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THE DO-IT-YOURSELFER IN PLATO'S *REPUBLIC*

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Abstract. The key expression *ta hautou prattein*, “to do one’s own,” has two opposite meanings in Plato’s *Republic*: to perform for oneself all tasks required to meet one’s own needs (2.370a); or to specialize exclusively in one task, leaving others to other specialists (4.433a and thenceforward). The former sense also appears in *Charmides* 161e–162a, with a list of tasks that closely matches that at *Hippias Minor* 386b–c. Given these contexts, the inconsistency in Plato’s usage in *Republic* suggests an answer to the teaching of the sophist Hippias, that the goal of life is self-sufficiency though mastery of many specialized crafts.

IN BOOK 2 OF PLATO’S *REPUBLIC* an attempt is underway to reach a definition of justice—that is, an understanding of what it is and consists in, its underlying principle.¹ Socrates suggests that the task might be easier if instead of trying to figure out directly what it is that qualifies an individual to be described or praised as “just,” he and his companions were to study justice writ larger, by considering what it might look like embodied in an entire *polis* (city-state). Accordingly, they set about constructing a hypothetical *polis*. They adopt economic interdependence and specialization as the first and guiding principle, on the assumption that people come together to form a community in the first place because individually they are not self-sufficient (2.369b). As the primary

¹ Vlastos (1995, 70–78) sharply questions but finally endorses “justice” as a translation for *dikaionē* in *Resp.*, as opposed to the broader “righteousness,” which might be a more accurate rendition in other contexts. On the explanatory character of the definition here sought, see Wilson 1976, 113–15.

physical needs are food, shelter, and clothing, so the first citizens brought into this hypothetical commonwealth are a farmer, a builder, a weaver, a shoemaker, and possibly one other ministrant to bodily needs or wants, for an initial population of “four or five men.”²

Once these four or five men have been supposed brought together, Socrates asks Adeimantus:

“And what next? Must each one of these contribute his own work to all in common—the farmer, for instance, being one person yet raising food for four, and lavishing fourfold time and trouble on the raising of food, and sharing it with others—or merely producing a quarter of this food in a quarter the time, and for the other three quarters, spending one on building a house, another on making a cloak, and another on sandals—having no partnership with others, but rather all by himself *doing his own work* [*ta hautou pratein*]?”

And Adeimantus said, “But perhaps, Socrates, the former way is easier than the latter.” (2.369e–370a)

Socrates adds that natural differences in aptitude also recommend the more specialized arrangement.³ The principle of specialization guides the

² That the craftsmen have their professional character ready-made at this point sufficiently shows that this is rather a hypothetical exercise than a serious inquiry, however speculative, into the prehistoric origins of communal life, as many have assumed that it is. Plato here pretends that the farmer’s role in the economy is perfectly analogous to those of the craftsmen, the *dēmiourgoi* (meaning those who work for the populace, i.e., for the market). In practice, the *dēmiourgoi* were specialists, each practicing a separate *technē* (art, craft, specialty); while farming (as Hanson teaches us) was the common way of life shared throughout the numerous land-owning middle class of hoplites or *zeugitai*, the social backbone of the Athenian *polis*, and each small farm typically raised the whole gamut of produce from barley to olives, grapes, and figs, rather than specializing in any one crop. The more so because of this crop diversity, the farmer’s household could in a pinch operate self-sufficiently, while the landless craftsmen had to sell or starve (Hanson 1999, xvi, 66–67, 103). Among the other professions here listed, that of the shoemaker warrants particular note. It gets forty-nine mentions in the Platonic corpus and twenty-two in this dialogue alone. It is the one craft mentioned both by Alcibiades at *Symp.* 221e and by Callicles at *Grg.* 491a, when they are both complaining of Socrates’ obsession with humble *technai*. Here it is the one case of a second craft’s being necessary to supply one need, the need for clothing, which the weaver is already addressing. Yet it would appear that Socrates himself was in the habit of doing without footwear altogether (*Symp.* 174a). The inhabitants of this first version of the hypothetical *polis* in *Resp.* go barefoot (and naked) in summer only (2.372a–b), but Socrates himself is said to go barefoot even in winter (*Symp.* 220b–c).

³ Curiously, Socrates has not even suggested that raising four times the food might require less than four times the time and trouble. Given the labor-intensive and diversified

construction of the hypothetical *polis* thenceforward, until in Book 4 Socrates suddenly seizes upon it as the very definition of justice for which the company has been searching all along. Socrates positively pounces on it, with a kind of hunter's halloo, and he seems giddily elated by their success (4.432d–434c). Though defining justice was the original project, and the dialogue is less than half over, this definition is not subsequently challenged.

Socrates at this point refers explicitly back to the earlier passage:

“For what we laid down from the beginning as a universal imperative, when we built the *polis*, this, as it seems to me, or some form of it, is justice. We laid it down, did we not, and said many times if you remember, that each one ought to carry out the single civic responsibility to which his nature was best suited.”

“Yes, we said that.”

“And indeed we have heard from many others and have often said ourselves that justice is *doing one's own things* [*ta hautou prattein*] and not being a busybody.”

“Yes, we have said that.” (4.433a)

Socrates here and henceforth epitomizes the principle of specialization in this phrase *ta hautou prattein*, which now recurs some half a dozen times in very short order, with minor grammatical variations but always the same basic meaning. But in the passage from Book 2, the same phrase *ta hautou prattein* refers to a kind of self-sufficiency that is diametrically opposed to such specialization: doing all the work oneself to provide directly for one's own needs, and not depending on a larger, differentiated economy, where jobs are specialized.

Socrates mischievously interprets the phrase this way in Plato's *Charmides* also, where the title character proposes (and Critias, having put him up to it, defends) *ta hautou prattein* as a definition of self-control (*sōphrosunē*). Socrates ridicules the idea:

Does a *polis* seem to you to be well managed under this law, a law commanding that each man weave and wash his own cloak, and make his own sandals, and so likewise with oil flask and strigil and all other things

character of classical Greek agriculture, as sketched by Hanson, it might not take much less at that. But surely some economies of scale ought to be realizable in the other crafts, even if we discount the time and trouble spent furnishing tools. For instance, the weaver not only can weave cloth for four cloaks on just one loom, he can do so on just one long warp.

according to the same principle of not setting one's hand to what is for others, but each working and *doing his own* [*ta . . . heautou . . . prattein*]?
(161e–162a)

The crucial formula at the very heart of *Republic*, expressing both the principle on which the hypothetical *polis* was founded and the definition of justice for the sake of which it was constructed, is thus radically ambiguous, bearing two distinct and even opposite meanings. It will be convenient to designate the meaning that we find in *Charmides* 161e–162a and *Republic* 2.370a as the do-it-yourself sense, and the better-known opposite meaning of *Republic* 4.433a (and thenceforward) as the specializing sense.

Almost immediately after being enthroned as the achieved definition of justice, the specialization principle undergoes a profound change of emphasis, arguably amounting to a complete change of character. The original principle of strictly dividing productive functions among socially equal specialists (such as the weaver and the shoemaker) is dismissed as relatively unimportant, and the emphasis moves wholly onto the strict division of function between superior and inferior social classes.⁴ Both before and after this shift, however, the specializing sense of *ta hautou prattein* stands equally in contrast with the do-it-yourself sense, which rejects division of function altogether.

This bifurcation of meaning has been noted before, but to my knowledge the interpretive problem it poses has not been seriously addressed. Rosamond Kent Sprague dismisses the sense expressed at *Charmides* 161e–162a as “literal and trivial” while opposing it to “the more proper Platonic sense,” i.e., the specializing sense; and later she mistakenly cites *Republic* 2.370a as an instance of the latter (1976, 32, 76). Charles Kahn notes that one and the same phrase is “used to forbid . . . [and] to enjoin the specialization of labor,” but dismisses the *Charmides* instance as mere “toying” with the idea (1988, 542).

Kahn, Gregory Vlastos, and A. W. H. Adkins all note the discrepancy between the different virtues for which the phrase is proposed as a definition: *sōphrosunē* (sound-mindedness or self-control) in *Charmides*

⁴ 4.434a–d, and see Reeve 1988, 172–74. This seems like bait-and-switch, since both ancient and modern readers would be more ready to assent to a definition of justice that incorporated or agreed with some notion of equality (*to ison*). We find the specializing sense of *ta hautou prattein* used as a rationale for subordinating women to men at Xen. *Oec.* 7.31–32. Plato famously rejects this specific application of the specializing principle at *Resp.* 5.451c–456b, but it is replicated at *Alc.* 1 126e–127a.

(and *Timaeus* 72a) and *dikaiosunē* (justice or righteousness) in *Republic*.⁵ But neither Vlastos nor Adkins notes that in *Charmides*, as in Book 2 of *Republic*, Socrates is giving the phrase its do-it-yourself sense, diametrically opposed to the better-known specializing sense that it carries in the rest of *Republic*.

Both Vlastos and Adkins relate Plato's usage of this phrase to usage by his contemporaries. Vlastos avers that in Book 2 the words *ta hautou pratein* "carry only the ordinary, commonplace sense of 'doing one's own work'"; and on this occasion he does note that Plato is describing "unspecialized, jack-of-all-trades, activity (the very opposite of Platonic *dikaiosunē!*)" (1995, 73 n. 22). Elsewhere he characterizes the formula as a popular "catch-phrase," which Plato is appropriating and bending to his own peculiar purposes when (and only when) he attaches it to the specializing sense (1981, 119).

Adkins in particular explores usage of the opposite term *polupragmonein* (to meddle, to be a busybody) and its cognate nouns, building on the work of Ehrenberg (1947). This is the more relevant because Plato himself opposes such terms to *ta hautou pratein*, as in "minding one's own business and not being a busybody."⁶ Adkins concludes that Plato, who like virtually all classical authors belonged to the gentry, was hitching his philosophic wagon to class prejudice: for this "busybody" was largely a term of abuse or reproach for uppity commoners, those who played active roles in politics and the law courts.⁷ In this connection, the expression *ta hautou pratein* referred to the opposite, to staying out of politics and away from the law courts. From the gentry's perspective, such abstention by social inferiors was praiseworthy, as tending to their own power and convenience. (Apparently regardless of class, Pericles condemns such non-involvement in his funeral speech in Thucydides, while in Plato, Socrates embraces it for himself and other philosophers.⁸) But this sense of *ta hautou pratein* is precisely a rejection of the do-it-yourself approach to lawyering and statecraft for which the constitution

⁵ Kahn 1988, 542; Vlastos 1981, 115 n. 13; Adkins 1976, 302.

⁶ *Resp.* 4.433a; cf. *Resp.* 4.443d, *Grg.* 526c, *Chrm.* 161d.

⁷ See especially Ar. *Plut.* 906–19, which Adkins cites. For a few of the relevant constitutional provisions, see Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 7.3, 27.4, 56.6.

⁸ Thuc. 2.40.2. Examples of *ta hautou pratein* as abstention from politics and law, outside Plato, include Xen. *Mem.* 2.9.1–2 and Lys. 19.19. For Socrates' own such abstention, see Pl. *Ap.* 31d–32a; elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, the theme of philosopher as political abstainer is seen at *Resp.* 6.488a–489c, *Grg.* 526c, and *Hp. Mi.* 281c. Chrysippus apparently concurred: Plut. *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* 1043.a–b.

provided. Therefore, if this context gives us the popular sense of the phrase, then that popular sense is clearly not the do-it-yourself sense.

The more general sense of *ta hautou pratein* as simply minding one's own business seems likewise to point towards inaction, towards not doing, in complete contrast with the markedly energetic creed of the do-it-yourselfer. For instance, in Sophocles' *Electra*, when Clytemnestra snaps at her daughter, "mind your own business!" (*ta sautēs prass'*, 678), she is clearly telling her to reduce the range or scope of her concerns and (verbal) activities. We see the theme of not-doing even more clearly in Lysias' oration "On the Scrutiny of Evandros," where the orator predicts that the examinee will misrepresent himself as one "who *is not seen doing* what others hereabouts venture to do, but prefers to mind his own business" (26.3–4).

But perhaps the best evidence that the do-it-yourself sense of *ta hautou pratein* was not ordinary or commonplace is that this interpretation comes as a surprise to Charmides. Charmides has proposed *ta hautou pratein* as a definition of self-control, which he clearly believes to be a good thing (161b; 159d, 162a); and yet when Socrates interprets it in the do-it-yourself sense, as quoted above, Charmides' immediate response is no, that would *not* be a good thing. That interpretation of *ta hautou pratein* is therefore unexpected in this context, and if it were the "ordinary, commonplace" sense, this scene would have lacked dramatic plausibility to Plato's early readers.

Since the do-it-yourself sense of *ta hautou pratein* in Book 2 is no mere casual slip into common usage, and since Socrates explicitly refers back to this passage when enthroning the specializing sense as the achieved definition of justice two books later, this bifurcation in meaning stands in need of explanation.

The obvious place to start is with the original purpose of the whole exercise. Construction of the hypothetical just *polis* was originally undertaken for the purpose of showing in macrocosm the nature of justice in the individual soul and thus easing the way towards an understanding of that nature. The just individual thus has two roles here, as both a constituent part and a microcosm of the just *polis*. Conceivably these two contrasting senses of *ta hautou pratein* might somehow correspond to these two roles, which do seem to contrast with each other as regards self-sufficiency.

According to the argument in *Republic*, people come together to form a *polis* in the first place because we are not individually self-sufficient (*autarkēs*, 2.369b)—that is, we each have more needs than any of us can single-handedly provide for. If we each live solitary, therefore,

some of our needs go unmet. Banding together to form a *polis* is a response to this problem; and the initial hypothetical *polis* of “four or five men” illustrates the basic principle by which this strategy can solve or at least ameliorate it. The farmer will take care of the nutritional needs of all, including himself, and each of the others will return the favor by taking care of some other need of his, so that he is housed by the builder, shod by the shoemaker, and clothed by the weaver.

To double-check and solidify agreement with this principle, Socrates reopens the possibility he has just rejected—that one man could conceivably manage all these various tasks on his own behalf, “doing his own things” (2.369e–370a, already quoted). Perhaps, after all, one single individual could manage to provide single-handedly, castaway-fashion, for just these three or four most basic needs. But Adeimantus rejects that way of doing things, because the other way is “easier.” Either way, the problem of individual non-self-sufficiency can be resolved; the easier way is to form a collective that *will* be self-sufficient, collectively. Plato thus effectively though sketchily anticipates Aristotle’s analysis in the *Politics*, where progressively larger units of social organization are said to approach the goal of self-sufficiency more and more closely, until at last the largest unit, the *polis*, “has reached the final limit of total self-sufficiency, so to speak”—self-sufficiency being the goal and chief good driving this entire process of social aggregation (1252b27–1253a1).

Those who practice *ta hautou pratein* in its do-it-yourself sense—building their own houses, weaving and washing their own garments, fashioning their own sandals, oil flasks, strigils, and so forth—thereby achieve or at least approach individual self-sufficiency in a fairly obvious and routine sense of the term. So, too, the *polis* that lives by the same maxim in its opposite sense (so that the various tasks are strictly distributed among specialists) is self-sufficient collectively. And insofar as the just individual is a microcosm of that just *polis*, that individual is likewise a self-sufficient system in some sense, even while functioning as a very specific and dependent cog in that larger self-sufficient system which is the *polis*.

This line of interpretation, however, runs up against Plato’s conspicuous omission to characterize his hypothetical *polis* as materially self-sufficient. Even the first version of it falls distinctly short of this Aristotelian political ideal, for Socrates arbitrarily declares it impossible for any *polis* to subsist without imports—even one so Edenically vegetarian and otherwise abstemious as this one (2.370e–371b). Then when Glaucon complains of the vegetarian diet and lack of furniture, Socrates (again rather arbitrarily) responds by adding not just tables, couches,

meat, and fish, but a whole slew of other luxuries, including perfumes, prostitutes, pastries, gold, and ivory, so that the *polis* is “fevered” or “inflamed” with luxury (372e–373a; *phlegmainousa*). The ivory for one would have had to be an import in any conceivable Greek *polis*, so that, although imports are not again mentioned as such, clearly they would, if anything, increase. They might decrease again when the *polis* thus inflamed receives its “purgation” (3.399e), but there is no reason to suppose that they would decrease below the levels of the abstemious first version. In any case, this purgation is only to be administered to the minority Guardian class through their own exclusive educational program; and clearly it does not so far reverse the disease process as to eliminate the prospect of war or the need for a warrior class, both of which arose with and because of the inflammation.

It was possible to characterize a classical Greek *polis* as self-sufficient even when it was dependent on imports. Thucydides has Pericles boast in his funeral speech of how Athens is “most self-sufficient both for war and for peace,” even though a later speech (that of Nicias) in the same history confesses Athenian dependence on imported grain.⁹ Possibly the ratio of import to home-grown had climbed dramatically over the intervening fifteen years; but I will stipulate that more likely Pericles was referring in the earlier speech to such things as the network of alliances that the Athenians had built for themselves, the treasure they had amassed, and their navy’s ability to maintain the empire and keep the sea lanes open for necessary trade, all of which added up to mean that Athens should not go hungry even when Attic fields were ravaged by the enemy.

But if we accept this broader definition of self-sufficiency, as “able to ensure that needs will be supplied by others” and apply it to the individual, we find ourselves calling that individual self-sufficient who merely earns enough money in some specialized profession to *buy* the house, food, cloak, and sandals. That kind of self-sufficiency (“pulling one’s own weight” in a differentiated economy) may be meaningful and worthy in its own way, but it is self-sufficiency only in an equivocal sense, which does not at all participate in the do-it-yourself sense of *ta hautou prattein*. And Socrates himself has already set individual self-sufficiency in opposition to the practice of going to one person for one need, a second for a second need, and so forth, which is precisely what our moneyed specialist does when shopping (2.369b–c).

⁹ 2.36.3–4; 6.20.4. As late as the seventh edition (1883) of the lexicon, Liddell and Scott cited Thuc. 2.36 (and 1.37, regarding Corcyra) as instances of *chōra autarkēs*, meaning “a country that supplies itself, independent of imports.”

There is yet another sort or sense of “self-sufficiency” that is in play in this dialogue, however. It consists in a kind of immunity from the vicissitudes of fortune and fate, attained when the soul learns to value only what is not subject to fortune or fate—such as mathematics, the Forms, its own ethical goodness. I shall call this kind “ethical” self-sufficiency to distinguish it from the “economic” kinds of self-sufficiency discussed hitherto.

As Martha Nussbaum has, I think, sufficiently shown, this ethical self-sufficiency is finally identical with, and really just a specific way of describing, that virtue and wisdom towards which the philosophic life is altogether directed, according to Plato's middle dialogues including *Republic*: the vanquishing or quieting of baser impulses under the absolute sway of reason, the contemplation of the immutable Forms that alone are ultimately real, and the preparation or practicing for death, when the soul shall relinquish the body and all impermanent things.¹⁰ In *Republic* the just individual resembles the hypothetical just *polis* by virtue of the strict subordination of the appetitive and spirited parts of the soul to the reasoning part. This arrangement corresponds to the strict subordination of the producing and Auxiliary classes to the Guardians. (It is thus, through its own strict social stratification, that the hypothetical *polis* has finally yielded that insight on individual justice for the sake of which it was constructed in the first place.) In whomever this subordination is most complete, reason is least subject to the promptings of the other (lower) parts of the soul; and with sovereign freedom and authority it forbids such attachments and curbs such appetites as would make or keep the soul dependent on mutable circumstance. Thus the most thoroughly just individual would naturally become ethically self-sufficient in the highest degree.

Can ethical self-sufficiency also be predicated of the hypothetical *polis* itself? Perhaps it can, but only in a secondary way, via the ethical self-sufficiency of people within it.

¹⁰ 2001, 136–64. I am much indebted to Nussbaum's discussion and argument on this subject and its role in Platonic thought. Oddly, though, her *index locorum* does not list any of the thirteen loci in which the terms *autarkēs* and *autarkeia* actually occur in the Platonic corpus. The characterization of the “proper” man as “most self-sufficient” at 3.387d–e is one of two such loci in *Resp.*, and the term there clearly carries the sense with which Nussbaum is most keenly concerned; for this man's self-sufficiency means that he does not allow his soul to become so attached to mortal friends that he will passionately mourn their demise. (I refrain from placing “middle” in scare quotes before “dialogues” in the text, but I use the term merely to designate a set of dialogues commonly so called, including by Nussbaum; no assumption regarding the chronology of composition is here implied.)

The citizens of the first version contrive to avoid both war and penury through their self-discipline in preventing overpopulation (2.372b–c). Thus they effectively and deliberately immunize themselves and their *polis* against at least two kinds of misfortune, and they do so through self-imposed limits on their own appetites, desires, and attachments. Such self-imposed limits on desire are also apparent in their generally abstemious habits and their not coveting the lands of neighboring *poleis*. The way of life that characterizes this first *polis*, then, closely approximates ethical self-sufficiency—even though no occasion has yet arisen for the discipline and profession of philosophy.

A later version of the hypothetical *polis* is agreed to be wise by virtue of the Guardians' good judgment, which is based on their knowledge—which is wisdom—as distinct from the various kinds of specialized technical knowledge found among the producer class (4.428a–d). Later yet, the role of Guardians is awarded to the philosophers, identified as those who contemplate and love the immutable (5.479e–6.484d). Since it has been agreed previously that the *polis* governed by the Guardians somehow collectively shares in their wisdom, so as to be wise itself, it would follow that philosophic wisdom and thus ethical self-sufficiency can indeed be predicated of this *polis*.

Here again, however, the case for calling the *polis* self-sufficient requires taking the term in a sense that has little connection with the do-it-yourself idea. Ethical self-sufficiency is more a matter of doing without than of doing for oneself: learning not to need or cherish within one's soul what cannot be secure, and thus learning to be less needy of the very things that the do-it-yourselfer is busy to contrive.

So who is this do-it-yourselfer, and what is he doing lurking in the shadows at the conceptual center of Plato's most celebrated dialogue? It does appear that we can give him a local habitation and a name. For in one of the two loci, already quoted, where Plato uses *ta hautou prattein* in its do-it-yourself sense, Socrates glosses it as “a law commanding that each man weave and wash his own cloak, and make his own sandals, and so likewise with oil flask and strigil and all other things according to the same principle” (*Chrm.* 161e–162a). Compare this with the following speech, also assigned by Plato to Socrates:

You were saying that you had arrived once in Olympia, all that you wore about your body being your own handiwork: first a ring that you had—for you started from that—that was your own work, as you knew how to engrave rings; and another seal of your own work; and a strigil and oil flask

that you fashioned yourself; then the sandals you wore, you said you had made them yourself, and woven the cloak and tunic. . . .

(*Hp. Mi.* 368b–c, DK 86 A12)

The correspondence here is too exact to be mere coincidence. And the interlocutor thus addressed is an actual and indeed a noted contemporary of Socrates—Hippias of Elis.

Hippias is among the most elusive of the major sophists from our vantage in time.¹¹ Verbatim quotations are limited to a few titles for his discourses, some isolated words, and only one whole sentence, in which he merely seems to be describing one of his own works as a composite or digest from diverse sources. This composite, presumably the *Synagogē* mentioned by Athenaeus (13.608f, DK 86 B4), is now understood to have been an important source for Plato and Aristotle on the doctrines of Thales and possibly Heraclitus.¹² Other non-Platonic fragments attribute various snippets of opinion to him, often at third hand, on diverse subjects, including history, geography, astronomy, ethics, and mythology. Proclus cites testimony by Hippias of Elis on the early history of Greek geometry and presumably is referring to him also when (some hundreds of pages later) he credits somebody named Hippias with inventing a curve called a *tetragōnizousa* or quadratrix.¹³

In the Platonic corpus, Hippias is featured as sole interlocutor in two brief dialogues that bear his name. In both he is portrayed as claiming mastery of many diverse *technai* (arts, crafts, sciences), including arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, music, poetry, and especially a *technē* of memorization—but withal ridiculously vain and none too bright. Neither dialogue clearly associates him with any particular philosophic doctrine.¹⁴

¹¹ Fragments and testimonies for Hippias are collected in chapter 86 of DK; English translation by David Gallop can be found in Sprague 1972, 94–105.

¹² Snell 1976; Mansfield 1983; Kerferd 1981, 48–49; Guthrie 1971, 282 n. 2.

¹³ *In primum Euclidis elementorum librum commentarii* 65, 272; DK 86 B12, B21. The quadratrix would constitute a solution to the classically insoluble construction-type problems of squaring the circle (hence the name) and trisecting any given acute angle; but constructing this curve is itself not possible with classical construction methods. Still, any number of points along it may be established by such methods, and the curve may then be approximated by connecting the points.

¹⁴ *Hp. Mi.* 301b is by far the most suggestive passage in either dialogue for those bent on educing Hippianic doctrines; and Kerferd (1981, 46, erroneously citing the passage as 301d5–302b4) briefly attempts to infer a metaphysical doctrine from it: “Though it is difficult to reconstruct, it seems to have been based on a doctrine of classes of things dependent on a being that is continuous or carried right through physical bodies without

He also appears in *Protagoras* as one of the sophists gathered at the house of Callias. When Socrates first speaks of seeing him there, he quotes Odysseus' line about seeing the phantom (*eidōlon*) of Heracles in the underworld (315b; cf. *Od.* 11.601). A little later in the same dialogue, Protagoras shoots Hippias a significant glance while noting that some sophists err by immersing their students in a curriculum of many discrete *technai* as opposed to the unified and signally non-specialized discipline (*mathēma*) of "good counsel" that Protagoras himself professes (318e).

Later yet in the same dialogue, Hippias is given a brief speech in which he urges Socrates and Protagoras, who seem to be losing patience with each other, to appoint a moderator between them.¹⁵ Though much applauded by the company, this proposal seems half-baked, not only for the reason that Socrates mentions, but also because it implies that philosophic dialogue is nothing more than a game. (Socrates' response to this proposal, however, and his preceding threat to walk out, are hardly the most shining examples to the contrary.)

This speech begins from the standard sophistic antithesis between nature and convention or law. (This was an antithesis nicely calculated to suggest arguments on either side of any question.) Hippias here sides with nature against the "tyrant" that is convention or man-made law, but his version of this position seems more benign than that of Callicles in *Gorgias* and more optimistic than that of Thrasymachus in Book 1 of *Republic*.¹⁶ He appeals to the company to regard and treat one another

interruption, in a manner, we are told, like the slices of beef cut the whole length of the back given in Homer to a very important guest as a special privilege at a feast." The point about the meat is well taken; it follows LSJ in relating *dianekēs* at 301b6 to Il. 7.321. Rankin (1983, 54–55) argues that no such inference is warranted, and that we are seeing merely a skilled dialectical stratagem. I cannot agree with Rankin that Plato (or whoever else wrote this dialogue) is representing Hippias as a skilled dialectician, or that this reads like a for-the-nonce dialectical expedient; and as to the difficulty Kerferd admits, it is surely no greater than those attending the fragments of Protagoras, if we just consider the passage as a fragment. Greater difficulties do arise, however, when we relate it to its context, for Hippias is made to seem incapable even of grasping the problem regarding the ontological status and character of common attributes such as beauty.

¹⁵ 337c–338b, classified by DK as imitation of the sophist's own discourse, 86 CI.

¹⁶ Guthrie (1971, 284) apparently puts this speech together with Xen. *Mem.* 4.4.5–25 in order to conclude that Hippias "contrasted law and nature and upheld the latter on moral and humanitarian, not selfish and ambitious, grounds"; Romilly concurs (1992, 114–15). Guthrie finds additional support for attributing this doctrine to Hippias in DK 86 B17, where Stobaeus quotes a now lost work by Plutarch, saying that Hippias faulted existing codes of law for failing to penalize slander. But though criticism of man-made law is, in general, consistent with belief in a superior behavioral code rooted in nature, still it by no

as kin and fellow citizens by nature, as they are all Greek intellectuals, regardless of their legal membership in separate households and their legal citizenship in separate *poleis*. It is an admirable sentiment, but comically irrelevant in context, since the dispute between Socrates and Protagoras about the length of their speeches is very far from degenerating into an exchange of anti-Abderan and anti-Athenian slurs. Still, parody and satire very commonly work by taking the target's well-known utterance out of the original context, where it made some sense, and sticking it into another, where it becomes absurd.¹⁷ So it may well be that this particular take on the nature/convention issue was or resembled the sophist's actual and expressed view.

The Platonic caricature of Hippias is in general less respectful than Plato's portraits of other sophists, including Protagoras, Gorgias, and even Prodicus; and it is probably even more unfair and distorted than these are. But one of the picture's salient features, Hippias' polymathy, stands clearly confirmed by other ancient authorities, some of whom draw on sources outside the Platonic corpus and even apparently on then-extant works by the sophist himself. This confirmation, and the apparent availability to Plutarch (and to possibly much later scholiasts) of actual writings by Hippias, together lend much credibility to a key piece of testimony from the medieval lexicon known as the Suda or Suidas: that Hippias identified *autarkeia*, self-sufficiency, as the *telos*, the proper goal of human life as a whole.¹⁸

means implies such a belief; and the objection there attributed to Hippias is based on the value of reputation, which is wholly a matter of consensus of opinion and therefore a matter of convention. The Xenophon passage is a discussion between Socrates and Hippias, which Xenophon says he witnessed and is recalling in substance; DK gives only the beginning of it (86 A14). It shows Hippias advancing some opinions on relations among justice, the often fickle and arbitrary laws of a *polis*, and universal unwritten law. But he modifies these views fairly freely under the pressure of Socrates' questions, and nowhere does he so much as mention nature; he attributes the unwritten law to the gods. For discrimination between the positions of Calicles and Thrasymachus, see Romilly 1992, 116–21; for an opposing view, see Kerferd 1976.

¹⁷ Compare the immediately preceding treatment of Prodicus, shown riding his peculiar hobby-horse of discriminating among near-synonyms, in a manner also ridiculously irrelevant to the immediate context (*Prt.* 337a–c).

¹⁸ Suda. Iota. 543, DK 86 A1. This position is not to be confused with Aristotle's statement that the *teleion* must be *autarkes*—that is, that nothing dependent for its value on anything else can properly be called or considered *teleion* (*Eth. Nic.* 1097b7–8, 20). Hippias' proposal that *autarkeia* is itself the *telos* might well fail Aristotle's test, ironically enough; but we know too little about it to pronounce with certainty, and in another context Aristotle himself avers that *autarkeia* is *telos* (*Pol.* 1253a1).

And with this latest information, the curious split in the meaning of *ta hautou prattein*, between the specializing sense and the nearly opposite do-it-yourself sense, begins at last to make some sense. The idea or theme of specialization clearly runs deep in Plato's thought, in *Republic* and elsewhere. Specialization is flatly equated with justice itself in *Republic*, as we have seen, and it is also fundamental to Plato's notion of *technē*, which plays an enormously and famously crucial role throughout the early and middle dialogues.¹⁹ If Hippias had articulated a coherent anti-specialist position, as it now appears he did, we can understand why Plato might want to respond to it.

In *Protagoras* we find a very different anti-specialist position, which is very ably and clearly articulated by Protagoras in his long speech (320d–328d). Protagoras clearly contrasts his own position with that of Hippias, as already noted. Rather than claiming and advocating mastery of many *technai*, he is noticeably leery of laying claim to any *technē* whatever, since that term had always tended to imply specialization, even in Homeric usage, and possibly even earlier.²⁰ When he has once described what it is that he professes to teach as “good counsel” in both private and public life, he accepts and even embraces Socrates' paraphrase of the idea, which is *politikē technē*, “civic art.” But he does so rather as one might greet a cleverly apt oxymoron. And for him it would be an oxymoron, something like “I specialize in just being human.” He himself has not used the term *technē* to describe his profession.²¹ Instead, he has termed it a *mathēma*, a discipline. This term, like *technē*, clearly

¹⁹ In fact, the treatment of *technē* or the “craft analogy” is one of the more important bases for the conventional chronology: Parry 1996, 3, 11, 60 n. 1. It is merely one index of the crucial role played by *technē* in these dialogues that two 1996 books, Roochnik's and Parry's, are entirely devoted to it.

²⁰ Roochnik (1996, 19) cites etymological evidence that even before Homer, the word would have carried associations with “a specialized (in Gould's words, a ‘comparatively rare’) individual.” For a contrasting view of Protagoras' relation to *technē* in this dialogue, see Nussbaum 2001, 89–121. Both Roochnik and Vlastos (1956) seem much more appreciative than Nussbaum of the anti-specialist force of Protagoras' long speech at 320c–328d.

²¹ Roochnik (1996, 213–14) points out that Protagoras *does* speak of the sophistic *technē* at 316d in a speech wherein he also identifies himself as a sophist; but he notes, too, that in the same speech Protagoras proceeds to list a remarkably varied set of luminaries as his predecessor sophists, thus preventing the supposition that this *technē* is a single specialty. This is part of Roochnik's more general argument that Protagoras is trying to have it both ways in the matter of professing a *technē* (212–27). I think that if anything Roochnik somewhat overstates the positive side of this ambiguity on the assumption that any assertion of teachability is an assertion of *technē*.

denotes something that can be learned, and thus presumably taught; but unlike *technē*, it does not imply specialization. Later, Protagoras terms it *politikē sophia*, civic wisdom (318e–319a, 321d).

At the end of the myth portion of his speech, Protagoras explicitly contrasts this civic wisdom with specialized *technai*. When Zeus directs Hermes to bestow on humanity the twin pillars of civic wisdom, justice and respect (lest the only species to worship the gods should perish), Hermes asks, “Am I to distribute these as the *technai* have been distributed? For they have been distributed thus: one possessing the medical [*technē*] suffices for many individuals, and likewise with the other artisans.”²² But Zeus says no—justice and respect must be given to and shared by all.

The remainder of the speech further elaborates and explains this anti-specialist position, and it cogently answers Socrates’ prior arguments against the proposition that good citizenship can be taught. Afterwards, Socrates offers no real rebuttal or challenge to Protagoras’ argument that civic excellence or good counsel, while teachable, is not a specialized expertise. Socrates merely raises a new question, a version of the one-and-many problem, completely and more or less admittedly tangential to the argument that Protagoras has made; and he succeeds in tripping Protagoras up with it. Ensuing segments of the dialogue go off in various directions but never return to the anti-specialist argument that so dominates Protagoras’ speech.

It is in *Republic* that we find Plato’s answer to the argument that he put in the mouth of Protagoras. Yes, he says, the wisdom needed to make a success of communal life in the *polis* has indeed a breadth of scope unlike the specialties of the artisans (4.428e, 5.475b). But no, it is not something given to all, by contrast with medical expertise; rather, it belongs to the very tiniest of minorities—and in this sense at least the philosopher-king’s role as physician to the body politic is the most rarefied of all medical specialties (4.428e; 3.389b, 5.459c, 8.564c).

This same “yes but” answer speaks similarly to Gorgias’ claim that his rhetorical *technē* somehow transcends specialization, that it contains all the petty discrete specialized *technai* gathered together under itself as a meta-discipline, a kind of second-order knowledge (*Grg.* 456a). Sprague explores the idea of such second-order knowledge throughout the Platonic corpus, terming it the “theoretical background” for the figure of the philosopher-king who emerges finally to rule the hypothetical *polis* in

²² 322c–d. The term I here render “artisans” is again *dēmiourgoi* (see n. 2 above). On the status of medicine as on a par with other crafts, see Horstmannshoff 1990, Pleket 1995.

Republic (1976). She finds that this figure, who also appears as the Statesman in the dialogue of that name, is he who finally achieves the status of second-order artist, which had proven so elusive in other dialogues, including *Ion*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Charmides*, *Lysis*, *Euthydemus*, and *Republic* 1. Roochnik disputes that the philosopher-king's mastery can properly be called a *technē* at all, but either way, his philosophic knowledge transcends specialization, mastering and ruling all the various specialized *technai* as Gorgias claimed that rhetoric did (*Grg.* 452e). So yes, there is such a master-knowledge that transcends specialization, but its exponent is not the rhetorician or orator; rather, it is the philosopher-king.

But with Hippias the case is far different. His challenge is coming from the opposite direction, from one who professes to be “altogether the cleverest and most skillful of people with respect to the most *technai*” (*Hp. Mi.* 368b)—and who holds that the self-sufficiency attained thereby is the *telos*. Plato introduces the do-it-yourself sense of *ta hautou pratein* because it has a vital role to play in his response to this very different anti-specialist position. Whether Plato originated this usage of the phrase in *Charmides* (for this or some other purpose), or whether he got it from some now lost discourse, oral or written, by Hippias or someone else, scarcely matters. Given this idea, and not without it, the answer to Hippias is implicit and clear, once again in “yes but” form: yes, Hippias, the *telos* is indeed self-sufficiency, but in the ethical rather than the economic sense; and yes, Hippias, *ta hautou pratein* is a sound maxim, but in the specializing rather than the do-it-yourself sense.

As the most elusive of the major sophists, Hippias has attracted arguably more than his share of speculative theories. Among other things, he has been proposed as the Anonymus of Iamblichus and as the author of *Dissoi Logoi* and the Hippocratic treatise *De Arte* (Dupréel 1948, 242–54; Untersteiner 1954, 277). It is with some trepidation that I here add to the pile. But I can see no other, better way to explain the curious split in the meaning of the crucial phrase *ta hautou pratein*, and the role of the do-it-yourselfer in Plato's *Republic*.²³

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