

ARISTOTLE'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) came to Athens as a young man to study in Plato's Academy. Upon Plato's death nearly twenty years later, Aristotle left Athens to spend time in Asia Minor and in Lesbos, returning in 343 B.C.E. to his home in Macedonia. In 335 B.C.E. he went back to Athens to set up his own school in the Lyceum, where he remained until the death of Alexander (323 B.C.E.) unleashed anti-Macedonian sentiments in Athens and he was charged with impiety. He fled to nearby Chalcis where he died about a year later. Most of the works Aristotle wrote for publication are lost; what survive are later compilations of works written for use within his school. Aristotle's most influential political ideas connect human nature and its flourishing with political activity, ideally under a constitution in which virtuous citizens take turns at ruling and being ruled.

This essay falls into three parts. Section 1 guides the reader through the first book of the Politics to acquaint her with the major concerns of Aristotle's political philosophy. Section 2 focuses on Aristotle's famous claims that the human being is by nature a political animal, that the *polis* (city-state)¹ is natural, and that the *polis* is naturally prior to the individual, who belongs to the *polis*. Section 3 examines Aristotle's ideal *politeia* (constitution) in the light of his criticisms of other ideal and existing *politeiai*.

1. Circumscribing and Valuing the Political

Near the beginning of the Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle says that the capacity that aims at the good, that for the sake of which we do everything that we do, is political

¹ Throughout, I will use the Greek words relating to *polis* (e.g., *politeia*, *politikos*) rather than their English translations as I think this will bring out the connections in Aristotle's political thought that are obscured by the rather different associations of their English-language counterparts (constitution, statesman).

science, and that political science is the ‘most authoritative’ of the capacities and uses all the others (1.2 1094a18-b12). So when at the end of the Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle directs the student of politics to his writings on legislation (10.9 1180b29-81b22), the logical place to go is Aristotle’s Politics, which discusses *politeiai* and their laws from Books 2 through 8. Unfortunately, the structure of the Politics is so unclear that it has been described as ‘a book with great defects’ (Robinson 1962, viii), and ‘a loosely connected set of essays on various topics in political philosophy . . . [perhaps] put together . . . by an editor . . . [which] Aristotle may never have intended to form a single treatise.’ (Keyt and Miller 1991, 3). Indeed, the first book of the Politics does not even mention legislation, the topic which sent the reader of the Nicomachean Ethics to it. Further, in Politics 1 Aristotle devotes a number of chapters to defending his notorious theory of natural slavery: that some human beings, namely non-Greeks, are natural slaves and ought to be ruled by natural rulers as the body ought to be ruled by the soul (1252a30-b9, cf. 1254a14-1255a3). Not only is the view odious, it also seems unconnected to the topic of legislation. All this makes for a discouraging beginning.

Now a student of philosophy who is interested in ideas rather than texts may decide to ignore the false or philosophically uninteresting parts of any body of work. But we can also take a more historical approach and try to determine how the ideas, promising as well as objectionable, fit together into a larger project (are they central philosophical commitments one, or do they follow from such commitments? or are they incidental to or even in conflict with the main ideas?). Taking such an approach can help to explain not only why Aristotle is so concerned with slavery in Politics 1, but also why he might have thought Politics 1 to be a suitable introduction to his work on legislation.

The second paragraph of Politics 1 (1252a9-17, cf. 1253b15-23) describes a view against which Aristotle will spend the rest of the book arguing, namely, that the expertises of the *politikos* (statesman), king, household-manager and master of a slave are one and the same expertise, *politikê* (the art of politics). This is a claim argued for in Plato's Statesman (258d-59e), and Aristotle argues against it to show that there is something distinctive, and distinctively valuable, about practicing *politikê*, so that the political life is a good life for human beings. By contrast, Plato's Republic treats political expertise as a byproduct of the theoretical wisdom of philosophers, and political rule as a burden that falls on philosophers as a consequence (346e-47d, 519d-21b).

Aristotle argues that there is a difference between the expertises of the *politikos*, the king, the householder and the master, on the grounds that in each case the character of the one who is by nature ruled is different (1260a3), and different enough that ruling such a character requires a different expertise. So he emphasizes the way in which a slave is by nature different from a free person: the slave 'by nature belongs to the master' (1254a10-16); the slave is to his master as the body is to the soul (1254b15-19); the slave can comprehend, but not originate, orders (1254b22); the bodies of natural slaves are strong for servile labor, whereas the bodies of free men are upright (1254b26). All this makes the appropriate way to rule over a slave different from the appropriate way to rule over a free person (1255b16-20). Arguing for this difference opens the door to showing how political rule, rule over a free person, is something finer than the rule over a slave, which Aristotle likens to the use of a tool (for a slave is a living tool). Aristotle's overall aim in Politics 1 is captured in his slogan, 'the rule is always better when the ruled are better' (1254a25).

Plato's Republic had addressed the worry that actual forms of rule are all practiced to benefit the rulers, by stipulating a *politeia* whose laws aimed at benefiting the ruled and then exploring what that would be like. Highlighting the distinctive value of political rule requires Aristotle to contrast it not only with exploitative rule, in which the ruler benefits at the expense of the subjects, but also with the best instances of other kinds of rule. The case of natural slavery, in which a natural superior rules a natural inferior in such a way as to benefit both master and slave, is useful to bring this out. This may be why Aristotle forces an opposition between the view that *politikê* is the same skill as that of the master of slaves and the view that slavery is contrary to nature (1253a3-12). The views need not be opposed; for example, a skeptic about *politikê* might maintain both, but Aristotle's discussion allows him to show that the superiority of political rule is not only a superiority to the kind of slavery that is forced on someone who could live freely, but also to the best kind of slavery, which is actually better for the slave than freedom. The contrast between political rule and the head of household's rule over his family makes Aristotle's case even more pointedly, since there, not only do the ruled benefit in fact, but their benefit is the aim of the rule.

Today we are likely to object that few people are better off being told what to do throughout their lives, and that there is something wrong with using such people as living tools. And we are likely to discount as the product of society the supposedly natural differences Aristotle finds between men and women. Modern readers will find least off-putting the way Aristotle makes his point by the contrast with the rule over domestic animals (1254b10-12). Certainly a good dog-owner makes the life of his dog much better than it would be if the dog had to fend for itself, and this is compatible with the owner

using the dog for security (for example); however, the relationship between a person and his dog is not thought to be as valuable as the relationship between one person and another.

Aristotle's case for the distinctness and superiority of political rule to even other forms of mutually beneficial rule acquires more positive content from two other claims central to Politics 1: that as the household is subordinate to the *polis*, economics is subordinate to politics, and that humans are by nature political and the *polis* 'is by nature'. Let us examine each of these claims.

First, in Politics 1, Aristotle claims that the institutions ruled by the non-political kinds of rule (household, village) are parts of the *polis* (1.2.1252a24 - 1.3.1253b3) Now when Aristotle says that the household is 'part of' the *polis*, he is saying something much more substantive than that households are found in *poleis*. He is saying that the *polis* accomplishes, to the fullest extent, the purpose for the sake of which the household is established: the *polis* makes possible not only living, but living well (1252b29-30). His account of the evolution of the *polis* out of the household and village (1.2) is meant to demonstrate this. (Aristotle's claim also marks another disagreement with Plato's Republic, which abolishes the household among the guardians, and treats either individuals or the classes defined by political function as the proper parts of the city.) A consequence of the household's belonging to the *polis* seems to be that the expertise of ruling a household or clan is subordinated to *politikê*. And this recalls the Nicomachean Ethics identification of *politikê* as the most authoritative expertise, the one that makes use of the general's expertise, economics, and so on (1.2 1094a26-b7).

Economics is the expertise of managing the household (*oikos*). The household, comprising the family and its property, is the institution that aims at obtaining and using the food, shelter, etc., required for living. Even though economics is not his subject, Aristotle pauses to note that the art of obtaining is part of the art of household management, and that its limit is set by the use that household management and politics make of the wealth it creates (1256b-39). He goes on to distinguish the use value of a thing (the use one makes of it in virtue of its nature) from the exchange value (the use one makes of it in exchange for other goods) and to offer a speculative history of money and trade. Meikle 1995 argues that here and in Nicomachean Ethics 5.5 where Aristotle argues that exchange must be based on proportional equality, Aristotle is only able to formulate the problem of relating use value to exchange value but not to give an account of their relationship. Meikle explains this inability as due to Aristotle's metaphysical view that there are many irreducible senses of being and of good. On the other hand, it seems that the notion of use value has already reduced the many senses of good to one kind of value, and that money then facilitates the conversion of use into exchange value. But in either case, Aristotle does not think a mechanism like money or price could be a basis for just exchange.

In what sense is politics for the sake of living well (as opposed to merely living, like economics)? This brings us to the second of our remaining arguments for giving content to the superiority of *politikê*. Aristotle says that human beings are by nature political. Evidence of this is that we desire to live together even when we have no need of help from one another (cf. Politics 3.6 1278b20-22). Because we are by nature political, friendship belongs to the happiest life (Nicomachean Ethics 9.9 1169b18). Here

again, we see a departure from Plato, who claims that a *polis* comes to be because we are not self-sufficient but need each other (Republic 369b). Aristotle agrees that this is why *poleis* originate or ‘come to be’, but thinks that they now exist also for the sake of living well. In Nicomachean Ethics (1.7 1097b25-1098a17) Aristotle argues that human happiness consists in the excellent exercise of our distinctive capacity for reasoning, i.e., in activities expressing the virtues of justice, moderation, courage, and wisdom. Insofar as political activity expresses these virtues, it enables us to live well in two ways: we make our communities better, and we ourselves engage in an activity that fulfills our nature.

What activity counts as political activity? According to Aristotle’s account of the *politês* (citizen), who is distinguished by having a nonrestricted share in judgment and office (1275a22-24, 1275b18-20), and whose function it is to preserve the *politeia* (1276b28-30), it would seem to be participating in government (rather than, say, opposing it, trying to change it, or discussing individual and social virtue, as did Socrates). Only *politeiai* that aim at the common good and apportion privilege in accordance with merit are correct, and as a result the virtue of a citizen—preserving the *politeia*—and the virtue of a human being (the excellence of the soul’s rational capacities) sometimes come apart (1276b34-36). So political activity will not in all circumstances be conducive to human virtue and happiness. Rather, it is participating in judgment and office, under a correct *politeia*, that is a particularly worthy activity and that, when engaged in virtuously, makes for a happy life.

Finally, what is the connection between our natural desire for society and the particular form our association is supposed to take for living well: why is it judging and

holding office, rather than, say, playing sports and going to the theater together? The Politics answers by giving a specification of the Nicomachean Ethics' idea that happiness consists in the excellent exercise of our rational capacities. Aristotle points to our sense of justice and our capacity for speech: human beings have a sense of good and bad, just and unjust, and we can communicate what is beneficial or harmful, just or unjust in speech (1.2 1253a8-18). Thus it is our rationality in the sense of our capacities to value and to communicate value that are our distinctive capacities, and we achieve our own distinctive good by improving and then exercising them, which judging and holding office give us the opportunity to do. In his (1991) 'The Connection between Aristotle's Ethics and Politics', Arthur Adkins argues that the Nicomachean Ethics' highly formal account of virtue in terms of the human function of reasoning is only given content by the Politics' account of the best *politês* in the best *politeia*—so that human virtue turns out to be an excellent condition for a leisured male. But although Aristotle thinks that judging and holding office belong to the leisured male 'by nature', it is not because of the content of judging and holding office that this is so, but because of Aristotle's false assumptions about which kinds of people have the ability to engage in judging and holding office.

Let us now take a closer look at Aristotle's ideas about human nature and the nature of the *polis*.

2. Nature and the *polis*

Aristotle says that the *polis* exists by nature (1253a1-2), that human beings are by nature political animals (1253a2-3), and that the *polis* is prior to the individual (1253a18-19, 25-26). These claims are important because of their normative implications: for Aristotle, to say that something is 'by nature' is not only to say that it is usual, but also

that it is connected with some good end. Consequently, students of Aristotle have tried to state precisely what Aristotle means when he makes these claims. In his classic paper, 'Three Fundamental Theorems in Aristotle's Politics,' Keyt (1987/1991) draws on Aristotle's sense of 'by nature' from Physics 2.1, where it contrasts with 'by reason' or 'by craft' on the one hand, and 'by chance' or by 'luck' on the other, to argue that Aristotle fails to establish his naturalness claims. Aristotle describes the *politikos* as the craftsman of *polis* (Politics 7.4.1325b40-1236a5), but of course, as a natural thing, the *polis* should not be what it is as a result of craft, but of an internal principle of motion in virtue of the thing that it is. Natural things come to be either by a parent reproducing its form as do plants and animals, or by chance as do certain parasites, or are eternal, like the heavenly bodies. The *polis*, however, evolved from the household and village. This leads one to suspect that the *polis* comes to be by reason and art, rather than by nature. Keyt identifies and criticizes four arguments in the Politics involving the claim that the *polis* exists by nature in Politics 1.2. (1) At 1252b27-34, Aristotle argues that the polis, which is an association of villages, is by nature, for the reason that it has achieved the limit of self-sufficiency, the aim of the earlier associations. Keyt identifies as the basis of this argument the principle of transitivity of naturalness: since the associations out of which the polis grew (from the necessary pairings of man-woman and master-slave through household and village) are natural, so is their product. But this principle is false, since many artificial things, like poems, are the products of natural impulses. (2) At 1253a1-4, Aristotle argues that since the *polis* exists for the sake of self-sufficiency, which is best, humans are by nature political. Keyt says this argument depends on the un-Aristotelian principle that what exists for the sake of the best is natural; however,

many things that exist for the sake of the best are artificial. Further, even granting this principle, it is wrong to conclude from the naturalness of the polis that human beings are political—some might be asocial. (3) At 1253a9-18, Aristotle argues that nature does not make anything pointlessly, but nature has made us capable of speech, which is an instrument for communicating good and bad and just and unjust. This capacity is the same as the capacity to form political communities, from which it follows that human beings are by nature political. But Keyt argues that the capacity to form political communities is not the mere ‘natural justice’ with which we are born but that capacity developed, by habituation, into a virtue. And this shows that both the *polis*, and humans’ being political, are artificial rather than natural. (4) Finally, at 1253a19-29 Aristotle argues that the *polis* must be prior in nature to the individual, because the individual when separated from the *polis* is not self-sufficient. Keyt understands this as the claim that the *polis* can exist without the individual but the individual cannot exist without the *polis*; but, he argues, an individual can survive without his *polis* (think of Philoctetes stranded on an uninhabited island). Further, Keyt argues that since parts of artificial wholes can survive the destruction of the wholes of which they are parts, Aristotle must be assuming that the *polis* is natural when he asserts that its parts can’t survive the destruction of the whole *polis*. Before we attempt a wholesale defense of Aristotle’s ‘by nature’ claims, it’s worth noting on point (4) that Aristotle does not say that an individual can’t survive without the *polis*, only that he lacks self-sufficiency, so the priority by nature claim must be a weaker one, namely that a self-sufficient individual cannot exist without a *polis*.

Miller 1995 (pp. 30-61) rejects Keyt's 'internal cause' criterion for existing by nature. Miller argues that human beings are 'by nature political' in that we have an innate potentiality to form cooperative associations to bring about a common end (like ants and bees) and specifically to form *poleis*. This potentiality is seen in (a) our capacities to perceive what is just and to reveal what is advantageous and just in speech, since nature does nothing in vain, and (b) our impulse to live in communities—for we desire to live in communities, and living in communities enables the common advantage and life itself. The presence of these potentialities in all human beings is best explained as for the sake of political cooperation. Miller interprets 'the *polis* exists by nature' to mean, the *polis* exists for the sake of the fulfillment of *human* nature, which is political. Miller adds that not all things said by Aristotle to exist by nature have an internal cause of their change and rest, for example, spider webs and birds' nests are natural (Physics 2.8.199a7-8, 29-30—although strictly speaking, what Aristotle says is that it is natural for spiders to make webs and birds to make nests). Miller's is a fairly weak sense of existing by nature; notice that the virtues, which Keyt points out are said by Aristotle not to exist by nature (Nicomachean Ethics 1.1.1103a19-5) also exist by nature in Miller's sense. But this is acceptable, Miller argues, if we remember that we should study each subject with the degree of precision appropriate to it (Nicomachean Ethics 1.3.1094b12-14): by 'nature' in the Physics may have the strong sense of 'having an internal cause of change and rest' but it does not in the Politics.

Even if we take claims about the naturalness of the *polis* to be shorthand for claims about the tendencies in human nature, as Miller does, Keyt's (1)-(3) are devastating criticisms if we agree that the force of 'by nature' is to be understood, as in

the Physics, by contrast with ‘by reason/art’ as well as with ‘by chance/luck’. However, we have at least two reasons not to understand nature by contrast with reason and art in the Politics. First, Aristotle defines human nature in terms of reason, and the natural human function is to use reason (Politics 7.151334b15: reason and intelligence are the endpoint of our nature). Second, if we think about Aristotle’s naturalness claims in the context of claims made by his contemporaries and predecessors in political thought, we can see that the naturalness claims are in the first instance opposed to the idea that the *polis* is the result of a contract between parties seeking their own advantage to refrain from doing injustice in order to avoid suffering it. Aristotle is making the point that it is not just to avoid suffering injustice that human beings form *poleis* (nor only, as Plato argued against the social contractarians, to meet our needs) but because human nature is fulfilled and human virtue expressed in political life. By contrast, in the Physics Aristotle is not only arguing against physicists who think that the world is the result of chance and that many properties thought natural are actually conventional (Democritus) but also against Plato, who thinks that an orderly world such as ours must be the product of a craftsmanlike God—against Plato, Aristotle needs to argue against assimilating nature to art. Aristotle’s own view that human beings have capacities that are fulfilled by the political life, but that this fulfilment requires the (for human beings, natural) contributions of reason and art, is quite similar to that of the sophist Protagoras, according to whom humans have god-given capacities for justice and respect which are cultivated by habituation and perfected by the political art (Plato, Protagoras 322c-23a, 325c-28b).

3. The Best *Politeia*

By the time Aristotle wrote his Politics, political thinkers of several generations had been writing accounts of best *politeiai* (constitutions). Examples of these are Plato's Republic (from *res publica*, the Latin for '*politeia*') and Laws, and Xenophon's Constitution of the Lacadaemonians. These works describe the way of life of an ideal *polis*, and sketch, in more or less detail, the laws, that is to say the institutional arrangements and customs, that would be causes and effects of this way of life. They typically begin with physical situation, move on to the production of healthy offspring, and then to the physical and moral education of the young. Aristotle follows his predecessors in thinking of a *politeia* as the way of life of a *polis* (4.11.1295a40-b1) and in the order of presentation of this way of life. However, Aristotle's own description of the best *politeia* (Books 7-8) is unfortunately incomplete, breaking off in the middle of a discussion of citizens' education in music. Aristotle has discussed the questions of extent of the territory and the size of the population of the ideal city, as well as the character and occupations of the citizens. He answers these and other questions by reference to the twin goals of self-sufficiency and virtue. Thus the best *politeia* requires a population just large enough for self-sufficiency but small enough that the citizens know one another; a territory large enough for self-sufficiency but small enough for the purposes of defense and commerce (7.4-5); whether it engages in trade and has a naval empire or not depends on how these measures contribute to or detract from the goals of self-sufficiency and virtue (7.6). Similar considerations apply to the provision of common meals and the distribution of land (7.10), and the layout of the city for the health and safety of its inhabitants (7.11-12). The goal of virtue requires that citizens be both intelligent and spirited (viz. Greek) in nature (7.7) and bars from citizenship farmers, craftsmen,

labourers, and in general money-makers (7.8-9). This restriction of citizenship puts Aristotle not only at odds with democracy, but also with Plato's Republic, which, although anti-democratic, considered members of the economic class ('producers') to be citizens. We will look at why Aristotle restricts citizenship below. First, however, let us consider the account of education with which most of Aristotle's description of the best *politeia* is concerned.

Immediately prior to the account of education, Aristotle pauses to reiterate the goal of the *polis*: happy, and so actively virtuous, citizens (7.13). The account of citizens' physical and moral education that takes up the rest of the work is directly concerned with producing virtue. Although Aristotle discusses the sort of education that is necessary and useful—instrumental towards performing one's social function, for example, and physical education, his focus is on music, because that, he says, has to do with how we use our leisure. Virtue pertains not only to the socially useful we do but also to that for the sake of which we have done this work for, those activities that are not useful for the sake of anything else, but good in themselves. Music in fact serves three purposes: education, relaxation, and right use of leisure. First, Aristotle believes that music represents emotion most exactly and so listening to and playing the right kind of music trains us, from childhood on, to have the right kinds of emotions for virtue. An important political idea in this discussion is that participation in an activity makes one a better judge of that activity (8.6 1340b24-25): hence, we may infer, participation in ruling makes one a better judge of the rulers when one is being ruled. This would not only make one appreciative of good decisions, but perhaps also sympathetic of decisions that involved some loss for oneself. Second, music as relaxation refreshes us for work.

In Aristotle: Political Philosophy, Richard Kraut elaborates on music's third purpose, suggesting that traditional poetry expresses wisdom and listening to it is the ordinary citizen's approximation of the best human activity, philosophizing or contemplating God and the way that divine activity results in an orderly natural world (200-202).

Because of its incompleteness, Aristotle's sketch of the best *politeia* will have to be filled out and evaluated in terms of what he says about the best *politeia* elsewhere in the Politics. Fortunately, Book 2 discusses actual and theoretical *politeiai* that have been put forward as particularly good by others because, Aristotle says, this discussion allows us to learn what is right and useful in them, and from what is wrong, to see the need for a *politeia* different from all those that have so far been considered (1260b29-36). Studying the views of others on a given topic is in fact Aristotle's standard procedure; he uses these views to formulate problems (most commonly, conflicting views on the topic) and measures his progress by his ability to solve these problems (Nicomachean Ethics 7.1.1145b1-8, Metaphysics 3.1.995a24-995b4). We can adopt Aristotle's procedure to follow his account of the best *politeia*, using the criteria by which he faults the *politeiai* surveyed in Book 2 to understand what motivates the institutions of the best *politeia* he describes, and to supplement his account where he falls silent. Relevant also is the idea that the virtue of citizens lies in ruling and being ruled, which, in the best *politeia*, would coincide with the virtue of a human being.

Politics 2 criticizes, among others, the best *politeia* of Plato's Republic (chapters 2-5) and the second-best *politeia* of Plato's Laws (chapter 6), Phaleas of Chalcedon's property-egalitarian best *politeia* (chapter 7), and the actual *politeia* of Sparta (chapter 9). Two themes recur in these discussions. First, Aristotle points out the lack of fit between

the virtue these *politeiai* aim at and the institutional means by which they seek to achieve it. For instance, Plato's best *polis* aims at the greatest possible unity among citizens (Republic 462a-d)², but Aristotle argues that this goal is undermined by the guardians holding all possessions in common, for that leads to a diminution in each individual's sense of responsibility for the care of those possessions, whether land or offspring (1261b32-40), and deprives individuals of the opportunity to exercise generosity towards fellow-citizens (1263a40-b14). Phaleas' constitution aims at economic equality among citizens, but unless the initial equal distribution of property is matched by a controlled population policy, there will be poor citizens (1266b8-14). Sparta's constitution aims at military virtue, but its inheritance laws are such that not enough men meet the property qualification to make a sizeable defence, and its policy of encouraging births increases poverty (1270a19-33140-b5). The most general misfit is between the *politeiai*'s aim, virtuous citizens, and their reliance on institutional arrangements rather than education citizens to bring about citizens' virtue.

The second major theme of these discussions is related to this last point. Aristotle faults the authors of the *politeiai* for misdiagnosing the cause of social ills, taking them to come from, for example, economic inequality rather than vice. Thus Phaleas of Chalcedon's egalitarian *politeia* is built on the assumption that the source of political

² Aristotle claims that this is a degree of unity inappropriate to the *polis*, which is a naturally plural entity (1261a16-22 *passim*). This sounds sensible enough, but it is not easy to see how the kinds of plurality Aristotle points to interfere with the kind of unity aimed at by the Republic's best *politeia*. For this *polis* is unified in the sense that each citizen feels that his or her fortunes and misfortunes are tied to those of the city as a whole (462a-d). Aristotle says that a *polis* is composed of people of different types, who perform different social functions. But Plato agrees with this; he just thinks that the citizens can, while performing different social functions (and in part because of it), also see that their fortunes are tied to one another.

conflict lies in inequality of resources, but according to Aristotle, equality in honors among men who are not equal is as significant a source of political conflict (1266b37-1267a2); further, injustice is committed not only by those who lack necessities, but also by those whose desires are excessive (1267a2-17). Similarly, Aristotle thinks that Plato has misdiagnosed the source of disputes over property, supposing them to come from the institution of private property when they in fact come from vice. Evidence of this is the presence of property disputes within families (1263b19-29). Finally, Aristotle notes that quite apart from whether the distribution of resources is equal or unequal, it matters how much citizens have: too much and they will live too luxuriously; too little and they will be poverty-stricken (1266b24-31). But to avoid luxury it is necessary that desires be moderated, and so a constitution must give thought to education (1266b28-34).

Aristotle's criteria for the correctness of a *politeia*—legislating for the common advantage (1283b35-1284a2) and distributing political functions according to merit—are not foregrounded in these discussions, presumably because he is only discussing *politeiai* that have a claim to be correct. (The criteria themselves are closely linked to his account of justice: Nicomachean Ethics Book 5 distinguishes two senses of justice, (1) general justice, that is, obedience to the law, which aims at the common good; this comprises the whole of virtue insofar as other people are concerned (5.1 1129b11-26). (2) Particular justice, insofar as it is distributive is concerned with equality (5.2 1130b10), apportioning goods such as honor and wealth to merit (5.3 1131a22-25); insofar as it is corrective, restores to the offended party in an unjust transaction what he has lost to the offender, irrespective of their merit as persons (5.4 1132a 2-3, 25-29).) However, he does raise the worry about apportioning offices to merit that the Republic's appointment of permanent

rulers would give rise to faction from the military (Politics 1264b6-10). This is a reminder that Aristotle regards (and expects others to regard) ruling as a privilege to be shared among the deserving, and not merely as a job to be done that is shared among the qualified.

Yet this idea that citizens should share in ruling and being ruled, because there is a value to political participation for whoever cultivates sufficient virtue to engage in it, is in tension with another idea we see in Aristotle: that wherever there is a ruler sufficiently superior to others, the superior should be the one to rule (7.14 1332b12-40, cf.

3.17.1288a15-29). Aristotle says such conditions don't obtain, but this just papers over the tension. Suppose that we could be ruled by gods. Insofar as they would do a better job of ruling, they should. But politics was supposed to be an arena for the expression of practical wisdom for us, and the goodness of political activity for us doesn't disappear just because there are others who can do it better.

Aristotle's best *politeia* reveals another tension in the ideal of ruling and being ruled, for it excludes from citizenship farmers, craftsmen, and in general money-makers (7.9 1328b33-1329a1). Aristotle has already (in Book 1) discussed the mental incapacity of women and natural slaves that would exclude them from citizenship, but what is the reason for excluding the economic producers? Aristotle's main idea is that economic activity impairs the mind of its practitioner and leaves him too little leisure time to develop virtue and engage in political activity. He seems to think there is something about money-making that distorts one's outlook. Perhaps it is difficult for the businessman to subordinate profit to virtue when he switches to running a *polis*? Perhaps it is difficult to adjust to a consultative political procedure? Kraut (2002) suggests that the

occupations Aristotle thinks to disqualify their practitioners from political participation involve a narrowly restricted use of reason, namely, the determination of means to a pre-determined end, and an instrumental relation to others. While Kraut thinks Aristotle's concerns about the effects of such an outlook on politics are legitimate, in general he attributes Aristotle's 'prejudice' to his sense that there is something base about using one's mind or body principally as a means of survival (pp. 216-17).

In 7.8-9, Aristotle engages in some tortured reasoning to justify the exclusion of the economic classes from citizenship. He applies to the *polis* a distinction between what is necessary for something and what is part of it (as, for instance, the housebuilding art is necessary for but not part of the house it produces) and claims that there is nothing in common (shared) between the merely necessary and the part (as there is nothing in common between the housebuilder and the house). Then, enumerating all the functions necessary for the *polis*--providing food, defense, judgment, etc., he argues that only those who provide defense, judgment, and religious services can live a life of virtue, which is the common good shared by all the parts of the *polis*. But the economic producers' inability to live a life of virtue is the result of institutional arrangements, rather than innate capacities. An alternative to assigning to some the life of the farmer and to others the life of a priest would be to have people alternate between economic and political activity. At one point, Aristotle expresses the hope that the farmers will be slaves (1330a25), presumably natural slaves, suggesting that it would be preferable for the necessity of providing for the *polis* to coincide with the availability of those who can provide for it. But if nature does not deliver up this perfect fit, we might ask, isn't it an unjust arrangement that assigns the economic life to some who have the natural capacity

to lead a political life, and then excludes them from political life on the grounds that their economic life doesn't allow them to develop and exercise the virtue required for political life (that they could have had, given different opportunities)? In aiming at happiness, Aristotle's ideal *politeia* takes on not just the task of enabling virtuous citizens to be active, but also of making citizens who are capable of it virtuous.

Our examination of Aristotle's political philosophy has taken the approach of thinking about the role particular (good or bad) ideas play in his overall project—in the case of natural slavery, to highlight the value of the distinctively political; in the case of the naturalness of the *polis*, as an alternative to the account of the *polis* as the result of a compromise social contract. Thinking about his extreme restriction of citizenship from the perspective of the *polis*'s goal of virtue and happiness for its citizens suggests that Aristotle is caught in a bind. If someone is a citizen, the *politeia* is supposed to aim at his virtue and happiness. But if his role in the *politeia* blocks him from developing virtue and happiness (as Aristotle thinks is the case with economic activity), the *politeia* can hardly be said to aim at his happiness. And yet the *politeia* cannot do without his economic activity; on Aristotle's view, virtuous and happy citizens require that someone else produce.

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