*!) to which one would be forced if one lacked the privilege of living in a functionally articulated economic society which allows each person to specialize in the one kind of work he can do best, *this* being the primitive "adumbration" of *dikaiosune* at the lowest, purely economic, form of human association.[18]

Therefore, according to Vlastos, understanding justice as "doing one's own job" is at least a very rough definition. From Vlastos' point of view, functionalists represent a very narrow conception of Platonic justice. The Platonic conception of

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[16] Gregory Vlastos, "Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*," in *Platonic Studies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1973, p. 115.
[17] Ibid., p. 115.
[18] Gregory Vlastos, "The Theory of Social Justice in the Polis in Plato's *Republic,*" in volume 2 of *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, ed. Daniel W. Graham, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995, p. 73, n. 22.

June 2018 Volume 20 Issue 1 (55-80)

justice does not consist of economic principles alone. So, glossing Platonic justice as just "doing one's own job" is insufficient and untrue. Before interpreting and exposing Platonic theory of justice, Vlastos first revises the passage in question in Book IV of the *Republic*:

> What we laid down at the start as a general requirement when we were founding the polis, *this, or some form it*, is justice. We did lay down, and often stated, if you recall, that every single person ought to engage in that *social* function [literally: that function which concerns the polis] for which his own nature is best fitted.—We did say this.—And indeed that to do one's own and not to be meddlesome is justice, this we have often heard from many others and have often said ourselves.—We have said it.—This then, my friend, if taken *in a certain way*, appears to be justice: *to do one's own* (433a-b, italics are added).[19]

To Vlastos, this is the correct translation of the passage. It can be seen that he erased "work" from the phrase and added the word "social" to function; and he maintains that this social function is related to the *polis*, not a personal task. Vlastos then draws attention to the vagueness of the definition; the "defining formula is imprecise, and is meant to be: that is the force of the qualifying phrases, 'this, or some form of it, is justice'; 'this . . . if taken in a certain way, is justice.' Plato refers to the very start of the investigation of the nature of justice in Book II"[20] which is the regulative principle of economy: one person-one job, namely specialization. But, at that moment, Vlastos makes a critical footnote about the weak linkage between the one person-one job rule and justice which is implied in the passage:

> it cannot be emphasized too strongly that if 'doing one's own' meant only the 'one man, one trade' principle, Plato would never have thought of using it as a definiens of 'justice'; hence the qualification 'this or some form of it' at the start of the citation, warning the reader that the principle of functional specialization in the division of labor has to be further qualified before it can be taken in all seriousness as the essence of justice. When endorsed without this qualification (*Laws* 846D-847A) the principle is *not* taken as a defining formula of justice.[21]

From Vlastos' point of view, this basic principle of economic life is not the cornerstone of Platonic justice. For Vlastos, Plato's manner of discussion in the

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[19] Vlastos, "Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*," pp. 117-8.
[20] Ibid., p. 118.
[21] Ibid., p. 118, n. 23.

Republic suggests that *justice* should be *more* than the one man-one job rule. According to Vlastos, the functionalist reading of Platonic justice is deficient; because, for Plato, the one man-one job rule just stands for mutual interest which is required in a self-sufficient city: "a polis arises when, and only when, men come to direct their individual energies with a view to the needs of others no less than their own, each of them pursuing a line of work which will best mesh with that of others to their joint benefit."[22] In other words, actually each citizen does their own job in order to serve the whole city, i.e., all citizens. So Plato pays attention to the public in his ideal *polis,* not personal gain alone. Vlastos then argues that Plato takes this economic principle and makes it a universal maxim for entire life:

> Plato then proceeds to generalize this principle, so that it will apply not only to economic activity but to all of the forms of associated living which go on within the polis. And he gives it a normative twist, making of it an imperative addressed to every person in a polis*: Keep to that line of social conduct by which, given your natural endowments and acquired skills, you can contribute maximally to the happiness and excellence of your polis.* He seizes on the catch-phrase 'to do one's own,' as a convenient stand-in for this maxim.[23]

Vlastos thus expresses his motto of Platonic justice: act in such a way that the happiness and excellence of your polis is greatly enhanced. In this interpretation, "doing one's own job" became a general way of behavior which is concerned with the socio-economic and political realm that is mentioned in the title of his article in a nutshell: "The Theory of Social Justice in the Polis in Plato's *Republic.*" Hence, for Vlastos, Plato's conception of justice in the *polis* is social, it is related to all spheres of life. Also, the end of justice is the happiness and excellence of the public. Accordingly, the Platonic just person is unlike *homo oeconomicus*: he does not just consider his personal interests. The Platonic just person attempts to maximize the happiness and excellence of the whole city. In brief, Vlastos' interpretation of Platonic justice is as follows: "engaging in that form of social conduct which constitutes the greatest possible contribution which nature has fitted one to make to the happiness and excellence of one's polis."[24] To Vlastos, this is the complete account of the phrase: "[t]he "doing in the "doing one's own" formula involves not only on-the-job conduct, but the whole of one's

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[22] Ibid., p. 118.
[23] Ibid., p. 118-9.
[24] Vlastos, "The Theory of Social Justice," p. 74, n. 24.

life, *including one's private life*."[25] Thus, the Platonic just person is neither *homo oeconomicus* nor a *functionalist*. The Platonic just person does their share to contribute to the happiness and excellence of the *polis*. The Platonic just person's priority is not self-interest; first and foremost, she pursues the public interest and well-being of the *polis*. For this reason, Vlastos claims that Platonic justice is the exact opposite of *pleonexia*: "though not many of Plato's contemporaries would have agreed with this definition of *dikaiosune*, I submit that none would have failed to see that it has good links with common usage, since on this definition, as on any other, justice would involve refraining from *pleonexia*."[26] Vlastos infers this negation of *pleonexia* from the following passage of the *Republic* which Plato puts forward to support his description of justice:

> will they [the guardians] not aim at this above all when judging lawsuits: that no one shall have what belongs to others or be deprived of one's own?—At nothing but this.—Because that is just?—Yes.—So in this way too it would have to be admitted that *the having and the doing of what belongs to one* and is one's own is justice? (433e-434a).[27]

Plato presents this argument after stating justice as "doing one's own" (433b) in Book IV of the *Republic*. Concerning this passage Vlastos remarks that

> the phrase I have italicized strikes at the very core of *dikaiosune* in its most specific sense. For since *pleonexia* is 'having more,' i.e. more than what is rightfully one's own ('what belongs to one'), to 'have what belongs to others' would be to perpetrate *pleonexia*, and to 'be deprived of one's own' would be to suffer it.[28]

The commentator points out the phrase of "the having and the doing of what belongs to one" and holds that it is the essence of justice. Therefore, Plato enlarged the definition of justice by adding "the having one's own." Indeed, *pleonexia* means "having more" of something which is not deserved. Given that justice is

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[25] Vlastos, "Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*," p. 122; recall that Greek understanding of the private and the public sphere is unlike the modern public/private dichotomy. In ancient Greece, the private is the realm of necessity whereas the public is the realm of freedom. The public realm thus is the way of freedom and happiness that is being free from necessities; see Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed., University of Chicago Press, Chicago *1958*, pp. 29-38.
[26] Vlastos, "Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*," p. 119.
[27] Vlastos' translation in "Justice and Happiness in the *Republic*," p. 119.
[28] Ibid., pp. 119-120.

"the having and the doing of what belongs to one;" *pleonexia* is associated with injustice and refraining from *pleonexia* is related to justice. The relation between *pleonexia* and justice is comprehensible; but what is the relationship between the "doing one's own" and "having one's own" phrases? The former is concerned with duties of citizens and the latter is about belongings. At first sight, the constituents of the definition of justice can be seen as irrelevant; but if someone considers the "doing one's own" concept, the connection is clear: "the link between 'doing one's own' and the common conception of justice would be fully apparent to his [Plato's] readers: he is counting on them to understand his definition to imply that in any community in which everyone lived up to the maxim 'do your own,' there would be no *pleonexia*."[29] So, in fact, the "having your own" is immanent in the term, "doing your own."[30] Vlastos insists on this claim depending on the feasibility of the "having and the doing of what belongs to one" phrase: "if the scope of the 'doing one's own' formula were not broad enough to cover refraining from all kinds of *pleonexia*, public or private, the biconditional, 'each shall have his own iff each does his own,' would fail."[31] In other words, since the "doing one's own" maxim is comprehensive enough to contain abstaining from all kinds of violation, "each shall have his own if each does his own."[32] That is to say, "doing one's own", which is the core of justice, includes the "having one's own" principle as well. Vlastos concludes that "everything in one's social conduct within the polis—all of one's dealings with other persons in the context of the only form of social life considered in the *Republic*—would come directly or indirectly within the scope of justice as specified by the 'doing one's own' formula."[33] The formula is thus very basic and comprehensive.

In the formula, "doing" "clearly refers to a duty, not to a right."[34] The persons of Plato have duties to the *polis*. Therefore "doing one's own" calls for doing one's best in order to contribute excellently to the happiness and perfection of the polis. To accomplish this task, one should perform her duties perfectly and broadly. Narrow-minded parochial mentality cannot serve to the happiness of the *polis*. "Doing one's own" thus does not mean "mind your own business." On the

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[29] Ibid., p. 121.
[30] Annas understands Platonic justice as "doing and having one's own," too; see Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1981, p. 120.
[31] Ibid., p. 125.
[32] Ibid., p. 121.
[33] Ibid., p. 125.
[34] Gregory Vlastos, "The Rights of Persons in Plato's Conception of the Foundations of Justice," in volume 2 of *Studies in Greek Philosophy*, ed. Daniel W. Graham, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995, p. 111.

contrary, it means do your best and more, not just one job. Of course, one should do one's duty, but this is not sufficient. Happiness and perfection of the polis needs much more. Persons have to consider whole of the city, not just their personal interests. At the end of the day, Vlastos' reading of Platonic justice is related to the common good of the *polis*. The "doing one's own" formula is applied both to the public and to the private realm. In this way, the virtue of justice regulates all spheres of life and seeks for happiness and excellence of the entire *polis*.

4. THE ARISTOTELIAN APPROACH

According to moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, "[t]he questions which Aristotle answers are Platonic questions,"[35] thus it is an enlightening and legitimate effort reading Plato from an Aristotelian point of view. So, Kenneth Dorter's interpretation appeals to Aristotle's doctrine of the mean – which is conceptualized in his book *Nicomachean Ethics* – to understand Platonic justice. In a few words, Aristotle's doctrine of the right mean offers the view that virtue is the middle of extremes; for instance, the virtue of courage lies between rashness and cowardice. Dorter attempts to read Platonic justice as a virtue between excess and deficiency. He claims that the Aristotelian concept of the right mean can be found in Plato's works as well.[36] Let me examine this contention. To this end, the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean will be introduced first, and then works of Plato will be investigated to see whether there is a parallel between them.

To Aristotle, virtue is the middle point between excess and deficiency; virtue is preserved by the mean. Aristotle also has recourse to the example of physicians. For doctors, balance is a proper value. Extremities are vice. The *golden mean* lies between excess and deficiency. The middle point indicates the proper state. Aristotle elaborates the concept of the golden mean as a measure in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. He refers to medical and dietetic sciences while developing the concept of the right mean between extremes. Aristotle expresses that excessive or deficient consumption of foods and beverages injures one's health, on the other hand, balanced nutrition keeps one healthy; then Aristotle articulates that this principle is valid for virtues too (1104a15-20). In other words, extremities destroy virtues, and the right mean makes virtues possible. From the Aristotelian point of view, for instance, both excessive fear and complete lack of fear are vices, but proportionate fear and self-confidence in the right way at the right time is a virtue, e.g., courage. Rashness and cowardice are extreme points of courage. Not only the

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[35] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?,* University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1988, p. 85.

[36] Kenneth Dorter, "Philosopher-Rulers: How Contemplation Becomes Action," *Ancient Philosophy,* Vol. 21/2, 2001, p. 346.

coward is contrary to the brave, but the rash also is opposite of the brave. Courage is the mean between rashness and cowardice; which is similar to healthy nourishment: balanced nutrition is the mean value between over-nutrition and lack of nutrition. Moreover, Aristotle draws a parallel between medical therapy and moral therapy in terms of the application of opposing factors. Both therapeutic and ethical therapy works through extremes (1104b15). In doing so, Aristotle shaped the doctrine of the mean in his moral thought. The influence of the Hippocratic Tradition[37] on Aristotle is the achievement of objectivity in Aristotelian ethical thought. Since the golden mean is the middle of extreme values (vices), virtue can be defined objectively. Aristotle seeks to eliminate subjective ethical judgments in this fashion, because the right mean is between excess and deficiency.

However, there is a problematical issue in Aristotle's account of the mean: the term "relative to us" (1106a30). In addition to the arithmetical mean, which is the middle point between extremes for everyone, he defines the mean relative to persons. The numerical mean does not vary: for instance, the mean value of one (too low) and five (too much) is three. The distance between one and three, and three and five is equal to two; so there is definitely the middle point between one and five. But this arithmetical mean is irrelevant in moral arguments, because the particular circumstances of the individual are different in each case (1104a5). The Aristotelian doctrine of the mean is highly circumstantial. It is understood by Aristotle's "relative to us" phrase. The mean relative to us is a problematic and suspicious definition. If it varies depending on individuals, how can we talk about standards and measurements in Aristotelian ethical thought? But, if the concept of the mean relative to us is examined entirely and carefully, it will be seen that the conception does not give rise to sophistical relativism. Aristotle describes the mean relative to us via a dietetic example: he presents two persons, one is an athlete and the other is a beginner in athletics. Aristotle suggests that since the same diet will not be proper for both of them, the coach of these sportsmen will prescribe different diets (1106b). Thus it is evident that the golden mean depends on the individual's conditions, but this does not mean that the intermediate is completely relative to each person. Identical circumstances produce the same proportions. That is to say, the diet of professional sportsmen does not change dramatically; excess,

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[37] There is a relation between Hippocratean physicians and Aristotle, but we do not have sufficient evidence to claim that Aristotle took the concept of mean from dietetic and therapeutic theories of Hippocratean physicians. If the supposition is right, then we can propose that Aristotle transferred the notion of balance from Hippocratic medicine and applied it to ethics, but he transformed and cultivated it. For the influence of Hippocratean physicians on Aristotle see Theodore James Tracy, *Physiological Theory and the Doctrine of the Mean in Plato and Aristotle*, Loyola University Press, Chicago 1969.

deficiency, and the mean are almost precise for them. At that point, Aristotle draws an analogy between virtues and arts. He claims that both arts and virtues operate according to the doctrine of the mean. He says that crafts also focus on the mean: "this, indeed, is why people regularly comment on well-made products that nothing could be added or subtracted, since they assume that excess or deficiency ruins a good while the mean preserves it" (1106b10). Furthermore, Aristotle implies that since virtues are more precise than arts, the mean of virtues is more exact than arts (1106b15). In doing so, Aristotle supports the precision of the middle state. As a result, under the same conditions the golden mean is exact, but when circumstances change the mean value is modified as well. Let me consider the virtue of mildness which is related to the feeling of anger. Excess of mildness can be defined as quick temper; and the deficient person can be said to suffer from a lack of spirit. Under normal conditions, the intermediate point should be a little close to deficiency, in the name of minimizing conflicts in ordinary life. However, if there is a manifest injustice in front of us, our anger should be much more; perhaps the mean should be close to excess. Consequently, under the same conditions everybody behaves alike. In this sense, the right mean is invariable and precise, but if the state of affairs changes the proper ethical conduct differs as well. In this way, the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean draws attention to the factual circumstances of individuals. That is to say, for Aristotle, the right mean is related to the social and political context; but this does not mean relativism. In the same socio-political context, identical mean values can arise. Besides, speculative and theoretical discussions on the doctrine of the mean can represent Aristotle as a moral relativist or subjectivist; but he thinks that ethical theory is practical so we have to "become good" not just "know what virtue is" (1103b28). Aristotle also stresses that some people consider that "they are doing philosophy, and that is the way to become excellent people. In this they are like a sick person who listens attentively to the doctor, but acts on none of his instructions" (1105b13-16). So, for Aristotle, speculative arguments on the doctrine of the mean are useless and invalid; the right mean is obvious in the practical realm. When we face manifest injustices, e.g., truly needy people, we do not think about the right proportion. In most cases, the right thing to do is clear. If we remind ourselves of Aristotle's definition of virtue, he underlines that the right mean is determined by the person who has *phronesis* (1107a). Virtue is concerned with *phronesis* not *sophia*. The Aristotelian notion of the right mean depends on certain circumstances and the contingencies of personalities; so individuals determine the right mean. The prudent person hits the right mean. Therefore, it can be argued that the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean is strongly related to human beings. The person who has prudential knowledge decides the golden mean, but it is limited with some boundaries as well.

Aristotle makes use of the doctrine of the mean in his *Politics* as well; he claims that the concept of the right mean is also valid in regimes and communities (1295a35-40). Social classes should be molded according to the doctrine of the mean;

> in all states there are three elements: one class is very rich, another very poor, and a third in a mean. It is admitted that moderation and the mean are best, and therefore it will clearly be best to possess the gifts of fortune in moderation; for in that condition of life men are most ready to follow rational principle (1295b1-6).

For Aristotle, the middle class is ideal because it is in line with the conception of the right mean; and it enables the good life. Both the poor and the rich are extremes, but the mean is the middle class. In addition to that, Aristotle has recourse to the doctrine of the mean in finding the best regime too: the best regime should be a mixed government which is between democracy, oligarchy, and aristocracy. Parallel to the middle class, the regime should be according to the poor and the rich, between the majority and the minority. Therefore, "the mean condition of states is clearly best, for no other is free from faction; and where the middle class is large, there are least likely to be factions and dissensions" (1296a6-9). It is evident that while examining the best form of government Aristotle exercises the doctrine of the mean as well: the best regime is a position where democratic and aristocratic elements are intermingled, because neither excess (democracy) nor deficiency (monarchy) is appropriate. Accordingly, it can be said that Aristotle concurs with the concept of the golden mean in politics, too.

Plato's similar ideas to Aristotelian doctrine of the mean can be found in the *Statesman* dialogue. At the end of the first division of the *Statesman*, the Eleatic stranger warns the young Socrates for his wrong cut (beasts and human beings), because he did not divide the living beings right in "the middle" (262b). The young Socrates could not find the mean; he took a small part of the whole. He should have divided them into wild and tame. His mistake is akin to dividing "ten thousand away from all" (262e), but the right division would be even and odd. Numbers can be split proportionately by the separation of even and odd; this is the right method of division for natural numbers. Plato's method of division thus seeks to find the correct mean in order to distinguish the target kind. In the following pages, the stranger describes the art of weaving in detail, and then he puts forward the art of measurement. The stranger introduces the art of measurement by pointing out the dialogue: "let's look first at the entirety of excess and defect, in order that we may praise and blame in proportion the things that are said on each occasion in engagements of this sort at greater and shorter length than they should" (283c).

That is to say, we glorify the proper ratio and condemn extremities such as excess or deficiency; we evaluate beings according to moderation. Neither excess nor deficiency is acceptable. The art of measurement determines whether something is extreme or appropriate. Afterwards the stranger divides arts in the following way: "the mutually relative measure and the measure relative to the mean" (283e). The former measure is identified according to extremes; excess and deficiency indicate the measure. Here measure is completely relative to extremities. Excess defines deficiency, and deficiency describes excess. The latter measure is delineated according to the *mean*. Appropriateness is decided according to closeness to the middle. The most fitting one hits the mean. Accordingly, the *measure relative to the mean* considers three factors: excess, deficiency, and mean. The former lacks the criterion of the mean value. But contraries are significant for both of the measures. We can evaluate *ethical* distinctions (283e), *political* judgments, and even all arts (284a) through the art of measurement: "by preserving the mean, that they produce everything good and beautiful" (284b). If ethics and politics comply with the mean, the idea of the good and the beautiful would be secured in life. The middle point between excess and deficiency enables judging ethics and politics. Moreover, the measure relative to the mean is the *sine qua non* for a politician or whoever wants to have knowledge of practical subjects: "mustn't the more and the less be compelled to become measurable relative not only to one another but also to the becoming of the mean? For it's really not possible for either a statesman or anyone else to have been proved to be indisputably a scientific knower of matters of action if this is not agreed upon" (284c). These remarks clearly give the foundation of the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean. Plato articulates that knowledge of practical matters is offered by the mean between excess and deficiency. In this way, statesmen can see the right thing to do. For Plato, the golden mean seems like a metaphysical principle which is applicable to all the arts and even an ontological principle which is the *raison d'être* for the arts (284d). Then once again Plato refines the former division of the art of measurement. The *mutually relative measure* gauges "number, lengths, depths, widths, and speeds relative to their contraries" (284e). Perhaps mathematics, geometry, and physics can be conceived in this category. On the other hand, the *measure relative to the mean* examines "the fitting, the opportune, and the needful, and everything settled toward the middle and away from extremes" (284e). Possibly moral, political, medical, criminal, legal (concerned with justice), and economic sciences are included in the scope of this measure. For instance, political science[38] deals with

[38] Meanwhile, the art of government is the ruling art. Seth Benardete underlines this feature of politics: "political science regulates the arts in the city according to their appropriateness to the city … the measure of the mean cannot be applied to itself without simultaneously

the fitting and the expedient (297a); jurisprudence strives for the right mean which is needful and just; ethics seeks to hit the mean which is good and favorable. The crux of the measure is finding the mean which is peculiar to each issue.

In the survey of the characteristic of the statesman, Plato frequently has recourse to contraries such as serfs and freemen (289e), the strong and the weak (291b), the voluntary and involuntary, the poor and the rich, the rule of law and anarchy (291e). His investigation is based on these opposites. Then Plato classifies types of government. On the whole there are three basic administrations: the rule of one, few, and the many (291d). It appears that majority rule is an excess and the rule of one is a deficiency. The middle point corresponds to the rule of the few, which are the aristocracy and oligarchy. The rules of one are kingdom and monarchy. The rule of the multitude is democracy. Plato's art of measurement should have indicated the rule of the few as the best regime, but on the surface at least he does not approve this idea (292c-d). He searches for another government whose ruler should have a sort of knowledge. This political knowledge is "the hardest and greatest to acquire" (292d); for this reason, only rare persons can have this kind of knowledge. It is clear that the majority cannot have this political knowledge; not even five percent of the people can acquire this knowledge (292e). From Plato's point of view, only *one* person out of a hundred men may have political knowledge. Needless to say, a king merely "has the royal science, regardless of whether he rules or not, must all the same, according to the previous speech, be addressed as royal" (292e-293a). Thus in this case, the golden mean is close to deficiency (the rule of one). Both the multitude and the one are extremities, but for political knowledge the right mean is near to one. Meanwhile, it is evident that the middle point does not point out the arithmetical mean. The golden mean is defined again in each case. For the best regime, the measure is relative to the knowledge of politics. After that Plato draws an analogy between a doctor and a statesman. Doctors are assessed by their treatment: we evaluate them according to the result, i.e., whether they cure the patient or not. Their healing techniques, economic conditions, and the willingness of the patient do not concern observers. They just consider whether patients get worse or better; and whether doctors stick to the medical art or not (293b-c). The measurement of the statesman is alike. People do not weigh how politicians manage a state. Persons do not notice whether statesmen concur with laws or not; people do not consider their social class and the like. But they just take into account the practice of political knowledge and the condition of the state in terms of justice and goodness (293d-e). In other words, if

being applied to its relations with all other arts. The measure of the mean, in its most general form, is political science." Seth Benardete, *The Being of the Beautiful: Plato's Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984, p. III.116.

the kingdom is just and good, there is no problem. In order to have a just and good regime, rulers have to possess political knowledge and practice it conveniently. Therefore, the statesman who has this knowledge finds the right measure for the city. He decides in what proportion the population would be or which arts are needed to maintain the law and order of the city. Ironically Plato's analysis implies the Protagorean idea: the statesman is the measure of all things. This is paradoxical because Plato wanted to refute Protagoras' opinion. But of course the Platonic criterion of the art of government and the Protagorean principle are not identical. Plato stresses that the statesman has political knowledge; he does not judge political things as does Protagoras. Plato's dialogues give the impression that all of his effort is to disprove the claim: "of all things the measure is man." Moreover, Plato tries to establish an alternative measurement which is valid for theoretical and practical sciences. Plato seeks to find objective measures which are normative and epistemic. For instance, in this dialogue Plato strives for a *measure relative to the mean* which is not arbitrary; because the middle is between excess and deficiency. Plato searches for a measure which is valid in politics, ethics, aesthetics and the rest. In brief, Plato pursues a measure which can be applied all through life. Plato looks for a firm ground in this world and in the world of ideas.

After appraisal of the regimes, Plato turns back to the resemblance between the art of government and weaving, because the statesman and weaver are both experts in measurement. The political and weaving arts measure the more and the less not merely in relation to each other but also in relation to the mean (284d). Both of them weave in a sense at the right proportion according to their tasks. The essence of weaving – intertwining different kinds of threads – indicates an essential feature of statesmanship. The statesman weaves in a number of ways with respect to the scope of political art. He takes care of every aspect of things in the city, weaving them together in the most correct way (305e). In particular, the statesman weaves together into one fabric the virtues of courage and moderation, which often clash in the city. He must determine what mix of courage and moderation will most advance the good in the state (308e-309a). The statesman thus has to find the proper mixture for the community by weaving manly and moderate persons commensurately. Plato relates the virtue of courage to quickness and the virtue of moderation to slowness. In general, individuals attribute swiftness to courage: "there are often many actions when we express our admiration for the speed, intensity, and quickness of thought and body, as well as of sound, in which we speak our praise of it by using the single address of manliness" (306e); and people ascribe slowness to mildness: "we surely say on each occasion "quiet" and "moderate," when we express our admiration with "slow" and "soft" ("mild") in the case of doings that involve thought no less than in terms of actions, and further still in the case of sounds there's "smooth" and "grave," and every rhythmic

motion and a whole muse that opportunely employs slowness" (397a). This explanation can be clarified as follows: take a person who does injustices to others and one counteracts immediately and sharply to the unjust man; and another one thinks what to do and responds slothfully. The former one inclines toward bravery and the latter one toward moderation; but there is a middle point for both of the virtues. The right mean should be found. If one exceeds the golden mean, he will be excessive otherwise he will be deficient. The measure relative to the mean is distinctive: "whenever both these things prove to be for us inopportune, we change each of the two around and direct our reproaches to the contrary quarter by making a reassignment of them with our names" (307b). Therefore, persons should hit the right mean; virtue is the mean between extremities: "if they prove to be quicker and faster and come to light as stiffer than the *opportune*, we speak of them as hubristic and manic, but if heavier, slower, and softer, we say they're craven and doltish" (307b, emphasis mine). The stranger claims that bravery is the mean between cowardice (defect) and rashness (excess). The right degree of anger is virtue, extremes are vices; neither excess nor deficiency is suitable. The stranger describes deficiency of spirit and anger along these lines:

> those who are exceptionally well-ordered are ever prepared to live the quiet life, minding their own business alone by themselves, associating with everyone at home on these terms, and likewise, in confronting cities on the outside, they are prepared on every issue to be at peace in some sense. And on account of just this love, which is *more untimely than it ought to be*, whenever they do what they want, they themselves come into an unwarlike state without being aware of it, and so condition their young in the same way, and they are always the prey of aggressors. It's from these circumstances that in not many years they themselves and their children and the entire city, instead of being free, often become without their being aware of it slaves (307e, emphasis added).

This is the extreme case of moderation; it is not the proper state, because the stranger says that this personality is more than "it ought to be." This kind of disposition is a defect. The golden mean is not like that. A mild person is not a spiritless coward. He gets angry when it is required, such as in the case of the occupation of one's homeland. Someone ought to take action against unlawful detainers. However, a moderate individual should not go to excess, and become irascible and furious. The golden mean is the balance of extreme feelings. The virtuous man is the one who finds the mean; as it is written at the temple of Apollo: *nothing in excess*. Both extremes are vices; virtue is the middle point between excess and deficiency. Neither irascibility nor sluggishness is a virtue. Mildness is

the golden mean between them. On the other hand, courage also should be well-adjusted. Otherwise, extremes are harmful and improper. The stranger suggests that "those whose inclination is more toward manliness" are constantly

> tensing up their own cities for some war, and on account of their desire – *more vehement than it should be* – for a life of this sort, they settle into a hatred with many powerful people, and either they altogether destroy them, or in turn they hazard their own fatherlands to be slaves and subjects to their enemies (308a, emphasis mine).

This is the result of extreme courage, namely rashness. Excessive bravery is also dangerous and wrong. Since the stranger articulates that they are "more vehement than it should be," we can infer that these people go beyond the middle point. They are more than due courage; so they are in excess. The aforementioned state does not fit the right mean. Proper bravery should be against attacks in times of war; but brave persons should not wage war in times of peace. Immoderate rash people act like this. The opposite of rashness is cowardice. The virtuous characters should not escape from the battle field as well. If they face an unjust attack, they should react to enemies. The right mean of bravery thus is in the middle of rashness and cowardice. Furthermore, according to Plato, this balance should be assured all over the city: opposite characters should be married in order to hold the balance of virtue (310d). Consequently, it is clear that Plato maintains that in ethics and politics the measure is defined in proportion to the golden mean which is between excess and deficiency. The concept of the right mean can easily be seen in the *Statesman*, but what about other works of Plato? Kenneth Dorter develops his thesis with other dialogues of Plato as well, such as the *Laws* (691c), the *Symposium* (187b), *Timaeus* (32a-b, 36a), and the *Republic*. But, since this paper focuses on the *Republic*, let me show evidence from this work of Plato. In the last book of the *Republic*, according to Dorter, "goodness and justice are explicitly described as a mean."[39] This is the passage which is at the very end of the dialogue:

> knowing how beauty, combined with poverty or wealth and with what kind of character of the soul, produces good or evil, good birth and bad birth, private life and governing, strength and weakness, ease of learning and difficulty of learning, and all such things regarding the soul, both natural and acquired, so that from all these things—and looking at the nature of the soul—he will be able to choose rationally between the better and worse life, calling a life worse which leads him to become more unjust, better if leads him to become more just,

[39] Dorter, "Philosopher-Rulers," p. 349.

> disregarding all other considerations… *He would know how to always choose the mean among such lives, and avoid each of the extremes*, both in this life and also, as far as possible, in all that come after. For in this way a human being becomes happiest (618b-619b).[40]

Here Plato's Socrates relates justice to the right mean and injustice to the extremities. For Dorter, "the source for that conclusion was, not surprisingly, Socrates' earlier definition of justice. Justice is a harmony among the three parts of the soul, he argues, so that a just action is one which preserves this harmony, while an unjust action is one which destroys it (443d-444a)"[41] Dorter points out Socrates' description of justice in the human soul that is depicted in Book IV of the *Republic*; where he had claimed that justice is a psychic harmony. "Since a harmony is destroyed when one of the elements is taken too far or not far enough, Socrates' later conclusion follows, that a life of justice requires us to avoid the extremes and pursue the mean."[42] Thus a just life should be in the middle way. Dorter goes on to support his thesis by some points in the dialogue: "at the beginning of book 2 Socrates identifies justice as an intermediate kind of good: neither the one extreme of a good that is only good for its consequences, nor the other extreme of a good that is intrinsically good but without good consequences, but the middle kind that is good in both ways."[43] That is to say, justice is the mean between something that is good for its own sake and something that is good for its consequences. In addition to that, again in Book II, justice is argued as a mean between the best and the worst: justice "is a mean between what is best—doing injustice without paying the penalty—and what is worst—suffering injustice without being able to avenge oneself. The just is in the middle between these two" (359a). Nonetheless, justice as described above is not supported by Socrates. Dorter replies to this objection in this way: "although Socrates would dispute the claim that goodness is injustice and lies at one of the extremes rather than with the mean, he would agree that justice is a mean between the extremes: the intention of a just person is neither to do nor suffer injustice."[44] Then Dorter puts forward some evidence again from the dialogue and then summarizes that "justice is, then, presented as a kind of mean throughout the *Republic*."[45] However, there is an important difficulty about this

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[40] Emphasis added by Dorter; and translation is cited from this article: Dorter, "Philosopher-Rulers," pp. 349-350.
[41] Dorter, "Philosopher-Rulers," p. 350.
[42] Ibid., p. 350.
[43] Ibid., p. 350.
[44] Ibid., p. 351.
[45] Ibid., p. 352.

judgment, because when Plato describes and defines justice in Book IV, he does not refer to the concept of the right mean. He defines justice as “doing and having one’s own.” There is no reference to the doctrine of the mean in the justice of the *polis*. Dorter would possibly reply to this objection by means of the *Statesman* dialogue; but Plato discusses the idea of justice mainly in the *Republic* and does not define it according to the concept of the right mean. If Plato would have considered justice as Dorter, he would have at least mentioned the right mean. Thus, it is apparent that Dorter’s interpretation appears inappropriate, because there is not sufficient textual evidence concerning with justice as the right mean in the *Republic*.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper, three types of interpretations of Platonic justice in the *Republic* have been examined. Arguments of Gerasimos Santas and Gregory Vlastos are analyzed. Kenneth Dorter’s argument is also analyzed but before this Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean and Plato’s understanding of justice is synthesized. Although this synthesis is creative, textual evidence is not sufficient enough. After this inquiry, it is demonstrated that Vlastos’ reading is legitimate and satisfactory.

First, the functionalist approach of Santas was considered. The functionalist interpretation is simple and clear: justice is doing one’s own job. If each part of a structure performs its own function well, which its nature is best fitted to, then the structure works well. To the functionalist, justice is every single component’s performance of its optimal function. Thus, both persons and cities become just. The functionalist interpretation sets the tone for the experts. Since every single person’s nature is suited to one job, one should do one’s own job only. If everybody does her own job, then order would be secured in the *polis*, just as in the *psyche*. Every task therefore should be done by its expert. Otherwise, efficiency would be reduced and disorders may emerge. The functionalist reading however is convincingly disproved by Vlastos. He claims that the functionalists mistranslate and misunderstand “doing one’s own job,” because “job or function” is not stated in the *Republic*. Vlastos argues that in Book IV of the *Republic*, Plato just says “the doing and having one’s own”, there is no word meaning *ergon*. Vlastos then claims that, for Plato, justice means “doing one’s own” in order to contribute to the common good of the *polis*. Justice also requires avoiding *pleonexia*. To Vlastos, therefore, Platonic justice is concerned with all spheres of life. Vlastos gives satisfactory textual and contextual evidence and supports his interpretation relying on the entire ancient Greek philosophy. Dorter is not as successful as Vlastos in these respects. Dorter’s Aristotelian reading of Platonic justice is inspiring but unsatisfactory. Dorter seeks to interpret Plato’s conception of justice by virtue of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, i.e., the doctrine of the mean. He argues that one can understand Platonic justice as the mean between excess and deficiency. The

Statesman confirms this idea, however, in the *Republic*, Plato does not directly describe justice in accordance with this interpretation. Plato articulates that justice is doing and having each person’s own. That is to say, justice is doing each citizen's share in order to promote the happiness and excellence of the *polis*.

“Doing one’s own” formula thus requires doing persons’ best to contribute perfectly to the happiness and excellence of the city. To that end, persons should perform their duties completely and satisfactorily. The shortsighted egoist cannot consider others. The formula thus does not just mean “mind your own business.” Quite the opposite, it means do your best and even more. Certainly, persons should perform their duties, but this is not enough. The common good necessitates much more. Persons should act in such a way that will benefit to the common good, not just their particular goods. In the end, Vlastos’ reading of Platonic justice is concerned with the happiness and perfection of the *polis*. The phrase, “doing one’s own” is both about the public and the private spheres. In this fashion, the virtue of justice affects the whole life and aims at happiness and perfection of the public.

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