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## An Outline of Labour in Plato's Thought

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### **Abstract**

The labour system of every society is crucial to its effective running. This is implied in Plato's theory of social justice, even though he does not engage in a formal discussion of labour in any of his works. Yet, attempts by scholars to explore the characteristics of labour in Plato have been limited to his economic ideas, with a concentration on the division of labour and specialization. In this paper, I argue that Plato's thoughts on labour go beyond just the principle of division of labour and specialization to employ philosophical, ethical, and psychological ideas in putting forward a labour system that keeps the *polis* functioning effectively, and that the socio-economic and political roles and implications of labour in Plato's thought can only be understood by considering his holistic ideas. I conclude that the absence of a formal discussion of labour is because the principles and ideas Plato expounds in his works are sufficient to put the ills and evils that could result from labour in check. Nevertheless, the *Republic* and *Laws* present the best outlines of what may constitute labour in Plato's thought, and so I concentrate, but do not limit myself, to both works.

**Keywords:** Class, Labour, Laws, Plato, Platonic Communism, Political Organization of Society, Republic, Work.

### **Introduction**

Implied in Plato's use of the principle of division of labour and specialization (Plato did not introduce these terms) in his *Republic* and *Laws* is the fact that the labour system of every society is crucial to its effective running. But Plato does not engage in any formal discussion of labour in these two dialogues, nor in any of his works. Because of this, scholars may not have seen the need to research what will constitute Plato's thought on labour. This observation is evident in the discussions on the abolishment of the private family and property (Barker, 2012; Okin, 2013, Okin, 1977), the role and place of women (Annas, 1976; Blair, 2012; Pomeroy, 1974; Santas, 2005; Vlastos, 1997), and the status and treatment of slaves (Calvert, 1975; Vlastos, 1941) in Plato's political thought. But there is evidence to show that the study of Plato's *poleis* (sing. *polis*), a

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“settled community of human beings cooperating ... to fulfil their needs and to promote their common welfare” (Melling, 1987, p. 5), can never be complete without reference to labour. In the *Republic*, for instance, Plato’s Socrates (hereinafter, Socrates) attempts a definition of justice by considering the state (II, 368d-369a).<sup>1</sup> This state, according to Socrates, arises because of specialization and division of labour:

[A] city comes to be because none of us is self-sufficient, but we all need many things. ... And because people need many things, and because one person calls on a second out of one need and on a third out of a different need, many people gather in a single place to live together as partners and helpers. And such a settlement is called a city. (*Rep.* II, 369b6-c3; cf. Aristotle, *Politics* I, 2.1252b28-30)<sup>2</sup>

Labour is therefore a central aspect of Plato’s *poleis*. Unfortunately, because specialization and division of labour are so crucial to the formation of Plato’s *poleis*, they have been treated as the major concepts and on purely economic terms with regards to labour’s role in Plato’s political organization (see Alvey, 2011a; Alvey, 2011b; Amemiya, 2007; Evers, 1980). This places limits on the extent of labour’s role in Plato’s political organization, for there are bordering concepts which are equally fundamental to the sustenance of Plato’s *poleis*: even though specialization and division of labour may result in the formation of a State, they cannot sustain it without the interplay of other ideas contained in these related concepts (see Hodges, 1962). For instance, what divisions of labour will be assigned to different groups of people? What regulations will govern these divisions? What kinds of training will produce the desired goals of the various class divisions? What socio-economic and political implications will labour present to the classes in Plato’s political organization?

In this paper, I argue that despite the absence of a formal discussion of labour, Plato’s *poleis* are sustained by an efficient labour system, which departs from a purely economic motive to engage philosophical, ethical and psychological ideas in producing virtue in the citizens of the respective societies in the *Republic* and *Laws*, and that these ideas are what influence Plato’s thoughts on labour. I examine this labour system by exploring the various aspects of Plato’s economic, ethical and psychological ideas in his two longest dialogues which also present us with substantial evidence, even though I refer to other works by Plato. Thus, my analysis extends beyond the concept of specialization and division of labour to other aspects of labour and non-economic principles, and gives us an opportunity to understand the socio-economic and political roles and implications of labour in Plato’s political thought. I conclude that the reason Plato does not formally discuss labour is because the ideas he proposes are enough to put the ills of labour in check, and that any attempt at studying labour in Plato’s thought should not focus on his economic ideas only.

At this stage, it is important to clarify my use of ‘labour’ and ‘work’ in this paper. Based on the near-synonymous use of ‘labour’ and ‘work’ in modern English language (for example, scholars have termed the division of work or tasks in the *Republic* as ‘division of labour’), I use ‘labour’ and ‘work’ interchangeably and to mean the same thing, unless otherwise indicated. This approach is further informed by Plato’s use of a common word, *ergon* (pl. *erga*, work, task, function) for both mental and manual occupations (*Rep.* II, 372a6-b2; 374b5-7; IV, 421b5-c2), but different words, *ergon* and *ponos*, for the activities involved in doing mental and manual work respectively. While *ergon* generally refers to occupation or task and to activities performed by mental effort, *ponos* refers specifically to those activities that are done by bodily exertion (*Rep.* II, 369e2-5, 371d9-e3). This means that a manual worker, say a ship builder, has an occupation (*ergon*) but labours (*ponei*) to produce a ship. Thus, the difference lies in the nature of the activities (mental or manual) involved in executing a task.

### **The Origins of Labour and the Principle of the Division of Labour**

In almost all creation myths of the greatest works, there is a part of the stories that account for the curse of labour and cause of the ills of society. For instance, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* the creation story presents an account of a Golden Age in which people had everything flourishing — it was all leisure for them. There was no need to till the ground: “the earth itself, without compulsion, untouched by the hoe, unfurrowed by any share, produced all things spontaneously....” (*Metamorphoses* 1.102-3).<sup>3</sup> People’s only task was to gather what they required. Then, the created

world began degenerating when sin entered it, and people began to labour (*Metamorphoses* 1.103-25).

Hesiod also narrates this myth in his *Works and Days* (109-201), to which Plato refers and states that there were no political institutions in society during the Golden Age (cf. *Laws* III, 677-678).<sup>4</sup> Instead, a god reared and cared for human beings, just as humans rear and care for other lower animals (*Statesman* 271e). There was no lack of basic needs: there was abundance of food since the earth brought forth its own produce and there was no need for clothes as the “blend of seasons” provided a favourable climatic condition:

*For the most part they [people] would feed outdoors, naked and without bedding; for the blend of seasons was without painful extremes, and they had soft beds from abundant grass that sprang from the earth. (Statesman 272a4-5)*

Succeeding this age was the Age of Zeus when human beings were deprived of the orderliness of the cosmos and the care of the gods. Humans became vulnerable: majority of the animals turned wild, and being weaker, humans fell prey to them (*Statesman* 274b); resources and expertise were lacking, and the earth ceased to yield fruit by itself (*Statesman* 274c; cf. *Laws* III, 677b, 678a2). Thus, care from the gods having ceased, human beings had to take care of themselves with the resources available to them (*Statesman* 274b). This began the need for people to labour and fend for themselves, making labour a necessary tool for their survival. But could they provide all they needed without relying on others?

In order to survive the crisis succeeding the Golden Age, human beings now had to depend on others to provide for their needs since they were no more self-sufficient (*Rep.* II, 369b7; cf. *Laws* III, 679e6). The wise course of action was to come together and provide individually those things they needed and share or exchange between themselves. Thus, no human chose to live alone; rather, they joined others who could provide the things they could not provide for themselves. The labour of each person and their various specializations resulted in the formation of a city (*Rep.* II, 369b9-c1). Thus, labour’s role here is very crucial; without the labour of the various persons and their specializations there would not be the need for them to come together to form societies.

Plato advocates for efficiency in labour: each person must “contribute his [or her] own work for the common use of all” so that instead of a farmer spending, say, twelve hours in producing food, building a house, producing textile, and making footwear, he or she would concentrate on using the twelve hours in only producing food for all (*Rep.* II, 369e; cf. IV, 433a). This is necessary because (1) naturally, we are different people and each person is best suited to particular tasks (*Rep.* II, 370a; *Timaeus* 17d1-2; cf. *Charmides* 171e2-6), and (2) an expert in a particular field does a better job than a jack of all trades (*Rep.* II, 370b). An economic effect of this is that more plentiful and better-quality goods and services are produced (*Rep.* II, 370c). Engaging in two or more kinds of work decreases any chance of being best in any of the trades, but specialization creates the process for one to be best at his or her trade: “...each individual would do a fine job of one occupation, not of many, and ... if he [or she] ... dabbled in many things, he’d surely fail to achieve distinction in any of them” (*Rep.* III, 394e1-4; cf. *Rep.* II, 370b, 374a6-7). In the *Laws*, for example, everyone must follow one vocation (VIII, 847a2-4). Like the Guardian in the *Republic*, who “requires most freedom from other things and the greatest skill and devotion” (*Rep.* II, 374e1; cf. III, 395b7-2, *Timaeus* 18b5-8), the citizen’s sole vocation is to cultivate virtue (*Laws* VIII, 847a5-6). The same rule applies to all other workers:

*Following two trades or two callings efficiently—or even following one and supervising a worker in another—is almost always too difficult for human nature. So in our state this must be a cardinal rule: no metal worker must turn to carpentry and no carpenter must supervise workers in metal instead of practicing his [or her] own craft. (Laws VIII, 846d5-e5)*

A critique of Plato’s division of labour and specialization is that it will create boredom and reduce the efficiency that it seeks to achieve since citizens will commit to only one task and the same routine of production. Nevertheless, citizens will have social lives where their boredom will be taken care of. They shall have sex and feast with their children and engage in religious activities (*Rep.* II, 372b5-6). Moreover, due to “geographical differentiation in [nature]” (Evers, 1980, p. 46), labour will result in domestic and international trade (*Rep.* II, 371a-d). It will also result in the

establishment of a monetary economy where the exchange of goods and services shall no more be by barter but by currency (*Rep. II*, 371b).

Even though it is an economic need that brings the labours of people together, the process is not without social consequences. A social effect of the division of labour and specialization is that it leads the individual to a second stage of the socialization process, that is, outside the bonds of family. According to Rothbard (1971), if human beings had been self-sufficient, there would not be any social life since they will have no need to be dependent on each other. Thus, labour is socially necessary for the formation and functioning of any city. It improves the social life of human beings and helps them understand the different personalities of other humans through interaction with them. Nevertheless, the increase in wealth of individuals and increased population resulting from the socialization process and the need to fulfil sexual needs will lead to scarcity of resources (*Rep. II*, 373d). This will result in litigation and the seizure of foreign lands through war (*Rep. II*, 373d-e). There will thus be the need for a class that will wage war on behalf of the city and protect it (*Rep. II*, 374a; *Timaeus* 17d2-4, 24b1-3). This class shall be developed into the ruling class while retaining their military function; the remaining citizens shall be engaged in manufacture and production of food (*Critias* 110c; *Rep. II*, 372a). Division of labour and specialization, therefore, influence the development of classes.

It is based on the laws of the division of labour and the various empirical assumptions Plato makes concerning the “social tasks”, talents, abilities and education of individuals that Plato defines his principle of social justice (Calvert, 1975; Santas, 2005). Thus, as Santas (2005) observes, Plato’s theory of social justice requires two principles: the principle of division of labour, which is independent of the second principle, that is division of labour by talent. The difference between both principles is that in the first, “we can have division of labour without regard [to] talent, though of course not division of labour by talent without division of labour” (Santas, 2005, p. 29). In other words, the goal of division of labour is to maximize goods and services, but division of labour by talent ensures an even distribution of work based on people’s aptitude— “it requires distributions of social labours on the basis of educated talent” (Santas, 2005, p. 29).

### **The Nature of Work in the Republic and Laws**

In both the *Republic* and *Laws*, work functions as a means to an end. Each person works with the aim of achieving goodness for the product and for himself and others. In the *Laws*, for example, the aim of the legislator is to produce the ‘best’ citizens who will serve as the fighting force of the state (*Laws VIII*, 830a-831a). In addition, he is to enact laws that would help distribute wealth proportionately so that there would not be either extremes of wealth (which corrupts the soul by luxury) or poverty (which drives men “by distress into losing all sense of shame”) (*Laws XI*, 919b6-d1). In the *Republic*, rulers choose to govern because they do not want to get punished from refusing to rule—the punishment being that they will be “ruled by someone worse than [themselves]” (*Rep. I*, 347c3). So, unwillingly they accept to rule and

take other people’s troubles in hand and straighten them out, but [they ask] for wages; for anyone who intends to practice his [or her] craft well never does or orders what is best for himself [or herself]—at least not when he [or she] orders as his [or her] craft prescribes—but what is the best for his [or her] subject. (*Rep. I*, 346e7-347a3)

Another goal of work is the satisfaction of the needs of the community through an even distribution of goods and services (*Laws XI*, 918b6-919c2). In doing this, the worker produces tools and crafts in return for pay (*Laws XI*, 920e). But the worker’s first goal is to the benefit of the subject of his or her craft (*Rep. I*, 341c4-342e, 346a5), and in achieving this he or she receives a reward in the form of wages through the operation of another craft—wage-earning (*Rep. I*, 346c). Thus, every kind of work does not benefit itself but the thing it is set over (*Rep. I*, 346d-e). Any work that does not produce the function of which it is set over, therefore, is useless (*Rep. I*, 333a1-e2).

The work process involves a relationship among art, skill, tool and matter. For any work to be accomplished, it will need a skilled person in that craft, and a tool that he will use on the matter to bring about the desired result (*Cratylus* 388a-c, 389c). To create a statue, for instance, a man needs several tools and the skill of sculpture to work on and mould the matter (wood, clay, metal or stone) into a finished product. The worker of the product is known as the cause of production

because he makes the product itself, while those workers who provide the tools or resources, without which a product would never be accomplished, are known as contributory causes (*Statesman* 281e, 281c2-5, 287c7-8). For instance, a weaver is the cause of the production of wool-clothing, while the carpenter who produces the shutter for weaving is a contributory cause of production. The shutter is the carpenter's product, in which case he or she is the cause of its production, but to the weaver the shutter is his or her tool (*Cratylus* 388c).

The accomplishment of work may involve several processes of production. These processes may also involve several kinds of workers, arts, skills, specializations and divisions of labour. The art of building, for example, would involve several divisions of labour and specialized arts. It would need the supervision of the master-builder, who will direct the building of a structure by ensuring that the expertise of the draughtsman and architect are followed. Other specializations that would be needed are carpentry and joinery, masonry, metal-work, and painting.

The work process also involves a relationship with knowledge, both theoretical and practical (*Statesman* 258d4-e5; cf. *Philebus* 55d1-2). The theoretical sort of knowledge (*tēs gnōstikēs epistēmēs*), which further divides into directive and calculative sorts of knowledge (*Statesman* 260b; cf. 258d8-e1), refers to the understanding of the mind, while the manual or practical sort (*cheiourgīān*, working by hand) denotes the use of the hand or body (*Statesman* 259c8-9). Thus, in building houses, master-builders provide understanding (theoretical knowledge or intellectual labour) rather than manual labour (*Statesman* 259e14-15): "they don't act as workers themselves, but manage workers" (*Statesman* 259e11-12). Moreover, the process of work involves an overlap of knowledge and skill. In the manufacture of a rudder, for instance, a carpenter would do a good job only by the supervision of a ship-captain, who has expert knowledge on the appropriate markings and measurements needed for his or her ship (*Cratylus* 390d1-2). These cases show that there cannot be a divorce of brain from hand; intelligence of the mind and the skill of the hand are needed to accomplish work that involves the application of both theoretical and practical knowledge.

In ancient Greek society, manual labour was seen as a form of slavery since it restricted humans from doing what they pleased, and subjected them to harsh conditions, causing them not to realize their full potentials. Except for citizens of the poor class who engaged in manual labour, Athenian citizens were mostly concerned about the politics of the city-state. Thus, the Athenian economy was mostly supported by slaves and foreigners who had come into the city to trade. Some of the slaves also engaged in trade and commerce, while others worked as farmers and domestic servants and in the silver mines (Amemiya, 2007; Cartledge, 1998). They had their labour "simply extracted from them" (Calvert, 1987, p. 368). Morrow (1939) summarises the characteristics of the slave status from Plato's *Laws* as follows:

[a] The slave is a possession, [b] but also a person, subject to the arbitrary will of another person, his master, and [c] subject also, independently of his master, to law, both positive law (the legislation of the state) and to religious and moral law (the requirements of "holiness"). [d] He is protected against certain forms of abuse by religious law, and [e] in his public capacity at least, by the law of the state. But [f] he possesses no rights of action, except in his public capacity, and a *fortiori* no political rights. (p. 188)

In addition to the above, the slave is believed to be incapable of giving or following rational account (*Laws* XII, 966b; Vlastos, 1941), suggesting a degradation to the status of animals (see Aristotle, *Politics* I, 5.1254b20-3; Amemiya, 2007). Moreover, Aristotle notes the difference nature places on slaves and freemen: slaves are made for "servile labour", while the freeman is made for "political life in the arts both of war and peace" (*Politics* I, 5.1254b25-30). In Plato's *Laws*, a distinction is made between the free doctor who attends to freemen and the slave-doctor who attends to slaves (IV, 720c-d). Here, the doctor-slave does not give "any [rational] account (*logos*) of the particular illness of the individual slave ...; he simply prescribes what he thinks best in the light of experience (*doxa*) ... Then he dashes off on his way to the next slave-patient ..." (Vlastos, 1941, p. 289; cf. *Laws* IV, 720c). This contrasts the process of attendance by the free doctor upon free men:

*his method is to construct an empirical case-history by consulting the invalid and his friends; in this way he himself learns something from the sick and at the same time he gives the individual patient all the instruction he can.* (*Laws* IV, 720d)

Thus, the slave, like the lower animals, is incapable of apprehending reason (*logou*), hence incapable of ruling: “*the only one fit to rule is he who possesses logos*” (Vlastos, 1941, p. 290; cf. *Laws* XII, 968a).”

### The Different Kinds of Work and Workers

Work, and those who do them, can be differentiated in several ways. According to the human talent or ability required, work and workers can be divided into skilled and unskilled (*Rep.* II, 374e1-3). A skilled worker is one who has been trained to work at a particular craft (for example, carpentry, painting, speech-writing, sophistry, weaving, teaching, medicine), while an unskilled labourer is one whose work does not require any training. In the *Republic*, some citizens are not fit to do any work except for providing retailing services (II, 371c4-d3), while others such as porters merely “sell the use of their strength” (II, 347d9-e3). Again, depending on the ability required there could be further divisions in skilled work since some jobs demand more skill than others. For example, based on their respective abilities, there are three groups of skilled workers in the *Republic*: money-making, auxiliary, and ruling classes. Everyone is given initial training in music and poetry and physical education, and is tested and assigned a class based on his or her performance (*Rep.* III, 413c-414a; VII, 537a-540c; cf. *Laws* V, 735a).

Skilled labour further divides into manual and mental work. Manual labour consists of all jobs carried out with the skill of the hand and strength of the body while mental labour consists of work done with the intelligence of the mind (*Statesman* 259c8-9). Manual labour depends primarily on practical knowledge as against mental labour’s dependence on theoretical knowledge (*Statesman* 258d4-e5, 259e14-15). The training of citizens involves both manual (physical training) and mental (music and poetry) labour (see *Rep.* II, 376e2-4; *Timaeus* 18a10-12), but their actual occupations fall either between manual or mental work. In the *Republic*, manual labour is carried out by the third class of citizens while the mental work, which is directive and calculative in nature, is done by the guardians. In the *Laws*, citizens engage in mental work through the cultivation of physical perfection and moral virtue (*Laws* VII, 807c-d; VIII, 828a-829e) and participation in politics (*Laws* VI, 751a-764c), but they are forbidden from engaging in craftsmanship so that they can give full attention to their political and civic duties (*Laws* VIII, 846d). Craftsmanship and every other manual work are carried out by foreigners, though slaves are forbidden from engaging in craftsmanship (*Laws* VIII, 846d-847a; VII, 806d8-10). Nevertheless, some foreigners also engage in mental jobs such as teaching (*Laws* VII, 804d1-3). In the *Laws*, the exclusiveness of craftsmanship and political activity to foreigners and citizens respectively shows that work can be differentiated according to the social status of the worker.

Work can be useful or useless depending on its ability to accomplish the task over which it is set (*Rep.* I, 333a1-e2), that is, whether it is productive or unproductive. One sense of productive labour is when work produces a desired result or a good outcome, so that if the required resources needed for production to occur are lacking, work would be done poorly and hence be unproductive (*Rep.* IV, 421d12-e1, 422a1-2). Productive labour could also refer to manual labour (*Philebus* 55d1-2), where the outcome of work is physical rather than abstract, unlike the case of mental labour, which is directive and calculative in nature.

Work can also be distinguished by reference to the way it is done. When a master-builder directs the completion of a building project, his supervision is solitary in nature, but the workers (*dēmiourgos*, those who engage in manual work for pay) over which he has oversight work in groups (*Statesman* 260a; cf. 268a6-b7). Hence, labour can be distinguished either as solitary work or group work. Work may also be considered as disreputable based on moral deviation and on the status of the worker. In the *Republic* lawgivers are cautioned not to subject citizens to orientations that are slavish in nature (III, 395e3; VI, 486a-b). Elsewhere, the moral deviations of trading and its abuse has made people think of it as a “low and disreputable occupation” (*Laws* XI, 918c2-3).

Depending on the motivation for working, work can be distinguished between paid and unpaid (or voluntary) (cf. *Statesman* 299a-b2). Plato distinguishes between those who work for pay and those who work without pay. Those who sell their labour to make money are called wage-earners (*Rep.* II, 371d-e; *Laws* 920e-921c; see Calvert 1987, p. 368). This excludes slaves since they do not sell their labour but rather provide free labour for their masters and depend totally on them for sustenance (*ibid.*). Included in paid work are the guardians who are not wage-earners, yet receive wages for their work (*Rep.* I, 346e6-347a6; IV, 416e1-3; VIII, 543b4-c2). The officials and

citizens in the *Laws* fall under the category of unpaid work since they are forbidden from practising any craft other than the cultivation of moral virtue and physical perfection (VIII, 847a5-6; VII, 807c5-d2). Their performance of civic and political duties does not result in any payments for work done.

When labour is bought and sold, it is characterised as a commodity and the reward for this service is wages. But wages could also serve as the reward for good performance, and penalty for poor performance or dereliction of duty. Plato divides wages into two—tangible and intangible wages (*Rep.* I, 347a4-6). The tangible wages are the physical monies (wages in cash) and prizes (wages in kind) that are given in exchange for services and performances respectively. The craftsman receives payments for his services (*Statesman* 298a-b3; *Rep.* II, 371c-e3; V, 464b6-c1; VIII, 543b6-c2; *Timaeus* 18b1-5; *Laws* VIII, 847a2-4, b2, 848a; cf. *Laws* VII, 804d1; XI, 918b6), and citizens who perform creditably well in competitions for guardianship and other contests receive rewards and prizes (*Rep.* V, 460a10; *Laws* VIII, 829c1-2, 833c1-3).

In the sense of being intangible, wages come in the form of honours, privileges and even punishments or penalties. Citizens are crowned with wreaths and honoured in life, and after death, they receive the best tombs and memorials for their outstanding performances in contests (*Rep.* V, 468b2-5; III, 414a1-3; V, 468c8-469b2; *Laws* VII, 802a; VIII, 829c4-6). For qualifying into the guardian class, the rulers have sex with the best women, but those who are good in war and other things have sex with the women more often (*Rep.* III, 459d6-7, 460a10-b2; V, 468c3-6). Those who fail, however, are demoted to the third class of citizens (*Rep.* V, 468a4-6; cf. IV, 423c), or in the case of the *Laws*, reprimanded (VIII, 829c4-6, 847a5-b1). In the *Republic*, the rulers have their wages in the form of punishment (that is, to be governed by an inferior person) if they fail to rule (*Rep.* I, 347c4-5), and in the *Laws*, those who refuse to engage in political activity are fined (VI, 763e9-764a).

### Work Qualifications of the Classes

Qualifications for work generally divide into four: education and training, moral and family life, age and experience, property-class and social status. There are rules of qualification for the various classes. First, they must all be educated and trained to be perfect at their respective crafts:

*No other tool makes anyone who picks it up a craftsman or champion unless he has acquired the requisite knowledge and has had sufficient practice.* (*Rep.* II, 374d; cf. *Laws* VII, 818b8-d1)

*Then to the degree that the work of the guardians is most important, it requires most freedom from other things and the greatest skill and devotion.* (*Rep.* II, 375e1-2; cf. *Laws* VIII, 846d)

Thus, education and training are compulsory and they play a key role in all the forms of mental and skilled manual labour. And in the *Republic*, it is the aptitude of an individual towards his education and training that determines which class he or she fits in (cf. V, 468a-b). Those who can meet the criteria for this type of education enter the guardian class, while the rest enter the wage-earning class (*Rep.* V, 468a4-6; cf. IV, 423c). Nevertheless, provision is made for promotions and demotions such that a person could progress from the wage-earning class to the guardian class, vice versa (*Rep.* IV, 423c; V, 468a4-6). A similar provision is made in the *Laws* where a person moves up or down the property-class ladder depending on changes in economic status (V, 744c6-d2). In the *Laws* emphasis is also placed on the acquisition of skills through education and training. Citizens must undergo several years of education to be able to perform their political and civic duties perfectly (*Laws* VI, 788ff.), and foreigners who wish to stay in the state must, as a requisite, possess a skill (*Laws* VIII, 850a8-b1).

Qualification could also be met by age or experience. It is important to note that even though age can influence experience, it does not mean experience. In the *Laws*, except for competitions in solo dramatic performances whose judges shall not be less than thirty years old, all other judges for contests in athletics and choral performances shall not be less than forty years old (VI, 764d-765a1-3). Nevertheless, those in charge of the choruses and the solo performances must, in addition, possess the required experience, failure of which they shall be rejected even if they are favourites of the lot (VI, 765b1-5). Also, the director of education and the censors of compositions shall not be

less than fifty years old (VI, 765d4-6; VII, 802b1-2). The Guardians of the Laws, though having a maximum tenure of twenty years, can neither hold office before age fifty nor beyond age seventy (*Laws* VI, 755a). If appointed at age sixty, they can only serve a maximum of ten years (*ibid.*). It is also by learning from experience that paediatric nurses and women can cure Corybantic conditions (*Laws* VII, 790d4-6; cf. *Theaetetus* 149b10-c5).

There is also qualification based on one's social status or property-class. In the *Laws*, only citizens qualify for civic and political appointments (cf. VIII, 846d). But citizens do not qualify, with their slaves (by social standing), to engage in craftsmanship (VIII, 846d). Of citizens, there are further distinctions between those who qualify to take up certain positions. Umpires for athletic contest, for instance, shall be chosen from the second and third property classes (*Laws* VI, 765c1-3). Only citizens of the highest property-class can be appointed to the office of the City-Warden while only those of the first and second property-classes can be elected to the office of Market-Warden (*Laws* VI, 763d-e). Apart from their duties of protecting the state's social amenities and supervising building constructions, the City-Wardens need time to engage in public affairs, hence their choice from the highest property-class; probably their wealth will allow for the leisure of engaging in public affairs (*Laws* VI, 763d). In this light, attendance at the assembly is optional only for members of the third and fourth classes (*Laws* VI, 764a). A fine of ten drachmas shall be paid by members of the first and second classes who fail to attend the assembly (*Laws* VI, 764a).

In addition to all the required qualifications, officials must possess good standing in their moral lives and family background (*Laws* VI, 751c). The director of education, for instance, must be a father of legitimate children (*Laws* VI, 765d6-7). Thus, in seeking political and civic appointment, Plato outlines certain preliminary qualifications such as age, social status or property-class, and education. Following these qualifications, elections are held and the one with the most votes undergoes scrutiny to determine his or her suitability for the job (cf. *Laws* VI, 753c-d, 755c-756a).

### **Rights of the Individual in Relation to Work**

In Plato's *Laws*, there is no need for labour unions considering the goal of the state to ensure a proportionate distribution of wealth and property and avoid the corruption and evils that the extremes of wealth and poverty could bring in society (*Laws* V, 737a-b). Thus, market and economic regulations seek to prevent corruption from creeping into the society (*Laws* VIII, 847bff.). Any attempt to make wealth the focus of life is illegal. The same is true of the *Republic*. The workers are at the whim of the philosopher-kings, who must also ensure that the extremes of wealth and poverty are avoided (IV, 421dff.; VIII, 547-548). Admitting labour unions will jeopardize the effective running of the state since it will focus individual's minds on unnecessary agitation, strikes, and the desire to make money. The laws are enough to ensure the proper working conditions of each person.

The absence of labour unions, however, does not mean that workers have no rights. In the *Laws*, craftsmen have the right to be paid (XI, 920e, 921a10-b2) and even sue at court for breach of contracts (XI, 921c6-d1; cf. VIII, 847b2-6). Individuals are encouraged to honour the contractual agreements they have entered with others (cf. XI, 921a). However, contractual agreements shall not be binding on an individual under the following conditions: (1) when the work contracted is illegal, (2) when the agreement is rushed, and (3) when because of unforeseen circumstances, an individual is involuntarily prevented from fulfilling his contractual obligation (XI, 920d1-7). Slaves also have some rights. They have the privilege of giving evidence at murder trials (XI, 937b) and prosecuting other slaves for committing or plotting murder (IX, 872a). The murder of a slave is considered pollution, and a man is submitted to trial if he killed a slave for fear that his shameful conduct will be reported (IX, 872c). Also, slaves can be set free if they render assistance to a victim of parental assault (IX, 881c), report to officials the tampering of another's treasure by someone else (XI, 914a), or inform officials of the neglect or ill-treatment of a parent by a man (XI, 932d). In giving out such information, they receive protection from injury (*ibid.*). Likewise, citizens and foreigners enjoy the protection of the law (IX, 865aff.). Foreigners, for instance, have the right of sacrosanctity with regards to contracts (V, 729e), and in most cases citizens receive the lightest punishments for offences (VI, 764b; VIII, 845a; IX, 865aff.).

Not all workers have the right to property. In the *Republic*, guardians require the greatest devotion to their cause so private property is restricted only to the wage-earning class (III, 416d; V,

464b; cf. *Laws* 739c-d). In the *Laws*, however, every citizen has the right to property. Nevertheless, there are regulations that govern the possession of property. Lands and houses must be distributed equally amongst citizens but with the intention that each man regards his portion of the land as belonging commonly to the state (V, 740a, 737c). The lands must be permanently held so that there is no increase or decrease for any given family (V, 740b, 741b); the lands cannot, with the houses, be bought or sold (V, 741b-c). There shall not be a redistribution of or encroachment on the land of citizens (VIII, 842e-843c). By this, the holdings of a man can only be inherited by one heir, his favourite son (V, 740b). This is a deviation from the practice of primogeniture which existed in Attic Greek society where the inheritance was equally distributed by lot among all the surviving sons (Murray 1988, p. 205). Except for the Country-Wardens or Guards-in-Chief and their assistants (VI, 763a), citizens can also possess slaves as their property (III, 690b1-2). The property of individuals shall also not be touched or tampered with (*Laws* XI, 913a; VIII, 843a-e; cf. XI, 915d).

### Conclusion

Plato presents interesting thoughts on labour by combining mythological, economic, social, and ethical ideas. With reference to his *Republic* and *Laws*, these ideas (except for the mythological account) are founded on the goal of each of the societies envisaged in these works, which basically is towards the efficient running of their respective states. An underlying principle is the need to prevent the extremes of wealth and poverty and ensure proportionate distribution of wealth and property. Thus, we find these goals reflected in the various economic regulations, the education of workers, the need for division of labour and specialization, the importance of leisure for the cultivation of the highest form of life, and the moral implications of laziness, idleness and corruption. Labour, even the one that involves exertion of physical strength, is not to Plato a kind of ill if it is productive. But, idleness, not leisure, is a kind of ill. The need for leisure also does not imply that labour is a curse for man. Leisure must be used for something productive, that is, the cultivation of moral, physical and mental excellence. The goals of labour are also reflected in the need for harmonious social relations among inhabitants of the respective societies.

Plato's ideas on labour are influenced by the societal goals and the laws he proposes to achieve them. Therefore, he does not devote any part of his works to a formal discussion of labour. He believes that the laws and regulations would cater for any problem that may arise from the work of the classes. Once the laws and principles are followed, Plato believes that the ills and evils that result from labour would never arise since every individual would neither be too rich nor too poor, and there would be harmony in society. But this requires an efficient labour system, where each person does what he is required to do, otherwise the foundation of the laws will be weakened, and society will be corrupted.

Another factor responsible for the efficient running of the *poleis* lies in the work of those in whose hands the states' administration is entrusted. Every practical work needs directional knowledge. One of the ills of society that Plato sought to correct was the corruption of leaders (*Laws* III, 691a). How would there be efficiency in society if those who possess practical knowledge are deprived of the right supervision for their work? For Plato, then, an education and training based on productive leisure is the catalyst for an efficiently run state. Those who are to give directional knowledge must devote themselves solely to this purpose, and not regard it as secondary. This should be their sole vocation.

Nevertheless, Plato's emphasis on theoretical knowledge or mental labour does not undermine the role of manual labour in its contribution to societal goals. In fact, both mental and manual labour cannot do without each other, but for manual labour to operate effectively in society, it would need the supervision of people who are highly trained in the cultivation of moral virtue and physical perfection, so that they can run the affairs of the state in a manner which will translate into happiness for all. Therefore, Plato gives the basic requirements for manual labour to be the evidence of a skill, and to some extent, experience. But for mental labour, several details come to play in determining who qualifies for certain positions.

Largely, the need to achieve the respective societal goals is what drives the various provisions of labour in Plato's thought. Thus, any attempt at studying labour in Plato's thought must be done considering the various philosophical, ethical, psychological and economic ideas in his works. This is also important because these principles are the fundamentals on which the major concepts

he discusses are founded. It is not surprising then that his thoughts on labour are a mix of these principles. This criterion would also apply in resolving any seeming contradictions concerning Plato's thoughts on labour across various dialogues.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares the work has no conflicts of interest.

### Endnotes

1. All references to Plato's works are to his *Complete Works* edited by Jonathan Cooper.
2. All references to Aristotle's works are to his *Complete Works* (vol. 2) edited by Jonathan Barnes.
3. All references to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are that of Mary M. Innes' translation.
4. For a discussion on how Plato makes use of the myth of the 'Golden Age' in his works, see John Dillon (1992): 21-36.

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