

A wage for the rulers: the function of the μισθαρονητική τέχνη

In the first book of the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates ascribe to his favorite stock-specialists (doctors, steersmen, etc.) a second, additional specialism. This striking innovation is the craft of wage-earning (μισθωτική or μισθαρονητική τέχνη), which serves the doctor's own interest by producing wages. Considering that Thrasymachus' definition of justice as 'what is in the ruler's own interest', was discarded earlier, it is peculiar that Socrates here re-introduces the interest of the ἄρχων. And it becomes even more curious when Socrates shifts from the doctor (who earns ἀργύριον, τιμή) to the political ruler and fixes the 'absence of punishment (ζημία) for refusing to rule' as his wage. In this paper, I will attempt to explain the relevance of these provocative oddities in the light of Plato's successive theory of the just city (book 5). The argument will proceed in two steps:

(a) The ascription of a wage-earning τέχνη to the ruling specialist becomes comprehensible when interpreted against the background of the two occupations of the philosopher-ruler. The μισθαρονητική τέχνη appears to be introduced for the purpose of creating the opportunity to discuss the self-interest of the true ruler. He does not (similar to what was claimed in the *Gorgias*) demand financial compensation or respect for the benefits conferred upon others. A third kind of 'wage' is designed: the absence of something unpleasant, namely being ruled by people who are morally inferior.

(b) The full significance of the complications Socrates introduced in book 1 only becomes visible in the discussion of Callipolis. The μισθαρονητική τέχνη and the absence of ζημία as the wage of true rulers are re-interpreted within the construct of the just city. The assumption underlying this construct is that human beings are part of an organic whole, society, and therefore share a common interest. In this closed system, absence of punishment is 'translated' into the social obligation that all citizens are to perform their natural task by benefitting the common good.

The μισθαρονητική τέχνη anticipates the social function of the philosophers as rulers of Callipolis. The social environments of book 1 and 5 differ radically: in book 1 it is assumed that in real life inferior people compete with the people who would truly be good rulers. Precisely because there is no philosopher-ruler outside Callipolis, the additional specialism of μισθαρονητική is necessary to secure the good ruler's own interest. In the just society, his interest coincides with the interest of all citizens.

The anticipation of the philosopher-rulers by the μισθαρονητική τέχνη suggests an answer to the possible question of why the philosophers would be willing to fulfil their social role (ἄρχειν), when that function may seem to compromise the more personally satisfying life of pure philosophy.

I will conclude my paper by drawing a comparison with the *Laws*. Interestingly, in this work, personal ambition (φιλονικία) and the desire for τιμή are not discredited but *recommended* for all citizens as motives in the competition for virtue.

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