According to Popper 1), this passage is one of the arguments devised by Plato “to establish his own anti-equalitarianism, his principle of natural privilege”. In fact it is not an argument at all, though Plato represents it as such (b5 τεκμαίρομαι). It boils down to “the surprising remark that, since all other virtues of the state have been examined, the remaining one, that of ‘minding one’s own business’, must be ‘justice’”. Since this imputation has not been sufficiently refuted by Popper’s critics 2), it seems worthwhile to reconsider the whole argument.

What Plato wants to establish is that justice is a special form of minding one’s own business (a3) and that as such it is an all pervading element of the state (a2 διὰ τεκμαίρος). The demonstration of this thesis proceeds through two steps. The first step is a preliminary one stating the importance of justice in a loose way. It consists of the following syllogism, the conclusion of which is not expressed:

(i) Everyone must mind his own business in the state (a5).
(2) To mind one’s own business is justice (a8).
<(3) Consequently there must be justice throughout the state.>

The second step defines the function of justice within the whole of the state more precisely. It consists of three syllogisms:

(1) The quality which makes it possible for the three virtues, wisdom, courage, and temperance, to take their place within the commonwealth, does not coincide with these virtues themselves (b7).


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(2) Justice is the only virtue beside the three virtues mentioned (c1).

(3) Consequently justice makes it possible for the three other virtues to take their place within the commonwealth.

(1) The foregoing conclusion.

(2) The quality which makes it possible for an element to take its place within a whole is its ability to mind its own business.

(3) Consequently justice is the ability to mind one's own business (b4).

(1) The foregoing conclusion.

(2) The ability to mind one's own business is equal if not superior to the three virtues mentioned in conducing to the excellence of the state (c4).

(3) Consequently justice is equal if not superior to these virtues in conducing to the excellence of the state (d11).

To this analysis of the argument the following observations may be added.

(1) In the first step of the argument justice only figures as a predicate of minding one's own business. In the second step this relation is converted: justice is now defined as the ability to mind one's own business. Adam and other critics failing to realize the purport of this distinction took b3-4 for a mere repetition of a8-9 1). Yet it is evident that a8-9 is a premiss, and b3-4 a conclusion. On the other hand, it cannot be a premiss for this conclusion, as appears from b4 οἶσθαι δὲν τεκμηρίομαι; So b3-4 must be the conclusion of a new argument.

(2) The words τρόπον τινά γεγονόμενον (b3) have the same meaning as τοῦτον τι εἶδος (a3): justice does not coincide with minding one's own business, but is a special kind of it 2). The reference

1) Adam, who is followed by Robin (Platon Oeuvres complètes, ad loc.), tries to get off the tautology by suggesting σωφροσύνη for δικαιοσύνη in a 9.

2) Cf. N. R. Murphy, The Interpretation of Plato's Republic (Oxford, 1951), 10-11, who thinks, however, that the restrictions a 3 and b 3 refer to the fact that minding one's own business has to take place within a whole. But this seems to be a matter of course. Robin completely misunderstood τοῦτον τι εἶδος as "une certaine espèce de celle-ci" (i.e. la justice). Similarly, A. R. Henderickx, De rechtvaardigheid in de Staat van Platoon, Ts. v. Philos.