Abstract

The article thematizes the actuality of despotism through a double reading of Xenophon’s Hiero and Dave Eggers’s The Circle. A key text on despotism, Hiero is interesting to reconsider in a contemporary context because of its explicit focus on the economic element in the nexus of despotism, economy and voluntary servitude. Discussion this, the article turns to The Circle, a dystopic novel from 2013, which elaborates on how the attempt at creating a transparent society results in the perversion of democracy to the point where a despotism fuelled by economization and voluntary servitude becomes immediately evident. Notwithstanding the significant differences between the two understandings of despotism that proliferate in Hiero and The Circle, their shared focus on the nexus of despotism, economy and voluntary servitude testifies to an interesting case of convergence in divergence. Offering an account of this continuity, the article reflects upon the nexus of despotism, economy and voluntary servitude itself, arguing, to end with, that it should be re-thought in a new way today. The concept of use is suggested as a key concept in this context.

The Despotic Imperative: From Hiero to The Circle


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