

ARISTOTLE ON RULE IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

E. ZOLI FILOTAS, Department of Philosophy
McGill University, Montreal

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ABSTRACT

Aristotle writes that there are several different ways for one person to rule over another. A Greek citizen, for example, must rule over his slaves in a qualitatively different way than he rules over his wife, and he must not confuse either of those kinds of rule with the ‘political’ rule he may acquire over his free fellow citizens. Scholars have not done enough to consider how the various sorts of rule fit together into a single picture, and how Aristotle’s discussions of rule—scattered throughout the *Ethics* and the *Politics* and beyond—illuminate each other. In this thesis I give a full account of Aristotle’s treatment of rule. I argue that it amounts to a sophisticated theory of cooperation and shared agency, firmly grounded in Aristotle’s moral psychology and social ontology, and one that sheds light not just on the household and the city, narrowly construed, but on a wide range of personal relationships. This theory, I claim, is of considerable intrinsic and historical interest. It also highlights the troubling connections between the parts of Aristotle’s work that modern readers are most inclined to admire, and those they are most inclined to reject.

In Chapter 1, I ask what Aristotle thinks all kinds of rule have in common. In what sense, for example, is a democratic statesman doing the same thing both when he rules his fellow citizens and when he rules his slaves? I answer that for Aristotle, when one person rules another, the ruler’s soul acts as a particular kind of cause (a final cause) for the soul of the person who is ruled. This gives persuasive speech a special role in human interactions—not, as we might think, because it allows people to think for themselves before following orders, but because it allows rulers to impose ends directly on the souls of the people they rule. I reach this conclusion by considering Aristotle’s place in the fourth- and fifth-century Greek discussion of force and persuasion, comparing Aristotle to such figures as Gorgias and Lysias.

In Chapter 2, I consider how the several forms of rule differ from each other. For example, how and why does Aristotle distinguish the rule over women both from the mastery of slaves *and* from the political rule over free men? The answer turns on the role of natural differences in determining how people contribute to cooperative action. In some cases (as in the rule of fathers over their children, and masters over natural slaves), one party is naturally qualified to take complete control of all shared activities. In others, notably the rule of men over their wives, nature dictates that one party should rule, but also that the other party should make significant, positive contributions to shared actions. And in still others—the cases that call for what Aristotle calls “political rule”—nature does not determine who should rule and who should follow. In those cases, rule must be distributed according to arbitrary, institutional means, like ruling and being ruled by turn. On this view, there are not just two social positions—ruling and being ruled—as *Politics* I might seem to suggest. Rather nature and convention assign people varying degrees of authority over various fields, and imposes on rulers a complex ethics of trust and delegation, one that allows Aristotle to distinguish between at least seven different kinds of cooperation, each characterized by a different distribution of authority.

In Chapter 3, I consider the special case of political rule, which Aristotle repeatedly characterises in terms of equality. Aristotle encourages the young men in his audience to regard their fellow citizens as equals and so to pursue this kind of rule. Indeed, he makes it clear that there is a special connection between political rule and the ultimate goal of human life. Nevertheless, I argue that Aristotle is deeply ambivalent about political relations and the equal treatment that they involve. Although Aristotle thinks that in most cases, humans can best achieve happiness by sharing rule in communities of near-equals, he sees this as a lamentable consequence of certain features of human nature, particularly our inability to judge our own

worth. If we were superior beings, more like the gods, he thinks we would not need to rule each other politically. In at least this sense, Aristotle thinks that hierarchical rule is better than equality.

RÉSUMÉ

Aristote soutient qu'il y a plusieurs façons pour une personne d'en gouverner une autre. Un citoyen grec, par exemple, doit régner sur ses esclaves d'une façon qualitativement différente de la façon qu'il gouverne son épouse. De plus, il ne doit confondre aucune de ces façons de gouverner avec le gouvernement politique qu'il acquiert auprès de ces concitoyens libres. Les chercheurs n'ont pas considéré assez en détail comment ces différentes façons de gouverner concordent l'une avec l'autre, ni comment les discussions aristotéliennes du gouvernement, dispersés entre l'Éthique et les Politiques, et même au-delà, s'éclairent entre elles.

Dans cette thèse, je donne un compte-rendu complet de la conception aristotélienne du gouvernement. J'y soutiens qu'Aristote présente une théorie sophistiquée de la coopération et de l'agentivité partagée, fermement ancrée dans sa psychologie morale et son ontologie sociale aristotélienne. Ma thèse met en lumière les façons de gouverner propres aux ménages ainsi qu'aux cités, compris de façon restreinte, mais elle éclaire plus globalement un large éventail de relations personnelles. Je soutiens que cette théorie politique est d'un intérêt intrinsèque ainsi qu'elle détient un intérêt historique évident. Cette thèse présente aussi les connexions troublantes entre les parties des travaux d'Aristote que les lecteurs modernes sont plus enclins à admirer ainsi que ceux qu'ils sont plus enclins à rejeter.

Dans le premier chapitre, je pose la question : qu'est-ce que les différents gouvernements ont en commun, selon Aristote ? Dans quel sens, par exemple, est-ce qu'un homme d'état démocratique gouverne de la même façon qu'un citoyen gouverne ses esclaves ? La réponse se trouve dans le fait que pour Aristote, lorsqu'une personne en gouverne une autre, l'âme du gouvernant agit comme une cause particulière (une cause finale) de la personne gouvernée. Cela donne au discours persuasif un rôle spécial dans les interactions humaines – non, comme nous

pourrions le penser, parce qu'il permet aux gens de penser pour eux-mêmes avant d'obéir à des ordres, mais parce qu'il permet aux gouvernants d'imposer leurs fins directement sur les âmes des gouvernés. Afin d'arriver à cette conclusion, je considère quelle est la place d'Aristote dans la discussion politique grecque du 4^e-5^{ème} siècles sur la force et la persuasion, et plus spécifiquement en comparant Aristote à Gorgias et Lysias.

Dans le chapitre deux, je considère comment les différentes formes de gouvernement se distinguent les unes des autres. Par exemple, comment et pourquoi Aristote distingue le gouvernement sur les femmes à la fois du gouvernement sur les esclaves et du gouvernement politique sur les hommes libres ? La réponse se trouve dans le rôle des différences naturelles qui déterminent la part de chacun dans l'action coopérative. Dans certains cas, (comme le gouvernement des pères sur leurs enfants, et des maîtres sur leurs esclaves naturels), un parti est naturellement qualifié pour prendre le contrôle complet de toutes les activités partagées. Dans d'autres, notamment le gouvernement des hommes sur leurs épouses, la nature dicte qu'un parti devrait gouverner, mais que l'autre doit aussi faire des contributions significatives et positives aux activités partagées. Encore dans d'autres cas – ceux qui demandent le «gouvernement politique» – la nature ne détermine pas qui devrait gouverner et qui devrait suivre la règle. Dans ces cas-là, le pouvoir doit être distribué selon des moyens institutionnels arbitraires, tels que gouverner et être gouverné en alternance. De ce point de vue, il n'y a pas seulement deux positions sociales – gouvernant et gouverné – telle que les Politiques semblent le suggérer. Plutôt, la nature et la convention assignent aux gens divers degrés d'autorité dans divers domaines, et imposent sur les gouvernants une éthique complexe de confiance et de délégation, permettant ainsi à Aristote de distinguer entre au moins sept différentes sortes de coopération, chacune caractérisées par une distribution différente d'autorité.

Dans le troisième chapitre, je considère le cas spécial du gouvernement politique qu'Aristote caractérise en terme d'égalité. Aristote encourage les jeunes hommes de son auditoire à considérer leurs concitoyens comme des égaux et donc à poursuivre ce genre de relation. En effet, il est clair pour Aristote qu'il y a une connexion spéciale entre le pouvoir politique et le but ultime de la vie humaine. Cependant, je soutiens qu'Aristote est profondément ambivalent à propos des relations politiques et le traitement égalitaire qu'elles impliquent. Même si Aristote pense que, dans bien des cas, les humains peuvent mieux atteindre le bonheur en partageant la règle dans des communautés presque égalitaires, il voit cela comme une conséquence lamentable de certaines caractéristiques de la nature humaine, particulièrement notre incapacité à juger de notre propre valeur. Si nous étions des êtres supérieurs, plus comme les dieux, il pense que nous n'aurions pas besoin de nous gouverner entre nous de façon politique. Dans au moins ce sens, Aristote pense que le gouvernement hiérarchique est meilleur que l'égalité.

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INTRODUCTION

I. PRELUDE: SOCRATES AND LYSIS

At the beginning of Plato's *Lysis*, Socrates asks a teenager whether his parents love him. The boy replies that of course they do. Why then, Socrates asks, do they forbid him to drive the family chariot and to take charge of the family donkey, though they readily entrust these tasks to slaves? Why do they humiliate him by forbidding him to “rule even his own self,” making him obey not only the two of them, but various tutors and guardians? It seems, Socrates says, that the boy is “enslaved” (δουλεύοντα) to many “masters and rulers” (δεσπότας καὶ ἄρχοντας).¹ Socrates lingers over the fact that many of his tutors are slaves, even though Lysis is amply marked out for privilege in fifth-century Athens—his family is unusually wealthy, he has good looks admired by many, and he seems destined for political power.² How could loving parents give such an elite specimen such a miserable station?

The *Lysis* is a dialogue about φιλία, love or friendship, and so the exchange is framed in terms of whether Lysis' parents love him. But the immediate paradox turns on a different concept, ἄρχειν, normally translated as “rule.” One reason that Socrates exploits this theme is that he takes it for granted that Lysis is already equipped with many common-sense assumptions about who can appropriately rule whom. On the one hand, Lysis thinks that parents have every right to rule over their children (even though, like many teenagers, he may sometimes chafe at their authority). But on the other, he also assumes that various parties—women, slaves,

¹ *Lys.* 207d–10b.

² *Lys.* 208c.

donkeys—have little or no claim to rule over anyone. Socrates is challenging him to articulate the principles underlying these assumptions. In particular, Lysis needs to say something that reconciles the universal rule of children by adults on the one hand with the subservience of slaves and women to free males on the other. Lysis doesn't find this too difficult—he just points to another difference in status. It is appropriate that he submit to rule by parents and teachers, he says, because he hasn't yet grown up. The difference between adult and child overrules the other ones, including the difference between free person and slave, or between man and woman.³

Socrates, however, will have none of this—he rejects *all* of the differences that Lysis (and most everyone else in the classical Athenian *milieu*) might expect to justify the rule of some people over others. According to Socrates, there is one and only criterion for rule: understanding (*φρόνησις*).

In those areas where we really understand something [Socrates says], everybody—Greeks and barbarians, men and women—will trust us, and there we will act just as we choose, and nobody will want to get in our way. There we will be free ourselves, and rule over others. But in areas where we haven't got any understanding, no one will trust us to act as we judge best, but everybody will do their best to stop us, and not only strangers, but also our mother and father and anyone else even more intimate. And there we are going to be subject to the orders of others.⁴

In domains about which Lysis already knows something, Socrates continues, his father accepts his rule—for example, he submits to Lysis' expertise in grammar and spelling. And since rule is related in this way to knowledge, the only limit to the power Lysis might someday acquire is

³ *Lys.* 209a4.

⁴ *Lys.* 210b1–c3. Trans. Lombardo. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from Plato in this thesis are, like this one, taken from Cooper's *Complete Works of Plato* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett, 1997).

how much he can learn. This leads to a rather perverse fantasy. If the king of Persia thought that Socrates and Lysis knew the secrets of medicine, Socrates says, “he wouldn’t stop us even if we pried his eyes open and smeared ashes in them, because he would think we knew what we were doing.”⁵

This way of thinking about rule suggests an outrageous revision of fifth-century Athenian common sense. On the one hand, Socrates is implying that anyone qualified to rule over women, slaves, and children is *ipso facto* qualified to rule over cities and empires. On the other, he is suggesting that anyone *not* qualified to rule the whole world has no claim to rule even over children. And although Socrates is happy to use practical skills like medicine as examples of φρόνησις, we can be sure that he thinks the deepest and best kind of understanding is won by dedicating one’s life to philosophy. So his admonition to Lysis invites the thought that non-philosopher Athenians have no right to rule anyone—even children, wives, and slaves—while philosophers should be the kings of the world.

I begin with this episode from the *Lysis* because it introduces both the main concept that I will discuss in this thesis—rule as a relationship between individuals—and its complex place in classical Greece. I should say at the outset that although “rule” is the standard translation of ἀρχή or ἄρχειν, it’s not a perfect fit. In modern English, we most often use “rule” in expressions like ‘democratic self-rule’ and ‘rule of law’. These expressions concern the fundamental structures and procedures of the state, and they have a rather austere, technical tone. But although ἄρχειν certainly had uses in Greek with both of those features (and before the thesis is done, I’ll find my way to several of them), they are not my primary concern. In this thesis, my topic is the sort of ‘rule’ where, in paradigm cases, one person rules over another. This is the sort that concerns

⁵ *Lys.* 207d4–10a7.

Socrates in the *Lysis*: the power of parents over their children, masters over slaves, and friends over each other.

In classical Greece, everyone took this sort of rule as an everyday part of interacting with others. It was a pedestrian fact of life, whatever puzzles philosophers might raise about it. For modern English speakers, by contrast, I think it seems quite strange to say that teachers, parents and, doctors “rule” over their students, children, and patients. We reach for other words in these contexts—those people, we prefer to say, have “authority,” hold positions of “power,” and should show “leadership.” This preference isn’t just about semantics, but also about justice. If we find it odd to think of people ruling over children, employees, and so on, the problem isn’t that the expressions sound like nonsense, but rather that they suggest hierarchy and inequality that we find morally and politically beyond the pale. So although we may well say that a country ought to “rule” itself through the organs of the democratic state, it’s something else altogether—and something altogether unacceptable—to say that any individual ought to rule over any other.

Thus the starting assumption in Socrates’ discussion with Lysis—that some people should rule over others as a matter of course—today seems at least *prima facie* incompatible with norms of equality taken to apply to all human relationships, including asymmetrical ones like those between parents and children, doctors and patients, and teachers and students. But among the ancient Greeks, no one seems to have supposed that ruling over someone else was *prima facie* unjust, though they disagreed about who should rule whom, how it should be done, and how the concept should be understood. Notably, the concept of ἄρχειν played one role in everyday assumptions about people’s interactions, and quite another in revisionist philosophical discussions by the likes of Plato.

II. ARISTOTLE’S THEORY OF RULE

Aristotle has both the common and the technical senses in mind when, at the beginning of the *Politics*, he announces the view at the heart of this thesis: that rule comes in many species or kinds. “Those people,” he says, “who suppose that the same person is an expert in political rule, kingly rule, managing the household, and being a master of slaves [πολιτικὸν καὶ βασιλικὸν καὶ οἰκονομικὸν καὶ δεσποτικὸν εἶναι τὸν αὐτὸν] do not argue well.”

For they consider that each of these differs in the number or fewness of those ruled and not in kind [εἶδει]—for example, the ruler of a few is a master, of more a household manager, and of still more a political or kingly ruler—the assumption being that there is no difference between a large household and a small city; and as for the political and kingly rulers, they consider a kingly ruler one who has charge himself, and a political ruler one who on the basis of the precepts of this sort of science, rules and is ruled in turn.

But these things are not true.⁶

Against the unnamed champions of this position, Aristotle promises to provide his audience with “a better view concerning these kinds of rulers, both as to how they differ from one another and as to whether there is some expertise [τι τεχνικὸν] that can be acquired in connection with each of them.”⁷ Soon enough he concludes that “despotism and political rule are not the same thing, nor are all the species of rule the same as one another” (οὐ ταῦτόν ἐστι δεσποτεία καὶ πολιτική, οὐδὲ πᾶσαι ἀλλήλαις αἱ ἀρχαί) and in particular that “the master is not so-called according to a science he possesses [κατ’ ἐπιστήμην], but through being a certain sort of person, and similarly with the slave and the free person.”⁸

⁶ *Pol.* I.1, 1252a8–16.

⁷ *Pol.* I.1, 1252a20–26, trans. Lord, modified. See also *Pol.* I.3, 1253b18. Unless otherwise noted, translations are from Carnes Lord *Aristotle’s Politics*, 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2013).

⁸ *Pol.* I.7, 1255b16–19, trans. Lord, modified.

Aristotle's students would surely have found this reassuring. By contrast with Socratic radicalism, Aristotle is reasserting that *of course* a normal Athenian's day-to-day rule over his children is nothing special, while kingship is an exotic and magnificent station, suited only to the most exceptional people, if to anyone at all. And he is distancing himself in particular from the idea that some kind of intellectual achievement (particularly philosophical study with strange men like Socrates and Aristotle himself) should determine anyone's ability to raise children, use slaves, and give speeches at the assembly.⁹

As often with Aristotle, though, it slowly comes out that he won't quite deliver the defence of convention he seems to promise. In fact, I argue in this thesis that Aristotle's theory of rule turns out to be a distinctive philosophical innovation, very different not only from rival philosophical theories, but also from fourth-century Greek common sense, to say nothing of the political theory of later centuries.

Rule as a *Genus*

To understand Aristotle's theory of rule, it's useful to start with a claim that he thinks is an *a priori* axiom, akin to the fact that a whole must be larger than the parts that make it up. He commits himself to it in the preliminaries to his notorious discussion of natural slavery.

Whatever is constituted out of a number of things—whether continuous or discrete—and becomes a single common thing, always displays a ruling and a ruled element. This is

⁹ This tactic—introducing his positions by distancing himself from the radicalism of the Academy—is a mainstay of Aristotle's pedagogical and rhetorical approach. See Stephen Menn, "Aristotle," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Donald Borchert, Vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan, 2006), 267. I say more about Aristotle and the *all-rule-is-the-same* position in Chapter 1.

something that animate things derive from all of nature, for even in things that do not partake in life there is a sort of rule, for instance in harmony.¹⁰

In other words, every composite whole has a power structure such that some parts rule over others. I won't be concerned with what this principle means for musical modes and other non-human things, nor will I say much about how it works within the souls of individuals. What's important for the sort of rule I will be discussing is that the principle applies to all groups of human beings (including, paradigmatically, pairs of people) united in pursuit of some shared goal—that is, it applies to all *κοινωνία*, “partnerships,” “relationships,” or, in the standard translation, “communities.”

If all communities are structured by rule, then it's misleading to think of Aristotle's conception of rule as “political” in most modern senses of the term—it's better to think of it as a term concerning *cooperation* or of *shared agency*. For a *κοινωνία* is any group of people who share goals and act together to pursue them. Although not every relationship between human beings belongs to this category—the relationship between enemies does not, nor does that between a tyrant and his subjects—they provide the context for a great deal of human life. We must, for example, belong to a community in Aristotle's sense (and so rule or be ruled) whenever we act in the marketplace, the gymnasium, the courts, the battlefield, and whenever we socialize with close friends. Some communities are hierarchical, others egalitarian; some are forced, others consensual; some are connected to the institutions of government, others private and idiosyncratic.¹¹ But all involve the rule of some people over others.

¹⁰ *Pol.* I.5, 1254a26–33. For more on this passage, see Chapter 2.

¹¹ *EN* VIII.9, 1159b25–1160a20. For an extensive recent discussion of Aristotle's conception of community, see Bernard Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 25–43, as well as Moses Finley, “Aristotle on Economic Analysis,” *Past and Present* 47:1 (1970), 7–8.

What does it mean to say that these sundry associations are all relationships of rule? What, more generally, can they have in common at all? An important part of the answer for Aristotle is that they all involve a certain kind of *causal* connection between people: all cooperative action will involve one person—the ruler—acting as a certain kind of cause on someone else.¹² Now anyone familiar with Aristotle’s *Physics* will know that the best explanation of any natural phenomenon must provide its *final* cause, i.e. it the goal or end that explains it.¹³ And although Aristotle’s treatment of rule is not part of the natural science developed in the *Physics*,¹⁴ I will argue in Chapter 1 that final causes are nevertheless central to his understanding of rule. Ruling over people is not just a matter of pushing around their bodies, but rather of giving them goals that animate and giving meaning to the activities in their souls. All together, this yields what we might, for mnemonic purposes call a ‘causal, psychological theory of rule’.

Now, one crude way to affect people’s goals is with bodily punishments and rewards, which take advantage of the fact that everyone pursues pleasure and avoids pain.¹⁵ Aristotle seems to think that this is how people rule over non-human animals. But he does not think it is the right way to rule over human beings, even those who are slaves by nature. To rule effectively over humans, we will see, Aristotle thinks we must use *logoi*, speeches or arguments. These appeal to honour and to reason, communicating facts about what deserves praise and blame and what is just and unjust. I will argue that one reason *logoi* are important to Aristotle is that they

¹² Here I set aside the qualification that the “ruling element” might not be an individual person. For more see Chapter 3.

¹³ For example, when a tadpole starts to grow tiny legs, tiny material changes in the sides of its body must of course be involved; but the scientist won’t fixate on them. A scientific account of tadpole legs will instead emphasize that they allow the tadpole to become a frog and to thrive and reproduce in the environment where it lives.

¹⁴ It belongs to ‘practical philosophy’, whose goal is not merely understand things theoretically, but to act—*EN* X.9, 1179b1.

¹⁵ This is an important idea for Xenophon. See the Appendix to Chapter 1.

provide the lever that allows one person to act as a cause on another's soul, for they have the remarkable capacity to transmit values from one person's soul to another.

On Aristotle's view, ruling over people with *logoi* is not just a matter of persuading them to do things. Aristotle's examples of rule often turn on something different—the ways actions that would otherwise be pointless or random can be transformed in relation to other, higher projects. Expert bridle-makers (to elaborate on an example from the *Ethics*) are adept at finding ways to make the best bridles for certain horses, for riding under certain conditions, and so on. But the craft of bridle-making is useless on its own. In a vacuum, the bridle-maker might make various bridles—some ornamental, some suited to novice riders, others for ponies and zebras, etc.—or, more likely, sit around idly and make no bridles at all. Making bridles only has a *point*, on Aristotle's view, when it contributes to a military expedition.¹⁶ Thus the art of a general rules over that of the bridle-maker, and so too does the general rule over the bridle-maker. The point isn't that the former gives instructions to the latter (although he does), but rather that his military projects *confer meaning* onto the bridle-maker's activities and deliberations.

In other words, when Aristotle talks about rule, we should think less of prisoners under the whip than of scientists working for a weapons company, or of artists making corporate advertisements. In such cases, the workers may (or may not) be compelled to do things they would prefer not to do, and their labour may (or may not) enrich or otherwise benefit the bosses more than it does them. But what make them paradigm cases of rule in Aristotle's sense is that their thoughts, ingenuity, and expertise can be animated by the bosses' goals. They contribute positively, as full human agents, to their rulers' actions. Thus, I will argue, Aristotle thinks of ruling people not just as controlling their bodies, but rather as taking charge of their souls.

¹⁶ *EN* I.1 1094a11–13.

Species of Rule

As I said, although for modern readers it may be strange to think that all cooperation is structured by rule, Aristotle this is something like a self-evident truth. By contrast, when he says that there are many kinds of rule, he treats this as an important philosophical discovery. Borrowing from twentieth-century philosophical jargon, we might label this position “pluralism” about rule. We’ve seen that he gets a fair bit of mileage out of attacking the position advanced by the Socrates of the *Lysis* that all rule is the same, a view which we can go ahead and call “monism.” He is also at pains to attack a different form of monism, best preserved in Plato’s depiction of Thrasymachus, who argues that all cities are ruled in one and the same way, namely through the strong imposing self-serving laws on the weak. According to this sort of argument, all kinds of rule are despotic.

But in addition to monism, Aristotle quietly rejects a much more popular way of understanding rule, a more-or-less dualistic one.¹⁷ This is the simple and intuitive view that the only really meaningful distinction between kinds of rule is between the good kind—which was variously described, according to political orientation—and the bad kind, usually labelled *δεσποτεία*, despotism. Some ancient versions contrasted the political order of Greek cities (*πολιτεία*) with the despotism of barbarian empires.¹⁸ Others drew the line within the Greek world. Political thinkers from the two main camps in Aristotle’s time (supporters of Athenian-style democracy on the one hand and of Spartan-style oligarchy on the other) both liked to argue that their preferred styles of government provided the best kind of rule for free people, while their adversaries’ favourite regime amounted to despotism, suited to slaves but not to the free.¹⁹

¹⁷ In places, though, Aristotle seems to revert to this dualistic position. I discuss these passages in Chapter 3.

¹⁸ See Jaqueline Bordes, *Politeia dans la pensée grecque jusqu'à Aristote*. Paris: Belles Lettres, 1982.

¹⁹ See Josiah Ober’s *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). For one example of this kind of talk, see *Laws* IV 712e9–10, where the Athenian stranger says that none of the city-types

Such thinkers often talk as if rule is ‘despotic’ just when it injures or mistreats the person ruled in one way or another—when it harms him, when it’s imposed without his consent, when it isn’t restrained by justice and the law, etc.²⁰ (In fuller versions of such theories, there’s an important qualification: despotic treatment may in fact benefit *some* subjects, like natural slaves, even though it would harm or injure them if they were free Athenians.) I take it that nowadays many people, both in popular and academic contexts, accept a kind of rule dualism that’s akin to this: they suppose that there is one good or legitimate sort of rule that manages to avoid wronging anyone—for example with procedural mechanisms allowing all people to rule themselves with minimal interference—and that the further an arrangement strays from this, the more it turns into unjust domination.

When Aristotle announces that there are many kinds of rule, he means that he will go beyond mere dualism. He does indeed give a version of the distinction between δεσποτεία and rule suitable for the free, arguing that even though natural slaves and free women are both naturally inferior to free men, householders must recognize the servitude of the ones and the freedom of the others by being sure to rule them in different ways.²¹ But he insists that this dualism is not enough. For one thing, although children are, like women, free inferiors to Greek men, they are suited to a distinct sort of rule of their own because they are potentially their fathers’ equals, even if they are inferior for the moment. And, even more importantly, *each* of the three forms of hierarchical ‘domestic rule’ (οικονομική) must be kept distinct from the ‘political

normally called πολιτεῖαι deserve the name, since they are organized despotically in the interest of some ruling group, but that Crete and Sparta both do, since they aim at the good for the city as a whole.

²⁰ I say more about the Athenian orators’ critiques of ‘despotic’ rule in Chapter 1. I argue that one of the core concepts underlying it was slavery, seen as a basic social status.

²¹ *Pol.* I.2 1252b4; *Pol.* I.2 1252b1–5.

rule' (πολιτική) exercised by free citizens when they take turns ruling and being ruled by each other.²²

Aristotle says repeatedly that each of these kinds of rule is qualitatively different from the others, but it is not obvious what he thinks the differences are. Do they reduce to the psychological differences between people, like those that separate a Greek man, in various ways, from his wife, his children, and his slaves? Is it a matter of ruling for one's own benefit in some cases and for the common good in others? Or is the main difference ruling permanently in some cases and taking turns in others? Aristotle suggests each of these explanations in various places, but (as I argue in Chapter 2) no combination of them gives a satisfying account of the differences between kinds of rule. A better source is Chapters VIII.9 through IX.3 of the essay on friendship in Books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which contains the fullest version of an analogy that Aristotle returns to in all three of his ethical works, a comparison of household relationships to political regimes or constitutions (πολιτεῖαι): fatherhood goes with kingship, slave-mastery with tyranny, brotherhood with constitutional regimes, and so on.

Aristotle sometimes talks as if there were just two positions in the power structure of any community: an active one and a passive one, ruler and ruled. But I argue in Chapter 2 that his full account depends on a third, intermediate station. People occupy this position by participating (μετέχειν) in rule, even though they are not 'most authoritative' or 'sovereign' or 'in charge' (κυριώτατος). One example of this intermediate position is described in the middle books of the *Politics*: the position of individual members of the masses in cities with powerful courts and the assemblies. These people are not "officers" or "magistrates" (ἄρχοντες—literally "rulers") in an unqualified sense. They will never have full authority over any aspect of civic policy, as does the

²² This is complicated by the fact that although rule over women seems like it should count as a subspecies of οἰκονομική, Aristotle once says that it is "political." See Chapter 2.

treasurer, the general, and so on. Still, they can have a real effect on the actions of the city by voting, recalling magistrates, giving influential speeches, and so on. In so doing, they make positive contributions to the city's actions, and they put limits on the person who is in charge. Indeed, in democracies, even though no single person is in charge, the population as a whole rules over any individual member of the elite. Aristotle suggests we label their ambiguous position "indefinite office" (ἀόριστος ἀρχή).²³ Women provide another example of this intermediate place in a power structure. Aristotle thinks they should deliberate and contribute to management of the household, and indeed when it comes to the internal operations of the household, men must even defer to them. Thus even though Aristotle thinks that women are destined by nature to obey their husbands, he also thinks they hold a kind of authority that imposes special limits on how men should rule them—limits absent in their rule of both children and slaves.

Aristotle thinks that each of the three positions in a power structure—being in charge, actively contributing although someone else is in charge, and passively submitting—should be occupied by some people, some of the time. This allows him to diagnose a wide variety of 'incorrect' kinds of rule. In addition to the staple complaint of Athenian oratory, that rulers sometimes rule despotically in their own interest when nothing entitles them to do so, Aristotle adds that although some people have every right to be in charge, they may nevertheless trust their subordinates too much or too little (this is one of two kinds of 'oligarchical' rule). Others may have every reason to exercise real power and authority, but they should nevertheless be kept from being in charge of a community (lest they rule 'oligarchically' in the other way). By the same token, the scheme allows Aristotle to distinguish between many kinds of 'correct' rule.

²³ *Pol.* III.1, 1275a32.

‘Royal’ rule is benevolent but completely unrestricted. The ruler is so vastly superior to the person ruled that no trust or delegation is necessary (the paradigm of this arrangement is the rule of a father over a young child). ‘Aristocratic’ rule is the more complex arrangement where nature puts one party in charge but nevertheless assigns the other some limited form of authority. And ‘political’ rule occurs where natural differences fail to determine who should rule and who should be ruled—in these cases rule is assigned by turn or some other, external set of practices or institutions.

What Kind of Rule is Best?

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that royal rule is the best of these kinds.²⁴ But it’s not easy to square this with the overall tenor of the *Politics*. To be sure, Aristotle does say there that if a godlike person of surpassing virtue belonged to your community, it would be appropriate to make that person king. But he passes over this point quickly. Political rule, on the other hand, plays an outsize role throughout the treatise. Not only do the citizens of the “regime of our prayers” in Books VII and VIII rule each other politically, but (as I will argue) one of Aristotle’s main goals in Books III to VI is to encourage the young men in his audience to exercise political rule by participating in the political institutions of their cities, notwithstanding the serious problems with all real-life *poleis*.²⁵ In Chapter 3, I consider why political rule has this special status even though it is the third-best kind of rule overall and the worst of the ‘correct’ kinds.

²⁴ *EN* VIII.10, 1160b9.

²⁵ In fact, Aristotle’s desire to encourage his students to take part in political rule provides one the main reasons that he defends rule pluralism against monism. On the one hand, he worries that if the young men in his audience are swayed by monism about rule, they will withdraw altogether from the practice of ruling-and-being-ruled that makes up civic life in cities like Athens (figuring that it is wicked and undignified to act as a slave master to their free neighbours, and even worse to allow them to submit to that treatment from others). On the other hand, he worries that they will go in for revolution, trying to take over as philosopher kings if they accept the Socratic version of monism, or as tyrants if they think, like Thrasymachus, that all political life is despotism, and the only choice citizens have is whether to be the masters or the slaves.

Political rule is largely defined by its unique relationship to one of the pillars of Aristotle's conception of justice, which we might call the principle of desert. This principle requires that we treat people according to differences in what they deserve: more deserving people should get a larger share of the goods belonging to the community, less deserving people should get less. Aristotle thinks that in non-political communities the principle of desert establishes who should hold what kind of power over whom. In the simpler cases, like the rule of children and slaves, superiors should rule, inferiors obey; in more complex cases, as in a marriage, an ethics of trust and delegation determines who should be trusted with what sorts of authority. But in political communities, whose members, as he variously puts it, are "equal" or "similar in kind," natural differences don't determine who rules and who is ruled. Still, *someone* needs to rule. Political rule involves finding some convention or practice allowing community-members to pass rule from one member to another. Aristotle describes such practices as ruling and being ruled "by turns" (κατὰ μέρος), and he usually seems to be thinking of the standard method the Athenians used to assign public offices: most sorts of magistrate were chosen by lot and held office for at most a single, one-year term. Everyone could expect to be in charge of some things at some points.

Political rule has various problems by Aristotle's standards. For one thing, as I argue in Chapter 3, he recommends it even in communities where he thinks some people deserve rule more than others. This means that the members of political communities sometimes treat each other as equals counterfactually, even though they know that some deserve to rule more than others. On top of that (and again, I make the case in Chapter 3), he believes that in political rule, inequalities must be imitated (μιμεῖται—you could also translate this as "faked") with titles and honours elevating rulers above the people they rule. All told, political communities involve a

messy practice of pretence and imitation that fits ill with Aristotle's usual approach to justice. On top of all this, there are more practical problems. Most notably, Aristotle worries that when people take turns ruling and being ruled everyone misses out on the practice and experience they would get if they specialized in a single activity—it is as if shoemakers and carpenters regularly traded places, rather than focusing on the one task that suits them.²⁶

In spite of all this, Aristotle thinks that under normal circumstances free Greek men should regard their fellow citizens as equals and give themselves over to political rule. This is not, as many commentators have thought, because he sees equality as a fundamental political value, nor because he thinks all of the members of any normal political community *are equal*, as a matter of empirical or metaphysical fact.²⁷ Rather, I argue that Aristotle recommends political rule because, all things considered, it is the best we can do granted the peculiar circumstances under which human beings normally find themselves.

When he calls a group of people a 'community of equals', he means when their members are *similar enough to disagree amongst themselves about who is better than whom*. Since human beings are generally poor judges of their own value, such communities are everywhere. And everywhere people meet this condition, dangerous faction is liable to break out whenever anyone tries to take permanent control. Thus the main virtue of political rule is that it wards off disastrous political conflict and thereby provides people with the conditions that allow them to achieve happiness: it gives some people the leisure necessary to do philosophy while allowing others a chance to exhibit the ethical virtues, by making decisions on behalf of themselves, their families, and their communities. But while this kind of rule is best for free men in most of the communities they find themselves in, its value is highly qualified. Aristotle never gives up on the

²⁶ *Pol.* II.2, 1261a33–b5.

²⁷ On the role that he does think *ισότης* plays in justice, see Chapter 3.

idea that rigid, hierarchical rule is best, at least from the perspective of someone who has stepped back from practical life to take on an absolute perspective on the world. Political rule is a mere imitation of the royal rule suited to gods, the divine beings free of the inconveniences of human life.

We might summarize all of this as follows. (i) Aristotle thinks that rule is found wherever humans cooperate, and that it is a particular kind of causal, psychological relationship in which the ruler assigns final ends to the people ruled. (ii) He divides it into kinds, based not only on the type of person in charge, but also on an ethics of trust and delegation. (iii) And he thinks that this scheme is particularly important because it allows us to see the relationship between the absolute, divine value of rigid, hierarchical rule, and the more qualified, specifically human value of politics.

III. AIMS AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE THESIS

I think it's fair to say that this adds up to a theory of rule. In this thesis, I give a fuller account of it, defending the interpretive claims I've just made and filling in details. Chapter 1 discusses Aristotle's general conception of rule, Chapter 2 turns to the differences between its species, and Chapter 3 to the theory of value to which it is attached. Each chapter, however, is also written as a freestanding essay using the theme of rule to unravel a puzzle arising from Aristotle's text. Chapter 1 tries to illuminate a strange comment in his treatment of slavery: that masters should rule their slaves with "admonishment" rather than "command." It approaches this claim by fitting it into a broader conversation between fifth- and fourth-century Athenian intellectuals including Lysias, Gorgias, and Plato. Chapter 2 is an explication of a relatively short, frequently misunderstood stretch of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, its treatment of asymmetrical friendships,

considering how it fits into the larger argument of *EN VIII-IX*. And Chapter 3 shows how to reconcile the treatment of equality in *EN V* with his view of human beings as animals that are at their best when they imitate the divine. Thus each chapter deploys the concept of rule in personal relationships within a somewhat different style of Aristotle interpretation. Over the course of the thesis, I hope not only to defend a certain interpretation of Aristotle's theory of rule, but also to demonstrate that attending closely to the theme of rule in Aristotle is a fruitful practice, one that illuminates puzzling details of his texts, the broader contours of his practical philosophy, and his place in intellectual debates of his time.

Aristotle's treatment of rule hasn't gotten enough scholarly attention.²⁸ Although a great deal has been written on several topics that come up in my discussion (slavery, friendship, and political regimes, among others), scholars have said little about how they fit together, or about the concept of rule that is fundamental to them. Several factors have conspired to make this so.

The simplest is that although Aristotle says the difference between kinds of rule will be central to his political thought and alludes to the topic often, he only rarely fixes his gaze on it directly, and even then his comments are brief and schematic, even for him. To make matters worse, his comments about rule often direct the reader to fuller discussions elsewhere that seem not to have survived. (One scholar has argued that the dialogue *On Justice*, listed in ancient catalogues of Aristotle's work, must contain the story that he neglects to develop in his surviving work.²⁹)

²⁸ Recently it has gotten a few brief treatments. See Thornton Lockwood, "Justice in Aristotle's Household and City," *Polis* 20:1/2 (2003), 1-21. Robert Mayhew, "Rulers and Ruled," in *A Companion to Aristotle*, ed. G. Anagnostopoulos (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009); Fred Miller, "The Rule of Reason," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, ed. Marguerite Deslauriers and Pierre Destrée (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 38-66.

²⁹ Paul Moraux, *A la recherche de l'Aristote perdu: Le dialogue "Sur la justice"* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1957).

Another reason that scholars have attended little to Aristotle's theory of rule is that, as I said, in paradigm cases it inheres in personal relationships. This is an aspect of human life that fits poorly into categories we take for granted. For one thing, personal relationships get lost in the cracks between moral and political philosophy. Thus some of the key concepts in Aristotle's treatment of rule—cooperation, friendship, and justice—nowadays get filed under 'morality', while others—power, equality, freedom, and the management of diversity—get filed under 'politics'. Scholarly works on Aristotle's political theory and on his ethics, and their modern descendants alike, must be sought out not only in different sets of books and journals but (as I've observed too often) on different floors of the McGill University library.

Now, Aristotle couldn't say more clearly that he thinks the *Politics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* are part of a single intellectual study.³⁰ Still, the fact that we find his philosophy of human affairs in two treatises, each with distinct argumentative and pedagogical strategies, tends to reinforce the tendency of the modern politics-ethics split to occlude the topic of rule. The *Nicomachean Ethics* is, as we might say, 'methodologically individualistic': it sets out from the perspective of an arbitrary individual human agent, and uses material available from that point of view to construct its famous theory of virtue as the ultimate goal of human action. In the *Politics*, by contrast, Aristotle's official topic is the city as a whole—the treatment is 'methodologically holistic'. Like Plato before him, he loves to compare the *polis* to a body, describing its various parts—classes, households, individual citizens, and so on—as organs that are “for the sake of” the being to which they belong.³¹ And he announces early on that he will explore this whole by

³⁰ *EN* 1.2 1094a28–b5, *EN* X.9, 1181b15.

³¹ Of course, Aristotle also develops his practical philosophy in another treatise, the *Eudemian Ethics*. In my view—which is quite standard, though not undisputed—this is a different, earlier version of the same argument found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, perhaps intended for a more philosophically informed audience. I think that it functions in the same way, and supports the same conclusions as the *EN*.

considering how it relates to its parts.³² As I said earlier, however, Aristotle’s theory of rule is a theory of cooperation, and it focuses on communities smaller and more varied than the *polis*, including in particular the ‘personal relationships’ paradigmatically made up of just two people. They include married couples, masters and slaves, close friends, and also various teams, guilds, and cliques of free citizens, like the academy and other philosophical schools. Although by Aristotle’s lights such communities aren’t quite basic—any personal relationship will find its causes, ends, and principles in individuals and the city—they are indispensable for human life, and they can be illuminated by philosophical thought.

If the split between ethics and politics (and between the *Ethics* and the *Politics*) provides one reason that modern scholars have paid little attention to Aristotle’s theory of rule, another comes from their own political commitments. As I suggested above, modern political theorists, at least those most often read in English-language philosophy departments, tend for the most part to assume some version of what I called rule dualism. In particular, even thinkers who attend to hierarchical social relations, like that between parents and children, or within the business world, typically assert that these must be founded on an equal regard for everyone’s dignity.³³ Thus modern thinkers tend to distinguish between hierarchical domination on the one hand and

³² There is a great deal of discussion in the literature about whether or not Aristotle is an *ontological* individualist—whether, for example, he thinks the properties of groups can always be reduced to properties of individuals. I will say a word or two about that in Chapter 2. On the relationship between individuals and cities, much discussion has revolved around the claim that the happiness of the city boils down to the happiness of its individual citizens (*Pol.* III.6, 1278b15–24). Recent surveys and assessments of this material can be found in Donald Morrison, “The Common Good,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Politics*, ed. Marguerite Deslauriers and Pierre Destrée (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 176–198, and Fred Miller, *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle’s Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 194–216.

³³ To take just one example, Virginia Held stresses (against the social contract tradition) that we should take the asymmetrical relationships between caregivers and children as seriously as market relationships between equals, but she insists that equality is fundamental to both sorts of relationship: “parents and children should not have equal rights in the sense that what they are entitled to decide or to do or to have should be the same. A family of several small children, an adult or two, and an aged parent should not, for instance, make its decisions by majority vote in most cases. But every member of the family is worthy of equal respect and consideration. Each person in a family is as important as a person as every other.” “Non-Contractual Society,” in *Science, Morality & Feminist Theory*, edited by Marcha Hanen and Kai Nielsen (*Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplementary Volume XIII [1987]).

relationships free of power on the other—between freedom and domination—or to distinguish between legitimate democratic rule and tyranny. This does not leave much room for the Aristotelian question of how different sorts of just and unjust rule differ from each other.

Lastly, there's the fact that Aristotle thinks that hierarchy is natural and perhaps even biological, that some people are born for slavery, that women are suited to obedience, and so on. I take it (and I'm glad) that there is an all-but-universal academic consensus that such thinking is beyond the pale. I think it's understandable that many people would simply avoid reading the work of someone who thought these things. It's also understandable that those who read him anyway often try to decide whether he can be redeemed by excising the bad parts or explaining them away; or whether, on the other hand, the bad parts show that Aristotle (and perhaps the whole Western canon) is rotten root and branch. Yet although those questions have their place, I won't try to answer them here. My goal is instead make sense of the troubling parts of Aristotle that escape from these projects, where it becomes clear that he sees the things we judge bad and good, foreign and familiar, from a single, seamless perspective.

CHAPTER 1

SLAVERY AND PERSUASION

I. ARISTOTLE AND MONISM ABOUT RULE

In Book I of the *Politics*, Aristotle twice disagrees with an unnamed group of opponents: “those who suppose that the same person is expert in political rule, kingly rule, managing the household, and being a master of slaves” (ὅσοι μὲν οὖν οἴονται πολιτικὸν καὶ βασιλικὸν καὶ οἰκονομικὸν καὶ δεσποτικὸν εἶναι τὸν αὐτὸν).¹ These people, whom we dubbed ‘rule monists’ in the Introduction, think that the only difference between the kinds of rule is the number of people ruled. But Aristotle thinks they get it wrong, and he promises to show why.

There are several ancient texts that defend versions of the position Aristotle has in mind. We have already considered a version of the *all-rule-is-the-same* hypothesis from Plato’s *Lysis*. Another, worded in a way that is very close to the Aristotle of *Politics* I, appears early in Plato’s *Statesman*. There the Eleatic Stranger first identifies the expertise of a king with that of his advisors, then with statesmen or politicians more generally, and finally even with that needed for household management and slave-mastery. “It’s clear,” he concludes, “that there is one sort of expert knowledge concerned with these things; whether someone gives this the name of expertise in kingship, or statesmanship, or household management, let’s not pick any quarrel with him.”² Xenophon’s Socrates

¹ *Pol.* I.1, 1252a7–9 and I.3, 1253b18–20 (trans. Lord).

² *Stat.* 259c1–5, trans. Rowe. It is widely agreed in the literature that Aristotle’s attack on the *all-rule-is-the-same* people is closely linked to the *Statesman* passage. Annas and Waterfield, for example, write that

(reflecting on the skills needed to get good results from households, armies, and choirs) says much the same thing. “Whoever can make people skilled in ruling human beings,” he says, “can clearly make them skilled slave-masters; and whoever can make people skilled slave-masters can make people skilled to be kings” (ὅστις γάρ τοι ἀρχικούς ἀνθρώπων δύναται ποιεῖν, δῆλον ὅτι οὗτος καὶ δεσποτικούς ἀνθρώπων δύναται διδάσκειν, ὅστις δὲ δεσποτικούς δύναται ποιεῖν, καὶ βασιλικούς).³ Elsewhere, he tells a young man aspiring to become a general that the appropriate knowledge will make him one, even if he is never elected, but that “a dunce without knowledge is neither general nor doctor, even if the whole world appointed him.”⁴

This version of the all-rule-is-the-same thesis, which we may attribute to Socrates and his followers, contrasts with another, nastier version that seems to have circulated among the sophists. In *Politics* VII, when Aristotle says that “most people seem to think that despotic rule is statesmanship,”⁵ he is apparently thinking of something akin to Thrasymachus’ claim in the *Republic* that success in politics (whether in a democracy, oligarchy, or wherever) is simply a matter of advancing one’s own interest at the expense of others. Whereas on the Socratic view all (legitimate) rule amounts to kingship, on the

Aristotle’s discussion is written “clearly with the present passage in mind”; (Plato: *Statesman*, ed. Julia Annas and Robin Waterfield [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995], 5n8) Paul Moraux says that “on a noté depuis longtemps qu’Aristote critique directement les vues exposées par Platon dans le *Politique*.” Paul Moraux, *A la recherche de l’Aristote perdu: Le dialogue “Sur la justice”* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1957), 26. See also Robert Mayhew, “Rulers and Ruled” in *A Companion to Aristotle*, ed. G. Anagnostopoulos (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009) and Victor Goldschmidt, “La théorie Aristotélicienne de l’esclavage et sa methode.” In *Zetesis: Album amicorum* (Antwerp: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1973, 153-58). Such interpretations often fail to note that these come from an early stage of the dialogue, before the Stranger recants much of his first attempt and embarks on the myth that will lead to his full account of the art of rule—including the claim that failing the arrival of an extraordinary ruler, cities nowadays (i.e. in the age of Zeus) are best ruled by laws administered by officials, as households are not.

³ Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 13.5 Trans Pomeroy, modified. For a discussion of Xenophon’s theory of rule, see the Appendix to this chapter.

⁴ Xenophon, *Memorabilia* III.4, 6–11.

⁵ *Pol.* VII.2, 1324b32–35.

Thrasymachean view all (actual) rule amounts to despotism. Aristotle's point is that both positions overlook crucial differences between kinds of rule, both at the descriptive and the prescriptive levels. It's a mistake, he thinks, to identify the benign leadership of Pericles with the disastrous reign of the Thirty, or to think that the citizens of Athens should be ruled in the same way as the women and children back home.

The idea that all kinds of rule are the same, at any rate, seems to have been quite familiar in fourth-century Athens. But, notwithstanding Aristotle's emphasis of this view, and even the fact that he attributes some version of it to "most people," we should not think that it was the main alternative to his own position or that rejecting it was bold or unorthodox. Quite the opposite. The *all-rule-is-the-same* position was undoubtedly a fringe view, designed to provoke. Xenophon and Plato themselves realize how shocking it is to suggest that an inexperienced child could command armies if he learned some philosophy, or that a citizen needs the mythical virtue of kings just to give instructions to slaves and children. And Plato, at least, does not ultimately seem to have accepted the view, even in the *Statesman*. Midway through the dialogue, the Eleatic Stranger seems to withdraw his earlier claim about rule, suggesting that his first attempts to characterize the statesman belonged to a naïve, utopian political philosophy applicable only to divine rule, rather than the more complex political relations humans must forge when they rule each other.⁶ For these reasons, along with others we will see in a moment, most of Aristotle's students would have thought that *of course* there must be some important differences between kinds of rule, and that the king leading his troops to battle is altogether different than the farmer sending his slaves into the field.

⁶ *Stat.* 274e1–4.

Aristotle has clear enough reasons to distort his dialectical situation in this way. As we saw in the Introduction, the contrast with the *all-rule-is-the-same* people makes his own position seem more plausible, and it may reassure his audience that his time at the Academy didn't lead him into its worst excesses. More simply, it draws attention to the specific differences Aristotle finds between kinds of rule, which (as we will see in Chapters 2 and 3), are of great importance to his practical philosophy. But if we want to understand how Aristotle's position relates to those generally accepted by his contemporaries, it's helpful to set aside the debate with the *all-rule-is-the-same* people, and consider a very different disagreement Aristotle has with his peers—one based not on how he thinks the various kinds of rule differ from each other, but on what he thinks all kinds of rule have in common. In particular, it will be useful to consider what Aristotle thinks is shared by two kinds of rule that in his time were widely thought to be opposites: the despotic rule of masters over slaves and the political rule of one free citizen over another.

I will ultimately argue that this leads us to a single, unified conception of rule that underlies his discussion of its various kinds. For reasons famously developed in Plato's *Meno*, we have good reason to think that some such conception exists. And when Aristotle says that rule is divided into *species* (εἶδει διαφέρει),⁷ he invites the more specific thought that they belong to some common genus. Aristotle's view of this common category, I will argue, is not quite unprecedented, but it is a highly original and distinctive feature of his philosophy, diverging sharply from both the cutting-edge philosophy of Plato and the untrained democratic mainstream of fourth-century Athens.

⁷ *Pol.* I.1, 1259b37.

II. ADMONISHMENT AND SLAVERY

At the end of Aristotle's famous treatment of slavery in *Politics* I, he contrasts himself with a group of opponents very different from the *all-rule-is-the-same* people.

Those who deny reason to slaves and assert that commands only should be used with them do not argue finely: admonition is to be used with slaves more than with children.⁸

I will refer to this claim often, and it will be useful if inelegant to call it the “admonishment claim.” Although Aristotle doesn't say so, one of the targets of the admonishment claim seems to be a passage in Plato's *Laws*. There, the Athenian stranger says this:

We ought to punish slaves justly, and not to make them conceited by merely admonishing them as we would free men.⁹

This disagreement about admonishing slaves complicates the debate we were just considering, about whether or not there are several kinds of rule. For when it comes to admonishing slaves, it is *Aristotle* who presses his contemporaries to treat slaves more like free citizens than they typically do. And he is apparently thinking of a passage from Plato—whose *Statesman* is presumed by many to be the *locus classicus* of the *all-rule-is-the-same* position¹⁰—stating that political and despotic rule differ not just in the number of people ruled, but in the ways they should be enforced.

⁸ *Pol.* I.13, 1260b5–8 (trans. Lord).

⁹ *Laws* VI, 777e. According to Glenn Morrow, Aristotle misunderstands this passage. On his account, Plato is making a narrow legal distinction, where “νουθέτησις” refers not generally to admonishment but more specifically to a verbal penalty—i.e. a warning—in the place of corporal punishment. (*Plato's Law of Slavery in its Relation to Greek Law* [New York: Arno Press, 1976], 44–45). I will follow Aristotle's interpretation here, which is, as we will see, plausible in light of other aspects of Plato's thought.

¹⁰ See note 2 above.

Aristotle's position here is quite surprising. He only rarely uses the word *νουθέτησις* and its cognates, but they are widespread in other classical texts, and Plato uses them often. *Νουθέτησις* is a gentle response to mistakes and bad behaviour using reason and education rather than force. In standard translations it finds English equivalents ranging from mild—"rebuke," "reproach," or "chastise"—to *very* mild—"convince" and "advise."¹¹ In Plato, admonishment is particularly associated with education in virtue. For example, the *Sophist* defines it as "our forefathers' time-honoured method of now scolding, then gently encouraging" (τὰ μὲν χαλεπαίνοντες, τὰ δὲ μαλθακωτέρως παραμυθούμενοι); they "used to employ it especially on their sons, and many still use it on them nowadays when they do something wrong."¹² Along the same lines, Socrates also says in the *Apology* that if he has ever acted unjustly then he did so unintentionally, and the city should admonish and instruct (διδάσκειν) him instead of just dishing out punishment.¹³

So when Aristotle says against Plato that slaves should be admonished, he means that slaveholders should persuade their slaves with rational arguments and ethical education; this, he says, is the best way to respond to the slaves' rationality. This may seem like an obviously progressive, even proto-liberal position. William Fortenbaugh, for example, seems to think so. In what is surely the most influential of the relatively few discussions of the admonishment claim, he writes that *νουθέτησις* gives slaves "their due." It "honours" and "respects" the slave's cognitive abilities such as they are, and it allows the slave to "partake in reason as best he can." Thus, he says, Aristotle has

¹¹ In our passage from Aristotle, Jowett renders it simply as "converse with."

¹² *Soph.* 229e5–230a2, trans. White modified. The passage may be contrasting a negative stage in the educational process, like the Socratic *elenchus*, with a more positive one.

¹³ *Apol.* 26a.

developed “a new and more thoughtful view” than his predecessors on the subordination of slaves.¹⁴ For Fortenbaugh, the admonishment claim amounts to what later philosophers would call a ‘negative claim right’, according to which slaves’ status as rational beings places a moral restriction on what their masters may do to them.

There is an obvious objection to this kind of reading. It is not clear how, after developing his notorious theory of natural slavery, Aristotle can coherently ask masters to “respect,” “honour,” or otherwise attach non-instrumental value to their slaves’ interests. Aristotle famously thinks that a natural slave is a person who lacks the ‘deliberative faculty’ (τὸ βουλευτικόν) that allows normal human adults to make fully rational decisions about what to do. The slave is therefore the living property of another—something like a part of his master and a living tool, similar to a farm animal or a bodily organ. Thus, rulers need never aim at their slaves’ interests, and may instead rule over them “tyrannically” in the name of their own projects. One dramatic piece of evidence for this latter claim is Aristotle’s comfort with using wars of aggression to enslave people who would otherwise resist taking up the yoke assigned to them by nature.¹⁵

How can Aristotle recommend this kind of unrestricted domination, yet still say that masters must respond to their slaves’ capacity for reason by admonishing rather than commanding? Few scholars suggest any answer, because few discuss the admonishment claim at all. Those that do discuss it mostly seem both to accept Fortenbaugh’s liberal reading, and also to agree with the suggestion that I have just made, namely that if Fortenbaugh is right about the admonishment claim, then Aristotle is inconsistent. They

¹⁴ William Fortenbaugh, “Aristotle on Slaves and Women,” in *Articles on Aristotle 2*, eds. Jonathan Barnes, Malcolm Schofield, and Richard Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1975), 135–39.

¹⁵ *Pol.* I.8, 1256b26.

do not, however, dwell on this contradiction, because the scholarly consensus is that Aristotle's entire treatment of slavery is an irremediable mess, pulled in opposite directions by Aristotle's ideological commitments on the one hand and his burgeoning insights into moral truth on the other.¹⁶ Incoherence, the story goes, is what we should expect when the rays of justice begin to pierce the clouds of ideology. Any problems with the admonishment claim are minor puzzles in a chorus of howlers, and if Aristotle had been true to his most important commitments he would have condemned slavery altogether.

I will not here try to address all of the possible contradictions in Aristotle's treatment of slavery, but I do hope to show that the admonishment claim is perfectly compatible with the view that slaves are nothing more than tools: that masters should rule over them completely selfishly, only considering the slaves' advantage where this will somehow benefit themselves.

III. SLAVERY AND VIOLENCE, FREEDOM AND PERSUASION

Aristotle directs the admonishment claim at people including Plato who "tell us to use command only" on slaves. Notice that these people don't merely say that it's *sometimes*

¹⁶ For example, if slaves are living tools by nature, how can Aristotle recommend manumission as a reward for good behaviour? And if they have no deliberative capacity, then how can they be human beings, granted that reason is the essential human property? For a discussion of many claims to this effect, and a detailed argument that Fortenbaugh can't rescue Aristotle from contradiction, see Nicholas D. Smith, "Aristotle's Theory of Natural Slavery," *Phoenix* 37:2 (1983), 109–22. See also Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 110–15. This consensus has recently come under fire from scholars who argue that Aristotle's account is philosophically coherent. Such scholars tend to follow Fortenbaugh's lead, arguing that Aristotle's treatment of slaves is much more liberal than it appears. See, for example, Richard Bodéus, "De l'âme servile affranchi de lois" in *Le véritable politique et ses vertues selon Aristote* (Louvain-la-Neuve ; Dudley, MA : Peeters, 2004), 79–106, which argues that Aristotle thinks that even natural slaves are educable, and that Aristotle hopes masters will educate their natural slaves in virtue, and thereby free them.

acceptable to command one's slaves. They say that you must *always* do so, and therefore that it is always at least *prima facie* wrong to give them reasoned arguments.

Commanding slaves isn't just permitted but required.

This position is quite striking, considering that the “commands” Aristotle has in mind are evidently backed with violent force. But Plato's position would not have been as surprising for Aristotle's audience as it is for us. Although household slaves in Athens were treated more liberally than in other cities, and some currents in Athenian thought (to which we will return) encouraged still gentler treatment, it remained perfectly standard to use violence to keep them in their place. Bernard Williams offers a concise survey of some central pieces of evidence:

It was a joke that *παῖς* [a casual term for slaves, literally “boy”] came from *παίειν*, “to beat.” Public slaves, at least, were marked with a brand, which as Xenophon observed, made them harder to steal than money. The overwhelming difference between free and slave, Demosthenes remarked, was that the slave was answerable with his or her body. Evidence from slaves was acceptable in the courts solely on the condition that it had been extracted under torture. In a speech of Lysias, a man's reluctance to allow his slave concubine to be tortured is cited as evidence against him.¹⁷

Such practices were of course instrumentally valuable—they helped compel slaves to do useful things for their masters and for the city. But they go beyond the kinds of

¹⁷ Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 107–8. Williams's sources are Demosthenes 22.3, Antiphon *I Tetral.* 2.7, and Lysias 4.10–17, along with Aristotle's *Rhet.* 1376b31. For fuller discussions of this material, see also Giuseppe Cambiano, “Aristotle and the Anonymous Opponents of Slavery,” *Slavery and Abolition Studies* 8:1 (1987), 22–41; Kenneth Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1974), 284–87; and Moses Finley *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* expanded edition, ed. Brent Shaw (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1998), 161–63.

exploitation (perhaps exemplified by sweat-shop labour today) regarded by their beneficiaries with indifference or even regret. The majority of free Athenians seem to have been actively *in favour* of the violent abuse of slaves, quite aside from its instrumental value. They laughed when it appeared in comedy, and there is some evidence that they made themselves out to be rougher with their slaves than they were in practice.¹⁸ It's true that some people argued that masters must be careful not to be *excessively* brutal with their slaves. Some gave instrumental considerations, i.e. that excessive violence makes slaves more likely to revolt, that if people routinely beat up unknown slaves they will end up hurting free, or that if a slave ends up dying it may bring *miasma* down on the community of free people. Others gave more moral considerations, in particular that excessive violence displays *hubris*.¹⁹ But with few exceptions if any, these are positions about *how*—rather than *whether*—masters should use violence against their slaves, and they give a good sense of the era's bounds of reasonable discourse.²⁰

In short, fourth- and fifth-century Greeks generally didn't just tolerate violence against slaves as a necessary evil, but actually endorsed it as a matter of principle. I'd like to take a moment to ask why they would think this—that using violence on slaves is not just permissible but obligatory.

¹⁸ See Michael Gagarin, "The Torture of Slaves in Athenian Law," *Classical Philology* 91:1 (1996), 1–18, which argues that βᾶσανος, the mandatory torture of slaves, rarely actually happened, even though orators constantly spoke as if it did.

¹⁹ These examples are collected and discussed in "Classical Athens," by T.E. Rihll in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery* vol. 1, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 48–73.

²⁰ For a thorough survey of later ancient texts critical of slavery, see Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

An important source of evidence lies in the fifth-century political uses of the language of slavery and freedom.²¹ In fifth-century Greece, the category ‘slavery’ did not just refer to literal human chattel, but was also used to slur those with unacceptable political views or alliances. In particular, those people were variously described as either enslaving free people (if the parties under attack held power), or as embracing their own slavery (if they supported rather than practiced the wrong kind of government). In early texts, Greek writers often applied this sort of language to non-Greeks (thus one of the themes in Herodotus is the downfall of the Persians, who were once free but have been reduced to δουλεία and δεσποτεία, and are therefore nowadays baffled by the freedom of Greeks).²² But opponents of oligarchy and democracy soon enough began arguing that the Greek governments they opposed likewise reduced citizens to slavery. Thus, for example, Demosthenes says that people who support Philip and the Macedonians have given up on the traditional love of freedom, and are instead “eager for slavery.”²³ The tyrant rules with force, as if his people were slaves; the good ruler, on the other hand, uses persuasion to secure his people’s consent. Likewise, in the *Constitution of Athens*, Aristotle (or whoever the author is) writes that the most grievous feature of Athens’ original constitution was that the people were enslaved; this, he says, led to the crisis that could only be resolved by Solon: “the many being enslaved to the few, the people rose up against the nobles.”²⁴ Slavery, in this tradition, is seen as a threat not because of the

²¹ For a useful survey of this material, see Peter Hunt, “Slaves in Greek Literary Culture,” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery* vol. 1, ed. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 22–47, esp. 23–25.

²² See Robert Schlaifer, “Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 47 (1936), 166–67. Early examples include Aeschylus, *Persians* 241–42 and Herodotus VII, 135.3. For related use of δεσποτεία, see *Laws* III, 697c–d.

²³ Demosthenes 9.36.

²⁴ *Const. Ath.* I.2 and I.5, trans. Rackham, modified

unhappiness and material disadvantage typical of slaves, but rather because of the shame tied to their status. Slavery is important because of its relationship to the honour and dignity associated with its opposite, free citizenship.

All this talk of slavery is very abstract and metaphorical, and it often seems to have little to do with actual, flesh-and-blood slaves. As Thomas Wiedemann puts it, the Greeks are “not thinking *about* slavery so much as using the concept ‘slavery’ to think *with*.”²⁵ But it does not follow that this discourse had no implications in actual slaves’ lives. On the contrary, the ideology made it natural to think that slaves as belonging to a completely distinct class of persons, and to treat them accordingly. In particular, it suggested a kind of argument, moving from abstract ideas about the sorts of people populating Greek cities, to specific directions about how to treat them. Premise 1: Slaves and the free are opposite kinds of people, and are suited to opposite kinds of treatment.²⁶ Premise 2: the treatment appropriate for free people is persuasion with arguments.²⁷ Premise 3: force is the opposite of persuasion.²⁸ Conclusion: slaves must be treated with force rather than persuasion.

Now even if the premises were true, this argument would have serious problems. The most damaging is that the idea of ‘opposite treatment’ is vague—if we took it

²⁵ Thomas Wiedemann, *Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 11 *apud* Peter Hunt, “Chapter 2: Slaves in Greek Literary Culture,” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 1, edited by Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 22–47. Hunt also provides a helpful bibliographical essay, as well as a survey of the main evidence about this kind of political ideology based on the language of slavery.

²⁶ This is a variation on the commonplace that equality calls for better treatment for the good and worse treatment for the bad. See also F.D. Harvey, “Two Kinds of Equality” (*Classica et Medievalia* 26 [1965], 101–146). On slaves as an inferior, essentially different kind of person, see Dover *Greek Popular Morality* and Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Ideology*, cited above.

²⁷ See the Demosthenes passages above, as well as the speech by Lysias discussed below.

²⁸ In some literary contexts (although not all, as we will see), including much chest-beating Athenian democratic rhetoric, this is a self-evident linguistic truism.

literally, we might have to conclude that the Greeks were committed to eating slaves, since they are committed to *not* eating the free. Still, each ‘premise’ is found in several places in the literature, and it’s not hard to see how those who accepted all of them might think they had strong reason to support ruling slaves with nothing but violent force.

And I think this framework is useful for making sense of Aristotle’s views about slavery. The admonishment claim denies the conclusion to this quasi-argument. I want to suggest that it follows by something like *modus tollens* that he likely also departed from his contemporaries in rejecting at least one of our three premises.

Which one, or which ones? Fortenbaugh’s rights-style interpretation suggests one answer. On his interpretation, slaves and the free both have a share of reason; this similarity makes it unjust to deny slaves the treatment appropriate for the free. If this is correct, Aristotle rejects the first of our premises, the one suggesting an essential difference between free people and slaves, a difference justifying different treatment.

But as we have seen, this cannot be right. Aristotle specifically opposes himself to a set of people who seem to reject our first premise. He reports that they think that “for one man to be another man’s master is contrary to nature, because it is only convention that makes the one a slave and the other a freeman, and there is no difference between them by nature, and that therefore it is unjust, for it is based on force.”²⁹ We do not have much of an idea of who these people were and what they thought; perhaps Aristotle exaggerated their importance, the better to make his own position seem moderate.³⁰ But

²⁹ *Pol.* I.3, 1253b20–23 trans. Rackham.

³⁰ Giuseppe Cambiano offers the fullest discussion of what the position might have amounted to, in his “Aristotle and the Anonymous Opponents of Slavery,” *Slavery and Abolition Studies* 8:1 (1987), 24–25. One possible source for this view is Alcidas, a student of Gorgias, whom Aristotle (or at least a scholiast) quotes in the *Rhetoric* as saying “god has left all men free; nature has made no man a slave” (*Rhet.* 1373b5-20).

we know for sure that he disagrees with it. While he concedes that some people are unjustly enslaved, his central claim is precisely that natural slaves are a different kind of people than the free, and that the rule appropriate for each of them is different.

I want to suggest, then, that Aristotle never doubts that justice permits and even requires that slaves be ruled in a way that would be impermissible for the free. He reaches his novel views about the role of admonishment in ruling slaves because of his position in a debate within his intellectual community that casts doubt on the other two premises, which finds (i) an affinity between freedom and persuasion, and (ii) opposes both to force.

IV. LYSIAS: *LOGOI* AND RULE BY THE TRUTH

To get a better sense of the ways these concepts worked together in popular democratic thought, consider this passage from Lysias' *Funeral Oration*. Early Athenians, Lysias says,

were the first and only people in that time to drive out (ἐκβαλόντες) the ruling classes (δυναστείας) of their state and to establish a democracy, believing the liberty of all to be the strongest bond of agreement; by sharing with each other the hopes born of their perils they had freedom of soul (ἐλευθέρας ταῖς ψυχαῖς) in their civic life, and used the law for honouring the good and punishing the evil. For they deemed that it was the way of wild beasts to be held subject to one another by force (ὑπ' ἀλλήλων βίᾳ κρατεῖσθαι), but the duty of men to delimit

justice by law, to convince by argument (λόγῳ πείσαι) and to serve these two in act by submitting to the sovereignty of law and the instruction of reason.³¹

This speech clearly endorses the claims (or ‘premises’) we are considering. In the final sentence, Lysias treats persuasion with *logos* as the only treatment appropriate for men and he opposes it to the force appropriate to wild beasts. The men he has in mind are the free citizens of Athens; he doesn’t mention slaves, but for the reasons we just saw, there’s every reason to think that when it comes to force and persuasion he and his audience members would class them with beasts rather men.³²

Now this passage exploits the contrast between force and persuasion to advance the idea that democracy is the form of political association that best recognizes freedom—and it suggests a very particular understanding of what freedom involves. Like the *Constitution of Athens*, Lysias’ funeral oration tells us that the first Athenians won their freedom by getting rid of despotic rulers. But Lysias stresses an important twist: this does not mean that Athenians now have *no* masters, or that each Athenian rules himself. Likewise, by no means can the Athenians do whatever they want.³³ On the contrary,

³¹ Lysias, *Funeral Oration* 18–19, trans. Lamb. For a useful discussion of this text and many others like it, see R.G.A. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy: A Study of Peitho* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982).

³² For more examples of the general line of thought discussed in this paragraph, see also Demosthenes 10.4 and Isocrates 20.10. For discussion, see Mogens Hansen “Democratic Freedom and the Concept of Freedom in Plato and Aristotle,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 50 (2010) 1–27, 3–41. And for a related discussion of Plato’s use of the word δουλεία, see Glenn Morrow, “Plato and Greek Slavery,” *Mind*, New Series, 48:190 (1939), 186–201, 187–88 and Dover’s *Greek Popular Morality*, cited above. See also John T. Kirby, “The ‘Great Triangle’ in Early Greek Rhetoric and Poetics (*Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, 8:3 (Summer 1990), 213–28. In a footnote to a paper on persuasion in Plato’s *Laws*, Christopher Bobonich briefly mentions the idea that “free people deserve persuasion and slaves deserve compulsion (“Persuasion, Compulsion, and Freedom in Plato’s *Laws*,” *Classical Quarterly*, New Series 41:2 [1991], 386n80).

³³ This was, however, one meaning of the word ἐλευθερία. See Hansen’s “Democratic Freedom,” p. 9.

the Athenians secured freedom by replacing one kind of master with another—they demonstrate their freedom precisely by “serving” (ὕπηρετεῖν) reason and law.³⁴

Why is it any better to serve *those* masters than the old tyrants the early Athenians drove away? Surely there are supposed to be obvious answers to this question. For a start, there is the matter of what reason and the law are *not*. They are not, like tyrants and the masters of slaves, human beings who can exert their arbitrary, individual preferences on those in their power. Thus in Lysias’ view slavery amounts not to having a master, full stop, but rather to having a particularly nasty kind of master—a *person*, i.e. someone liable to use coercion to advance his or her perhaps arbitrary preferences. But law and reason also have positive features that make them good masters. The law “delimits” justice, honours the good, and punishes the bad, and Lysis evidently assumes that reason too necessarily expresses the truth about what people should do, as the whims of a tyrant likely do not.³⁵ That is, the Athenians, in accepting democracy, subordinate themselves to the ‘rule’ of impersonal facts about what should be done. They subordinate themselves, as we might put it, to the truth.

Now Lysias thinks that the way to secure the rule of reason and the law is through a particular kind of constitution, democracy. This raises the obvious objection that no form of political organization can *directly* put moral truth in control of its citizens. Rather, even the most democratic regimes will give some people the power to restrict and direct the actions of others. Athenian democracy had many distinguishing characteristics,

³⁴ Compare the description of Sparta attributed by Herodotus to Demaratus (VII.104.4): “They are free, yet not wholly free: law is their master, whom they fear much more than your men fear you.” For an argument that this discussion of Sparta is run through with democratic Athenian ideology (and a discussion generally related to these questions), see Sara Forsdyke, “Athenian Democratic Ideology and Herodotus’ Histories,” *American Journal of Philology* 122:3 (2001), 329–58.

³⁵ The association of persuasion with truth has a long history in Greek literature. See especially

including institutions allowing citizens to censure officials if their tenure proved unsatisfactory, and to bring their neighbours to trial at will, but nothing in Lysias' discussion here suggests that he has those in mind. He focuses on two practices, that of establishing and following the law (which minimally restricts the ability of rulers to impose their arbitrary preferences on the people and ideally leads them to act according to the insights of wise legislator from the distant past, and—more importantly for our purposes—persuasion with *logos*, by which he presumably means the distinctive way that speakers in the assembly and the courts could direct *polis* by giving speeches. And on Lysias' account, even when people exert a great deal of influence over each other with *logoi*, the people who are influenced are ruled by truth, not their neighbours.

Lysias, then, attaches himself to a tradition, going back at least to Parmenides, according to which persuasion “attends on truth.”³⁶ This expresses the point—we might loosely call it a ‘phenomenological’ observation—that being talked into going somewhere feels a lot different—a lot freer—than, say, being carried away.³⁷ And the reference to law and reason suggests an explanation of this intuition. When someone addresses you with arguments, they potentially contain information about the world. When you consent to their arguments, it is because they seem to tell the truth. Your relationship to a speaker is not political but cognitive—you are using him to acquire facts relevant to your actions, in the same way as you might use a seeing-eye-dog or a blind person's cane. The persuader, like these perceptual aids, is a mere intermediary

³⁶ KRS 291.3–4: The Goddess announces that there are two paths, and that the first one (‘that it is’) “is the path of persuasion (for she attends upon Truth)” —πειθοῦς ἐστὶ κέλευθος (Ἀληθείη γὰρ ὀπηδεῖ).

³⁷ Socrates expresses this aspect of persuasion in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. “By making its victims sensible of loss,” he says, “violence rouses their hatred: but persuasion, by seeming to confer a favour, wins goodwill.” *Mem* 1.2.10, trans. Marchant.

transmitting to you facts that you might, ideally, have grasped directly. We may see in this view of persuasion an early version of the later idea of the “unforced force of the better argument.” The slogan suggests that the better argument is nothing to be scared of; persuaded action is unforced or uncoerced because it expresses a relationship you would ideally have had with your environment anyway.

Lysias doesn't take himself to be saying anything radical or philosophically deep. Rather, since he presumably designed his oratory to resonate with a varied, uneducated Athenian audience, we can assume that it would seem widely plausible, and perhaps familiar. Nevertheless, he expresses a distinctive view of freedom, one that is similar only in some respects with later versions of that concept. It is a conception of freedom that allows the democratic city to treat its citizens in a manner ‘befitting the free’, even though it empowers some people to control other people's actions. And it also gives substantial support to the idea that persuasion is uniquely suited to the free—a view which, as we have seen, in turn helps to support the treatment of slaves that Aristotle rejects with the admonishment claim.

V. GORGIAS: PERSUASION AS FORCE

Although Lysias' picture of the relationship between persuasion and truth presumably had considerable support, it failed to account for some worrying features of real-life persuasion. As Thucydides, Aristophanes, and Plato never tire of repeating, the power of persuasive speech allowed some people—notably orators and sophists—to acquire frightening power in politics and education, even when they seemed to have sketchy

characters and bad arguments.³⁸ So there was every reason to question the way people like Lysias understood persuasion and freedom.

Such challenges came in many forms, but I would like to focus on one in particular. We find it vividly expressed in Gorgias' *Encomium to Helen*. There, Gorgias argues that Helen is blameless for her role in the Trojan War. He considers various reasons that she might have left—she might, for example, have been physically compelled or gone because of love—and argues that whichever was in fact her reason, Helen is blameless. The speech's core is a long section where Gorgias considers persuasive argument, which he refers to variously just as *λόγος* and as *πειθώ*.³⁹ He argues that if we would forgive Helen for getting dragged to Troy by force—as of course we should—then we should also forgive her if someone persuaded her with *logos*.⁴⁰

Gorgias begins his argument by dismissing an idea that we have just seen in Lysias: that when someone uses *logos* to get us to do things, our master is the truth (or at least the apparent truth), not the person. Real knowledge, Gorgias says, is extremely hard to come by, mistakes and illusion are widespread, and we must therefore often depend on mere opinion rather than knowledge.⁴¹ His idea seems to be that if we could easily decide which speakers were telling the truth, we could indeed use speeches as aids in coming

³⁸ Josiah Ober has very helpfully developed the idea that these figures represent a tradition of dissent against a democratic consensus (*Political Dissent in Democratic Athens*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996).

³⁹ Gorgias, *Helen* 8–14.

⁴⁰ Scholars disagree about what Gorgias is up to in this text, but for our purposes it doesn't matter much whether he is showing off his skills by arguing for a position he takes to be absurd (or incomplete), using inconsequential content to illustrate formal aspects of rhetoric, or instead earnestly advancing his considered views of knowledge, belief, and language. In any case, the speech has traction because it points out an apparent problem with the treatment of persuasion by people like Lysias.

⁴¹ Gorgias, *Helen* 11: "If all men on all subjects had both memory of things past and awareness of things present and foreknowledge of the future, speech would be similarly similar, since as things are now, it is not easy for them to recall the past, nor to consider the present, nor to define the future; so that on most subjects most men take opinion as counsellor to their soul." Trans. Dillon and Gergel.

into correct relationship with the truth. But as things stand, most people are exposed to all kinds of speech whose truth they cannot evaluate with any confidence. These speeches are politically important even when their truth is completely uncertain, and these conditions call for an analysis of *logoi* independent from whatever truth they might contain.

When we look at *logos* from this perspective, he says, we find that persuasion and force are not opposites. Rather, the one is a particularly dangerous and powerful subspecies of the other. Persuasion, he says, is “a powerful master” (δυνάστης μέγας), and Helen left “just as unwillingly under the influence of speech as if she were seized by the violence of violators (βιατήρων βία).”⁴²

The Greek language makes it particularly easy to identify persuasion with force. Although sometimes the word *πειθώ* means much the same as the English “persuasion,” it also refers to other kinds of influence such as bribery, blackmail, and especially seduction—whatever it takes to get someone else to submit, acquiesce, or obey.⁴³ Gorgias repeatedly reinforces these associations. He says, for example, that *logos* “forced” Helen’s soul to be persuaded and that a persuader is an aggressor whose words “mould” the listener’s soul.⁴⁴ The fact that such metaphors of physical transformation are

⁴² Gorgias, *Helen* 12. Translation Gagarin and Woodruff.

⁴³ See Buxton, cited above, and (in a discussion that itself draws extensively on Buxton) Christopher Bobonich, “Persuasion, Compulsion, and Freedom in Plato’s *Laws*,” *Classical Quarterly*, New Series 41:2 (1991), 365–88. The Goddess Peitho seems to have predated *πειθώ* as a social concept, and she was much more associated with sexuality and seduction than, say persuasion in the political arena.

⁴⁴ Gorgias, *Helen* 12. In Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* (385) the chorus uses similar language. It describes the personified figure Persuasion as an overwhelming force that can’t be resisted (“βιᾶται δ’ ἄ τάλαινα Πειθώ”). This passage is highlighted and discussed in Kirby, cited above.

even intelligible suggests that the old opposition between force and persuasion cannot be as clear cut as Lysias makes it out to be.⁴⁵

The point is not just linguistic. Rather, Gorgias suggests that that this language reflects an intuitively plausible picture of persuasion, which we can again think of in terms of its ‘phenomenology’. As we have seen, Lysias and others like him depend on one aspect of the experience of being persuaded: when we are persuaded to do things, we often continue to feel like our own masters. But the *Helen* reminds us that is by no means *always* how it feels to be persuaded. When we hear a powerful practical argument for a position we are inclined to reject—and all the more so if it is made using techniques and jargon that we haven’t mastered, or where we’re uncertain that anyone in the conversation has a firm epistemological footing—we *don’t* in fact always feel as if the persuader is shining a light on the truth. Instead, we may feel confused and upset. We may feel that we have come under the persuader’s power, even if we see no problem with the other’s reasoning. Under these circumstances, a skilled user of *logoi* may leave us completely disoriented and confused, or make us feel that there is no choice but to concede that they must be right. To these first-personal observations, we might add a similar third-personal variation: sometimes when we watch one person persuading another it *looks* like the exercise of power.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ It’s not clear that this is Gorgias’ settled view. At the end of the *Palamedes*, he exploits the same attitude as Lysias: “Pity and entreaties and the intercession of friends are useful when judgement takes place before a mob. But among you, who are the foremost of the Greeks in fact and in reputation, I should not persuade you with the aid of friends or entreaties of pity. I must escape this charge by making justice very clear and showing you the truth, not deceiving you. You must not pay more attention to words than to deeds, or prefer accusations to proofs, or consider a short time to be a wiser judge than a long time, or think slander more credible than experience.” (33–34)

⁴⁶ Plato attributes just this view to Gorgias at *Phlb.* 58a–b: “Many times, Socrates, I have heard Gorgias maintain that the art of persuasion far surpasses all others and is far and away the best, for it makes all things its slaves by willing submission, not by violence.”

While Gorgias accommodates such features of persuasion, he does not lose track of the features that distinguish persuasion from the more straightforward, physical kinds of compulsion. Losing an argument sometimes feels like losing a fight, but this doesn't mean it feels just like suffering physical blows. This, I take it, is Gorgias' point when he identifies the effects of *logos* with those of one particular distinctive kind of force rather than others: the compulsion exercised by drugs and magical spells. *Logos*, he says,

injects pleasure and rejects pain, for in associating with the opinion of the soul, the power of an incantation enchants, persuades, and alters it through bewitchment. The twin arts of witchcraft and magic have been discovered, and these are illusions of mind and delusions of judgment... The power of *logos* has the same effect on the disposition of the soul as the disposition of drugs on the nature of bodies. Just as different drugs draw forth different humours from the body—some putting a stop to disease, others to life—so too with words: some cause pain, others joy, some strike fear, some stir the audience to boldness, some benumb and bewitch the soul with evil persuasion.⁴⁷

By treating persuasion as a kind of magic or medicine, Gorgias keeps a grip on the close relationship between force and persuasion, but also points out that it has a distinctive nature of its own—its effects seem more diffuse and as it were more internal than those we would normally call violence. Gorgias stresses that this kind of effect on a person's soul opens up something that is normally thought to be protected within the individual—a person's "private feelings"—to vicissitudes of the lives and affairs of others."⁴⁸ Thus not only is persuasion a kind of force rather than an uncoercive alternative to it; it is in some

⁴⁷ Gorg. *Helen* 9, 14. Trans. Gagarin and Woodruff.

⁴⁸ Gorg. *Helen* 9. Trans. Gagarin and Woodruff.

respects a particularly powerful kind of force. And it is a force that, like drugs and magic, gives some people the power to impose their preferences, if they choose, on other people.

Gorgias has an explanation of why *logos* acts so differently than other kinds of force. There is a distinctive *object* for that force: the soul. He summarizes this doctrine when he says that persuasion “has the same power but not the same form as compulsion.”⁴⁹ We are familiar enough with what violent force does to the body; Gorgias suggests that persuasion does just the same thing to the soul.⁵⁰ Thus we have a clear account both of how force and violence are in a sense the same phenomenon, and also how they nevertheless differ in their particulars.

Many scholars treat the *Helen* as a “defence” or a “celebration” of rhetoric. There is something right about this—indeed, Plato says something similar about his version of Gorgias, who praises oratory for giving people “freedom in their own persons,” and “the power of ruling over others in their several states.”⁵¹ But it’s worth noting that this is a highly qualified kind of praise: while it suggests that it’s good to be able to persuade

⁴⁹ The text here is jumbled, although the meaning is not in question. D.M. MacDowell, following Diel, has “τὸ γὰρ τῆς πειθοῦς ἐξῆν ὁ δὲ νοῦς καίτοι εἰ ἀνάγκη ὁ εἰδὼς ἔξει μὲν οὖν, τὴν δὲ δύναμιν τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει,” (which he translates “for persuasion expelled sense; and indeed persuasion, though not having the appearance of compulsion, has the same power”) (*Gorgias: Encomium of Helen* [Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1982]). Daniel Graham has “τὸ γὰρ τῆς πειθοῦς ἐξῆν <ιδεῖν ὡς κρατεῖ>, ἡ ἀνάγκης εἶδος ἔχει μὲν οὐ, τὴν δὲ δύναμιν τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει” (“it is possible <to see how> the faculty of persuasion <rules>, which does not indeed have the form of necessity, but does have its power”) (*The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, vol. II [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010]). “Form” is a contentious translation of εἶδος here. Other possibilities include “appearance” or even “mode.” For the classic discussion of early uses of the word εἶδος, see A.E. Taylor, “The Words Εἶδος, Ἴδέα in Pre-Socratic Literature,” *Varia Socratica* (Oxford: James Barker, 1911). For a longer, more recent discussion, see André Motte et al. (eds.), *Philosophie de la forme: Eidos, Idea, Morphe dans la philosophie Grecque des origines à Aristote* (Liège: Peeters, 2003).

⁵⁰ For a closely related point—that for Gorgias the soul can be described with the same physical language as the body—see Charles Segal “Gorgias and the Psychology of Logos,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 66 (1962), 99–155. He points out the similarities between Gorgias’ view here and Democritus: “Medicine cures the diseases of the body, but wisdom takes away the soul from sufferings.”

⁵¹ *Gorg.* 452d, trans. Jowett.

others, it emphatically does not make it seem like a good thing to *be persuaded* by someone else.

Quite the opposite, Gorgias casts serious doubt on the kind of praise lavished on persuasion by people like Lysias. If, as Gorgias suggests, persuasion is in fact a way that individuals may reach into the souls of others and manipulate them as they choose, then there is no difference in terms of freedom between submitting to an orator and a tyrant. And in directly challenging the opposition between persuasion and force, he also makes trouble for the association between persuasion and freedom. Persuasion is not, after all, exclusively a dignified treatment suitable for the free. It follows that the tradition of persuading citizens and beating slaves is pointless.

VI. PLATO: *LOGOS* GOOD AND BAD

Recall that we have been trying to explain Aristotle's claim that slaves should be admonished, i.e. ruled with persuasion. We have been considering the alternative view that they should be ruled with violent force, and I have suggested that Aristotle's contemporaries typically accepted it because it follows from the view that persuasion is the exclusive province of the free, while the subordinate status of slaves must be maintained by assigning them the opposite treatment, violence. But we have just seen that Gorgias' treatment of *πειθώ* and *λόγος* in the *Encomium to Helen* challenges this view by painting linguistic persuasion in the same colours as violence. Aristotle's main interlocutor, however, is Plato, who adopts a mixed position that takes on aspects both of Lysias' democratic conception of freedom and of Gorgias' challenge to it.

Although Plato stresses the disagreements between Gorgias and Socrates, he is sensitive to the worries raised in the *Helen*.⁵² He too is convinced that persuasion with words can be powerful and dangerous, and that there is good reason to fear persuasive people. In fact, he often reproduces Gorgias' identification of discourse with potions, poisons, and magical spells. In the *Sophist*, for example, the Eleatic stranger says that sophists “belong to the class of wonder-workers” (τοῦ γένους εἶναι τοῦ τῶν θαυματοποιῶν),⁵³ and even Socratic discourse seems to have upsetting magical or physiological effects, as we learn when Meno complains that Socrates has “beguiled him,” “put him under a spell,” and numbed him like a poisonous fish.⁵⁴ In other words, Plato has his own version of the idea that *logoi* sometimes feel like force.⁵⁵

But where Lysias and Gorgias alike understand *logos* as more or less homogenous, Plato divides it into kinds. Although the details vary from dialogue to

⁵² Of course, this is not necessarily to say that he got them directly, or even indirectly, from Gorgias himself. There is, however, reason to think that Plato was an attentive reader of Gorgias' speeches: the *Apology* seems to be closely modeled on Gorgias' *Palamedes*. See Guido Calogero, “Gorgias and the Socratic Principle *Nemo Sua Sponte Peccat*” (*Journal of Hellenistic Studies* 77:1 [1957], 12–17.

⁵³ *Soph.* 235b7. Likewise, in the *Phaedrus* (268d1), he describes an orator (apparently Thrasymachus) as magically charming (ἐπάδων κηλεῖν) audiences.

⁵⁴ *Meno.* 80a2–b3. In the *Symposium* (218a), Alcibiades also complains about the dazzling, paralysing effects of Socratic discourse.

⁵⁵ Plato is also emphatic that speech often fails to have much effect at all. Indeed, in the dialogue named after Gorgias, Socrates argues that the apparent power of orators is deceptive. The orator needs to flatter the people he persuades and to give them pleasure, and this puts him—the orator—under the control of the mob, not the other way around (*Rep.* VI, 493a–d.). Plato also reminds us again and again that even good speeches are often powerless. A famous passage from the beginning of the *Republic* stresses the impotence of Socratic argument against people prepared to use force. There, Socrates and Glaucon have this famous exchange with Polemarchus:

“Do you see how many we are?” Polemarchus said.

“I do.”

“Well, you must either prove stronger than we are, or you will have to stay here.” “Isn't there another alternative, namely that we persuade you to let us go?”

“But could you persuade us, if we won't listen?”

“Certainly not,” said Glaucon.

“Well, we won't listen; you'd better make up your mind on that.” (*Rep.* I, 327c–28a. trans. Grube.)

Polemarchus' light-hearted threat, of course, takes on a sinister note for those who know the consequences of Socrates' failure to speak effectively about virtue and philosophy, and it points out how easily some audiences can resist even what we would expect to be very potent verbal enchantment.

another, he consistently distinguishes between a good and a bad kind of speech. The overall picture is very familiar: The bad kinds traffic in appearance rather than reality, and the people who use them pay too much attention to spirit and the appetites, and not enough to reason. Sometimes the bad kinds of *logos* seduce young men, leading them away from individuals away from virtue, as they do to Euthyphro; sometimes they also wreak political chaos, allowing the basest appetites of the *demos* to set policy, as we learn in the *Gorgias*. Like the *λόγοι* in the *Helen*, the bad speeches in Plato's dialogues influences people's souls in ways that have no particular connection to reality and truth.

By contrast, good *λόγοι* escape these dangers and allow speakers and listeners alike to be ruled by the truth rather than irrational impulse. Throughout the *corpus*, Plato variously tries to show how this is possible with his accounts of Socratic refutation, academic dialectic, and philosophy *tout court*. According to dialogues like the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, good *logoi* give the people who use them fleeting glimpses of the Forms, familiarity with which is the only real knowledge. Thus Plato's account of philosophy gives new content to the idea we saw in Lysias that *logos* is impersonal and intellectual, that it respects the ideal of rule by truth rather than by individuals.⁵⁶

In the *Republic*, Plato famously connects this to an idea we found in Gorgias' *Helen*: that we understand *logos* best when we consider its effects on the soul. One of the three parts of the soul—the *λογιστικόν* or “rational” part—is capable of responding directly to the better kind of *logos*. The other two, spirit and appetite, are particularly

⁵⁶ The concept of dialectic preserves the conception of *logos* as argumentative conversation between people rather than merely as individual reflection.

susceptible to manipulation by sophistical arguments, and thus to the sophists themselves, who are expert in the moods and pleasures (ὄργην καὶ ἡδονὰς) of their audience.⁵⁷

The tripartition of the soul allows Plato to explain both why speeches can be powerful even when they are false and irrational and why the people with the truest and most rational speech—notably including Socrates, the only person with the true political art—are often so ineffective. The sub-rational parts of the soul only come to have an appropriate relationship with the truth once they have undergone a rigorous training regime and are properly subordinated to the λογιστικόν. And the rational part itself can only do its characteristic work after an even longer, more arduous educational program outlined in *Republic* VII.⁵⁸ Thus the tripartition of the soul informs the political program of the *Republic*, which is in part to spell out the cultural and institutional conditions that will allow good speeches (as we might say, the objectively persuasive ones) actually to persuade.

A couple of observations about these familiar ideas are in order. First, for reasons I have just sketched, the ‘force of the better argument’ is indeed an honest-to-goodness force in Plato, but it can only win the day under some political circumstances. This explains a feature of Plato’s philosophy that has been particularly worrisome for modern readers. In the *Republic*, Socrates says that the goal of the laws is to secure happiness for

⁵⁷ *Rep.* VI, 493c–d. For an interesting discussion of how the orator affects and (especially) is affected by the character and values of the masses in his audience, see Rachana Kamtekar, “The Profession of Friendship,” *Ancient Philosophy* 25:2 (2005), 319–39.

⁵⁸ Plato marks his distinction between two kinds of persuasive speech by insisting on a distinction between *πειθώ* and *λόγος*, which Gorgias uses almost interchangeably. Plato almost always treats *πειθώ* as something negative, something to be *prevented* or held off by learning philosophy. Indeed one benefit of a philosophical education seems to be that it makes you unpersuadable. This definition of persuasion appears at *Tim.* 51e, where we learn that knowledge and true belief are distinct because “one of them arises in us by teaching, the other by persuasion; and the one is always in company with true reasoning, whereas the other is irrational; and the one is immovable by persuasion, whereas the other is alterable by persuasion” (trans. Lamb). Thanks to Calvin Normore for emphasizing this point to me.

the city, and it gradually emerges that he is rather sanguine about doing this deceptively, through both “persuasion and compulsion.”⁵⁹ It sometimes seems hard to reconcile his coercive politics with the flattering light he elsewhere shines on Socrates’ open-ended style of discussion, which forces nothing on anyone, proceeding as long as necessary to discover the truth.

But Plato’s emphasis on ‘musical’ education—the control of culture, and the mandatory extended education leading up to dialectical training—suggests part of the answer: that the not-quite-rational forms of manipulation we find the *Republic* are preconditions for Socratic discussion to arise and find an audience. That is, philosophical discourse only works on cities and souls with certain conditions in place, and (even under the idealized conditions assumed in the *Republic*) they can only be secured using various kinds of manipulation and coercion—the bad kinds of speech in some cases, and outright violence in others. Neither bad speech nor outright force connects people directly to truth, but both can be used in service of good speech, making it possible for at least some people to produce and respond directly to true discourse while putting everyone else under its influence indirectly.⁶⁰

Second observation: We saw a moment ago that Plato defends a version of a view we found in Lysias. In the ideal case—e.g., in philosophical discussions in the Academy—the makers of arguments influence each other with dialectic, which by revealing contradictions somehow or other leads to knowledge of the good. This leaves them free from arbitrary preferences, and subordinates them not to human beings but to

⁵⁹ *Rep.* VII, 519e3.

⁶⁰ This is not to deny that Plato also sometimes endorses a more straightforward kind of paternalism, where the ruler uses force on subjects simply because he or she understands their good better than they do.

the truth. But Plato only manages to defend an attenuated version of Lysias' thesis. Recall that Lysias' approach seemed appealing partly because it reflected a phenomenological difference between being violently forced to do something and being persuaded—which, as it were, *feels* as if it preserves our freedom. Now notice that according to Plato's account, only a very rare, specialized kind of speech actually manages to leave people free from arbitrary preference. When non-philosophers secure your consent, however, they are pushing you around with mere appearances, whether you feel free or not. Thus, for Plato, Gorgias is quite right that the kinds of persuasion exercised in the assembly and the agora—indeed, the only kinds of persuasion most of us have ever experienced—are not in principle much different from violence. For Plato, very few people will ever experience the kind of discourse he calls “the free man's knowledge.”⁶¹ Such considerations sometimes lead Plato to talk as if non-philosophical free citizens are essentially the same as slaves.⁶² Gregory Vlastos makes the point well:

The absence of self-determination, so striking in the case of the slave, is normal in Platonic society. The fully enlightened aristocrats are a small minority of the whole population (e.g. *Statesman*, 292e). All the rest are in some degree *douloi* in Plato's sense of the word: they lack *logos*; they do not know the Good, and cannot know their own good or that of the state; their only chance of doing the good is to obey implicitly the commands of their superiors. Thus Plato speaks currently of

⁶¹ *Soph.* 253c. Plato here seems to be borrowing from an aristocratic tradition that aimed to narrow the definition of freedom (see Kurt Raaflaub, “Democracy, Oligarchy, and the Concept of the ‘Free Citizen’ in Late Fifth Century Athens,” *Political Theory* 11:4 [1983], 517–44). In this tradition, “free is not applied to every person who is not a slave but only to the truly free—the members of the noble and wealthy upper class.” It refers to “those pursuits that are removed from the immediate and base necessities of life and, therefore, suitable for the truly free person.” The tradition would culminate in the Stoic doctrine that only the sage is free.

⁶² E.g. *Rep.* IV.431c2, where he mocks the supposed freedom of the pleasure-loves in the *demos*.

the subjection to the reasonable discipline of rulers, human and divine, laws, parents, and elders as servitude.⁶³

Plato delights in this provocative way of talking, and it is in this vein that early in the *Statesman*, the Stranger makes the comment that we saw at the beginning of our discussion, to the effect that there is just one kind of rule.⁶⁴ Indeed, Plato might lead us to think that for Plato there are just two kinds of people, philosophical masters of the craft of rule and everyone else—and that we might as well call the two groups “natural rulers” and “natural slaves.” Along the same lines, we might think that Plato endorses a kind of unmitigated paternalism: that when rulers know what’s best for their subjects they may do anything at all to force it on them.

VII. PLATO: MIXING COMPULSION WITH PERSUASION

But this is not quite Plato’s considered position. At least in the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger introduces a view that he presents as an important innovation in political philosophy:

It’s likely [he says] that none of the lawgivers has ever reflected on the fact that it is possible to use two means of giving laws, persuasion and violence (insofar as the uneducated condition of the mob permits). They have used only the latter;

⁶³ “Slavery in Plato’s Thought,” in *Platonic Studies* [Princeton, Princeton UP: 1973], 150). As Vlastos also argues, the lesson to the slave boy in the *Meno* is not a counterexample to this—Socrates’ lesson is extremely clear, and also about rudimentary math. The slave boy, as Vlastos says, would have to be an idiot not to grasp the lesson—and it does not follow from that that he would be able to contemplate the Forms as a free person would.

⁶⁴ We should be particularly careful about thinking that the *Statesman* passage represents Plato’s considered view, since it comes early in the dialogue, during a discussion of the Stranger will at least partly recant—it turns out to be part of a divine political order, rather than one that pays proper attention to the features of actual human life. Perhaps this material was Socratic, echoing as it does a theme also found in Xenophon (see the Appendix to Chapter 1).

failing to mix compulsion with persuasion in their lawgiving, they have employed unmitigated violence alone. But I, O blessed ones, see the need for yet a third way of handling laws.⁶⁵

He goes on to spell out this third way, which combines force and persuasion, and is one of the guiding principles in the dialogue. Just as speeches and songs are preceded by warm-up exercises, the laws should be accompanied by ‘preludes’ (προοίμια). These explain the moral point of the law in question. Their goal is that “he who receives the law uttered by the legislator might receive the command—that is, the law—in a frame of mind more favourably disposed and therefore more apt to learn something.”⁶⁶ This doctrine makes it clear that, in the *Laws* at least, Plato thinks that the free citizens that make up the “mob”—incapable though they might be of fully achieving the rational freedom of philosophers—nevertheless can receive a partial measure of rational persuasion.

The preludes themselves, which are scattered throughout the dialogue, demonstrate that this involves a wide variety of arguments, some rigorous and others very sketchy, as well as various kinds of myth and rhetorical appeals to emotion. Clearly, these do not always meet the Plato’s highest aspirations for rationality, but neither are they simply “lying propaganda,” as Karl Popper thought.⁶⁷ Rather, they suggest that for Plato some kinds of treatment are intermediate between philosophical discourse and bare

⁶⁵ *Laws* IV, 722b5–c4 (trans. Pangle).

⁶⁶ *Laws* IV, 723a7.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Bobonich, “Persuasion, Compulsion, and Freedom in Plato’s *Laws*” (cited above), 368. Bobonich’s paper gives a useful overview of this debate, arguing forcefully that the preludes are meant to give citizens an epistemically solid rational basis for accepting the laws. In the final paragraphs of his paper, Bobonich briefly suggests that Plato thinks free citizens deserve persuasion just because they are free, much as I am proposing.

compulsion. They draw citizens into good behaviour not merely through threats, but also by helping them grasp some version of the reasons that support virtuous action.

It seems plausible that Plato intends much of Socrates' practice in other dialogues in much the same spirit as the preludes: through myths and suggestive argumentative sketches, he allows readers a glimpse of philosophical truth that they would see much more fully in serious philosophical training. This is the best way to understand his claim in the *Republic* that while it would be best if everyone were ruled by the rational part of his or her own soul; but that where this is impossible, rule by the rational part of someone else's soul is a good alternative.⁶⁸ These people certainly can't receive the rational part of their leaders' souls through dialectic. Rather, they must get it through more or less manipulative means ranging from instruction at the theatre to the noble lie.

We saw earlier that it was a widespread democratic view that persuasion bestows an honour on its listeners, treating them like the free, by contrast with the disgrace of being subject to force like beasts and slaves. And we saw that Gorgias challenges this view by dragging persuasion down to the level of violent force; his account suggests that being persuaded is little better than being enslaved. We can now see that Plato does just the opposite—he argues that free citizens sometimes have no reason to complain about being manipulated and controlled by human rulers, for this can put them into the correct relation to the truth. Where Gorgias links persuasion to force (thus degrading it, at least in Plato's eyes) Plato elevates compulsion, deception, manipulation, and other force-like kinds of speech by connecting them to an idealized form of persuasion.

⁶⁸ *Rep.* IX, 590d3–5.

Plato, then, argues that many nominally free people are suited to slavish treatment. And he often seems to accept the implication that this makes them slavish—most of the citizens of even the best cities will turn out to be somewhere in between slavery and freedom.⁶⁹ And if in the *Republic*, he stresses how these intermediate people differ from philosophers, in the *Laws* the most pronounced contrast is with foreigners and especially slaves.⁷⁰ And this brings us back to his claim that slaves should always be commanded and never admonished. Plato, it is true, is critical of the sadistic treatment of slaves that sometimes occurs in Athens—he rails against those who “treat them like brute beasts, [and] with goads and whips make the slaves’ souls not merely thrice but fifty times enslaved,” and argues that masters should show their respect for justice by being even more reluctant to harm their slaves than they are to harm their equals. But it is clear that by “harm” he means something like “going beyond the force that is appropriate for them,” or perhaps even “harming them for no good reason.” He certainly doesn’t think slaves should never be beaten, nor that they should be treated like the free. Quite the opposite—for example, he consistently requires (as did Athenian law) that slaves receive corporal punishment when they do something wrong. Indeed, Plato recommends punishments more severe than seem to have been current in Athens. If, for example, a slave harms a free man, that man may beat him as much as he likes (although he must compensate the slave’s owner for whatever damage he does to this piece of his property).⁷¹

⁶⁹ Again, this is part of a broader aristocratic tradition. Cf. note 61 above.

⁷⁰ For a detailed account of the treatment of slaves in the *Laws*, see Morrow’s *Plato’s Law of Slavery*, and “Plato and Greek Slavery,” both cited above. Morrow contrasts Plato’s proposed legislation with the law of slavery in Athens and finds Plato’s proposals more severe.

⁷¹ Morrow, *ibid.* 195. The unlimited punishment of slaves guilty of assault is endorsed at 879a. Here Plato seems to be following the Spartan rather than the Athenian model.

Plato rehearses this difference between slaves and the free again and again throughout the *Laws*: a full statement of most any law will distinguish between its application to slaves and the free. The principle motivating him is the one that has guided our entire discussion, namely that free people are to be persuaded rationally, while slaves are suited to manipulation and compulsion. If the qualified forms of persuasion embodied in the preludes place free citizens somewhere in the middle of a spectrum between rational persuasion and violent force, the slaves of Magnesia are distinguished from them by their position at the very bottom of that spectrum. Thus for Plato as for the Athenian mainstream, slaves and the free are different kinds of people (although in degree if not in kind), the ones especially well-suited to rule by force, the others to at least some measure of rule by rational persuasion.⁷²

Plato, in other words, like most of his fellow Athenians, sees a version of the first of our three ‘premises’—that slaves are different from the free, and the two classes must therefore be treated differently—as obvious. We have seen that he accepts only weak versions of the other two: he does not see force and persuasion as clear-cut opposites, but grants that much persuasion is morally equivalent to force, and that other kinds are somewhere in between the two extremes. And he thinks that while the freest people are ruled only by persuasion, non-philosophical free citizens should sometimes be ruled with various kinds of force and compulsion. Still, he retains versions of all three premises strong enough to justify the violent treatment of slaves, and to lead him to deny them admonishment. There is, as he puts it, a “necessary distinction” between free people and

⁷² This is not to say that Plato thinks masters may never talk to their slaves, even about moral matters—he says, for example, that masters should tell their slaves about the evils of incest. *Laws* VIII, 838d–e.

slaves, and this follows the pattern that was standard in Athens—slaves are to receive less persuasion and more violent force than the free.⁷³

VIII. ARISTOTLE: PRACTICAL TRUTH AND THE ΠΙΣΤΕΙΣ

In short, although Plato disagrees with Lysias and the democratic mainstream about many things, he agrees that the best kind of persuasion mediates between listener and truth without personally subordinating anyone to anyone else. And he agrees that this kind of rule is suited to the free but not to the slavish (a group including actual slaves), who must submit to more coercive treatment, including both manipulative speech and physical compulsion. This, I think, is the context for his claim in the *Laws* that we should never admonish slaves, thereby treating them as if they were free. However startling it is to modern readers, for Plato it is a safe, offhand comment, one that he can toss off in a passage that also exhorts slaveholders to be kinder and more moderate. Aristotle's admonishment claim, on the other hand, emerges as more surprising than ever—it departs both from Plato and from the democratic mainstream. As I would now like to argue, however, it is well grounded in Aristotle's own philosophy, and it resembles Gorgias' position in some important respects.⁷⁴

We can start by considering the treatise that bears most obviously on persuasion. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle manages both (like Lysias) to treat persuasive speech as a distinct way of affecting people based in the truth and (like Gorgias) to emphasize the ways it subordinates one person's soul to another's. Both of these features figure in his doctrine of the three *πίσταις*. Recall that according to this doctrine there are exactly three

⁷³ *Laws* VI, 777a.

⁷⁴ Another antecedent in some respects is Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*. See the Appendix to Chapter 1.

things that rhetoricians may use to persuade their audiences (and indeed three things at work in any effective piece of oratory).⁷⁵ Orators ‘prove’ their points not only (i) with facts and their logical relations, but also (ii) by influencing listeners’ emotions, and (iii) by convincing the audience of their own good character. Now points (ii) and (iii) are less banal than they might seem. Aristotle doesn’t just mean that orators sometimes can cause their listeners to agree with them by moving them emotionally or by coming across as good people. Of course he thinks those things happen, but he thinks that most often such supposed proofs are ‘*atechnic*’—that is, they don’t belong to the art of rhetoric properly speaking.

Persuasion through emotion and character are only truly rhetorical when they are provided διὰ τοῦ λόγου, “through the *logos*.”⁷⁶ Orators violate this requirement if they shape the feelings of their audiences with tricks irrelevant to the case at hand (this, Aristotle says, is the *only* thing covered by the rhetorical handbooks of his day). To use *ethos* and *pathos* consistently with the art of rhetoric, they must use character and emotion only in ways that rationally support the judgment (κρίσις) that the speech is trying to secure.⁷⁷ In other words, the listener’s emotion and the speaker’s character must somehow operate as evidence—even proof—of whatever judgment the speech is

⁷⁵ It is not obvious what kinds of “things” the πίσταις are; this makes them hard both to interpret and to translate. One interesting rendering is John Cooper’s “persuaders”; see “Ethical-Political Theory in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*” in *Aristotle’s Rhetoric: Philosophical Essays*, ed. David Furley and Alexander Nehamas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 193–210. It’s probably best, however, just to use “proofs.” For an argument that this is the best way to go, see Myles Burnyeat, “Enthymeme: Aristotle on the Logic of Persuasion” in *Aristotle’s Rhetoric: Philosophical Essays*, ed. David Furley and Alexander Nehamas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994): 3–56.

⁷⁶ *Rhet.* I.2, 1356a1.

⁷⁷ *Rhet.* I.2, 1356a1–12. This kind of support must be “through *logos*” in the case of character, and it must “result from the *logos*” in the case of emotion. See Jacques Brunschwig, “Rhétorique et dialectique, *Rhétorique et Topiques*,” in *Aristotle’s Rhetoric: Philosophical Essays*, ed. David Furley and Alexander Nehamas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 57–96; and John Cooper, “Ethical-Political Theory in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*,” in *Aristotle’s Rhetoric: Philosophical Essays*, ed. David Furley and Alexander Nehamas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 193–210.

designed to secure. In this way, although public speeches will not achieve “scientific exactness” (ἀκριβῆς ἐπιστήμη), rhetorical appeals to emotion and character can transmit the honest-to-goodness truth from speaker to listener no less than the content of a speaker’s argument.

But what does it take for emotion and character to be rational in this sense? It’s easy to point to rhetorical uses of character and emotion that *fail* to be rational. The speaker may not, for instance, bring crying children into the courthouse, nor recruit friends to warm up the audience by telling them how wise and accomplished he is. Likewise, a charming smile and a resonant voice are (excluding special cases) incidental to the speaker’s argument, and therefore to the art of rhetoric as Aristotle understands it. But it’s perhaps harder to say what uses of character and emotions might *meet* Aristotle’s standards. Orators seek to bring about some judgment relevant to the political life of their community: that they should negotiate a cease-fire with the Persians, that the defendant committed the murder, that the dead were exceptionally heroic, and so on. Once again, how can listeners’ emotions and speakers’ personalities count as rational support—or indeed *proof*—of conclusions like this?

In the case of emotion, there is fairly straightforward answer. As any reader of the *Nicomachean Ethics* knows, Aristotle holds that the virtues are dispositions not just toward certain actions, but also to certain emotional responses—indeed, he defines the virtues as ‘being well or badly off with regard to emotions’: ἔξεις δὲ καθ’ ἅς πρὸς τὰ πάθη ἔχομεν εὖ ἢ κακῶς.⁷⁸ Thus courage is a matter of how you experience fear—

⁷⁸ *EN* II.5, 1105b26. See Aryeh Kosman, “Being Properly Affected: Virtues and Feelings in Aristotle’s Ethics,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. A. O. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 103–16.

whether you feel it under the right circumstances, in the right amount, and so on.⁷⁹ Thus our emotions aren't brute facts; rather they are informed by a rational grasp on the salient features of a given situation.⁸⁰ My anger is not just the boiling of blood in my heart; it also signals that that someone has (at least apparently) dishonoured me or someone I care about. I take it that proof through *pathê* happens just when a person has some such response to a situation presented to them in speech, rather than grasped through sense perception.⁸¹ When I convince you that that we need to mollify the masses with a public feast, this may involve scaring you with the prospect of their rising up against us. Part of my *point* in such a speech is that it wholly appropriate to be afraid in this situation. If you aren't afraid, this is a sign that you haven't been persuaded; if you are, then your fear supports the desperate measures I am recommending.

So much for the rationality of persuasion through emotion. Persuasion through character—the “most effective” of all the *pisteis*⁸²—is trickier. A speaker's character will often have no obvious connection to the subject matter. If I set out to persuade the city that it's time to go to war with the Persians, the peculiarities of my character are not

⁷⁹ Aristotle makes the point repeatedly. One example is *EN* II.1, 1103b15–16, he says the following: “what we do in terrifying situations, and the habits of fear and confidence that we acquire, make some of us brave and others cowardly” (πράττοντες δὲ τὰ ἐν τοῖς δεινοῖς καὶ ἐθιζόμενοι φοβεῖσθαι ἢ θαρρεῖν οἱ μὲν ἀνδρεῖοι οἱ δὲ δειλοί). Trans. Irwin.

⁸⁰ It's uncontroversial that Aristotle accepts some version of the thesis that emotions (as well as desires and other things belonging to the *ἄλογον* can rational, though different people work out the position in different ways. See for example Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 81–8; and John Cooper, “Some Remarks on Aristotle's Moral Psychology,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 27 (1988): 25–42.

⁸¹ Some caution is in order in drawing psychological conclusions from the *Rhetoric*, since the discussion of emotion there is not a scientific exposition of Aristotle's views on emotions, and it may be made up of *endoxa* that Aristotle doesn't endorse. But however exactly these contested issues shake out, pretty much everyone agrees that Aristotle would see the views on the emotions that he discusses as at least respectable. For more discussion see Gisela Striker, “Emotions in Context: Aristotle's Treatment of the Passions in the *Rhetoric* and His Moral Psychology,” in *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 286–302.

⁸² *Rhet.* I.2, 1356a13–14.

likely to be relevant to the war itself.⁸³ Of course, if I have good judgment about military matters, then you have some reason to take my advice. But if I *tell* you that, perhaps by pointing out that the recommendations I made last time worked well, then my character has entered the argument itself—I will be using persuasion through *logos*, not *ethos*. So it's hard to see how Aristotle can think that a person's character can persuade 'through' an argument at all. On the one hand, speakers cannot rely on their reputation or on external evidence of their expertise (for this would not persuade through the *logos* as all three *pisteis* must do); on the other, they cannot either implicitly or explicitly use their own good character as premises (since this would use the wrong *pistis*—*logos* rather than character). What remains?

Aristotle suggests the answer when he characterizes the three "causes" of persuasion through *ethos* as practical wisdom, virtue, and goodwill.⁸⁴ For it seems clear that people can convey these characteristics by the way they talk about ethical issues, even when they are not talking about themselves. Indeed, one of the best ways to get a sense of the moral character of others is to see how they talk about difficult practical issues. What they say can't help but reflect the way they perceive the ethically relevant aspects of a situation, their judgments about which aspects of it are pertinent, and their sympathy and understanding (if they have any) for your sensibilities as a listener.

When we are otherwise at a loss about what to do, we sometimes find good advice persuasive in this way. That is, sometimes good advice doesn't provide us with new facts

⁸³ There is an important set of cases where the speaker's character happens to be an important part of his subject matter: those where he is defending himself from criminal charges. But from the perspective of the art of rhetoric, the role of the speaker's character in these speeches is no different from whatever else he happens to talk about: military strategy, the achievement of the Athenians, or whatever.

⁸⁴ *Rhet.* II.1, 1378a9–10, trans. Kennedy.

or alert us to their logical implications (as it would if it were primarily persuading us with the argument); and sometimes it doesn't change how we feel about our situation (as it would if it we were persuading us with emotions); rather, some of the best advice helps us because it makes it obvious that the advisor sees the situation better than we do. In such cases, we don't acquire the advisor's good sense about the issue. Rather, we give ourselves over to the moral insight she or he brings to bear.

I think this helps to clarify the links between the three kinds of *pistis* and the three parts that Aristotle say come together in every speech: the speaker, the topic (περὶ οὗ λέγει), and the listener.⁸⁵ Persuasion through emotion is literally 'in' the listener, *logos* is 'in' the argument itself, and proof through character is 'in' the speaker. Both *logos* and *pathos* give listeners materials allowing them to form a judgment that is ultimately fully grounded within their own souls. But this is not the case with persuasion through character. As Aristotle also puts the point, when one person persuades another through character, the "speaker himself" is persuasive.⁸⁶ These locutions suggest that the speaker provides something more—and the listener something less—in persuasion through character than in the other two proofs. If I am persuaded in the other ways, I take the speaker's argument into my soul and then use my own *phronêsis* to decide how to act. But with persuasion through character, it is the speaker's *phronêsis* that issues the relevant decision to the reason-receptive parts of my own soul, my ἄλογον. The most my own *phronêsis* can do is recognize the speaker's wisdom, virtue, and goodwill. This account fits well with Aristotle's claim that character persuasion is most applicable in

⁸⁵ *Rhet.* I.3, 1358a37–8.

⁸⁶ *Rhet.* II.1, 1378a8.

situations where the truth is doubtful⁸⁷—for in those cases where listeners will be least able to sort things out for themselves, it stands to reason that they will be especially inclined to let someone else do it for them.

If this reading is on track, then so long as the speaker isn't lying or mistaken, persuasion through character is (i) guided by the truth (since the speaker really does perceive the relevant features of the situation more clearly than the listener, as the speaker recognizes), but also (ii) puts one person squarely and personally under the power of the other. When I take good advice, I am submitting to the practical wisdom of the speaker—and that means I am not submitting, say, to an impersonal form of the good, mediated by a philosopher king, but rather to a specific person *qua* individual.

IX. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SOULS IN ARISTOTLE'S *ETHICS* AND *POLITICS*

I've just suggested that the best way to make sense of the *Rhetoric*'s discussion of persuasion through character is to understand it as the process by which the speaker's *phronêsis* acts on the listener's ἄλογον, much as the *phronêsis* of virtuous individuals normally acts within their own souls. One worry about this reading is that it suggests causal relationships between souls that are mysterious or even magical—that multiple people's soul-parts could merge into something like a single, virtual soul, or that one person could psychically push another around like a marionette. And this (the objection continues) would be both un-Aristotelian and highly implausible.

To evaluate this, it will be useful to look more closely at the causal relationships between souls in the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, particularly those using *logoi* and involving

⁸⁷ *Rhet.* I.2, 1356a7.

ethical guidance. Let's start with Aristotle's famous pronouncement about the role of language in human life at the beginning of the *Politics*, where he argues that human beings are the "most political" of all animals:

The human being alone among the animals possesses *logos*. The voice indeed indicates the painful or pleasant, and hence is present in other animals as well; for their nature has come this far, that they have a perception of the painful and pleasant and signal these things to each other. But *logos* serves to reveal the advantageous and the harmful, and hence also the just and unjust. For it is peculiar to human beings as compared to the other animals that they alone have a perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state.⁸⁸

In this passage, we learn (i) that *logos* draws from the uniquely human capacity to perceive the good, bad, just, unjust, and other such things—i.e. to perceive the fine; that (ii) making *logoi* allows us to transmit such perceptions to others (that is, that it has the character we found in ideal cases of rhetoric, of passing moral evaluation from one person to another); and (iii) that doing this allows us to achieve partnership (κοινωνία) in good and bad and right and wrong that constitutes both the *polis* and the *oikos*.

This passage makes it clear that 'indicating' (σημαίνειν) justice and injustice with *logoi* is central to human life, and particularly to our interactions with each other. But it doesn't tell us much about how the process works or why Aristotle finds it so important. Several passages from the *Ethics*, however, suggest that at least in some cases the mechanism is much the same as the one we just saw in the *Rhetoric*—human beings can

⁸⁸ *Pol.* I.2, 1253a9–18. Trans. Lord, modified.

share their evaluative perception by putting one person's *phronêsis* in charge of another's ἄλογον.

Consider the end of Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle introduces the partition of the soul into his practical philosophy. Having established that the excellence of the nutritive part of the soul is not relevant to ethics, he moves on to the thesis that there is a part—the ἄλογον—that may resist reason but can also “participate” in it by attending to it (κατήκοον) and obeying it (πειθαρχικόν). In case it seems obscure how parts of the soul can be in this relationship, Aristotle clarifies by pointing out that we—or at least the reason-receptive parts of ourselves—can attend to the reason of other people: we say that we can “have” the reason of our father or of our friends (τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τῶν φίλων φαρμέν ἔχειν λόγον). He then offers a brief argument to support the claim that the soul does have a part that can be rational in this way.

That the ἄλογον is in a way persuaded by λόγος is shown by our practice of admonishing people, and all the different forms in which we reprimand and encourage them. If one should call this too [i.e. responding to the admonishment of others] ‘possessing reason’, then the aspect of soul that possesses reason will also be double in nature: one element of it will have it in the proper sense and in itself, another as something capable of listening [or obeying: ἀκουστικόν] as if to one’s father.⁸⁹

On a first reading, we might think that Aristotle mentions the familiar interpersonal phenomena of admonishment and persuasion as a metaphor, to make it easier to imagine the more obscure psychological processes he wants to discuss. But as Sarah Broadie

⁸⁹ *EN* I.13, 1102b33–1103a3, translation Rowe.

points out in an illuminating discussion of the passage, this isn't right. Rather, the passage I've just quoted shows that he sees the interpersonal cases as *evidence* supporting a certain conception of the soul: the normal practice of inter-personal admonishment somehow "shows" that there is a reason-receptive soul-part within the individual.⁹⁰ But this argument only works if the rational part of the soul can do the same thing to the reason-receptive part of someone else's soul that it does to its own.

Aristotle makes this argument immediately after pointing out the ways that nonrational impulses interfere with reason, observations that could invite the thesis (advanced, e.g., by Plato's Socrates in the *Phaedo* and elsewhere, though not in the *Republic* and the *Laws*) that any non-rational parts of the soul are merely and entirely obstacles to rationality. If this were true, then we could not strive for partnership or harmony between reason and the emotions. Rather, reason at its best would suppress, eliminate, or subsume the irrational passions and desires, effectively eliminating any division within the better sort of soul. This gives him a reason to offer arguments that there is a distinct, reason-receptive part of the soul not only within *enkratic* or *akratic* people (in whom the ἄλογον can be easily distinguished from the λογιστικόν) but also in the souls of people who are entirely virtuous.

Aristotle, however, points out that in youngsters, students, and other impressionable people, appetites and passions can be made harmonious with other people's reasons, and in those cases the good non-rational impulses clearly remain distinct from the rational impulses that direct them. They are, after all, housed in entirely different bodies. This shows that reason can interact with the not-fully-rational parts of

⁹⁰ Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 63–5.

the soul without suffocating or destroying them, and it leaves the door open for a single virtuous soul that is nevertheless composed of distinct parts (even when the difference between them isn't made manifest by conflict). The argument, then, runs roughly as follows: Indisputably, people receptive to admonishment have a reason-responsive part, since it can respond to *someone else's* reason; why not admit, then, that this part coexists with reason in the souls of virtuous people as well, even if it is not as evident there as in the souls of the *akratic*? The central point for our purposes is that when the semi-rational part of my soul submits to someone else's *logoi*, it is in some sense doing the same thing as when it submits to my own.⁹¹ In fact it is *clearer and less controversial* that one's λογιστικόν can domesticate and subordinate the ἄλογα of others than it is that it can domesticate and subordinate one's own ἄλογον.

When Aristotle describes the *workings* of psychic processes in the *Ethics*, he also discusses not just individual souls, but the ways psychic phenomena can bridge the souls of several people. This is clear in a little-noticed series of claims in his discussion of deliberation in *EN* III.3. At 1112b27, Aristotle says that the objects of deliberation consist of things that are possible. The notion of possibility here isn't metaphysical but personal. Possibilities are things “that could come about through our own agency; for things which come about through the agency of our friends do so in a way through our own agency, since their origin is in us” (δυνατὰ δὲ ἃ δι' ἡμῶν γένοιτ' ἄν: τὰ γὰρ διὰ τῶν φίλων δι' ἡμῶν πως ἐστίν: ἢ γὰρ ἀρχὴ ἐν ἡμῖν).⁹² A few lines later, he says that we seek out not just

⁹¹ As I noted above, Plato says something similar in the *Republic*: that if the best part of person is weak, so that the person cannot be ruled by the divine and the intelligent, then those people should be ruled by someone who can make that happen *Republic* IX 590c–d. The difference is that Plato thinks that this must be done by force or by deception, whereas Aristotle thinks it can be done by a certain kind of λόγος.

⁹² *EN* III.3, 1112b28, trans. Taylor, modified.

instruments or means to our ends, but also “someone through whose agency it could come about” (ὅτε μὲν δι’ οὗ ὅτε δὲ πῶς ἢ διὰ τίνοϛ).⁹³ And finally he closes the discussion of deliberation with an example of this sort of out-sourced agency: the Homeric forms of government in which “the kings announced to the people what they had chosen to do.”⁹⁴ Commentators usually let these passages slip by without comment, and this is not entirely unreasonable, since they don’t contribute directly to Aristotle’s main concern in the *EN*, his argument about the happiness and virtue of individual agents.⁹⁵ But Aristotle is nevertheless communicating very clearly that he takes it for granted that agency can flow through other people. In the *Ethics* he is mostly concerned with producing decisions and using *phronêsis*, not receiving them. But in his list of intellectual virtues, he describes one—σύνεσιϛ, ‘comprehension’ or ‘understanding’—which is concerned with judging the decisions that issue from someone else’s practical wisdom. Aristotle introduces it by pointing out that it is concerned with just the same things as *phronêsis*, things that could be otherwise, in the realm of what should and what should not be done—the things “about which we are puzzled, and we might deliberate.” Nevertheless, although it is about (πρός) the same things as *phronêsis*, the two virtues are not the same.⁹⁶ The difference is that comprehension consists in using the faculty of belief to judge the things “said by another” (ἄλλου λέγοντοϛ).⁹⁷

⁹³ *EN* III.3, 1112b30–1, trans. Taylor: ὅτε μὲν δι’ οὗ ὅτε δὲ πῶς ἢ διὰ τίνοϛ. Most translators (e.g. Irwin and Crisp) render διὰ τίνοϛ as “by means of what.” But, as Taylor argues, this means that the reader has to supply some substantive difference between the “by-means-of-*what*,” of a decision, and the “by-means-of-*which*” of that same decision. Taylor plausibly suggests the translation above, which as he notes fits nicely with the reference to things done through one’s friends. See C.C.W. Taylor, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics II–IV*, Clarendon Aristotle Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 157.

⁹⁴ *EN* III.3, 1113a8–9.

⁹⁵ Broadie, Taylor, and Irwin all ignore these passages, for example. For more on the *Nicomachean Ethics*’s individualism, see Chapter 2.

⁹⁶ *EN* VI.10, 1143a7.

⁹⁷ *EN* V.10, 1143a13–14. Trans. Irwin.

If Aristotle makes it clear in the *Ethics* that one person can deliberate about an action that will flow through the soul of someone else, in *Politics* I, he suggests that in some cases *deliberation itself* can be outsourced. Notoriously, when he explains why he thinks some people are naturally subject to rule, he says that slaves lack the deliberative faculty (βουλευτικόν), that women have it, but that it is ‘unauthoritative’ (ἄκυρον), and that in children it is incomplete.⁹⁸ Moreover, none of them have *phronêsis*, which Aristotle says at *Pol.* III.4, 1277b25-9 is “the virtue peculiar to the ruler.” Deliberation and practical wisdom are essential for human virtue, and Aristotle thinks that slaves, women, and children lack them or can’t exercise them properly. And yet he insists that they all have human virtue. The implication, as Marguerite Deslauriers has argued, is that free men lend them their own deliberative capacities and practical wisdom to their slaves and other natural subjects. Thus their virtues are “relative to the master” (πρὸς δεσπότην);⁹⁹ they live a life according to reason when their desiderative faculties submit to (and, in the best cases only produce desires in accordance with) the reason of their rulers.¹⁰⁰ And although Aristotle does not put the point in terms of soul parts, we might note that when a city does something (as for example, when Athens declares war) the citizens are divided into people who rule and people who are ruled; those who are not ruling do not need to exercise *phronêsis*; but *all* citizens must by definition be involved in

⁹⁸ *Pol.* I.13, 1260a7–14.

⁹⁹ *Pol.* I.13, 1260a31–3.

¹⁰⁰ Marguerite Deslauriers, “Aristotle on the Virtues of Slaves and Women,” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 25 (2003), 213–31.

judgment and deliberation.¹⁰¹ It would seem, then, that some are under the power of others, but nevertheless contribute to the collective action by judging and deliberating.¹⁰²

X. ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPTION OF RULE

It is by no means un-Aristotelian to think that a person could use *logoi* to transmit *phronêsis* to someone else's ἄλογον—quite the opposite, this kind of relationship between souls is a persistent theme in his practical philosophy. And I'd like to argue that for one person to rule another is just this kind of relationship. When, in the philosophical lexicon in *Metaphysics* Δ, Aristotle defines the word “ἀρχή” in its political and interpersonal sense, he does so in terms of decision (προαίρεσις). Rule, he says, is

that in accordance with whose decision (κατὰ προαίρεσιν) that which is moved is moved and that which changes changes; e.g. the magistracies in cities, and oligarchies and monarchies and tyrannies.¹⁰³

Now ‘decision’ is a technical term for Aristotle, and it is part of the same psychology of action that runs through the passages we just looked at.

For Aristotle, one of the defining features of an action properly speaking (by contrast, for example, with a twitch or a reflexive reaction) is that when you perform one, you apply the various features of your outlook, including your goals, the insight you've acquired through experience, and so on, to the specific features of a situation. A decision

¹⁰¹ Division of the city into rulers and subjects: *Pol.* II.2, 1277a21; subjects need not use *phronêsis*: *Pol.* III.4, 1277a15 and 1277b25–30; citizenship defined in terms of judgment and deliberation: *Pol.* III.1, 1275b19.

¹⁰² For an illuminating comparison of personal and political deliberation and its connection to ruling and being ruled, see Bryan Garsten, “Deliberating and Acting Together,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, ed. Marguerite Deslauriers and Pierre Destrée (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁰³ *Met.* Δ.1, 1013a10–11, trans. Ross, modified.

is a state (ἔξις) that reflects a judgment about what to do based on this sort of deliberation. Decisions, however, are not the only kind of judgment people make. When Hippocrates is confronted with a certain type of injury he may come to think that it is the sort of wound that should—from the medical standpoint—be treated with leeches. This is not yet a decision. Practical considerations might intervene—maybe there are no leeches available, or the patient has other, more urgent injuries that should be treated instead. And moral considerations might enter the picture as well—some non-medical action may be more important than treating this patient, or the patient just might not *deserve* to be treated.

Decisions, in short, go beyond mere deliberation. For one thing, a decision marks the place where deliberation ends. That is, it takes into account, as fully as possible or practical “how and by what means” something is best brought about, incorporating insofar as possible all of the opportunities, demands, and constraints implied by some set of circumstances.¹⁰⁴ Second, it draws together not only the judgments that issue from deliberation but *all* of the desires and ends an agent may have (for example hypothetical prescriptions like those provided by crafts—that I should reinforce this saddle *if* I want it to support a particularly heavy rider) into a final, all-things-considered judgment about what to do.¹⁰⁵

Now, if rule is defined in terms of decision, it should come as no surprise that, as we saw, Aristotle links it to *phronêsis*, which is simply the virtue that allows people to *make* good decisions—Aristotle defines *phronêsis* with just the same concepts (deliberation and all-things-considered judgments about the good life) that he uses to

¹⁰⁴ *EN* III.2, 1112a16–18.

¹⁰⁵ *EN* III.3, 1112b24.

explain decision.¹⁰⁶ Thus when he says that good rulers must have practical wisdom, while this is not necessary in the people they rule, that political expertise is the same disposition as *phronêsis*,¹⁰⁷ that the people who are naturally subject to rule—slaves, women, and children—are in various ways unable to reach decisions of their own, each of these could also be rephrased as cases where one person—a ruler—makes the decision that moves the reason-receptive parts of another person’s soul.

It’s clear, then, both from the definition of the *Metaphysics* as well as many of Aristotle’s comments about rulers and ruling, that when one person rules over another, the ruler makes decisions and (provided the ruler is good) exhibits *phronêsis*, while the other does not make decisions, but rather submits to those of the ruler.¹⁰⁸ In ideal cases, this will put the soul-parts of two different people into much the same relationship that soul parts normally have within a single virtuous individual.¹⁰⁹

But how exactly does this work? One indication is that Aristotle writes that “the one ruled is like a flute maker, while the other [sc. the ruler] is like a flute player, the user of what the other makes.”¹¹⁰ This claim appeals to the distinction between ‘ruling-arts’ (ἀρχιτεκτονικαί) and the arts that fall under them, which he also discusses in the first chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The point of distinction between makers and users is

¹⁰⁶ Virtue allows people to make good decisions: *EN* VI.5, 1140b10; definition of *phronesis* in terms of decision and deliberation: *EN* VI.5, 1140a26.

¹⁰⁷ The claim that good rulers must have *phronesis*, while this is not important for the people they rule is at *Pol.* III.4, 1277a15–17 and *Pol.* III.4, 1277b26–29. The identification of political rule and *phronesis* is at *EN* VI.8, 1141b23–24).

¹⁰⁸ It follows that strictly speaking rule is tied to actions. If a doctor and a general form a community, the doctor will make medical decisions, while the general will make military decisions.

¹⁰⁹ Aristotle explicitly connects the concept of decision to the distinction between free people and slaves in *Politics* III.9, 1280a30, where he writes that that while natural slaves may live together and engage in cooperative activities, they do not count as forming cities because they cannot “live according to προαίρεσις.” I owe this reference to Kristen Inglis.

¹¹⁰ *Pol.* III.4, 1277b28–9.

that the users provide an end or goal for the makers. There would be no point at all in making flutes if no one would ever play them, and the various skills involved in flute making are directed toward players' needs. On Aristotle's view, however, the story doesn't end there. There would be no point in flute-*playing* in a vacuum either—for although the art of flute-playing makes the flautist sensitive to various ends (perhaps intonation, expressive phrasing, and so on) there is a higher art that determines when the player should play and remain silent, what tunes are in order, and so on.¹¹¹ And the reason that one rules the other is not, as we might expect, that the πολιτικός gets to boss around the flute player—although if things are as they should be, that is so—but rather because that goals *internal* to political expertise determine how flute playing should be done, just as goals internal to flute-playing determine how flutes should be made. A ruling art sets goals for a subordinate art that the latter cannot set for itself, and so too a ruler sets goals for the person who is ruled.

This point, as I said in the Introduction, helps to dispense with a misunderstanding that is natural for modern readers. Heirs that we are to the scientific revolution, we might imagine that rule is a matter of efficient causation. If this were so, rulers would decide that their ends are best served by some change or activity in another person, and then find a way to bring it about. This is certainly a reasonable account of what happens when we use nonhuman tools. If I decide to affix these pieces of wood to each other, then I hit a nail into them with a hammer, and so bring the nail into conformity with my ends.

Aristotle does not, however, really speak of “ruling” inanimate tools. He does, however,

¹¹¹ For further discussion of ἀρχιτεκτονικά (especially in Plato), see C.D.C. Reeve (“Platonic Politics and the Good, Political Theory 23:3 [1995], 413).

talk about ruling beasts.¹¹² And in this context, the analysis in terms of efficient causation begins to break down. It is a peculiar feature of animals that we can cause physical changes in them by first changing what they desire—by dangling a carrot in front of them, for example—and this, rather than say pushing them around, is presumably what is involved in ruling over them as animals.

I've been saying that when one person rules another, the ruler makes a decision, the ruler “outsources” certain psychic functions, or that action “passes through” the soul of another. I now want to suggest that these expressions refer to a particular kind of causal relationship between souls—one in which the ruler establishes a final cause that uses the *ἄλογον* in such a way that its acts become meaningful, just as the flute-maker's activities become meaningful in light of the flute-player's use.

To rule over human beings involves animating them with the kinds of goals embodied in *phronêsis*. And these goals—unlike either the goals embodied by the appetites of a beast or the principles of flute-playing—are distinctively moral. Decisions, we may recall, are not just passing psychological states but the characteristic product of the virtues, and among the most reliable indications of the agent's character as a whole.¹¹³ So when we use our *phronêsis* and decision to set goals for another person, we are conveying to them not only facts about the world, but also an evaluative outlook that provides an end and direction to their activities—one that makes those activities true *actions* directed toward an end, rather than mere random motions.

¹¹² Cf. *Pol.* I.13, 1260a15–25, where Aristotle says that “A ruler must have virtue of character complete, since his task is unqualifiedly to that of a master craftsman, and reason is a master craftsman.”

¹¹³ Characteristic product of the virtues: *EN* VI.1, 1139a22; indication of the agent's character: *EN* III.2, 1111b5.

And in the famous passage that we saw earlier, about how *logos* makes the human being the most political of all animals. Aristotle could not be clearer that giving speeches is the tool that allows us to pass evaluations from one to another.¹¹⁴ Indeed, Aristotle reverts to the language of *logos* even in discussing how moral judgments are transmitted between parts of a single soul. The semi-rational part participates in reason just in the sense that it is “obedient,” it is “ready to listen,” and it “chimes with” reason; it is “capable of listening and obeying.”¹¹⁵ Likewise, the semi-rational part “speaks” with the same “voice” as reason.¹¹⁶

This brings us back, at last, to the admonishment claim. Aristotle never says that it is impermissible to use force on slaves if admonishment fails or if they deserve to be punished. And we would not expect him to—even with free people, Aristotle thinks arguments are often of little use. “In general it is not talk that makes emotion yield,” he says, “but force.”¹¹⁷ But we are now in a position to see that there are benefits to using *logoi* on any human being who we think might be moved by them. For *logoi* don’t just allow rulers to cause people’s bodies to move in certain ways, but also to implant goals directly into their souls.

This doctrine, which takes Gorgias’ thesis that *logoi* are causal levers for the soul in an unexpected direction, has consequences for the treatment of slaves—it implies that if a master wants to take full advantage of his living tools, then he should admonish them. The point of giving arguments is not to give slaves a choice about what to do or to help

¹¹⁴ *Pol.* I.2, 1253a7–15, trans. Lord.

¹¹⁵ *EN* I.13, 1102b26–33, trans. Rowe.

¹¹⁶ *EN* I.13, 1102b28.

¹¹⁷ *EN* X.9, 1179b25.

them evaluate the reasons for the action they've been asked to perform. On the contrary, the admonishment claim amounts to something like instructions about how to use a tool, built around its peculiar properties and the activities that you want to do with it. Since a violin bow has a certain elasticity and you don't want it to bounce around too much, you should put your little finger on the frog like so; since a slave is a human being who performs cooperative actions with you, you need to control not just his body but also his soul, and that requires persuasion with language. Far from a defence of the slave's rights, the admonishment claim provides instructions about how to dominate the slave more effectively and more completely.

And this is an unusual doctrine classical Athens. For Aristotle thought *logos* is 'ethically neutral' in the sense that we cannot say in general whether it is a good thing or a bad thing to be influenced with words. If someone secures your consent with the power of the better argument, you cannot rest easy—this treatment is powerful, personal, and far-reaching enough to turn one person into the living tool of another.

APPENDIX

XENOPHON'S SOCRATES ON SLAVERY AND RULE

I. INTRODUCTION

Xenophon's Socratic dialogues, including especially the *Oeconomicus*,¹ set out a theory of rule that is a sibling to the Aristotelian theory we have been considering. It draws on similar assumptions and conceptual materials, negotiates similar intellectual pressures, and comes together into a position that anticipates Aristotle in many ways (though, as we will see, it contrasts with him in others). Among other things, Xenophon's approach to rule leads him to unconventional views about slavery. Like Aristotle, Xenophon recommends replacing the traditional violent domination of slaves with a gentler educational program in which slaves will be persuaded of the value and importance of their role in the household.

In this appendix, I provide a sketch of Xenophon's theory of rule, showing how he arrives at his unusual views about slaves. My main goal is to answer a possible objection to the argument I make in Chapter 1. As you will recall, I argue there that Aristotle is by no means concerned with treating slaves kindly or respectfully, but rather with taking advantage of them as fully and effectively as possible. Part of my support for this conclusion is historical. I argue that Aristotle's position belongs to a conversation where all parties take it for granted that slaves—or

¹ Is the *Oeconomicus* really a Socratic dialogue? Admittedly, Socrates isn't the main speaker for much of it, and many of the themes—tilling earth, planting trees, and so on—aren't especially philosophical or Socratic. But even though it is a special case in these respects, the *Oeconomicus* is indeed a Socratic dialogue in the fullest sense. It's not just that Socrates spends the first several chapters advancing revision views about wealth, virtue, and the good; the rest of the dialogue is designed to show how a more conventional Athenian might benefit from Socrates' teachings about ἐγκρατεία without adopting his eccentric, saintly way of life. See Louis-André Dorion, "Socrate οἰκονομικός" in *Xénophon et Socrate: Actes du colloque d'Aix-en-Provence*, edited by Michel Narcy and Alonzo Tordesillas (Paris: Vrin, 2008, 253-82).

at least natural or rightful slaves—deserve to be exploited. Now, according to the objection that I will be answering, Xenophon shows that liberalism toward slaves *was* a live option in fifth-century Athens—indeed, the similarities between his account and Aristotle’s suggest that one of Aristotle’s goals might have been to acknowledge and incorporate parts of Xenophon’s liberal position.

My answer is to deny that Xenophon is any more of a proto-liberal than Aristotle. I will argue that notwithstanding the significant differences between them, Aristotle and Xenophon’s theories of rule end up treating slaves in much the same way. Xenophon, in other words, cannot be a source for Aristotle’s supposedly liberal views about slaves, because he is no liberal about slaves himself.

II. THE UNIVERSALITY OF RULE

In *Memorabilia* I.1, Socrates talks to Aristippus (a well-known hedonist) who says it is “the height of folly” to try to rule over anyone. To do so successfully, he says, would require uncomfortable levels of self-control and discipline, and it would also mean neglecting one’s own needs to attend to others.² The only solution is to abandon rule altogether, the better to focus on pleasure. Socrates replies with a rhetorical question. It turns on the assumption that people who don’t rule must therefore be ruled by others: Can Aristippus really think, he asks, that it’s more pleasant to have the station of a barbarian than a Greek? Aristippus replies by denying the assumption:

I am no candidate for slavery [οὐδὲ εἰς τὴν δουλείαν ἐμαυτὸν τάττω] but it seems to me that there is a middle path between the two [μέση τούτων ὁδός]; I strive to walk it,

² Xen *Mem.* II.1.8. trans. Marchant.

avoiding rule and slavery alike. It lies through freedom—the high road which leads to happiness.³

Socrates argues that no such path exists, at least for those of us who find ourselves “among human beings” (ἐν ἀνθρώποις). We must either rule or, failing that, submit to being ruled, for failure to rule is evidence of weakness that others will be sure to exploit.⁴ Like Aristotle, then, Xenophon’s Socrates thinks that interacting with others necessarily entails ruling or being ruled—although where Aristotle’s reasons for this position are metaphysical, Xenophon’s are empirical generalizations about human behaviour.⁵ The assumption, however, gives them some common areas of inquiry. Aside from the passage we just looked at, both take it as a given that their listeners cannot avoid getting involved in rule, and therefore occupy themselves with *how* to rule rather than whether or not to do so.⁶

Xenophon’s Socrates stresses, like Aristotle, that the question of how to rule well is not limited to traditional arenas like the city and the battlefield. Rather, it is concerned with all of the avenues in which human beings hope to secure goods for themselves and protect themselves from evils, including especially the household. Unlike Aristotle, Xenophon’s Socrates argues that the skills involved in ruling in any one of these arenas are transferable to any of the others. Indeed it is this transferability that underlies what I called Xenophon’s rule monism. His fullest argument for this position is in *Memorabilia* III.4, where he tries to straighten out a certain

³ Xen. *Mem* II.1.11, trans. Marchant modified: οὐδὲ εἰς τὴν δουλείαν ἑμαυτὸν τάττω, ἀλλ’ εἶναι τίς μοι δοκεῖ μέση τούτων ὁδός, ἣν πειρῶμαι βαδίζειν, οὔτε δι’ ἀρχῆς οὔτε διὰ δουλείας, ἀλλὰ δι’ ἐλευθερίας, ἥπερ μάλιστα πρὸς εὐδαιμονίαν ἄγει. This is of course similar to a Platonic position that we should remove ourselves from interactions with others, the better to pursue philosophical contemplation. Aristotle considers such claims at *Pol.* VII.2, 1324a39-40.

⁴ Xen. *Mem* II.1.13, trans. Marchant. Notice, however, that although Xenophon denies that it’s possible *neither* to rule nor to be ruled, he thinks that many people occupy both stations simultaneously. See Chapter 2, n.XX.

⁵ Indeed, he is quite interested in people like Ischomachus’ foreman in the *Oeconomicus*, who rule some people as a way of serving others.

⁶ Although see Chapter 3 below for Aristotle’s argument that a person should not withdraw from political life.

Nicomachides who has just failed to be elected general, losing to an opponent with much less military expertise than him. Socrates argues that the winner, Antisthenes, is eminently qualified for the position. The latter, he argues, recently led a choir to victory in a musical competition, and this didn't call for musical expertise. Rather, his task was to find musical experts and choral coaches, and to delegate the work to them, and—like the good businessman that he is—to effectively put a lot of resources into the project. Those skills are transferable from choral competitions to the battlefield, Socrates concludes, and indeed they're sufficient to make someone a good 'leader' (προστάτης):

Whatever someone leads [he says], if he knows what he should have and is able to get it (ἐὰν γινώσκη τε ὧν δεῖ καὶ ταῦτα πορίζεσθαι δύνηται), he will be a good controller, whether he controls a chorus, an *oikos*, a *polis*, or an army.⁷

There is indeed a kind of radicalism here. Like the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues, Xenophon's Socrates is attacking an old-fashioned sort of aristocracy in order to replace it with another one that is at once more intellectual and moralistic. The people who used to be able to take their elite status for granted—war heroes, well-born oligarchs, and so on—may or may not have the skills necessary to rule hidden in their souls. And those skills may on the contrary be found in as unlikely a figure as Socrates.

III. TEACHING OTHERS TO RULE

The passage I just quoted contains a schematic account of what it takes to be able to rule: knowing what one should have and being able to get it.⁸ Elsewhere in the Socratic texts,

⁷ Xen. *Mem* III.4.6, trans. Marchant, modified.

⁸ This is apparently not an unusual thought at the time. Compare Meno's proposed definition of virtue, and Socrates' response, at *Meno* 77b2-78c.

Xenophon spells out what this means. We might say that the Xenophontic Socrates' art of rule has three main components.

The first gives some content to the idea of 'knowing what one should have', and it depends on a counterintuitive ways of understanding 'goods' and of 'wealth'. The Socrates of the *Oeconomicus* argues that money, horses, and land are only 'goods' properly speaking when they benefit the person who owns them. People, then, should be considered 'wealthy' just when they have more goods than they need.⁹ Various people satisfy this definition, including not only Ischomachus, the owner of a bustling estate and the main speaker in the dialogue, but also the penniless Socrates, whose possessions only outstrip his needs because he scarcely needs anything. Socrates suggests that in order to *become* wealthy, it is better not to try to concentrate on accumulating possessions but rather on getting rid of needs. Thus—and this is the second component of Xenophon's account of rule—the key to getting and maintaining goods is self-control (ἐγκράτεια), the "kingly art" that is the "greatest of the virtues."¹⁰ Once we've mastered this art, success in most any activity will follow, since (as the chorus-master example shows) we'll be able to delegate to people who are competent in the niceties of whatever field we are working in, be it music, war, or whatever; indeed we will be able to train them to rule in our place. This practice of delegation and training is the third component.

It is the only component that directly involves relationships between people, and it's almost an afterthought. Although we might expect rule to be an interpersonal concept through and through, In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon's Socrates mainly studies it by way of the souls of individuals—those who seek to master others, he says, should pay little attention to that goal and

⁹ Xen. *Mem.* I. See Louis-André Dorion, "Socrate οικονομικός," in *Xénophon et Socrate: Actes du colloque d'Aix-en-Provence*, ed. Michel Narcy and Alonzo Tordesillas (Paris : Vrin, 2008), 253–82.

¹⁰ Xen. *Mem.* IV.2.11. This point has been most fully developed by Louis-André Dorion, in the essays throughout *L'autre Socrate: Études sur les écrits socratiques de Xénophon* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2013).

instead work on mastering themselves; the rest will follow. Indeed, the practice of delegating to others is meant largely to free up time and attention so that the ruler can pay less attention to others and more to himself.

My purpose here, however, is to consider the interpersonal side of Xenophon's theory of rule in general and the treatment of slaves in particular, so I will set aside the doctrine of ἐγκράτεια. In Chapters VIII to XIV of the *Oeconomicus*, Ischomachus explains how he rules over his wife, his housekeeper, and his foreman (ἐπίτροπος), who in turn rule a large team of slaves.¹¹ This involves various practices, many loosely related to the theme of self-control, including preaching to his wife about the importance of ἐγκράτεια for everyone and making sure the foreman won't be prone to distracting love affairs. But in perhaps the most revealing passage, Ischomachus explains how he has trained the foreman to rule over the estate's workers in his place, so that the *oikos* will be in good hands even when he spends the day in the market, chatting with Socrates about the philosophy of farming.

Socrates is surprised to hear Ischomachus say that the art of rule can be taught, and says with amazement that if a slave has been taught to rule other slaves he has *ipso facto* learned how to be a king (this is the second place where he says that there is only one kind of rule).¹² As we saw in the Introduction, this is an important implication for Plato, and it provides one of the reasons that Aristotle insists there must be different kinds of rule. But Ischomachus ignores Socrates' interjection, and simply details the training of his foreman. In his account, the art of rule is teachable because it is grounded on a simple theory of animal behaviour.

¹¹ Xenophon's foreman is probably but not definitely a slave. See Sarah Pomeroy, *Xenophon Oeconomicus: A Social and Historical Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 316.

¹² Xen. *Oec.* XIII.5.

“Living creatures,” Ischomachus says, “learn obedience [τὸ πείθεσθαι] in two ways: by being punished when they try to disobey, and by being rewarded when they are eager to do as they are told.” After noting that treats and punishments secure obedience in colts and puppies, he concludes that the same mechanism works for human beings. In their case, he adds, λόγοι and τιμαί should be added to the simpler regime of treats and beatings:

In the case of human beings it is possible to make them more obedient merely by talking to them [ἀνθρώπους δ’ ἔστι πιθανωτέρους ποιεῖν καὶ λόγῳ], pointing out that it is to their advantage to obey. But for slaves the method of training that is accepted for wild animals is very effective in teaching obedience. For if you gratify their desires by filling their bellies, you may get a great deal out of them. Those who are naturally ambitious become even keener with praise; for some natures hunger for praise as much others do for food and drink. These methods, then, are exactly the ones I use myself, because I believe I shall have more obedient people in my employ as a result, and I teach them to those I wish to appoint as foremen.¹³

This blurs the traditional opposition between force and persuasion in something like the same way Gorgias does in the *Helen*. Xenophon sees ruling people as causing them to do things (particularly to secure goods), and he sees the manipulation of their desires as the best way to do that. Speeches, honours, pleasures, and pains are all means to this one end, and we should not choose which one to use based on the status of the people around us but rather based on what will work. Thus here he endorses the standard Greek practice of treating slaves like beasts (though we will return to this point later). His reason, however, is that it’s effective, not that slaves need to be kept in their place.

¹³ Xen. *Oec.* XIII.6–9.

Xenophon says emphatically that a man should rule his wife by persuading her with *logoi*. Although he says women are less able to endure cold and heat, and more inclined to care for children than men, he claims they are identical in terms of receptivity to reason: the god, he says, gave “equal powers of memory and concern to both of them” (τὴν μνήμην καὶ τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν εἰς τὸ μέσον ἀμφοτέροις), and it is thus best to persuade them to obey by showing them that their own benefit depends on the good functioning of the household.¹⁴ In fact (though we might doubt how literally he means this) he says that if his wife demonstrates that she is better than Ischomachus, he will be happy to make himself her servant.¹⁵ The same thing seems to go for at least some slaves. The ones who are chosen to have authority over other slaves are also to be shown that it is in their interest to be loyal and to look after the household. Ischomachus goes so far as to say that he rewards the most devoted foremen by treating them like free people, and with the honours due to gentlemen.¹⁶

IV. THE TREATMENT OF SLAVES

For reasons we saw in Chapter 1, this approach to the education of women and slaves is unusual in fifth-century Athens. Indeed, Xenophon gestures at the contrast between his teachings and standard practice. Before recounting the extensive conversations Ischomachus used to train his wife, Xenophon has Critobulus, the dialogue’s everyman, admit that although he entrusts more important things to his wife than to almost anyone else, there is hardly anyone he has spoken to less than her.¹⁷ Thus Xenophon’s claims about the education of slaves and women provide the main support for the objection I promised to address: that Xenophon recommended a liberal

¹⁴ Xen. *Oec.* VII.26, trans. Pomeroy.

¹⁵ Xen. *Oec.* VII.42.

¹⁶ Xen. *Oec.* XIV.9–10.

¹⁷ Xen. *Oec.* III.12–13.

treatment of slaves that may have influenced Aristotle's account. Sarah Pomeroy offers the most important reading of Xenophon that supports the objection. She argues that "in the *Oeconomicus*, there is no natural hierarchy among human beings according to gender, race or class" and that "although Xenophon, like his contemporaries, took slavery for granted, he did not have a theory of natural slavery." Elsewhere, she says that with regard to slaves, Xenophon is "liberal, even radical."¹⁸

As I said, she's certainly right that Xenophon sometimes suggests unusually generous treatments for slaves. But her overall assessment seems to me misleading. Xenophon's Socrates shares his contemporaries' disgust for the degraded manual tasks (βαναυσικαί) slaves typically performed—he says they make people's bodies effeminate and their souls weak.¹⁹ And notwithstanding the education through *logos* that Ischomachus recommends, Xenophon is quite comfortable with the corporal punishment of slaves. Thus Socrates asks Nicomachides how masters treat slaves who prefer expensive pleasures to hard work: "Do they not starve them to keep them from immorality, lock up the stores to stop their stealing, clap fetters on them so that they can't run away, and beat the laziness out of them with whips?" Nichomachides says that he does the same himself: "I make their lives a burden to them until I reduce them to submission."²⁰ Again, when Critobulus refers to people with the knowledge and resources to benefit their *oikoi* who nevertheless refuse to do so, Socrates assumes that he's referring to slaves.²¹

¹⁸ Sarah Pomeroy, *Xenophon Oeconomicus: A Social and Historical Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 66; Sarah Pomeroy, "Slavery in the Greek Domestic Economy in Light of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*," *Index* 17 (1989), 11–88, reprinted in *Oxford Readings in Classical Studies: Xenophon*, ed. Vivienne Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 31–40l.

¹⁹ Xen. *Oec.* IV.2. Xenophon's main claim in the *Oeconomicus* is that economics in general and farming are a noble kind of toil (πόνος) suitable for the καλὸς κἀγαθός. But this is no challenge to the stigma against banausic work. Quite the opposite, Xenophon takes the distinction between noble and slavish work for granted in order to argue that farming belongs with the former rather than the latter. For related discussion, see Steven Johnstone, "Virtuous Toil, Vicious Work: Xenophon on Aristocratic Style," *Classical Philology* 89 (1994), 219–40.

²⁰ Xen. *Mem.* II.1.16–17, trans. Marchant.

²¹ Xen. *Oec.* I.17–18.

As we've seen, Xenophon doesn't think that *every* slave deserves to be treated this way. Quite the opposite, he thinks some should be treated like *kaloι k'agathoi*, and that domination through force is appropriate only to *bad* slaves. But bad slaves are apparently very common.²² All bad masters, Ischomachus argues, have bad slaves, since they don't have the knowledge or self-control needed to train them properly. Thus, he says, he has never found a bad master with good slaves. And he quickly adds that even good masters have bad slaves at least sometimes, "though at least they don't go unpunished" (οὐ μέντοι ἀζημίους γε).²³ So however much influence a good master may have on his slaves, it remains the case that some should be beaten, while only a few should be treated like the free; moreover there exists a seemingly large group of slaves *constitutionally unable* to be good, and they should certainly be brutally punished by their masters. Perhaps this isn't quite a theory of natural slavery, but it is closely akin to one. It is at any rate nothing like an argument for the equal dignity of all human beings.

Moreover, even to the limited extent that Socrates does argue that masters should use reason to secure the consent and win the loyalty of their slaves, his reasons are cannot fairly characterized as liberal. Consider, for example, one of the first references to slaves in the *Oeconomicus*, where he points out that different houses have different sorts of slaves. "In some houses," he says, "they are nearly all chained, but run away again and again, while in others they are unchained and want to stay and work."²⁴ Here as throughout the *Oeconomicus*, the emphasis is not on how to do right by one's slaves, but rather on how to get them to do more work. This makes sense. The entire dialogue is an answering Critobulus' questions about how to become

²² I exclude from this argument the nominally free people who Xenophon says at *Oec.* I.17 and X.10 make themselves slaves through lack of self-control. It's not clear what treatment by others he thinks is suitable for them, but it's doubtful that he thinks they should be enslaved and punished by the likes of Socrates and Ischomachus.

²³ Xen. *Mem.* XII.19.

²⁴ Xen. *Oec.* III.4.

rich. Although Socrates tries to get Critobulus to see that wealth and the status of a gentleman are not what he thinks they are, everything he says *is* about what Critobulus should do to advance his own interests. Socrates never expresses any interest in defending the needs, interests, or rights of slaves for their own sake. It may be useful here to consider the analogy between Xenophon's approach to slaves and women in the *Oeconomicus* and Plato's discussion of female guardians in *Republic V*. That argument, as Julia Annas writes,

is not based on, and makes no reference to, women's desires or needs. Nothing at all is said about whether women's present roles frustrate them or whether they will lead more satisfying lives as Guardians than as house-bound drudges.... Of course Plato is not bound to be interested in the psychology of women, but his complete lack of interest underlines the fact that his argument does not recommend changing the present state of affairs on the ground that women suffer from being denied opportunities that are offered to men.²⁵

Annas concludes that this is sufficient grounds to say that whatever its merits, *Republic V* is not a feminist text. For similar reasons, we must conclude that Xenophon's Socrates is no liberal about slaves. For Xenophon (as for Aristotle, I claim), slaves are tools to be used to advance the interests of the free. Xenophon's Socrates does suggest radical claims: if he had his way, the Greeks would disenfranchise those whose power is founded exclusively on wealth and birth, and replace them with an aristocracy founded on virtue. But there is never any question of effecting

²⁵ Cf. Julia Annas on Plato's supposed feminism in *Republic V*: "Plato's *Republic* and Feminism," *Philosophy* 51:197 (1976), 307–21, 311.

social change in order to improve the situation of slaves.²⁶ Still less—it scarcely needs to be said—does Xenophon suggest trying to eliminate the institution altogether.

To this extent, then, Xenophon and Aristotle are on the same page. They differ, however, about the natural differences between slaves, women, and free men, a topic we will consider in Chapter 2. Xenophon certainly thinks, like Aristotle, that there are natural, psychological differences between men and women, and it seems that he may think there are inborn differences between some truly slavish people and the noble. Yet, impressed by the effectiveness of education and the potential value of women's and slave's contributions to the household, he argues that people's cognitive abilities are often similar enough that one kind of training is suitable for anyone, and that people from any station might well be able to earn the highest honours. Although he doesn't seem much interested in upsetting the *status quo*, his philosophy does not rule it out. We will see in Chapter 2 that Aristotle too is impressed by the contributions that some household subordinates—particularly women—can make to shared actions, but that he finds a way to make room for these contributions while foreclosing the possibility that they should ever be allowed to take charge.

²⁶ For Aristotle the questions how to assign rule and how to treat slaves are questions of justice: the answers depend on the principle of proportional equality (see Chap 3). When Xenophon's Socrates broaches the topic of justice at *Mem.* IV.4, he explores its connections with obedience to the law, not with giving people what they deserve.

CHAPTER 2

KINDS OF COMMUNITY, KINDS OF RULE

I. *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS* VIII.9–IX.3: ASYMMETRICAL FRIENDSHIP

Sometime in the 1970s, after a long period of neglect, scholars rediscovered the essays on friendship that make up Books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and Book VII of the *Eudemian Ethics*. Most of the issues that they and their successors focused on—the friendships of character, utility, and pleasure; the connection between friendship and self-love; and so on—are closely tied to what Aristotle calls ‘perfect friendship’, the symmetrical relationship between virtuous people who share a single life, each admiring the other’s excellence.¹

In a paper that set the agenda for this body of work, John Cooper makes a point that has since been repeated very often. The *Nicomachean* treatment of friendship, he points out, occupies a fifth of the *EN*, more space than Aristotle reserves for any other single topic. This, Cooper says, is “a fair measure of the importance of this subject to the complete understanding both of Aristotle’s overall moral theory and even of many of the more circumscribed topics (moral virtue and pleasure, for example) to which so much scholarly and philosophical attention has been devoted.”²

¹ For a useful summary of the literature on friendship until 1999, see Heather Devere, “Reviving Greco-Roman friendship: A Bibliographical Review,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 2:4 (1999), 149–87. Thornton Lockwood provides an extensive and more recent list of essays in “A Topical Bibliography of Scholarship on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*: 1880 to 2004,” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 30 (2005), 78–85.

² John Cooper, “Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship,” *Review of Metaphysics* 30:4 (1977), 619.

But this line of thought is complicated by a fact that is hardly ever mentioned. Aristotle almost entirely restricts his account of virtue friendship, other-selves, and such topics to the very beginning and end of his treatment of friendship. The rest—almost everything from VIII.7 to IX.3, seven out of seventeen Bekker pages—is dedicated to asymmetrical relationships, including especially those Aristotle calls friendship “based on superiority,” in which one friend is a better person than the other. Of course, it might not quite be unprecedented for Aristotle to fill up a lot pages working through fine details and special cases. But if we *did* take the space Aristotle gives to a topic to indicate importance, then we would have every reason to conclude that asymmetrical friendships have a major role to play in Aristotle’s argument, at least locally in the essay on friendship, and maybe more globally in his practical philosophy as a whole.

And indeed I want to show that the discussion of asymmetrical relationships is of considerable importance to Aristotle’s practical philosophy. In this chapter I will argue that, far from the miscellany commentators have often found, the middle chapters of Book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* contain Aristotle’s broadest and most systematic treatment of the varieties of human cooperation and friendship. And this discussion of human community—call it ‘Aristotle’s sociology’—also amounts to his fullest treatment of the doctrine that there are many kinds of rule, not only in cities, but throughout the social world.

II. THE CONSTITUTIONAL ANALOGY

At *EN* VIII.9, with no warning or explanation, Aristotle starts talking about the six πολιτεῖαι (‘constitutions’ or ‘regimes’): monarchy, aristocracy, timocracy, democracy,

oligarchy, and tyranny. He opens with a sketch of the ways each ‘correct’ πολιτεία deviates into its opposite, and then moves on to what seems to be the main attraction: the comparison between each constitution and some relationship in the household. Fatherhood, he says, resembles kingship when it’s good and tyranny when it’s bad, brotherhood degenerates from timocratic to democratic when no authority figure keeps it under control, and so on. Before moving on, Aristotle also stops to say something about the kinds of friendship found between rulers and the people they rule *within* certain constitutions, such as the friendship of a king for his people, and connects these relationships with various kinds of justice.

The constitutional analogy is certainly the centre of gravity for this stretch of argument, but at first sight it is not at all clear what purpose it’s supposed to serve. The constitutions are the official topic of a different inquiry, that of the *Politics*, and there is no obvious reason for them to appear here in the middle of the *Ethics*. Aristotle says nothing to explain why he also introduces them into a discussion of friendship; nor, once the analogy is complete, does he explain what lessons have emerged to make it worthwhile. An initial question, then, is simply what this part of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is supposed to be *about*. We might suppose that the topic must be one of the two poles of the analogy: either the four family relationships he invokes (fatherhood, marriage, brotherhood, and mastery of slaves), or the various constitutions themselves. Or we might suppose along the same lines that the topic is the *relationship* between those two poles, i.e. the causal relationship between households and cities.³

³ Aristotle encourages this last thought by introducing the analogy with the claim that household relationships are “likenesses” (ὁμοιώματα) and, “models, roughly” (οἷον παραδείγματα) of the *politeiai* (*EN* VIII.10, 1160b23–24). In the parallel passage from the *Eudemian Ethics* he calls them the “springs and

But none of these interpretations works out. For one thing, the discussion cannot be about the constitutions *per se*. Aristotle’s practical philosophy is designed to be taught in a specific order, and students will only learn the full story about the constitutions later, once they’ve already covered the contents of the *Ethics*, including friendship.⁴ And his tour of constitutional theory in the *EN* is brief and schematic—indeed very crude—compared to the detailed discussion developed in the middle of *Politics* III, and through *Politics* IV-VI.⁵ Thus we should read Aristotle’s appeal to constitutional theory along the same lines as his well-known appeal to psychology at *EN* I.13.⁶ In both places, he offers only a rough sketch of material that gets a proper scientific treatment elsewhere. In both places, he exploits material that his audience will find familiar and intellectually serious (indeed, material that he indicates will be familiar from “the exoteric texts,” whatever those are).⁷ And in both places, although he tries to avoid saying anything that contradicts the rigorous account he gives elsewhere, he shows little interest in completeness. Rather, he takes on whatever aspects of the familiar material will best pique his students’ interest and illuminate his real topic.

Does he, then, invoke the constitutions just to shed light on the four relationships he singles out in the analogy—on the friendships between fathers and sons, husbands and

origins” of friendship, justice, and politics: ἀρχαὶ καὶ πηγὰὶ φιλίας καὶ πολιτείας καὶ δικαίου (*EE* VII.10, 1242b1–2).

⁴ See especially *EN* X.9, where Aristotle concludes the argument of the *Ethics*, and argues that it suggests that “we must next” turn to the study of the constitutions found in the *Politics*.

⁵ The version of the analogy that appears in *Politics* I does indeed seem to be meant to help us understand the causal relationship between the household and the city. For a study of what Aristotle probably means by ὁμοιώματα and οἷον παραδείγματα, see Claudio William Veloso “La relation entre les liens familiaux et les constitutions politiques” in *Politique D’Aristote: Famille, régimes, education*. eds. Emmanuel Bermon, Valéry Laurant, and Jean Terrel (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2011), 23–40.

⁶ There he says that while a study of ethics must address the soul, it needn’t study it with the depth appropriate to natural philosophy, as he does elsewhere, i.e. in the *De Anima*.

⁷ The references to the “exoteric *logoi*” are at *Pol.* III.6, 1278b31–32; and *EN* I.13, 1102a27–33. For more, see Paul Moraux, *A la recherche de l’Aristote perdu: Le dialogue “Sur la justice.”* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1957), 14–22.

wives, masters and slaves, and brothers?⁸ This would be in keeping with an interpretation favoured by some interpreters⁹ to the effect that much of *EN VIII-IX* is a hodgepodge where Aristotle, indulging his inclination to catalogue, finds something to say about all the friendships he can find. If this were right, the friendship of fathers and sons would be just one more specimen, taking its place alongside the friendship of criminals, lovers, old people, sailors, and on and on. Or again we might take Aristotle to be looking at those four relationships as members of a distinct group—the household, or the private sphere. After all, Aristotle does think that the city and the household differ in kind, which might in turn suggest that household *relationships* are completely different from all other relationships. If this were so, then the constitutional analogy might be intended just to illuminate them.

But in fact Aristotle is not mainly concerned with household relationships for their own sake, but rather because of the ways they illuminate a broader set of relationships. He first indicates this when he introduces household relationships to his treatment of friendship, at the beginning of *EN VIII.7*:

A different form of friendship [he says] is that based on a superiority (καθ' ὑπεροχήν), such as the friendship of father with son, and generally of an older man with a younger; of husband with wife; and of any sort of ruler with his

⁸ For an illuminating example of this style of interpretation, see Elizabeth Belfiore, “Family Friendship in Aristotle’s Ethics,” *Ancient Philosophy* 21:1 (2001), 113–32. She writes that “complete friendship and family friendship represent two different paradigms of the ‘other self’ relationship. In the complete friendship of unrelated people, similarly virtuous others become ‘other selves’ because of a deliberate choice, based on virtue. In contrast, family friends, especially in the paradigmatic family friendship, that between parents and children, are natural ‘other selves’ who share a biological and ethical sameness and who become ‘other by being separated’.”

⁹ Thus in their classic translations Gauthier and Jolif and Ross describe the middle chapters of the essay on politics as “casuistry.” René Antoine Gauthier and Jean Yves Jolif, *Aristote: L’Éthique à Nicomaque*, 2 vols. (Louvain : Nauwerlaerts, 1959), and David Ross (trans.) *Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954).

subject. These friendships differ from each other, since that of parents with children and that of rulers with subjects are not the same. . . . In fact, the friendship of father with son is not even the same as that of son with father, nor that of husband with wife and of wife with husband. For each of these has a different virtue and function; and that on account of which they love differs as well; therefore, both the friendly affections and the friendships are different.¹⁰

Far from treating household friendships as distinctive specimens that need a freestanding treatment of their own, here he introduces them (with οἷος, “such as”) as particularly vivid *examples* of the broader class of hierarchical friendships. He intends to use them (and in particular the variety they exhibit) to illustrate something about relationships spread much more broadly through the social world: namely that these relationships differ from each other, and in complex ways. In the pages that follow this quote, Aristotle touches on a bewildering variety of relationships between rulers and the inferiors over whom they have or should have authority: gods and humans, ancestors and descendants, the powerful and their lackeys, magistrates and criminals, and so on. Aristotle thinks that reflecting on the case of household friendships can shed light on all of these.

The household relationships, then, are neither irreducible special cases, nor do they belong to a special domestic subspecies of φιλία. Rather, they introduce a vast range of relationships spread through every avenue of the social world. And this bewildering variety, I would like to argue, provides Aristotle’s reason for introducing the constitutions. The six constitutions—and their similarities with household relationships—

¹⁰ *EN* VIII.7, 1158a12–19, trans. Pakaluk.

allow him to confer order on the various hierarchical friendships by providing an accessible scheme for sorting them into kinds.

III. KINDS OF COMMUNITY, KINDS OF FRIENDSHIP

It may seem unlikely that Aristotle would use the constitutions to provide a typology of friendship. For by the time he introduces the constitutions, he has already gone to considerable lengths to defend a different distinction between kinds of friendship—the famous threefold distinction between friendships based on pleasure, utility, and virtue. Why would he now introduce a new, different classificatory scheme based on the six constitutions?

To see the answer, recall that at the very beginning of Book VIII, Aristotle explains that he now needs to explore friendship, “because it is a kind of virtue, or something involving virtue” (ἔστι γὰρ ἀρετὴ τις ἢ μετ’ ἀρετῆς). This signals that he will make sense of friendship using the philosophical machinery set up in *EN* II-VII to deal with familiar virtues like courage and wisdom—he will treat it, as he says a few lines later, in terms of character and emotion (τὰ ἦθη καὶ τὰ πάθη).¹¹ And indeed as the discussion progresses we learn that like the other virtues, friendship is a state of character that shapes a person’s goals, emotions, and dispositions, and that over the course of a lifetime, it partly constitutes *eudaimonia*. This approach—an examination of friendship as it appears in an individual’s character and emotions—leads naturally to the question why individuals love or care about their friends, and thence to the threefold classification that sets the agenda until *EN* VIII 9. We love people, Aristotle argues, for the same reasons

¹¹ *EN* VIII.1, 1155a4, 1155b9–10.

we desire other things: variously because we think they are useful, they cause pleasure, and because they are good. Aristotle's treatment of friendship as a quasi-virtue also leads naturally to the argument that a disposition to be friends with someone must be more-or-less regularly *active*, although it can be dormant at particular times, just like a courage or the ability to speak German.¹²

This much of the discussion of friendship fits easily into what we might call the 'methodological individualism' of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. That is, it studies actions, motivations, and states of character insofar as these belong to individuals one at a time. But Aristotle does not think that the individual is the only entity worth studying in practical philosophy. After all, he treats the *polis* as a perfect whole, teleologically prior to its parts; and on at least one of his accounts, he treats even its most basic parts as collectives rather than individuals—the relationships between master and slave, husband and wife, and father and child.¹³ Although the *Ethics* fixes its gaze by and large on the individual, Aristotle is by no means averse to a kind of 'methodological holism' treating communities as beings worthy of study in their own right.

I don't want to get distracted by the question of whether Aristotle is an *ontological* individualist—whether he thinks the properties and actions of communities can always be reduced to the properties and actions of individuals.¹⁴ However we come down on that question, there can be no doubt that he often thinks it is legitimate and

¹² *EN* VIII.5, 1157b7.

¹³ *Pol.* I.2, 1252a25–31. Note, however, that while the whole husband-and-wife is a community, the units of father-and-child and master-and-slave are too unified to be *κοινωνία* strictly speaking, since in both cases the subordinate member is "as it were" or "in a way" a part of the ruler.

¹⁴ Though see Chapter 1 above, where I argue that it's best to explain collective actions in terms of the deliberative contributions made by individuals—the ruler contributes the *προαίρεσις*, while the people ruled contribute other cognitions. On the question of whether and how Aristotle is an individualist, see also the Introduction.

illuminating to treat communities and relationships as entities in their own right, speaking holistically at least for heuristic and methodological purposes.

And I would like to argue that starting in Chapter 9, Aristotle begins a line of argument (making prominent use of the constitutional analogy) that treats *φιλία* not *qua* virtue but *qua* community. This focus on *κοινωνία per se* is new in the *EN*, but the currents of Aristotle's argument make it natural. By the end of Chapter 8, he has used the threefold analysis of friendship to resolve many of the puzzles that he introduced at the outset (about the roles of similarity and difference in friendship, the friendship of wicked people, and so on). Now his original line of inquiry is trailing off, leading beyond the bounds of ethics into natural philosophy.¹⁵ So he starts on a new problem: "It seems, as we said at the beginning, that friendship and the just are concerned with the same things and exist in the same persons." The backward reference is to his initial catalogue of *endoxa* about friendship, and particularly to the widespread view that there is some kind of connection between friendship and justice. Aristotle is announcing that he will explain the connection in proper philosophical detail.¹⁶

If our goal is to understand friendship in its connection with 'the just', there are reasons to think we shouldn't think of friendship as a quasi-virtue. The expression Aristotle uses for "the just" is "τὸ δίκαιον," which refers to just *situations*, as opposed to "δικαιοσύνη," which indicates a virtuous *disposition*, held by individuals. And, as we will see, he goes on to focus on fair exchanges in which everyone gets what he or she deserves (i.e. what Aristotle labels 'narrow' justice in *EN V*)—and this is in its most

¹⁵ *EN* VIII.8, 1155a34–b9.

¹⁶ *EN* VIII.9, 1155a25–30, trans. Pakaluk.

basic sense a four-place relationship between two sets of goods and two people, and only derivatively a state of character.¹⁷

Aristotle introduces the theme of communities to his discussion with a very compressed argument that community, friendship, and justice are coextensive.¹⁸ The idea seems to be something like this: In every community—i.e. wherever people cooperate—it's a matter of observable fact (i) that people both make certain claims of desert on each other (τι δίκαιον εἶναι), so community implies justice; and (ii) that they regard each other with an eye for each other's good, so, according to the definition from the beginning of *EN VIII*, community implies friendship. So community entails both justice and friendship. Furthermore, friendship involves some sort of fair exchange, where people give to others what they deserve, so friendship also entails justice (i.e. the standards that determine how much one should give and take). Why does justice entail friendship? Perhaps because it requires attending to what people deserve, and interacting with them in ways that help to secure it—and this is very close to a definition of φιλεῖν that Aristotle offers at *Rhetoric* II.4: wishing for someone what one thinks is good, for that person's sake and not one's own, and being inclined to do those things, as far as possible (τὸ βούλεσθαί τινι ἃ οἶεται ἀγαθὰ, ἐκείνου ἔνεκα ἀλλὰ μὴ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ κατὰ δύναμιν πρακτικὸν εἶναι τούτων).¹⁹

¹⁷ *EN* V.3, 1131a18–24. See Chapter 3 for much more on Aristotle's account of justice.

¹⁸ *EN* VIII.9, 1159b25–28. ἐν ἀπάσῃ γὰρ κοινωνίᾳ δοκεῖ τι δίκαιον εἶναι, καὶ φιλία δέ.

¹⁹ For general treatments of this difficult passage, see Michael Pakaluk, *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics VIII and IX* (Clarendon Aristotle Series, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 111–14 and Bernard Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal: Community, Justice, and Conflict in Aristotelian Political Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993). For the importance of the *Rhetoric*'s definition of friendship, see John Cooper, "Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship," *Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship*, *Review of Metaphysics* 30:4 (1977), 619–648. It is not entirely clear how to square the discussion in *EN* VIII.9 with an *endoxon* (or series of interrelated *endoxa*) that Aristotle seems to endorse at the beginning of *EN* VIII: "Those who are friends have no need of justice, but just people do need friendship as well; and the greatest form of justice seems to be friendly" (φίλων μὲν ὄντων οὐδὲν δεῖ

Aristotle goes on to say that the *typology* of one domain will shed light on the typology of the others. In the *EN*, he points to this connection quite briefly: “The kinds of friendship,” he says, “will follow the kinds of community” (ἀκολουθήσουσι δὲ αἰ τοιαῦται φιλίαι ταῖς τοιαύταις κοινωνίαις).²⁰ In the *Eudemian Ethics*, he develops the idea at greater length.

It is thought that what is just is something that is equal, and also that friendship is based on equality, if there is truth in the saying “amity is equality.” And all constitutions are some species of justice [αἱ δὲ πολιτεῖαι πᾶσαι δικαίου τι εἶδος]; for they are communities, and everything communal is founded on justice, so that there are as many species of justice and community as there are of friendship, and all these species pick out the others (καὶ πάντα ταῦτα σύνορα ἀλλήλοις) and have their differentiae closely related (ἐγγυὺς ἔχει τὰς διαφοράς).²¹

The idea is that if we understand the typology of one phenomenon, then we will have access to the typology of the others. And so we may start with whatever is easiest to analyze, and use it to get a foothold on the rest.

This, I submit, is the purpose of the constitutional analogy. There are six intuitively accessible kinds of πολιτεία. These can be used to indicate differences between kinds of community which would otherwise be hard to make out. And these in

δικαιοσύνης, δίκαιοι δ' ὄντες προσδέονται φιλίας καὶ τῶν δικαίων τὸ μάλιστα φιλικὸν εἶναι δοκεῖ. (*EN* VIII.1, 1155a29). I think the three views in question are (i) that if you regard someone as a friend, you won't, in addition, need the virtue of justice to keep you from taking more than your share from that person; that (ii) if you are fair-minded about giving people what they deserve, this still falls short of having the relationships necessary to be happy; and (iii) that the fullest commitment to giving people what they deserve will involve pursuing their good for its own sake. If so, there is no conflict with Chapter 9 as I interpret it. But in any case, if there is a contradiction, then Chapter 9, which is intended as rigorous philosophy, should take precedence over Chapter 1, which is a broad rhetorical prolegomenon, appealing to the importance of studying friendship.

²⁰ *EN* VIII.9, 1160a 27–30.

²¹ *EE* VII.9, 1241b12–17. Trans. Rackham, modified.

turn shed light on distinctions between kinds of justice and friendship that aren't so easy to tackle head-on. The analysis as a whole is ultimately valuable to a study of friendship because it clarifies the widespread but rarely understood view that justice and friendship are somehow intimately related.

There is reason to think that Aristotle's students would have agreed that the constitutions provide an easy way to get this complicated ball rolling. For by Aristotle's time, the constitutions were a familiar lens through which to look at the social world, indeed the basic tool with which Greek political thinkers arranged themselves into political factions—Athenian-style democrats and Spartan-style oligarchs. The constitutions built on powerful civic stereotypes: the chaos and faction of Athenian democracy; the wise stewardship of Homeric kings, the militaristic virtues of Sparta, and so on.²² And this tradition was also sometimes redirected—most notably but not only by Plato—to express the idea of varied ways of life on a smaller scale. Thus, for example, we can explain certain people's behaviour by saying that it expresses a tyrannical or democratic personality. Aristotle likewise thinks that the real and imagined differences between cities and peoples—between, Athens and Sparta and Persia and so on—are so vivid to a politically curious audience that they provide a model for something less intuitively available, the patterns distinguishing different ways that we can work together on shared projects. It is as if a modern speaker said “parents and their children often end up like *Russia*, but really they should be more like *Sweden*...”

²² The various kinds of rule, as Aristotle says, have been “often defined” by his predecessors (*Pol.* III.6, 1278b32). At least as early as Herodotus, Greek thinkers distinguish between three kinds of constitution; Plato introduces the sixfold distinction that is Aristotle's starting point in his *Statesman*. For much more on this background, see Jacqueline Bordes, *Politeia dans la pensée grecque jusqu'à Aristote* (Paris: Belle Lettres, 1982). Also very useful on the ancient Athenian discussion of the constitutions is Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998).

IV. COMMUNITIES AND POWER STRUCTURES

As a tool to sort κοινῶνίαι into kinds, however, the analogy with constitutions might seem completely unpromising. Aristotle's best-known scheme for classifying πολιτεΐαι is a two-by-six grid based on the number of people who rule (one, many, or all) and whether the rule is self-interested or on behalf of the people ruled. Monarchy is benevolent rule by one person, democracy is self-interested rule by the many, and so on.²³

	<i>One Ruler</i>	<i>A Few</i>	<i>Many</i>
<i>Benevolent Rule</i>	Kingship	Aristocracy	Polity/timocracy
<i>Exploitation</i>	Tyranny	Oligarchy	Democracy

In *Politics* III, Aristotle treats this as the starting point for understanding the differences between constitutions of cities. Soon enough, though, he modifies it in various ways, ultimately leaving it pretty well entirely behind. Thus, for example, while he starts out by defining oligarchy as the rule of the few, he soon goes on to say that it is better understood as rule of the *rich*, who are typically but not necessarily few in number.

How, if at all, is the grid supposed to illuminate the kinds of friendship? Partway through his explanation of the analogy, Aristotle appeals to one consideration drawn directly from it: the distinction between beneficent and self-interested rule. He says that fathers resemble kings because they rule with an eye to their children's advantage;

²³ *Pol.* III.6–7. Aristotle sometimes also writes that in the non-deviant constitutions, the ruler rules in the interest of the whole rather than the interest of the ruled. The point is that in looking out for his subjects, the ruler also (accidentally) benefits himself, and so ends up acting for in the interest of the whole (*Pol.* III.6, 1278b35).

masters, by contrast, are like tyrants because they rule in their own. But this distinction does not serve Aristotle's main purpose in this section: the distinction between benevolence and exploitation does not indicate the boundary between two *kinds* of friendship, but rather between friendship and its absence. For Aristotle, regarding someone as a friend entails pursuing his or her good for its own sake.²⁴ Thus since slave masters and tyrants are defined as people who rule to benefit themselves (and therefore only concern themselves with the good of their subjects for instrumental reasons) they cannot be friends with their subjects (at least *qua* subjects—a master may not be friends with his slave *qua* slave, though perhaps he can be friends with him “as a human being,” if for example they sometimes play games or chat about public affairs).²⁵ This is the idea underlying his claim in *EN* VIII.11 that in the most deviant cities, there is hardly any justice or friendship.²⁶

So insofar as the constitutional analogy is supposed to offer an analysis of various kinds of friendship (rather than a distinction between friendships and other kinds of human interaction—a distinction I'll return to later) it cannot draw on the distinction between benevolent and exploitative rule. Once we have abandoned this, what remains of the two-by-three grid is a threefold division of constitutions according to the number of

²⁴ For the claim that friends always seek the other's good for its own sake, see *Rhet.* 1380b36–81a3 and *EN* VIII.1, 1155b23–31. For an argument that this definition applies not just to virtue friends but also to the other two kinds, see John Cooper, “Aristotle on the Forms of Friendship,” *Review of Metaphysics* 30:4 (1977). Cooper argues that Aristotle is happy to define friendship as wishing others well for their own sake in general, and that there is no reason to think that this definition applies only to virtue friendship; he also offers examples and arguments meant to make it plausible that even the distant relationships between partners to exchange and fellow-citizens typically involve some small measure of mutual well-wishing.

²⁵ Note however, that at *Pol.* I.6, 1255b11–14 Aristotle says that “There is a certain advantage—and even a friendship of slave and master for one another—for those slaves who merit being such by nature.” This outright contradicts what he says about slaves in the *Ethics*—that there can be no friendship between master and slave *qua* master and slave. The latter position must be Aristotle's settled view, while the claim in the *Politics* is meant to emphasize the idea that master and slave each benefit from the arrangement.

²⁶ *EN* VIII.11, 1160b24–27.

their rulers. But this is scarcely better than the correct/deviant distinction as a tool for sorting friendship into kinds. Although Aristotle recognizes that groups of friends come in various sizes,²⁷ he consistently treats relationships between *two* people as capturing everything worth saying about them. In short, to use the constitutions to categorize the various kinds of friendship, Aristotle must abandon the criteria both of beneficence and of number of rulers, and exploit some other aspect of constitutions.

Happily, a more promising idea is ready to hand. Consider this general definition of πολιτεῖαι, which appears shortly after the three-by-two grid in *Politics* III.6:

A constitution is the structure (τάξις) of a *polis* with respect to its offices (τῶν τε ἄλλων ἀρχῶν), and most of all the one that has authority over all matters (τῆς κυρίας πάντων).²⁸

This definition characterizes a πολιτεία roughly as a ‘power structure’.

Strictly speaking, only cities have πολιτεῖαι. “ἀρχαί” means “magistracies” or “offices”; κυριώτατος is often translated as “sovereign.” Both are in this context distinctly political concepts. But these terms have ready analogues in smaller relationships. We might identify ἀρχαί with ‘responsibilities’ or ‘areas of authority’, and translate κυριώτατος “ultimately in charge” or “most authoritative.” The power structure of a community would then answer both the general question of who has what responsibilities, and the narrower one of who has the highest level of responsibility, and therefore runs the whole operation. And in fact the terms Aristotle uses make it particularly natural to look for constitutional analogues in the household. “Κύριος,” which means “supreme,” “sovereign,” or “authoritative,” can also be used as a noun

²⁷ *EN* VIII.2, 1171a2.

²⁸ *Pol.* III.6, 1278b9–10, trans. Lord, modified.

referring to the head of a household (simultaneously husband, father, and slave master) and can generally indicate anyone in control. But many groups of people will have some assignment of power that can be described in these terms. Some people will have authority over some things and, in particular, someone (or perhaps *something*—I will return to this complication in a moment) will be in charge of everything. Military squads provide one obvious example of such a hierarchy, and at least in Aristotle’s thought, teams of builders, with their menial workers and ἀρχιτέκτονες, provide another.

I have been arguing that the treatment of πολιτεῖαι in *Ethics* VIII looks to the kinds of rule in order to make sense not just of some limited range of communities, but of human relations generally. Immediately after giving the definition of πολιτεία as a τάξις of ἀρχαί, Aristotle suggests that the definition of πολιτεία as power structure is suited to precisely this task. In studying the constitutions of cities by looking at the household, he says, we will see “how many forms of rule there are for human beings and for communal life” (καὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς εἶδη πόσα τῆς περὶ ἄνθρωπον καὶ τὴν κοινωνίαν τῆς ζωῆς).²⁹ Again, the idea is that the constitutions aren’t relevant only to cities and household relationships, or to some restricted set of hierarchical communities, but rather to power structures spread across all of human cooperation, structures that allow us to distinguish human relations quite generally into εἶδη.

Many will find it easy to accept that power structures provide a sensible way to categorize city-states. And anyone familiar with Aristotle’s practical philosophy will recognize (however regretfully) that he thinks that rule is at the heart of household

²⁹ *Pol.* III.6, 1278b15, trans. modified.

relationships.³⁰ But it may seem like a stretch, both by Aristotle’s standards and by modern ones, to categorize all kinds of *friendship* in terms of power or rule. We might suppose that many—indeed, most—friendships and other small social groups can’t be categorized by kind of rule because they don’t involve rule at all.

Aristotle, however, is committed to rejecting this. If we treat friendships and communities as single units (as I’ve argued Aristotle does in this middle section of his essay on friendship) and we add the uncontroversial point that communal wholes are made up of parts, then we have on his view automatically committed ourselves to the view that some part rules over the others. As we saw in the Introduction, this is for Aristotle just an *a priori* implication of the concept “single, structured unit”:

In all things which form a composite whole and which are made up of parts, whether continuous or discrete, a distinction between the ruling and the subject parts comes to light. Such a duality exists in living creatures, but not in them only; it originates in the constitution of the universe; even in things which have no life, there is a ruling principle, as in a musical mode.³¹

Now the composite whole he has in mind in this passage is formed by a master and slave, and as I said a moment ago this is neither a friendship nor a community. Indeed, for

³⁰ Some scholars (often of a broadly Straussian persuasion) have argued that although Aristotle says this, he does not mean it; by reading between the lines we can decipher a secret argument for the equality of men and women, and for the abolition of slavery. See for example Harold Levy, “Does Aristotle Exclude Women from Politics?” *Review of Politics* 52 (1990), 397–416. This does not seem plausible to me. For one thing, various reliable sources (not to mention the maddening compression of the argument) testify that while Aristotle published dialogues for a wide readership, the surviving Aristotelian corpus is ‘acroamatic’, i.e. a rough accompaniment of some sort to his oral teaching. It would be odd for this kind of text to be carefully seeded with an esoteric message. For a survey of the arguments against this position, see Richard Mulgan, “Aristotle on the Political Role of Women” *History of Political Thought* 15:2 (1994), 179–202.

³¹ *Pol.* I.5 1254a28–33. Compare this principle with a related ‘law of nature’ that Thucydides attributes to the Athenians in the Melian debate: “Nature always compels gods (we believe) and men (we are certain) to rule over anyone they can control.” (*Thuc.* 5.105, trans. Gagarin and Woodruff).

Aristotle the master-slave pair scarcely counts as two individuals—the slave is “a kind of part” (μέρος τι) of his master.³² But the principle must certainly apply to all communities, and therefore to all sets of friends. After all, it applies to cities, wholes which he argues in *Politics* II should not be very highly unified.³³ Many of the subgroups within the community will be more unified than the city itself, and these include not just armies and building crews, but also pairs of virtue friends.

In Chapter 1, I argued that for Aristotle one person rules another just when the first makes a decision that provides a final cause for the second person’s actions and mental states—military officials, for example, rule not primarily by bossing people around but by providing a higher purpose to the technical work not only of soldiers but of bridle-makers, riders, and everyone else whose expertise is subordinated to the war. Is it conceivable, by modern lights, that all cooperation involves rule of this sort? In particular, is rule involved in virtue friendship, or in the interactions of free fellow citizens who regard each other as equal? Aristotle commits himself to this position, and perhaps it isn’t quite as strange as it seems. At any rate, examples of rule proliferate when we start looking for them: Not only do bosses and teachers direct peoples’ activities and redirect them toward ends they would not have otherwise, and may not even grasp; so too, in a different way, do manipulative people. And to take a third kind of example, art experts may change the values we bring to bear in our perceptions—whether we like it or

³² *Pol.* I.6, 1255b11. At *EN* V.6, 1134b8–13, he says that the slave is “as it were” a part of the master.

³³ He uses the principle, for example, to criticize Plato’s portrait of a fledgling city made up of a weaver, a farmer, a shoemaker, and a builder: “even among four persons, or however many partners there are, there must necessarily be someone who assigns and judges what is just”) *Pol.* IV.4 1291a21–24. ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ ἐν τοῖς τέτταρσι καὶ τοῖς ὅποσοισοῦν κοινωνοῖς ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τινα τὸν ἀποδώσοντα καὶ κρινοῦντα τὸ δίκαιον.

not.³⁴ And we may add Foucault's famous examples of the productive 'pastoral' power exhibited in the confessional booth and the psychoanalyst's couch, where (far from restricting their actions) power leads people to tell certain kinds of truth about themselves, and contributes to the formation of their identity.³⁵ Perhaps considering such examples helps to show how Aristotle might have thought that rule plays a major role in many personal relationships, including friendship. Perhaps it even lends plausibility to the view that some such analysis applies to *all* cooperative activity, including that between equals.³⁶

But whatever we think of this thesis, we must accept that Aristotle not only believes it, but finds it entirely obvious. This is part of the reason that when he discusses rule within communities of equals, he never imagines (like Rousseau, for example) that all citizens might ultimately rule themselves. For Aristotle, equals must content themselves merely with taking turns, sometimes ruling, sometimes being ruled.³⁷ In smaller relationships, we might imagine that we can do without the institutions and formal practices needed for the *polis*, instead passing around control situationally.³⁸

³⁴ Cases like these help to illustrate why "rule" is often a doubtful translation of ἄρχειν. For more on this point, see the Introduction.

³⁵ See especially "Omes et singulatum: Vers un critique de la raison politique," *Le débat* 41 (1986), 5-35 and "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (1982), 777-95.

³⁶ Fred Miller (*Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's Politics* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1995]), provides an interesting discussion of the main modern objection to this approach, the "theory of spontaneous order," which he associates with Adam Smith. According to this theory, orderly social structures sometimes arise without rule through the unregulated actions of self-interested agents. Aristotle might resist the idea that competitive marketplaces are really κοινωνία. However that may be, even if such arguments do undermine Aristotle's claim that is *conceptually* necessary for every community to have a ruler, they do not refute the argument the psychological or action-theoretical claim that we are discussing here, that every cooperative or collective *action* must in some sense be directed by the deliberative principle of one agent.

³⁷ For a fuller discussion of the 'political' rule of one equal over another, see Chapter 3.

³⁸ For more on the difference in virtue between rulers and subjects, see Dorothea Frede, "Citizenship in Aristotle's Politics." In *Aristotle's Politics: Critical Essays*. Edited by Richard Kraut and Steven Skultety. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005, 176–84. (Revised version of "Staatsverfassung und Staatsbürger," in *Aristoteles' Politik*, ed. O. Höffe [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001], 75–92).

Perhaps one friend defers to the other based on each person's expertise in the matter at hand, maybe they give the lead to whoever most feels like it right now, and it's not hard to dream up other possibilities. But there too there must be a ruling element, and one that is ruled.

Could it be that in friends and communities of equals, no party rules, but all are ruled by some non-human principle, perhaps reason or the law? The principle that in every composite whole a "ruling element must come to light" certainly allows this—it does not specify that the ruler must be a person. And indeed Aristotle frequently discusses rulers of human communities that *aren't* human individuals. *Poleis*, for one thing, are often ruled by groups, like the many, the virtuous, and the rich. Furthermore, the *law* can rule a city—indeed it is better for the law to rule than it is for a person to do so.³⁹ But while human individuals aren't the only kinds of rulers, it would seem that every community distributes rule among the human beings that make it up, even if it is ruled by law. Even under ideal circumstances, however, the law can't rule without human help. Someone must always be available to step in to fill the gaps, adapting it to specific circumstances, recognizing exceptions where it doesn't apply, and so on.⁴⁰ In other words, even when the law is sovereign, rule will need to be assigned to some people and not others. Furthermore, in the cases where Aristotle describes a social group as ruling a city, he often *also* describes the individuals that rule that group, as for example when he discusses the rise of demagogues within certain kinds of democracy.⁴¹ If a city is ruled by

³⁹ *Pol.* III.16, 1287a18–32; *NE* V.6 1134a35–b2 makes the related claim that political justice is found only among people "whose mutual relations are governed by law."

⁴⁰ *Pol.* III.15, 1286a15–20.

⁴¹ *Pol.* VI.4, 1319b12.

a group, *that group* will have some power structure, and often ruled by an individual person.

To these considerations, we might add that by Aristotle's lights it would be a real misfortune if a community had no human rulers. For, as we saw in Chapter 1, Aristotle thinks that *φρόνησις* is "peculiar to the ruler" (*ἄρχοντος ἴδιος*), and indeed that it is "the same state as politics" and therefore that it is required to achieve virtue and the human good.⁴² A community with no ruler is thus a community where no one can exercise human virtue in its fullest form. All told, I think we can say with some confidence that whenever people act together, Aristotle thinks that power is distributed in some determinate way to the various individuals that make up their community. As we will see in Chapter 3, this has important implications for justice: securing the good for a community does not mean deciding whether or not hierarchy is appropriate to it (and still less does it mean systematically eliminating all hierarchy). Quite differently, it means deciding how hierarchy will be managed, even in communities of equals.

V. THE CONTENT OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL ANALOGY

If my argument so far is correct, then the constitutional analogy is designed to sort human communities into kinds, and it does so in terms of different kinds of rule. This means that we can mine the passage for information about the different kinds of rule, in order to fill

⁴² See *Pol.* III.4 1277b25–29. "*Φρόνησις* is the only virtue peculiar to the ruler. The other [virtues], it would seem must necessarily be common to both rulers and ruled, but *φρόνησις* is not the excellence of the subject is not *φρόνησις*, but true opinion"; and *EN* VI.8, 1141b23–8: "*Πολιτική* and *φρόνησις* are the same state, but their being is not the same. Of practical wisdom concerning the city, the ruling part is legislative science, while the part concerned with particulars has the name common to both, i.e., political science. This part deals with action and deliberation, for the decree is to be acted on as the last thing."

out the pluralism that, as we have seen, Aristotle announces in *Politics* I with plenty of fanfare and little detail.

Now it's worth stressing that although Aristotle refers to the kinds of rule with the names as the *πολιτεῖαι*, this does not mean that there is a very close relationship between the two sets of phenomena. Oligarchical *rule*, for example, is pretty well independent of the study of actual *oligarchies* studied in the middle books of the politics. The middle-books of the *Politics*, famous for their 'empirical' or 'social-science' style, depend on such features as whether farmers live too far from the centre to regularly participate in the city, and which citizens can afford what kinds of weapons—institutional, demographic, and even geographical questions that are very far from the concerns of Aristotle's study of friendship. Such details provide no direct help with the typology of rule we are looking for.

In fact, a city's constitution won't even tell us all that much about the kinds of rule *within* it. Suppose, for example, that each member of the ruling class in an oligarchy regards the others as equals, and they take turns making decisions for their city. This won't make the city any less oligarchical, but it will give us some license to say that political rule is an important part of its makeup, and even that it is in a certain sense *ruled* politically.

When scholars consider the differences between specifically interpersonal kinds of rule, they typically focus on some combination of three ideas, all stressed in *Politics* I: First, there is the distinction we have already considered (and to which we will return) between benevolent rule and exploitation. Second, there are what we might call "temporal" categories: a free man's rule over slaves and women is permanent, his rule

over his sons is temporary, and his rule over his fellow citizens is intermittent, since everyone will take turns ruling and being ruled.⁴³ And third, there is the difference between kinds of people: women, children, and slaves have different cognitive abilities, and are therefore suited to being ruled in different ways; since Aristotle stresses that rule does not amount to holding any particular ἐπιστήμη, but depends on natural differences between rulers and subjects, we might easily conclude that the differences between kinds of rule are *constituted* by natural differences between kinds of people.⁴⁴

But it would be disappointing if these options exhausted Aristotle's views about the various kinds of rule. For each of them fails to satisfy two *desiderata* of an Aristotelian theory of rule. First, an account of Aristotle's view about the kinds of rule should allow us to draw meaningful distinctions between *at least three kinds of correct rule*. As we have seen, Aristotle stresses this point. Nature, he says, doesn't make people like the multi-purpose delphic knife, suited to perform many tasks and receive many kinds of treatment: a man's wife should not be ruled in the same way as any of the other members of the household—she should be treated differently than the slaves, *and* differently again than the man's sons, while the sons and the slaves must be treated differently than each other.⁴⁵ Since the correct/deviant dichotomy is merely twofold, it cannot illuminate all these distinctions, and it's of little help in satisfying the *desideratum*.

⁴³ See Chapter 3 for more on this distinction.

⁴⁴ *Pol.* I.7, 1255b16–19

⁴⁵ Another version of the same mistake is to treat women as a special kind of *child*. This is the problem with the interpretation of Francis Sparshott ("Aristotle on Women," *Philosophical Inquiry* 7 [1985], 177–200), who argues that Aristotle's claims about women are grounded in a difference in age between husbands and wives.

Second, a theory of rule should treat different kinds of rule as *different kinds of activity* in a suitably strong sense. To see this, imagine that Aristotle promised to explain that there are several εἶδη of sculpture. It would be disappointing if he pointed to ‘carving maple’ and ‘carving oak’ as two of them, and then simply ended the account. Nothing about that distinction explains why we should take the two activities to differ in kind or to require different accounts. While an explanation of the differences between kinds of sculpture might well *begin* with the difference between materials worked on, it would be much more satisfying if these were related to substantive differences in the activity itself. For example, carving wood is indeed different—and even different in kind—than carving clay. But the difference is not constituted by the material difference between clay and wood. Rather, that difference is a *cause* of a further difference—the difference between additive and subtractive sculpture. And those seem like honest-to-goodness different kinds of sculpture because they are substantively different kinds of activity. A satisfactory theory of the kinds of rule should be like that: the famous differences between the deliberative faculties of women, children, natural slaves and the free should help to *explain* it, but they should not *exhaust* it.

Thus the natural differences between subjects don’t satisfy the second *desideratum*. And the temporal distinctions have the same problem. Aristotle does indeed think that women should be ruled permanently, children temporarily, and free men intermittently. This provides grounds for saying that each is ruled differently in *some* sense, but here too it would be disappointing if this exhausted the claim that they differ from each other in form. We are looking for an account according to which when a

κύριος turns from ruling his slave to his wife, he stops doing one sort of thing and starts doing another, as when he stops shaping clay and starts carving wood.

Happily, the discussion of household friendships in *EN VIII* provides an account of rule that satisfies the two *desiderata*. When the time comes to explain why each kind of household rule resembles one of the constitutions, Aristotle gives a series of γάρ clauses providing reasons for the various parts of the analogy. At first glance, they are not very illuminating. He writes, for example, that fatherhood resembles monarchy because good fathers care for their sons, while the rule over slaves is tyrannical because it is in the interest of the master.⁴⁶ Brotherhood, on the other hand, resembles timocracy because (and only so long as) the brothers are equal, and therefore must take turns ruling.⁴⁷ This gives us two seemingly unrelated, even arbitrary, ways of linking household relationships to constitutions: via the altruism of the ruler or the lack thereof, and via the friends' equality or inequality; in one case, Aristotle appeals to the benevolent/altruistic distinction, and in the other to the temporal distinction, and he gives no indication of how these ideas are supposed to be related.

More helpful, though, is Aristotle's treatment of the 'aristocratic' rule of husband over wife, and of the 'oligarchic' relationship that results when marriages go wrong.

The association of husband and wife seems aristocratic in character, because it is in virtue of his worth (κατ' ἀξίαν) that the husband rules and over those things that he should, and whatever is appropriate for a wife (ὅσα δὲ γυναικὶ ἀρμόζει) he hands over (ἀποδίδωσιν) to her. But if a husband dominates (κυριεύων) in everything, he converts it into an oligarchy, since it is not in virtue of his worth

⁴⁶ *EN VIII.10*, 1160b25–6.

⁴⁷ *EN VIII.10*, 1161a4–7.

that he does so and not as the better person. Sometimes wives rule, because they are heiresses, and so their rule is not based on virtue but is a consequence of wealth and power—just as in oligarchies.⁴⁸

Aristotle here describes good marriages as “aristocratic” and bad marriages as “oligarchical,” exploiting the distinction between correct and deviant constitutions. But notice that he has abandoned the usual associations with that distinction. The bad marriages Aristotle calls “oligarchical” need be ruled selfishly rather than benevolently. Rather, the problem is with the *values* that determine who rules whom. When the relationship is correct, the man rules “in virtue of his worth”—which is to say his *ethical* worth, and in particular in virtue of the authoritative deliberative faculty he has but she lacks.⁴⁹ On the other hand, a marriage becomes oligarchic when rule is assigned based on some other, inappropriate consideration—wealth and power, in the case of the heiress.

Notice also that Aristotle singles out *two distinct sorts* of deviant marriage, neither based on the self-interest of the ruler. In one case, the problem is simple: the wrong person is in charge. The other, however, is a bit different. Although the right person—the husband—is in charge, he has *too much power*. He “dominates in everything” rather than merely “ruling over those things he should.”

Recall the definition of πολιτεία we considered earlier, according to which a constitution is a τάξις of ἀρχαί—a power structure—including but not limited to the determination of who is κυριώτατος. Notice that on this definition, the structure falls

⁴⁸ *EN* VIII.10, 1160b32–61a4, trans. Pakaluk.

⁴⁹ Aristotle is applying an idea of competing conceptions of justice that he develops at *Pol.* III.9: 1280a22–25: Men and women in bad marriages make the same kind of mistake in assigning power as democrats and oligarchs: “The ones, if they are unequal in a certain thing, such as goods, suppose they are unequal generally, while the others suppose that if they are equal in a certain thing, such as freedom, they are equal generally. But of the most authoritative thing [i.e. virtue] they say nothing.” For more about heiresses, see Thornton Lockwood, “Justice in Aristotle’s Household and City,” *Polis* 20:1/2 (2003), 12–13.

naturally into two parts—(i) the most authoritative offices, and (ii) all the rest. This same division underlies the two kinds of oligarchic marriage. When a woman takes charge of a marriage, Aristotle thinks that the wrong person is in charge; if a husband rules in everything (rather than handing over to his wife responsibility for ‘preservation’ within the household), the remaining powers and responsibilities are incorrectly assigned. This analysis presupposes a more complex picture of rule than we find in *Politics* I, where Aristotle often talks as if everyone is either straightforwardly a ruler or a subject. Aristotle’s treatment of bad marriage makes it clear that there are in fact *three* stations people may occupy in a community’s power structure. People may have no power at all, they may be κυριώτατος, *most* in charge, or they may occupy an intermediate position, granting them some limited set of powers and responsibilities.

We can get a fuller sense of these three stations by turning to the middle books of the *Politics*. In the civic institutions he examines there, the people who are most in charge are called ἄρχοντες—“magistrates” or “officers,” although the word literally means “rulers.” Aristotle often describes these people, using cognates of κύριος, as sovereign over some domain or other. Among his examples of magistrates are the people in control of revenues and of the guard, or who distribute grain in times of scarcity.⁵⁰ These people straightforwardly qualify as rulers according to the account we saw in Chapter 1: they determine what constitutes happiness for the city in some domain or other, and they use that end to provide meaning to the various activities of people under their purview, just as the master-builder does to his subordinates.

⁵⁰ *Pol.* IV 1300b10–12. τῶν προσόδων καὶ τὴν κυρίαν τῆς φυλακῆς.

Aristotle's account of political institutions also helps fill out how he understands the intermediate responsibilities. Aristotle alludes in *Pol.* III.1 to a debate about whether judges and assembly members should be called ἄρχοντες.⁵¹ He often speaks as if they are not magistrates in the fullest sense. His reason is clear enough: voting in a criminal trial does not indicate that you are in charge of anything, and neither does voting in the assessment of a magistrate, giving speeches in the assembly, or performing other such tasks. Yet Aristotle says that it would be absurd to deny that these people rule in any sense, especially considering that in cities like Athens the judges and assemblymen are *collectively* sovereign. He stipulates that while such people do not count as ἄρχοντες in an unqualified sense, it's fair enough to say that their role is to participate (μετέχειν) in rule, and that we may label the judgement and civic deliberation as "indefinite office" (ἀόριστος ἀρχή).⁵²

There is an analogy between the indefinite officers in the city and of women in the household. Just as Aristotle thinks that women should have only limited power in the household, so too does he think that the masses in normal Greek cities should not be allowed to hold "the greatest offices" (ἀρχῶν τῶν μεγίστων), since they have neither justice nor practical wisdom. Yet on the other hand, he writes that excluding the masses from power altogether would lead to intolerable conflict. "This," Aristotle says, "is precisely why Solon and some other legislators arrange to have them elect and inspect officers, but prevent them from holding office alone."⁵³ In both cases, the challenge is to acknowledge a limited but real claim to power without giving away too much.

⁵¹ *Pol.* III.1, 1275a27–33. See also *Laws* VI, 767a.

⁵² Here, I am indebted to an unpublished paper by Marie-Noëlle Ribas.

⁵³ *Pol.* III.11, 1281b25–35.

As he considers the various kinds of magistrate and their roles in the city, Aristotle writes the following:

Generally speaking, those should be most particularly spoken of as offices to which are assigned deliberation and judging and command (ὅσαις ἀποδέδοται βουλευσασθαί τε περὶ τινῶν καὶ κρῖναι καὶ ἐπιτάξαι) concerning certain matters, and especially the latter, for command is more characteristic of ruling.⁵⁴

Here civic judgment and deliberation function in a similar way to the deliberation of individuals. As we saw in Chapter 1, deliberation contributes to action, but is not on its own sufficient to make us do anything. People only perform actions if, in addition to acting and deliberating, they make a decision—or if a ruler makes a decision on their behalf. Likewise, judgment and deliberation contribute to the actions of a city, but the civic function that is most characteristic of ruling is commanding.

Thus in both the city and the individual, judgment and deliberation contribute to action without providing its end. And it seems to me that this helps to explain why Aristotle takes such pains to stress the difference between the kinds of rule suitable to slaves and to women. Κύριοι will of course *rely* on their slaves as they do their tools and animals. But men must accord to women “that which is fit to them,” i.e. judgment and deliberation, or some function that contributes in much the same way to the ruler’s actions. This is to say that unlike slaves and children, men have to *trust* their wives, which entails both limiting their own actions and making themselves vulnerable to the

⁵⁴ *Pol.* IV.15, 1299a25–28.

contributions of others to household activity.⁵⁵ It is this qualified kind of rule that Aristotle calls ‘aristocratic’.⁵⁶

There is further support for this interpretation in Aristotle’s comments about the rule of fathers and kings in the *EN*. When he first introduces monarchy to the discussion, he claims that its distinguishing features are the king’s self-sufficiency and his thoroughgoing superiority over all his subjects (“οὐ γάρ ἐστι βασιλεὺς,” he writes, “ὁ μὴ αὐτάρκης καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς ὑπερέχων”—“no one is a king who is not self-sufficient and superior in all good things”).⁵⁷ The superiority of kings and fathers (which Aristotle presumably thinks is particularly evident in contrast with the dependence and inferiority

⁵⁵ I draw the contrast between trusting people and merely relying on them from Annette Baier’s “Trust and Antitrust” (*Ethics* 96 [1986], 231–60) although I don’t use it quite the way she does.

⁵⁶ This, at least, is his account in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which contains his longest (and I think best-worked-out) discussion of the kinds of rule. Aristotle complicates the story in *Politics* I. There, in a briefer and more schematic discussion than the one we have been considering, he writes that a husband’s rule is not aristocratic but ‘political’ (*Pol.* I.12, 1259b7–9). Some scholars have treated these two claims as contradictory, and it may well be that Aristotle changed his mind about how to think about the rule of men over women, but I think it’s just possible to see the two discussions as compatible. For one thing there is no formal contradiction in comparing marriage to *both* aristocratic and political government. Marriage may of course be akin to a political regime in some respects and to an aristocracy in others. And Aristotle says nothing in the *Politics* that conflicts with the substance of the account he gives in the *Ethics*.

My view is that his main goal in the *Politics* is not to give a full account of the kinds of rule, but to indicate how rule over women is different from rule over children and slaves. A comparison with political rule is perfectly well suited to this job—and it allows marriage to occupy an analytic slot that is otherwise unoccupied in this context, which does not discuss the relationship between brothers. The feature of marriage that Aristotle uses the analogy to highlight is just the same as the ones I’ve discussed here—the passage is designed to bring out the idea that women are different kinds of people than children, and different in a way that requires and entitles them to contribute moral judgment to the activities they share with their husbands.

When, in the *Politics*, he calls the rule over women “political,” he is emphatically not saying that women are equal to men—on the contrary, as he begins the discussion, he restates his conviction that men are naturally “fitter for command” (ἡγεμονικώτερον) than women, and points out that marriage does not involve the arbitrary measures (specifically, alternation of rule) that characterize the relationship between people between whom there are no differences to prevent them from treating each other as equals (*Pol.* I.12, 1259b5–9). His position in the *Politics* pays women only a very mixed compliment: that they can and should contribute to the household in a manner analogous to the contributions of the masses to the political process of democracies. The natures of husbands and wives suit both to contribute morally and deliberatively to the household. But they are not so similar that they make it necessary to introduce the exchange of responsibility, grounded in convention and artifice rather than nature that would make their relationship political. For an example of a scholar who finds a contradiction between the passages, see Richard Mulgan, “Aristotle on the Political Role of Women,” *History of Political Thought* 15:2 (1994), 188.

⁵⁷ *EN* VIII.10, 1160b4.

of children), is such that the person suited to be κύριος is also suited to take responsibility for *all* the actions of the collective—he need not and should not “hand over” anything to those in his charge.⁵⁸ Fatherly or kingly rule is thus the simple case in which the nature of partners dictates that one party should get complete control, encompassing both levels of authority.

The reason for this is given in a passage in *Politics* I that we saw briefly in Chapter 1, in which Aristotle writes that what separates slaves, children, women, and Greek men are the various natures of their capacity to deliberate. Children, he says there, have only an immature capacity to deliberate. This presumably means that they have the properties of the not-yet-virtuous people that Aristotle describes in *EN* II. They cannot perform virtuous actions ‘as the virtuous do them’—knowingly, from a settled disposition, and from their own decision—yet they can nevertheless perform virtuous actions either by chance or according to the directions or the example of another (ἄλλου ὑποθεμένου).⁵⁹ Slaves, who lack the capacity altogether, are certainly equipped to perform technical tasks or to overcome obstacles that complicate their daily lives—there is no reason to think that Aristotle doubts that they can judge when the ox needs extra food, for example.⁶⁰ What they cannot do independently, on his view, is form moral judgments that express practical wisdom in a way that will restrict and influence the

⁵⁸ The kings he describes in the *EN* are evidently highly idealized—real-world kings must always delegate tasks to a wide range of subordinates, and in some cases, like Sparta, they seem to have very little power at all.

⁵⁹ *EN* II.4, 1105a20–30. For the classic discussion of learners’ virtue, see Myles Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to be Good,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 69–92.

⁶⁰ Contra for example, Martha Nussbaum (“Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics,” in *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Philosophy of Bernard Williams*, ed. J. E. J. Altham and Ross Harrison [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 86–131), who says that Aristotle’s natural slaves are the people we would now think of as mentally disabled.

master's capacity to set morally informed ends for the household. Ruling over slaves and children, on this account, is distinctive because the ruler must make all truly practical decisions (rather than merely technical ones) on their behalf.

Aristotle contrasts the defective and immature deliberative faculties of children and slaves with the 'unauthoritative' deliberative faculties of women. The claim is notoriously difficult, and it has been the subject of divergent interpretations. Some think that the female deliberative faculty lacks authority over the non-rational parts of the woman's soul; others think that it lacks authority over *men*. We need not take sides on this debate, however, to see that Aristotle thinks that the distinctive feature of women (and any other suitable subjects of aristocratic rule that might exist) is that while they may not be put in charge of collective action, they can and should be trusted, morally, to take charge of certain tasks subordinate to the ruler's ultimate ends, and perhaps even to have some form of input into collective decisions.⁶¹

This, I think, gives us a satisfactory account of the difference between two of the three kinds of 'correct' rule as they appear in household relationships, one that fares better than the standard answers in the literature. Just as the difference between clay and wood helps to explain the difference between additive and subtractive sculpture without constituting that difference, so too does the difference between kingly/fatherly rule and

⁶¹ Aristotle says little about just what kinds of division of labour are involved in the relationships between husband and wife and whatever other aristocratic relationships might resemble it, but other sources suggest some of the anxieties this part of his account might have been designed to address. Preservation of the *oikos*, the woman's task on Aristotle's account, was a crucial duty for fourth century Athenians. Not only did the household provide the material conditions necessary for a free man's activities but it also was also a gift from the past generations to be preserved and passed on, on pain of severe dishonour. Women had major responsibilities in the estate's day-to-day operation. And they played an equally important role in providing legitimate sons who would provide for the *kurios* in his old age, and carry the *oikos* into the future. Thus a husband had to trust his wife with significant responsibilities. (See Wolfgang Detel, "The Assymetrical Relationship," in *Foucault and Classical Antiquity*, translated by David Wigg-Wolf [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005]).

marital/aristocratic rule respond to alleged natural differences between women and children. But as with the difference between additive and subtractive sculpture, the story does not end there. Paternal and marital rule are substantively different kinds of activity, not just because one is permanent and the other is temporary, but because they amount to distinct modes of cooperation; one calls for moral trust and delegation, and the other does not. And they both differ from the domination of slaves, because that is not strictly speaking cooperation at all.

In political/fraternal communities, Aristotle says that everyone is “equal, and of the same age, and such persons are mostly similar in their feelings and character” (ἴσοι γὰρ καὶ ἡλικιωῶται, οἱ τοιοῦτοι δ’ ὁμοπαθεῖς καὶ ὁμοήθεις ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ).⁶² In such relationships, unlike those of a father to his wife, his child, and his natural slave, there are no natural grounds for putting one person in charge rather than the other, or more generally for assigning responsibilities in any particular way.⁶³ Thus some further principle—such as rule by turn—must enter the picture. This principle will distribute ἀρχαί in a way that is necessarily arbitrary but at least not completely unfair. When no such measures are instituted at all, and everyone “has license to do what he or she wants,” then the relationship crumbles and becomes ‘democratic’.⁶⁴ (This, we may note in passing, is yet another new way of describing ‘deviant’ rule relations without appealing to benevolence and exploitation.) And it is also, like the relationship between master and slave, a kind of human interaction that is by Aristotle’s lights barely a community at all.

⁶² *EN* VIII.10, 1161a25–7.

⁶³ We will consider the nature of this equal status in more detail in Chapter 3.

⁶⁴ *EN* VIII.10, 1161a8.

A chaotic democracy of this kind presumably stretches the limits of community—it will be more like a heap than a composite whole.

All told, the discussion of household relationships in Book VIII of the *Nicomachean Ethics* gives Aristotle's students the means to distinguish between quite a wide variety of forms of rule: (i) 'despotic' rule, which is simple exploitation; (ii) 'royal' or 'paternal' rule, in which the ruler has complete, benevolent control over shared activities; (iii) 'aristocratic' or 'marital' rule, in which the ruled party limits and shapes the decisions of the person in charge; two kinds of 'oligarchic' rule, one of which (iv) involves someone who should merely be trusted but instead takes charge of shared action, while the other (v) involves a leader who fails to delegate and trust as much as he should; and finally (vi) political rule, in which natural differences do not dictate who should occupy what position, and human institutions must therefore take their place. To this list we might add (vii) the special case of 'democratic' rule. This does not quite belong on the list since it involves clusters of people who are strictly speaking neither friends nor communities; they cannot cooperate because no one is in charge.

I have given short shrift here to political rule. But in the *Politics* it takes on outsize importance, one which we will consider in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

POLITICAL RULE, EQUALITY, AND THE GOOD

I. ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ AND ΔΕΣΠΟΤΙΚΗ

I've been arguing that one of the main innovations in Aristotle's theory of rule is its expansive pluralism, according to which there are some seven kinds of rule, including three 'correct' kinds that are appropriate for free people. I'd now like to consider how this theory informs his political philosophy more generally. If, as I have argued, Aristotle's theory of rule is designed to sort all communities into kinds, we might expect it to figure prominently throughout the *Politics*. But in fact, through much of the treatise the Aristotle's pluralism about rule seems to drop away. To begin making sense of this different way of thinking about rule, particularly appropriate to the relations of fellow-citizens, let's start with two passages that are quite unlike the passages we focused on in Chapter 2. They make no mention of varied relationships in the household; in fact, they seem to revert to what I've called "rule dualism," talking as if there were just two kinds of rule: πολιτική and δεσποτική, political and despotic rule.

The first of the two passages I have in mind is in *Politics* III.4, in the middle of his discussion of the virtues of citizens. As so often, Aristotle finds himself faced with an *aporia*. Should promising citizens devote all their energy to learning to rule well, he asks, at least in the realm of personal relationships? There might seem to be a lot of reasons to think so. We know from the *Ethics* that there is a special connection between *phronêsis* and politics. And Aristotle has just argued that the rulers are the only people who need human (rather than merely civic) virtue in order to play their role in the city correctly. So all those concerned with developing and

exercising virtue seems to have some justification for devoting themselves exclusively to rule.¹ But then again (this is the second horn of the *aporia*) people are sometimes praised for learning the “political” virtue that involves not just ruling but being ruled by others (this position is especially well attested in the Laconizing literature of the time, which recommends subjecting young men to severe discipline in order to prepare them for their turn at power).² Aristotle lingers on the problems with this alternative. It’s not just that learning to be ruled takes time and energy that might be better spent elsewhere. More worryingly, submitting to rule might seem like something a free person should actively *avoid* doing, since it is widely thought to be abject and servile (ἀνδραποδώδης).³ If these *endoxa* are right, then however impressive the results of Spartan-style discipline and the modesty and obedience it demands from the young, it’s hard to avoid thinking that the practice imposes *de facto* slavery on free people.

To solve the problem, Aristotle turns to the binary analysis of rule that I now want to consider: πολιτική on the one hand, and δεσποτική on the other. Despotism, he says, is a kind of rule directed toward mere necessities (περὶ τὰ ἀναγκαῖα). It’s not clear exactly what “directed toward” means here. Perhaps it’s an empirical claim to the effect that most of the time, despotic rule involves getting slaves to take care of food, land, and so on. But whatever the exact nature of the link between despotism and necessity, Aristotle thinks it provides a reason for rulers to avoid learning to be ruled despotically. But this is not the end of the story. “There is,” Aristotle

¹ *Pol.* III.4, 1277a14–15. For the connection between πηρόνησις and πολιτική see especially *EN* VI.8, which opens with the claim that φρόνησις and πολιτική “are the same state though their being is different” (I take it that this means at least that ruling presupposes φρονήσις, and perhaps also that ruling over a city is among the highest ways of exercising rule.)

² *Pol.* III.4, 1277a31–33. My trans. For the ideal of learning to rule by being ruled, see, e.g., Xenophon’s *Constitution of the Spartans* II–IV. Such texts are an important influence on *Politics* VII and VIII.

³ *Pol.* III.4, 1277a35. For contempt for banausic arts, see *Pol.* I.11, 1258b37 and VIII.2, 1337b8–11, as well as Xenophon, *Oec.* IV.2 and *Mem.* II.1.6 and Plato *Rep.* VI, 495d–e. For an interesting argument that contempt for banausic work was not as widespread as these philosophers imply, see Maurice Balme “Attitudes to Work and Leisure in Ancient Greece,” *Greece & Rome*, Second Series 31:2 (1984), 140–52.

continues, “also a kind of rule exercised over those who are similar in birth and free. This we call political rule.”⁴ Submitting to political rule, Aristotle suggests, is not (or at least not necessarily) afflicted with the same indignity as submitting to despotic rule. Indeed, Aristotle, continues, in order to rule politically, we must first *be ruled* politically, just as the Spartanizing literature suggests. The *aporia* is solved: free people should avoid learning how to be ruled—despotically. But they should nevertheless seek out a dual education involving both ruling and being ruled—politically.

In *Politics* VII.3, to move on to the second passage, Aristotle is considering the value of the political life. Some people, he says, reject politics because they think it is an unimpressive business of bossing around inferiors. “Certainly,” Aristotle concedes,

there is nothing dignified about using a slave as a slave (οὐθὲν γὰρ τό γε δούλω ἢ δοῦλος χρῆσθαι σεμνόν); giving commands concerning necessary things has nothing noble about it (οὐδενὸς μετέχει τῶν καλῶν). But to consider every sort of rule as despotism is not correct. There is no less distance between rule over free persons and rule over slaves than between what is by nature free and what is by nature slavish.⁵

In the first passage we looked at, Aristotle was addressing people who oppose *being ruled* because they found it slavish. Here he is addressing people who object specifically to *ruling others*, or at least to dedicating one’s life to doing so. Again Aristotle’s interlocutors suppose that all rule shares objectionable properties with δεσποτική. And again, Aristotle concedes that one sort of rule, despotism, does indeed have the problems in question—it’s altogether unsatisfactory

⁴ *Pol.* III.4, 1277b7.

⁵ *Pol.* VII.3, 1325a24–29.

as a life project—but then distinguishes despotism from political rule, and says the latter is free from the problems that afflict the former.⁶

When people talk about the protreptic aspect of Aristotle's politics, they usually focus on the thorny question of how to fit together disengaged philosophical reflection on the one hand and active civic involvement on the other.⁷ But however we solve that age-old problem (if indeed it can be solved), we should not forget that Aristotle also hopes to convince his students to abandon bad ways of living a *political* life in favour of better ones. Perhaps his audience includes philosophers who will someday be invited to establish the law code for a new colony or to replace one that is failing, and the *Politics* will offer guidance to them.⁸ Even if it does not, Aristotle's teachings will help young people to pursue justice and the fine within their existing cities, at least to the limited extent that arguments can make a difference for such matters of character.⁹ His students, if they learn well, will deliberate about civic actions in the assembly and they will vote in the criminal courts; perhaps they will participate in other ways, for example as prosecutors.¹⁰ If they pay attention to Aristotle's strictures as they do all of this, it will help keep faction at bay, and make it more likely that the city's children will grow up in an environment that encourages them to do the same when they're old enough. In both of the passages we have just looked at, Aristotle uses the distinction between δεσποτική and πολιτική as part of this broad protreptic project. When he discusses it, he is encouraging his students to engage in politics in

⁶ He doesn't expand on this point either, although he does gesture back to an earlier discussion of it elsewhere, which is presumably the discussion of natural slavery in Book I.

⁷ There is an enormous literature on this question. Distinguished entries include Richard Kraut's *Aristotle on the Human Good* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) and Sarah Broadie, *Ethics with Aristotle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁸ For this possibility, Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁹ *EN* X.9.

¹⁰ See also Richard Mulgan, "Aristotle on the Value of Political Participation," *Political Theory* 18:2 (1990), 195–215.

addition to the other kinds of rule that they exercise at home, and even to consider dedicating their lives to it.

Aristotle's summons to πολιτική is evidently meant to appeal to a range of students and listeners. He hopes that his account of political rule will appeal to quietists disgusted with politics because they see it as unjust domination, and also opportunists attracted to rule because they think it will bring them profit and glory.¹¹ In both these cases, Aristotle contrasts πολιτική with δεσποτική in an attempt to persuade his listeners to involve themselves in a political practice consisting both of ruling and being ruled within a community of free, equal people, because he fears they won't have noticed its distinct nature.

The argument in our two passages, however, is negative: Aristotle points out that political rule does not (at least not necessarily) have the unappealing properties his audience might expect, and so relieves it of guilt by association. But what, if anything, does he think is *good* about political rule? And is his recommendation of political rule compatible with the praise he famously showers on kingship and aristocracy?¹² In this chapter, I'd like to argue that the answers are more complicated, and rather gloomier and more tentative, than is often thought.

The path to those answers will be circuitous. After a closer look at what Aristotle means by the distinction between πολιτική and δεσποτική (Section II), I turn to a surprisingly difficult claim about the communities suited to political rule: that they are composed of equals. I consider what this means (Sections III and IV), and in particular what it suggests about how people should treat similarity and difference (Section V and VI). This finally leads back to the main question

¹¹ The quietist tradition was presumably grounded in the Academy; see *Rep.* IX, 591e1–5, where Socrates says that true philosophers will decline to practice politics anywhere but in Kallipolis. This passage is discussed by Stephen Menn in "On Plato's Πολιτεία," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 21 (2005), 1–55. The opportunistic camp is of course associated with the sophists.

¹² E.g. *EN* VIII.10, 1160a35; *Pol.* III.13, 1284b25–34; *Pol.* IV.2, 1289a40.

about the value of political rule, which I argue (in Sections VII and VIII) needs a complex answer responding to a range of particular features of human nature and judgment.

II. POLITICAL RULE REVISITED

I argued in Chapter 2 that Aristotle thinks that every community, association, and relationship (κοινωνία—that is, every group in which people cooperate to achieve some shared goal), has a structure (τάξις) that determines positions of authority (ἀρχαί), including one that is ultimately in charge (κυριώτατος). I argued that Aristotle understands political rule as one such power structure, constituted by rule-by-turns or some other mechanism guaranteeing everyone a role in shared decisions. By contrast, he understands despotic rule as the crudest form of exploitation, where one person uses another as a tool, with only an instrumental interest in his or her own good. I'd now like to consider if he has these same definitions in mind in the two passages we have been considering, the ones where he praises political rule to his readers.

We might suppose that he does not, and take up a possibility I gestured at earlier, to the effect that when Aristotle contrasts πολιτική with δεσποτική, he abandons pluralism about rule and reverts to a simpler distinction between altruistic rule (“correct” rule in Aristotle’s jargon) on the one hand, and exploitative (“deviant”) rule on the other.¹³ If this were right, our passages would be using “πολιτική” and “δεσποτική” as synecdoches, standing in for broader categories of which political and despotic rule are only parts. Most notably, Aristotle would be lumping

¹³ And indeed, there is at least one place—in his initial attempt to classify the constitutions—where Aristotle does seem to identify correct rule with πολιτική and deviant rule with δεσποτική: “It is evident, then, that those constitutions that look to the common benefit turn out, according to what is unqualifiedly just, to be correct, whereas those which look only to the benefit of the rulers are mistaken and are deviations from the correct constitutions. For they are like δεσποτεία, whereas a *polis* is a community of free people” (*Pol.* III.6, 1279a16–21).

together political rule with paternal rule and marital rule, and abandoning distinctions that, as we've seen, he works hard to establish *Politics* I and *EN* VIII.

I think it's unlikely that his apologetics for πολιτική are supposed to apply to those other kinds of rule too. In *Politics* I, for example, Aristotle associates rule over women with mere life rather than living well, and so makes it clear that he agrees with most everyone in his circles that rule over women may be necessary but that it is trivial and insufficient for happiness, in much the same way as ruling over slaves. When he recommends political rule in *Politics* III and VII, he is evidently aiming at something much higher, a noble activity that could constitute a good life. And dialectically speaking, a defence of πολιτική that included the rule of women and children would anyway be a tough row to hoe. The audience members who turn up their noses at *any* kind of rule will likely think of ruling women and children as a case in point—they will be more easily moved by a narrower conception of πολιτική than a broader one.¹⁴

Moreover, in both of the passages we just considered Aristotle is concerned precisely with the feature that we have seen distinguishes political rule from the other kinds of 'correct' rule—the practice of ruling and being ruled in turn, or more broadly of sharing in power. The other non-political forms of benevolent rule clearly don't involve that. So when Aristotle invites his listeners to commit themselves to πολιτική, then, it seems that he is still thinking of political rule in its narrow sense. Indeed, the advantages and disadvantages of turn-taking and shared rule are a consistent focus of the *Politics* as a whole, which we can see in large part precisely as an extended assessment of the value of political rule.

Does he intend “δεσποτική” in a similarly narrow sense, according to which the subject's soul is completely subordinated to the interests of the ruler? The texts aren't explicit one way or

¹⁴ Xenophon, by contrast, goes to some trouble to argue that the training of women and (certain) slaves is a noble activity befitting a gentleman. See the Appendix to Chapter 1

the other, but it seems most likely that Aristotle is indicating a broader range of power relations. In the passage from *Politics* III discussed above, he takes the time to discuss the many kinds of necessary work (he calls them “kinds of slavery”) with which despotism is concerned. These include not just household slavery but also rule over poor people and manual labourers—people who are treated as free citizens in some cities, even if they would not be so treated under the best constitution.¹⁵ And so although he doesn’t quite say so, Aristotle seems to be thinking of any kind of rule that that isn’t political—that is, everything that we might call “hierarchical rule.”

Over the course of this chapter, in any case, I will be arguing that Aristotle thinks that political rule stands apart, not just from deviant kinds of rule like despotism and oligarchy, but also from the other kinds of ‘correct’ rule. There is a sense in which I think this helps to make sense of what we can reasonably call Aristotle’s conceptions of “politics.” Indeed, I will refer variously to Aristotle’s views about “political practices,” “the value of politics,” and so on. All of this seems to me to capture an important aspect of Aristotle’s thought, according to which the give-and-take required by dealing with people similar to oneself is a central aspect of human life, distinct from the rest.

But it also highlights an important area of possible misunderstanding. “Πολιτική” and its cognates refer to a wide range of different concepts in Aristotle himself, and modern commentators have piled on various anachronistic abuses of the concept of “politics” besides. So before launching into my argument proper, I’d like to take a moment to note explicitly some of the things that I will *not* be addressing when I discuss what Aristotle thinks is good about political rule. For one thing, it excludes the much broader concepts of (i) the science of politics,

¹⁵ *Pol.* III.4, 1277a36–b3: “Now we speak of several forms of slave; for the sorts of work are several. One sort is that done by menials [οἱ χερνῆτες]: as the term itself indicates, these are people who live by their hands; the manufacturing artisan [βάνουσοις] belongs among them. Hence among some peoples the craftsmen did not partake in offices in former times, prior to the emergence of rule of the people in its extreme form.” Trans. Lord.

and (ii) human activity that take the *polis* as its end. Politics in those senses cover pretty much all of human life. After all, Aristotle famously writes that that human beings are political animals, that all communities exist for the sake of the political community, that the actions of individuals are at their best when they take the *polis* as a whole as their end, and so on.¹⁶ These are certainly crucial tenets in Aristotle's practical philosophy, and they might give us some reason to say that *everything* is 'political' in Aristotle's account of human affairs. But they should not distract us from the fact that political *rule* is just one kind of social organization among others.

Perhaps more subtly, we should not confuse the distinction between political and other kinds of rule with any version of the distinction between household and city, or worse yet between public and private.¹⁷ Of course, Aristotle does think there is a crucial difference between households and cities. Most notably, the ones merely keep us alive while the others let us live *well* and thereby attain the human end. But, as we have seen, the distinction between political rule and the other kinds cuts across this distinction between household and *polis*. Not all groups of human beings are ruled politically (not, for example, those ruled either by godlike kings or tyrants); nor do all of the smaller institutions governing the *polis*—assemblies, councils, and courts, as well as individual rulers and magistrates—necessarily use political rule, even in regimes that are by and large political. Indeed, Aristotle notes that the various organs of government may use different kinds of rule, as when deliberation and magistracy are oligarchic but the courts are aristocratic.¹⁸ Meanwhile some communities only distantly related to the official organs of government provide paradigm cases of political rule. Interactions between

¹⁶ All human beings are political animals: e.g. *EN* I.7, 1097b11, *Pol.* I.2, 1253a2–3; all communities are for the sake of the political community: *Pol.* I.1, 1252a5–7.

¹⁷ For a helpful sketch of some of the difficulties of articulating ancient political thought with later ways of thinking about the concept of "politics," see Paul Cartledge, *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 11–13.

¹⁸ *Pol.* VI.1, 1317a5–7.

equals in the marketplace, the gymnasium, and the battlefield are cases in point, even if they take place in oligarchies, and so too is the friendship of brothers similar in age, even though it is within the household.

When Aristotle suggests that his readers stop identifying rule with domination and exploitation, and instead invites them to learn both how to rule and how to be ruled, he is not just inviting them to live in *poleis*, as they certainly do already, or to participate more enthusiastically in any given political institution, which may or may not advance the cause of political rule and may or may not be a good idea under particular circumstances. Moreover, he is not asking a question that occupies him elsewhere, of what kind of *polis* is best. Rather, he is inviting the people in his audience to cooperate with their neighbours in a particular way, and thus to forge a certain kind of community (a political community, but not necessarily a *polis*) with them.¹⁹ Our question is why Aristotle thinks that this kind of cooperation—that of people who take turns ruling and being ruled by people they regard as their equals—is a good thing (if he does indeed think so), and more precisely whether he thinks political communities are better than more hierarchical ones where some people permanently rule their inferiors.

III. EQUALITY OF VALUE

When Aristotle distinguishes political rule from the other kinds, he usually mentions not only rule by turns, the practice that I have argued constitutes political rule, but two *properties enjoyed by the members of political communities*: freedom and equality. Aristotle associates these very closely with political rule; indeed, he sometimes uses them to provide something like a

¹⁹ In this chapter, I will use “neighbours” as a quasi-technical term, to refer to the other people in a community with someone. I have in mind, for example, the “others” Aristotle refers to when he says that justice is virtue πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλοις.

definition, as when, early in the *Politics*, he distinguishes πολιτική from both δεποστεία and οικονομική by stating that it is “rule over people who are free and equal” (ἡ δὲ πολιτικὴ ἐλευθέρων καὶ ἴσων ἀρχή).²⁰

For Aristotle, as for his contemporaries, freedom is in the first instance a negative concept—you are treated as free whenever you are *not* treated as a slave.²¹ And he thinks that slaves (at least when so by nature) are people whose good should not be pursued for its own sake but for the sake of their rulers—people, in other words, who deserve to be used as tools. When people are free, by contrast, this status is necessary and sufficient for them to be ruled in view of their own good. Since political rule is a form of benevolent rule, it’s clear why the citizens suited to it must be free.

But freedom does not by itself entitle anyone to political rule—it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for politics. Children are free, but they must be ruled monarchically rather than politically; women are free, but must be ruled aristocratically.²² To qualify for politics, you must not only be free, but also *equal* to the other members of some community. Equality, then, is the mark that distinguishes political communities as special and distinct from all other relationships, and I would like to spend a large part of this chapter considering how this concept illuminates Aristotle’s views about political rule.

²⁰ *Pol.* I.7, 1255b19–20

²¹ Aristotle doesn’t say explicitly how freedom should be defined, but he does single out what he considers the most common mistaken definitions. The reason extreme democracies are unstable, he says, is that they define freedom badly, as doing whatever one wants. *Pol.* V.9, 1310a28–35. Similarly, at *Pol.* IV.2, 1317b115 he says that this false conception of freedom leads people to wrongly resist submitting to the rule of others. For more on the general Greek definition of freedom, see Mogens Hansen, “Democratic Freedom and the Concept of Freedom in Plato and Aristotle,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 50 (2010), 1–27.

²² Although note that Aristotle also describes marriage as a qualified kind of political rule. See Chapter 2.

What does it mean for the members of some community to be ἴσοι, equals?²³ This may seem like a trivial question, one whose answer is obvious from Aristotle's surface meaning, as well as from political common sense and the bare meaning of the word, both in English and Greek. In its most basic sense, for Aristotle, equality is a relationship between quantities: if we double the length of a line two units long, then it's possible to 'fit' (ἀρμόττειν) it to line that is four units long—the length of the two lines will be equal; some analogous but more complex operation will allow us to say that in the area of a some squares is equal to the area of some circles. Surely, it would seem, it's perfectly obvious how to extend this to people. To say that some people are "equals" must simply mean that *each person's value is equal to the value of each other person*. Let's call this conception of equality "equality of value."

This is certainly how Aristotle's references to the equality of citizens are normally understood. And there's a reason for that—it's sometimes exactly what he means when he describes people as equals. Most prominently, Aristotle uses the concept in this way to establish common ground with his main political rivals, democrats and oligarchs of various descriptions. Thus at *Politics* III.9 he says:

Justice seems to be equality, and it is, but not for everyone, only *for equals*. Justice also seems to be inequality, since indeed it is, but not for everyone, only *for unequals*. They [i.e. democrats and oligarchs, and maybe other partisans] disregard the "for whom," however, and judge badly.... So since what is just is just for certain people, and consists in dividing things and people in the same way (as we said earlier in the *Ethics*), they agree about what constitutes equality in the thing but disagree about it in the people...

²³ This is not, I want to stress, the question of *Ethics* V about what it means to *treat people equally* (though we will get to that soon enough), but rather a question about the meaning of equality as a *property* that people may have as a group or in relation to each other.

For one lot thinks that if they are unequal in one respect (wealth, say) they are wholly unequal, whereas the other lot thinks that if they are equal in one respect (freedom, say) they are wholly equal. But about the most authoritative considerations they do not speak.²⁴

We will return later to the parts of this quote that I've elided. But for now the important point is that it's perfectly obvious that when Aristotle describes people as "equals" here, he means "people of equal value, according to some standard."

Here as elsewhere, Aristotle commits himself to two basic claims connecting this kind of equality to just distributions. He takes one of them to be a matter of common sense, and the other to be more philosophically difficult. The common-sense view is that if two or more people are of equal value according to some appropriate standard, justice requires that they be treated equally. This invites the question of *what* standard is appropriate. As we saw, oligarchs think the relevant consideration is wealth, and democrats think it is freedom. Clearly, other contexts would call for other standard: if you're choosing a doctor the relevant standard will be his ability to produce health; if you're judging a footrace, it will be how quickly the competitors ran. But these sorts of considerations are "just only to a point." That is, they neglect the standard necessary to achieve *unqualified* justice (διὰ τὸ λέγειν μέχρι τινὸς ἑκατέρους δίκαιόν τι νομίζουσι δίκαιον λέγειν ἀπλῶς). The consideration necessary to establish unqualified justice, the "most authoritative" (κυριώτατον) one, is simply *virtue*.²⁵ At bottom and from the point of view of a philosopher, the members of a community are ἴσοι (and therefore suited to equal treatment) when each of them is equal in virtue to each of the others.

²⁴ *Pol.* III.9, 1280a10–24. For similar uses of "ἴσος," see for example *EN* V. 3, 1131a22 and *Pol.* II.7, 1267a1–2.

²⁵ Although see Richard Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) for an argument that the standard is contribution-to-the-common-good.

If this interpretation of Aristotle's conception of equality seems obvious and uncontroversial, it might seem also to lead to an easy answer to our question about the value of political rule. Since Aristotle thinks that the members of his audience do indeed live in communities with lots of others roughly equal to them, a simple principle of desert requires that they adopt political rule. For if everyone is the same or similar, then everyone deserves the same thing, and that includes both the honours associated with political office and the leisure associated with release from it, and thus everyone should spend some time at the helm and some away from it. We have, then, a simple and compelling story beginning with a pre-political equality, moving through the requirement that equals be treated equality, culminating in a distinctive set of procedures and practices, fit to be embodied in the institutions of government.²⁶

IV. EQUALITY AND EQUALIZATION

You will have gathered, however, that I think there are problems with this story and the definition of equality that underlies it. One place where they show themselves is in the claim that the members of a political community can be equal in *several ways*. Aristotle makes this point at *Nicomachean Ethics* V.6, in a passage about political justice and the communities in which it is appropriate. "What we are looking for," he says,

is both what is just without qualification and what is just in the context of the political community. This is found where people share their lives together with a view to self-

²⁶ We may note in passing that this picture corresponds to a standard liberal picture of politics. Equality, or a right to equal consideration, is on this picture the fundamental pre-political fact, and the central consideration necessary to give an account of political justice. A just political regime, on this picture, will preserve and recognize that pre-political equality, building it into the basic structure of society. Aristotle might well seem to be doing just this, moving from the natural equality of the free Greek men to the claim that they should rule and be ruled in turn.

sufficiency: people who are free, and equal either proportionately or arithmetically [ἴσων ἢ κατ' ἀναλογίαν ἢ κατ' ἀριθμόν].²⁷

Aristotle is unquestionably thinking of the same kind of community as in the passages we have been considering all along, namely political communities made up of people who are free and equal. But here he specifies that the people can be equal either arithmetically on the one hand, or proportionally on the other. We should read this passage alongside another one from the *Politics* (which itself points backward to *EN V*), in which he names yet a third way of being equal that is involved in political community and the practice of rule by turns. “It is reciprocal equality [τὸ ἴσον τὸ ἀντιπεπονθὸς],” he says, “that preserves cities, as was said earlier in the *Ethics*. This is necessarily the case even among persons who are free and equal, for all cannot rule at the same time.”²⁸

It's worth pausing to note that the bare idea that politics involves several ways of being equal is already enough to put some pressure on the conception of equality we just sketched, which I've been calling equality of value. The point of Aristotle's arbitration of the dispute between democrats and oligarchs is to identify the *one* standard for judging equality of value that is true ἀπλῶς, and to show how democrats and oligarchs depart from it. So even if we didn't know what Aristotle meant by geometrical, arithmetical, and reciprocal equality, we would have reason to think that while some one of them might amount to equality of value, the others must not. And it would follow that when Aristotle's describes the parties to political rule as “equals” he likely doesn't *just* mean that that they are equal in value—for there are other kinds of equality at work as well.

²⁷ *EN V.6*, 1134a27.

²⁸ *Pol. II.2*, 1261a30–34. In the passage from the *Ethics*, Aristotle says that reciprocity plays an important role in the city, but he doesn't refer by name to something called “reciprocal equality.”

But of course the tools to make sense of these three kinds of equality are near to hand. And I would like to argue that looking at them closely makes it still clearer that when Aristotle says that the members of political communities are “equals,” he does not mean by any stretch of the imagination that they are equal in value. In fact, *none* of these three kinds of equality amounts to equality of value. All three are treated in a very well-known text: *EN V* (or *EE IV*), chapters 3–5.

Proportional Equality

The first kind of equality is “equality according to geometrical proportion.” As with other species of equality, Aristotle introduces it in order to make sense a particular kind of justice: the kind shown in “the distribution of honour, wealth, and the other divisible assets of the community” (τὸ ἐν ταῖς διανομαῖς τιμῆς ἢ χρημάτων ἢ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα μεριστὰ τοῖς κοινωνοῦσι τῆς πολιτείας).²⁹ Now, Aristotle’s conception of distributive justice is well known and easily understood. He states it clearly and simply midway through *EN V.3*. “Awards,” he says,

should be according to merit; for all men agree that what is just in distribution must be according to merit in some sense, though they do not all specify the same sort of merit, but democrats identify it with the status of freeman, supporters of oligarchy with wealth (or with noble birth), and supporters of aristocracy with excellence.³⁰

Aristotle thinks it obvious that desert is determined by a person’s worth (although, as we’ve already seen, he treats the criterion by which we should judge worth as a matter of some controversy). And it follows easily that justice in distributions requires that more deserving

²⁹ *EN V.2*, 1130b35.

³⁰ *EN V.3*, 1131a24–30.

people get more and that less deserving people get less. He himself stresses that there is nothing complicated or controversial about this.

What is harder to understand is why Aristotle buries this simple idea in a much longer argument that takes up all of *EN* V.3. That argument is so dense and jargon-laden, even by Aristotle's standards, that at first it's tempting to imagine that he's trying to impress some mathematicians who stopped by his classroom. I'll quote it at length:

(1) Since the unjust man is unequal and the unjust act unequal, it is clear that there is also an intermediate for the unequal. And this is the equal; for in any kind of action in which there is a more and a less there is also what is equal. If, then, the unjust be unequal, the just is equal, as all men suppose it to be, even apart from argument. And since the equal is intermediate, the just will be an intermediate. (2) Now equality implies at least two things. Necessarily, then, the just involves at least four terms: the persons with an interest are two, and the things in which they deal are two. (3) And there will be the same sort of equality between the people and between the things involved, in so far as the second pair, the things, stand to each other in the same relationship as the first; for if the persons are not equal to each other, they will not have equal shares. [Here I elide the discussion of distribution according to worth quoted just above.] (4) The just, then, represents a kind of proportion. For the proportionate is not just a property of numbers that consist of abstract units, but of number in general; proportion is equality of ratios, and involves four terms at least (that discrete proportion involves four terms is plain, but so does continuous proportion, for it uses one term as two and mentions it twice; e.g. as the line A is to the line B, so is the line B to the line C; the line B, then, has been mentioned twice, so that if the line B be assumed twice, the proportional terms will be four); and the just, too,

involves at least four terms, and the ratio is the same—for there is a similar distinction between the persons and between the things. As the term A, then, is to B, so will C be to D, and therefore, *alternando*, as A is to C, B will be to D. Therefore also the whole is in the same ratio to the whole; and this coupling the distribution effects, and, if the terms are so combined, effects justly. The conjunction, then, of the term A with C and of B with D is what is just in distribution, and this species of the just is intermediate, and the unjust is what violates the proportion; for the proportional is intermediate, and the just is proportional. (6) Mathematicians call this sort of proportion ‘geometrical’; for it is in geometrical proportion that one whole also stands to the other whole as each term stands to the other in a given pair.³¹

The argument’s main conclusion appears at 1131a29, at the beginning of the section I’ve numbered (3): “the just, then, is a kind of proportion” (ἔστιν ἄρα τὸ δίκαιον ἀνάλογόν τι). The main support for this conclusion appears in (2), in the form of the claim that the just “involves at least four terms” (ἐν ἐλαχίστοις εἶναι τέτταρσιν). Aristotle supports this intermediate conclusion by arguing that there must be (in the first place) at least two *recipients* whenever goods are distributed (Aristotle refers to them collectively as the οἷς, the “for whom” of justice), and these must, moreover, be considered in light of the *shares* each receives, the “of which” ἐν οἷς, or simply the “stuff,” πράγματα. If we assign a value to each of these four items, Aristotle says at (4), we see that distributive justice turns out to be a proportion-of-proportions: the ratios created by the two pairs of values will be equal. For example, if I’m barely enkratic, and we represent that by saying that I have a value of 4, while you are moderately virtuous, so that you are a 6, and then we further suppose that I get some small pile of goods with a value of 2, then justice in

³¹ *EN* V.3, 1131a20–b15. Trans. Rowe, modified.

distribution requires that you get goods worth 3. If you do, the ratio formed by me and my share, 4:2, is equal to the ratio formed by you and yours, 6:3. (Or, to put the same calculation differently, the ratio formed by the two of us, 4:6, is equal to the ratio formed by the shares, 2:3.)

As I've said more than once now, this is a complicated way to put a simple point, especially one that Aristotle thinks is obvious, and one that he explains much more straightforwardly as an aside in the middle of this very stretch of text. Why does he even bother with the thesis that the just is a kind of proportion, with the highly artificial device of assigning numerical values to people, and with the mathematical rigours needed to show how everything fits together? One reason, stressed by several commentators, is that assigning numbers in this way makes it easier to see each share of goods as a mean between too much and too little, so that there is a connection, however tenuous, between his treatment of the virtue of justice and his definition of virtue as a mean state.³² This is indeed one preoccupation of *EN V*, and Aristotle does gesture at it in the introduction to the argument, section (1).

But it is less important than another point, also stressed (and with greater emphasis) in our section (1): that the discussion of proportions illuminates the role of equality (here τὸ ἴσον) in just distributions.

Aristotle thinks we need to get clear about proportions precisely in order to solve an *aporia* about justice and equality. We've seen the first of the conflicting *endoxa* already: that desert determines justice in distribution, so that if some parties to a distribution are better than others, they will get appropriately bigger shares. An obvious consequence, on the assumption that some people are better than others, is that in many cases just distribution will involve

³² *EN V.3*, 1131a11. Commentaries that explain the mathematical bent of *EN V* in terms of Aristotle's interest in the mean include Michael Pakaluk, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics VIII and IX*, Clarendon Aristotle Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Richard Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

unequal people and unequal shares. But this conflicts with the second *endoxon*, which is the main point of our section (1), namely that everyone thinks prephilosophically (ἄνευ λόγου) that justice, both as a virtue and as a state of affairs, is grounded in, or even identical with, equality. Thus unjust people are thought to be unequal (or “unfair”—ἄνιστοι), and so are unjust acts and situations.

So the problem is that while most everyone thinks that justice must secure some sort of equality, everyone *also* takes it for granted that just distributions often require inequality—that is, inequality of goods, corresponding to inequality of persons. Aristotle’s solution, which justifies the seemingly unnecessary excursion into mathematics, is to show that even when people are unequal in virtue (or according to some other standard), and even when they are therefore treated differently, *some* two parts of the picture really are equal to each other. To wit, as Aristotle says in (4), “proportion is equality of ratios.”³³ If we endorse the second *endoxon*, he is saying, we are right to think that equality has an important role to play in just distributions, and even that justice is identical with or constituted by equality. But we would be wrong to imagine that it follows that *people* are necessarily equal or suited to equal treatment. That may sometimes be the case, but the things that *must* be equal are rather the ratios they form with each other and with the things distributed. Thus when Aristotle says that the members of a political community may be “geometrically equal,” he does not mean that every citizen will be equal to every other citizen. Instead, he is willing to describe them collectively as “equals” (in the sense that suits them to political rule) whether or not they are equal in value to each other, provided equality enters into their relationships in the oblique way we’ve just described.³⁴

³³ This involves a controversial thesis in the philosophy of mathematics. Euclid avoids speaking of ratios as equal, presumably because they aren’t magnitudes.

³⁴ Neither the puzzle nor the solution here is original to Aristotle. The second *endoxon*, that justice is equality, is obviously a democratic claim, and a trace of a real rhetorical victory by the champions of democracy. But as F.D.

Arithmetic Equality

In *Politics* V, Aristotle seems simply to identify arithmetic equality with what I've been calling equality of value.³⁵ But when he gives arithmetic equality a fuller treatment in *EN* V, the story is rather different. There he uses arithmetic equality not to indicate the democratic ideal of equal people treated equally, but to explain how justice figures in a particular subsection of social life—"in personal interactions" (συναλλάγμασι), by which he mainly means cases where one person injures another in such a way that some sort of retribution is needed. In such cases, he writes,

the law pays attention solely to the difference created by the damage done, and where one person is committing an injustice, another suffering it, or one person inflicted damage and another has been damaged, it treats them as equal. So what is unjust in this sense the judge tries to equalize, because it is a matter of inequality; for in fact when one person is struck and another does the striking, or if one person actually kills and the other is killed, the effect of the action and the doing of it constitute unequal parts of a division—and the aim of imposing a loss on the doer is to equalize things, taking away from the gain realized.³⁶

Harvey shows in a classic discussion, the association of democracy with equality was by Thucydides' time coming to be seen as a problem for democrats. Thus Pericles' funeral oration is remarkably defensive about equality: he worries about critics who think that "democracy is not intelligent or ἴσον," and he insists that "while the law secures equality to all alike in their private disputes, the claim of excellence is also recognized; and when a citizen is in any way distinguished, he is generally preferred to the public service, not in rotation, but for merit." Harvey shows that the distinction between arithmetic and geometric proportion comes from Pythagorean musical theory. In a fragment by Archytas, we learn that the series 6, 4, 2 instantiates arithmetic proportion, since 6 exceeds 4 by *the same amount* as 4 exceeds 2. By contrast, the series 8, 4, 2 exemplifies geometrical proportion: 8 "stands in the same relation" to 4 that 4 does to 2. The difference between these sorts of proportion is relevant to politics because geometric proportion *acknowledges the value* of the numbers involved, just as distributors should acknowledge the value of the people to whom they distribute (F.D. Harvey, "Two Kinds of Equality," *Classica et Medievalia* 26 (1965), 101–146). Plato winks at this view at *Gorg.* 337-8.

³⁵ *Pol.* V.1, 1301b30–33

³⁶ *EN* V.4, 1132a2–10.

Once again, the idea is simple, and it is neither a matter of recognizing people's equality nor of treating them alike. Whenever one person wrongs another, he or she can be represented as gaining something at the other's expense. The amounts gained and lost are not obvious. Transactions bring about highly abstract social and ethical gains and losses, in particular of honour, and even with material goods the amount gained needn't be equal to the amount lost, since a possession can be more valuable to one person than another. This is presumably why a judge is needed to determine how much has been gained and lost, and to use that assessment to assign punishments, or presumably compensation, that undo both the gain and loss. If justice is served, then insofar as possible neither party ultimately benefits or suffers as a result of the exchange (though of course there are complications—an injury may, for example, be severe enough that the person who imposed it cannot give a large enough compensation, etc.).

What is just in these cases, Aristotle says, is “having the equal before and after” (τὸ ἴσον ἔχειν καὶ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον).³⁷ That is, the quantity of goods that I have before our transaction must be equal, insofar as possible, to the quantity I have after justice has been done. The dialectic here is the same as with geometrical equality. Aristotle is bound by received opinion to give equality some role in justice; and he obliges, but in a way that does not preserve the idea that citizens are equal *to each other*, as democrats suppose. Like geometrical equality, arithmetic equality as it is defined here does not require that I be equal to you in worth, nor that I have the same amount of goods as you, nor again that we be treated in the same way.

³⁷ *EN* V.4, 1132b19–21.

Reciprocal Equality

Reciprocal equality is the most obscure of the three kinds of equality in *EN V*. It might roughly be characterized as equality of exchange. Aristotle's first example of ἀντιπεπονθός is *lex talionis*, which requires straightforwardly giving what one has received or taking what one has had taken. But Aristotle quickly moves on to commercial transactions, where reciprocity is necessary for a fair exchange of *unlike* goods: one house is to be exchanged for a great many shoes, or the equivalent in currency. When, in *Politics II*, he writes that reciprocity preserves the political community, he seems to have two sorts of exchange in mind: on the one hand, the ruler provides benefits to the people he rules, and he repays them in honour; on the other hand, those who are ruled repay their rulers by taking a turn in command, and vice versa.³⁸

It's less than perfectly clear how reciprocity is supposed to fit into Aristotle's typology of justice. On the one hand, it might seem to be a part of corrective justice. He says that this concerns two kinds of transactions; some are voluntary, like buying selling and lending, while the others involuntary, like theft and poisoning.³⁹ Since his main treatment of corrective justice concerns the involuntary cases, and it seems natural to suppose that the treatment of commercial justice will cover the voluntary part. But then again when he introduces commercial justice, he immediately says it "is not compatible" or "cannot be harmonized" (οὐκ ἐφαρμόττει) with either distributive or arithmetic justice.⁴⁰ To make matters worse, he also says that reciprocity has a

³⁸ *Pol. II.2*, 1261a30. On the exchange of honour for benefits, see Marguerite Deslauriers, "Political Unity and Inequality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, edited by Deslauriers and Pierre Destrée (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 117-43).

³⁹ *EN V.2*, 1131a3-4. This reading goes back at least to Aquinas. For recent interpretations along these lines, see e.g. Finley's "Aristotle on Economic Analysis," "Aristotle on Economic Analysis," *Past and Present* 47:1 (1970), 3-25 and Gabriel Danzig, "The Political Character of Aristotelian Reciprocity," *Classical Philology* 95:4 (2000), 399-424.

⁴⁰ *EN V.5*, 1132b25-6. Proponents of this interpretation include Gauthier and Jolif, *Aristote: L'Éthique à Nicomaque* (Louvain : Nauwerlaerts, 1959).

place in communities of exchange (ἐν ταῖς κοινωνίαις ταῖς ἀλλακτικαῖς), only if it is “proportionate rather than equal” (κατ’ ἀναλογίαν καὶ μὴ κατ’ ἰσότητα)⁴¹

I frankly don’t think Aristotle gives an entirely clear or consistent picture of how reciprocal equality is related to the other two kinds. But the crucial point for our purposes is conveyed by the last of the claims I’ve just cited: however reciprocal equality fits into his larger scheme, it does *not* presuppose the equality of the parties, either in virtue or according to any other standard of value. Aristotle’s main concern in *EN* V.5 is to make sense of justice in the exchange of unlike goods (shoes for a house, in his favourite example), and of the role that need and currency play in mediating between them. And so we might expect that this would be the kind of justice most inclined to treat people as equals—after all, the worth of the people making an exchange has nothing to do with the value of the items traded. This would mean that communities governed by ‘reciprocal equality’ need not be composed of people equal to each other in value. But in fact Aristotle goes further—he says that reciprocal commercial transactions presuppose the *inequality* of the exchange partners. Here’s what he says:

No community is formed from two doctors. It is formed *from a doctor and a farmer, and, in general, from people who are unequal and need to be equalized*. This is why all items for exchange must be comparable in some way. Currency came along to do exactly this, and in a way becomes an intermediate, since it measures everything, and so measures excess and deficiency—for instance how many shoes are equal to a house. Hence *as builder is to shoemaker, so must the number of shoes be to a house*; for if this does not happen there will be no exchange and no community.⁴²

⁴¹ *EN* V.5, 1332b35–9.

⁴² *EN* V.5, 1133a17–25, trans. Irwin. My italics, of course.

Scholars have tried in vain to explain or to explain away the idea that the relative value of a builder and a shoemaker will somehow enter into the price the one pays for the other's product.⁴³ But Aristotle leaves no reasonable room for doubt that on his view reciprocal equality presupposes not just a difference between goods to be exchanged, but also an inequality between parties to the exchange. Far from presupposing the equality of the parties, commercial transactions presuppose their *inequality*, and correct for it in some obscure way, equalizing not just goods but people. Thus Aristotle does not think equality of value is necessary for reciprocity, any more than for proportional and arithmetic equality.

Equalization

One remarkable feature of this account is that Aristotle takes it for granted in all kinds of equality that some political actor (either a distributor or a judge) must *do something* to make the relevant values come out equal. Equality of value is a simple relational property, antecedent to what anyone does. Geometrical, arithmetic, and reciprocal equality are relational properties that are partly constituted by *social practices*, things that people may or may not do to others, or have done to themselves. Thus Aristotle speaks throughout the discussion not only of “equality” (ἰσότης), but also of “equalizing” (ισάζειν). While currency and need equalize people and products, a judge “equalizes” the unfair situations created by unjust transactions (τὸ ἄδικον τοῦτο ἄνισον ὃν ισάζειν πειρᾶται ὁ δικαστής).

Elsewhere in the *Ethics* he returns to the idea that *people* can be “equalized” through proportional distribution. When a better person is friends with a worse one, Aristotle writes, the

⁴³ Moses Finley approvingly quotes Joachim as describing the core doctrine as “unintelligible” (“Aristotle on Economic Analysis,” *Past and Present* 47:1 [1970], 9). He gives a useful survey of earlier attempts to interpret the passage up to 1970. For a helpful recent discussion, including a helpful discussion of more recent literature, see Gabriel Danzig, “The Political Character of Aristotelian Reciprocity,” *Classical Philology* 95:4 (2000), 399–424.

superior should love less and the inferior should love more, so that the one who deserves more gets more love. “For when the loving is distributed according to merit,” he says, “that produces equality of a sort” (ὅταν γὰρ κατ’ ἀξίαν ἢ φίλησις γίνηται, τότε γίνεταί πως ἰσότης).⁴⁴ He returns to this point a couple of pages later: “It is most of all in this way that unequal people can be friends—for it equalizes them” (οὕτω δ’ ἂν καὶ οἱ ἄνισοι μάλιστα εἶεν φίλοι: ἰσάζοιντο γὰρ ἄν).⁴⁵ When he says, then, that the members of a political community are geometrically, arithmetically, or reciprocally equal, he means not that that they are equal in value, but rather that someone has, wherever necessary, given them things or taken them away, incorporating equality into their relationships in a way that is very different from that standardly accepted by democratic champions of equality.

Ἴσωνομία?

At this point, someone may object that I’m overlooking a crucial part of Aristotle’s conception of equality. All three forms of justice, the objector will say, presuppose a single, further kind of equality. Aristotle evidently thinks that criminal justice, fair distribution, and reasonable exchange all involve applying a single, consistent set of rules to every member of some group of people. And this recalls a conception of equality that certainly existed in Aristotle’s time—indeed, one that was the main form of equality in Athenian political discourse and practice. The idea (often expressed with the term ἰσωνομία, roughly “equality before the law”) was that the law should treat all citizens without favoritism, and this was used variously by disenfranchised groups like the poor to claim a place in government. Aristotle too thinks that everyone should be treated equally so long as there is no relevant difference between them. So when he says that

⁴⁴ *EN* VIII.7, 1158b24–29

⁴⁵ *EN* VIII.8, 1159a37–b3.

political communities are made up of equals (the objector will ask), doesn't it stand to reason that *this* be what he has in mind: that there can be no inequality of treatment within such a community that isn't dictated by a fair, objectively determined inequality of merit?

It seems to me for several reasons that this cannot be the conception of equality underlying political rule. There is in the first place an argument from silence. Although Aristotle spends a lot of time explaining what it is for people to count as "equals" in various ways (as we've just seen at some length), equality of status never appears in this discussion, nor does he use the word ἰσωνομία or otherwise signal any sympathy for the idea.

Second, if equality of status requires only that inequalities of treatment be based on inequalities of merit, then free Athenians and natural slaves enjoy equality of status. After all, Aristotle thinks that natural slaves should get worse treatment than the free because they are inferior in objective, morally relevant ways.⁴⁶ But the sense of equality that we're after is used precisely to signal a *difference* between the community formed by fellow citizens of cities like Athens and that formed by a master and his slaves. When Aristotle describes the members of political communities as equals, he must mean something more than this.

Finally, as Paul Cartledge has well argued, the standard Greek conception of equality was tied up with what (or rather who) the citizens were *not*. Political or civic equality, he says, meant equality of status and respect within the conceptual framework of the Greeks' normative socio-political system of polarised hierarchy. Insofar as the Greek citizen was by definition male not female, free not slave, native insider not stranger or outsider, and

⁴⁶ In the same way, women are parties to distributive justice within the household, and the same might even go for beasts.

adult not a child, he was equal to all other citizens, and deserving therefore of equal respect, privilege, consideration, and treatment.⁴⁷

This conception of equal status is a version of equality of value: it treats any two people as equal just so long as they aren't marked out as inferior because of their foreign birth, sex, etc. But as we have seen, Aristotle argues against such standards for equal treatment, including notably the "democratic" conception that people should be treated alike if they are free. Equal freedom is not equality *ἀπλῶς*, and Aristotle argues emphatically that political thinkers must acknowledge the political significance of *other* kinds of similarity and difference, most notably virtue. On the democratic view, all citizens come out as exactly equal because all of them are *entirely* or *perfectly* male, free, native, etc. But Aristotle thinks that the best standard for judging people's value is virtue, and this is a matter of degree. More generally, the considerations that matter to him for politics are differences of degree, not of kind, and he does not think that fellow-citizens are *exactly* equal to each other in any sense that matters.

V. SIMILARITY, DIFFERENCE, PRETENCE, AND IMITATION

To summarize: I've been considering what Aristotle means when he says that political rule is appropriate for communities of equals. I've just finished arguing that he doesn't mean that the people in question are equal in virtue or according to any other standard of value, but rather that equality is introduced into their relationship through institutions and practices that 'equalize' them by responding in various ways to their similarities and differences. I'd now like to look more closely at how the similarities and differences between members of political communities

⁴⁷ This quote is from *Ancient Greek Political Thought in Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); his full version of the argument is in *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

are related to the practice of ruling and being ruled by turns. To do this, it will be useful to gather a few further observations about Aristotle's views about political communities.

For one thing, not only are the various sorts of equality characteristic of political rule compatible with differences in value, but real-life political communities *reliably include* people of unequal worth, as a matter of empirical fact. Aristotle takes it to be obvious that “it is impossible for a city-state to consist entirely of good people,”⁴⁸ and he argues at various points in *Pol* IV-VI that although under normal circumstances the unwashed poor—in particular, βάνουσοι and θῆτες, menial workers—must be granted some share in political rule, higher offices should be restricted to the rich.⁴⁹ Moreover, even among full-fledged citizens of the ideal city sketched in *Politics* VII, some citizens will be more deserving of rule than others at any given time: the young should be soldiers, and political rule reserved for older people, who have a greater share of *phronêsis*. This arrangement, Aristotle says, “contains conformity with merit” (ἔχει γὰρ αὕτη ἡ διαίρεσις τὸ κατ’ ἀξίαν).⁵⁰ Moreover, the assumption that political communities contain better and worse members runs through even his more abstract formulations of the various kinds of justice. When he says that distributive justice treats equals equally *and* unequals unequally, this clearly suggests that we can expect our communities (including our *political* communities, where we have seen distributive justice is most at home) to contain people both equal and unequal to ourselves. Some members of political communities, then, will be better in morally significant ways than others.

⁴⁸ *Pol.* III.4, 1277a1.

⁴⁹ For a useful discussion of the inferiority of the βάνουσοι, see Julia Annas, “Aristotle’s *Politics*: A Symposium: Aristotle on Human Nature and Political Virtue,” *Review of Metaphysics* 49:4 (1996), 731–53. See also Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 307–310.

⁵⁰ *Pol.* VII.9, 1329a2–b17.

So political communities include some people who are superior to others, just like households and other non-political communities. This brings us back to a more pointed version of the question about what distinguishes political communities from the rest. Why does Aristotle think that *some* communities of unequals—i.e. communities some of whose members are better than others in morally significant ways—should be ruled by turn, rather assigning permanent rule than by merit, as distributive equality seems to require? That is, why does he think that some communities of unequals should be ruled politically while others should not?

Before trying to answer, it's worth noting that Aristotle says quite explicitly that the principle of desert must sometimes be ignored in political communities. He makes this especially clear in a passage discussing corrective justice. "It makes no difference [οὐδὲν γὰρ διαφέρει]" he says,

whether a decent person has defrauded a worthless one, or a worthless person a decent one, or whether the adultery was committed by someone decent or someone worthless; the law pays attention solely to the difference created by the damage done, and where one person is committing an injustice, another suffering it, or one person inflicted damage and another has been damaged it treats them as if they were equal (χρῆται ὡς ἴσοις, εἰ ὁ μὲν ἀδικεῖ ὁ δ' ἀδικεῖται, καὶ εἰ ἔβλαψεν ὁ δὲ βέβλαπται).⁵¹

Since Aristotle thinks that corrective justice is essential in any well-run city, and thus in at least some communities structured by political rule, it follows that members of political communities should sometimes help and harm their fellows without regard to their worth—which is to say without regard to what they naturally deserve. This could hardly contrast more with justice according to desert, which requires that we recognize as fully as possible the facts about the

⁵¹ *EN* V.4, 1131b34–32a7.

people we interact with, and, where they are relevant, allow those facts to determine how we treat them.

A passage in *Politics* II.2 (we have already seen it in part—it is about the connection between reciprocity and rule by turns) contains a further twist. Aristotle has been arguing that a city (unlike, say, a military alliance) is a sort of whole whose unity requires that some of its parts differ from each other. At 1261a30, he turns to political communities in which there *don't* at first sight seem to be any notable differences between people—communities in which everyone is free and equal. He writes that reciprocal equality—i.e. the kind of equality achieved by the fair exchange of goods—is necessary to preserve these communities. In communities of equals, this takes the form of rule by turns: every citizen must sometimes rule, but at other times obey, according to some regular rotation. This sort of exchange is necessary, Aristotle says, because everyone can't rule at the same time (ἅμα γὰρ οὐχ οἷόν τε πάντα ἄρχειν).

But when this sort of arrangement is in place, it is “as if shoemakers and carpenters were to exchange places rather than the same people always being shoemakers and carpenters.” This is a familiar analogy (see, e.g. Isocrates *Busiris* 8), and it is not flattering. The principle of specialization is widely taken to be one of the greatest human political accomplishments. “It is clear,” Aristotle writes, that “it is better that the same always rule, where this is possible.” He continues:

but in cases where it is not possible because all are equal in their nature [ἐν οἷς δὲ μὴ δυνατόν διὰ τὸ τὴν φύσιν ἴσους εἶναι πάντα], and it is at the same time just for all to have a share in ruling (regardless of whether ruling is something good or something

mean), there is at least an imitation of this [τοῦτο γε μιμεῖται]. For some rule and some are ruled in turn, as if becoming other persons.⁵²

What is being imitated here? Clearly it must be the practice that Aristotle has just claimed is best, although that is impossible in communities of equals: namely that there be specialist rulers, who are qualitatively different than the people they rule.⁵³ The practice of rule by turns allows

⁵² Pol. II.2, 1261a39–b6, trans. Lord : ἐν οἷς δὲ μὴ δυνατόν διὰ τὸ τὴν φύσιν ἴσους εἶναι πάντας, ἅμα δὲ καὶ δίκαιον, εἴτ' ἀγαθὸν εἶτε φαῦλον τὸ ἄρχειν. πάντας αὐτοῦ μετέχειν, τοῦτό γε μιμεῖται τὸ ἐν μέρει τοὺς ἴσους εἴκειν τὸ ἀνομοίους εἶναι ἔξω ἀρχῆς: οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄρχουσιν οἱ δ' ἄρχονται κατὰ μέρος ὥσπερ ἂν ἄλλοι γενόμενοι. There are many textual problems with this passage, and there is no possible solution that doesn't require editorial intervention.

For our purposes, the problems begin with “there is at least an imitation of this...” For the relevant sentence, Ross's Oxford edition has πάντας αὐτοῦ μετέχειν, τοῦτό γε μιμεῖται τὸ ἐν μέρει τοὺς τὸ ἐν μέρει τοὺς ἴσους εἴκειν τὸ θ' ὁμοίους εἶναι ἔξω ἀρχῆς. Ross (like the most modern editors, including Aubonnet and Newman), mostly follows the first of the two families of manuscripts of Aristotle's *Politics*. This is mainly because the second family has the infinitive μιμεῖσθαι as a verb in the place of μιμεῖται. If we adopted this infinitive verb, we would have to read Aristotle as saying that where people are natural equals, it's *better* for imitation to take place, though this may or may not happen. But in context, this reading doesn't make sense. The following sentence (οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἄρχουσιν οἱ δ' ἄρχονται κατὰ μέρος...) makes it clear that Aristotle is saying what *does* happen under these conditions, not what should happen. So it's better to go with the first family, which has the indicative μιμεῖται. If μιμεῖται is the verb, then it's apparently in the middle voice, and we should take τοῦτο as its object and the phrase “τὸ ἐν μέρει τοὺς ἴσους εἴκειν” as its subject. As I argue in the main text below, Aristotle's broader argument makes it clear that the referent for the pronoun must be the inequality of rulers and ruled.

The phrase that follows in the manuscripts is more controversial (though less important to the present argument). Here, the manuscripts suggest all sorts of possibilities: τὸ δ' ὡς ὁμοίους εἶναι ἔξ ἀρχῆς, τὸ θ' ὡς ὁμοίους ἔξω ἀρχῆς, and various others. Some editors and translators take the phrase as a gloss, and leave it out (a decision that Lord follows in his translation). Others have added to the confusion with a variety of other suggestions and speculations, such as replacing τὸ δ' ὡς ὁμοίους with ἀνομοίους. This suggestion, due to Susemih, is adopted by Ross's Oxford edition; it would allow us to read Aristotle as saying that the members of political communities are similar in some respects but not in others. If we stick to language found in the manuscripts and adopt a variant with ἔξω ἀρχῆς, the idea is that citizens are similar when they aren't in power, or in non-political respects. Newman suggests that if we accept ἔξ ἀρχῆς and ἀνομοίους the idea may be that rule by turns “imitates an original inequality.”

Perhaps it will help give a sense of the range of possible interpretations to offer up some of the ways translators have dealt with this passage. Jowett translates it as follows: “an approximation to this is that equals should in turn retire from office and should, apart from official position, be treated alike.” Aubonnet's Budé has “on en a une imitation so des homes égaux cèdent à tour le pouvoir, et sont tous considérés comme pareils hors de leur charge.” Reeve has “it is at least possible to approximate to this if those who are equal take turns, and are similar when out of office.” Saunders writes “the principles (a) that equals should yield place in turn, and (b) that out of office they should be similar, approximate to that practice.” For a full discussion of the textual issues, see W.L. Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle*, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) (reprint of the original 1884 edition), 234–5.

⁵³ As far as I have been able to find, this interpretation is the consensus among commentators. As Newman (*ibid.*) paraphrases, “since it is better that the same men should always rule . . . and that there should be a permanent difference between rulers and ruled, men seek, where this is out of the question, to get as near to this state of things as possible (μιμεῖται), and by alternation of office to create two different classes, rulers and ruled, thus conjuring up a difference where it can hardly be said to exist. For a similar interpretation, see also, e.g. Peter Simpson, *A Philosophical Commentary on the Politics of Aristotle* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1998).

communities of unequal people to “imitate” hierarchical communities in which some members are permanently in charge of others.

We’ve seen that Aristotle thinks that the members of political communities reliably differ in value. And we’ve seen, further, that Aristotle thinks we should sometimes ignore those differences. But this passage marks an even greater departure from the principle of desert. In the cases Aristotle has in mind, instituting political rule is not a matter of responding to the facts about people. It isn’t even a matter of selecting a narrow range of facts to respond to, as in corrective justice. Rather, Aristotle is saying that we should sometimes imitate difference, creating a kind of ersatz inequality.

In Book I, Aristotle describes the same process, of creating virtual differences between otherwise equal people. “It is true,” he says,

that in most cases of political rule people take turns at ruling and being ruled, because they tend by nature to be on an equal footing and to differ in nothing (ἐξ ἴσου γὰρ εἶναι βούλεται τὴν φύσιν καὶ διαφέρειν μηδέν). Nevertheless, whenever one person is ruling and another being ruled, they try to create a difference (ζητεῖ διαφορὰν εἶναι) by means of appearances, words, and honours (καὶ σχήμασι καὶ λόγοις καὶ τιμαῖς). Witness what Amasis said about his footbath.⁵⁴

The bit about Amasis is a reference is to a passage in Herodotus where a king who was once a commoner refashions a golden footbath “in which Egyptians had once vomited and urinated and cleaned their feet” into a statue of a god.⁵⁵ In this story, Herodotus highlights the ways that a thing’s history (i.e. being urinated in, etc.) can suggest that we should evaluate it in one way, while its matter and form (a golden statue of a god) suggest another evaluation. In Herodotus’

⁵⁴ *Pol.* I.12, 1259b4–9. Trans. Lord, modified.

⁵⁵ Herod. 2.172.

account, Amasis persuades his Egyptian subjects that the considerations about matter and form outweigh those about history (the footbath's ascent from filth to nobility is supposed to represent Amasis' own biography), but it's not clear whether Herodotus expects his readers to find this convincing. When Aristotle appropriates the story, though, it seems clear that he uses it to represent a kind of transformation that is superficial in one way, but that really does matter, politically: the appearances, words, and honours that distinguish rulers from the people they rule are not natural differences, but they amount to something like a virtual transformation of ordinary citizens into superior people, worthy of obedience. When the natural facts about don't otherwise meet our political needs, Aristotle claims, we can make do by instead changing social facts about them.

What emerges when we bring these points together is that Aristotle thinks that (i) political rule is appropriate for people who are equal or similar in virtue; yet (ii) there are significant differences in virtue between members of the communities where political rule is found, which means they deserve to be treated unequally; but (iii) we must also sometimes ignore those differences, treating people as equal even when they are not; and in still other cases (iv) we must act as though some people are better than others, even though they are, as a matter of natural fact, equal. To see how this can all be so, we need to get still clearer about what Aristotle means when he says the members of political communities are equal to each other; and about when he thinks people's natural differences should and should not determine their treatment. More broadly, all this pretence and imitation lends new urgency to the question of how he can recommend life in a political community to his students at all.

VI. EQUAL ENOUGH FOR POLITICS

Aristotle sheds some light on these questions in a passage in *Politics* VII, as he lays the foundations of his discussion of education in the best regime.

(1) Since every political community is constituted of rulers and ruled, this must then be investigated—if the rulers and the ruled should be different or the same throughout life [εἰ ἐτέρους εἶναι δεῖ τοὺς ἄρχοντας καὶ τοὺς ἀρχομένους ἢ τοὺς αὐτοὺς διὰ βίου]; for it is clear that education too will have to follow in accordance with this distinction. (2) Now if the ones were as different from the others as we believe gods and heroes differ from human beings [ὥστε ἀναμφισβήτητον εἶναι καὶ φανεράν τὴν ὑπεροχὴν τοῖς ἀρχομένοις τὴν τῶν ἀρχόντων]—much exceeding them in the first place in body, and then in soul, so that the pre-eminence of the rules is indisputable and evident to the ruled—it is clear that it would always be better for the same persons to rule and the same to be ruled once and for all. (3) But since this is not easy to assume, there being none so different from the ruled as Scylax says the kings in India are, (4) it is evident that for many reasons (φανερὸν ὅτι διὰ πολλὰς αἰτίας) it is necessary for all in a similar fashion to share in ruling and being ruled in turn (ἀναγκαῖον πάντας ὁμοίως κοινωνεῖν τοῦ κατὰ μέρος ἄρχειν καὶ ἄρχεσθαι). (5) For equality consists in giving the same to those who are alike, and it is difficult for a constitution to last if its organization is contrary to justice (τό τε γὰρ ἴσον ταῦτόν τοῖς ὁμοίοις, καὶ χαλεπὸν μένειν τὴν πολιτείαν τὴν συνεστηκυῖαν παρὰ τὸ δίκαιον).⁵⁶

The last sentence here, the one I've marked as (5), might seem to support the 'desert interpretation' that I've been criticizing. After all, it says that equality (τὸ ἴσον) calls for a single

⁵⁶ *Pol.* VII.14, 1332b15–26. Trans. Lord, modified.

kind of treatment “for similar people” (τοῖς ὁμοίοις), and it offers this principle as logical support (with “γάρ”) for the practice of sharing in rule, recommended in (4). But this is a misunderstanding, based on a misconception of the rather vague expression “similar people.”

So far, I have followed standard practice by focusing on the roles freedom and especially equality and freedom in Aristotle’s conception of politics. But in fact, this doesn’t quite capture Aristotle’s language. There is a third term that is in fact just as prominent: *similarity* very often replaces or accompanies equality in Aristotle’s discussions of political rule. *Politics* III.4, to take one of several examples, describes πολιτική without mentioning equality, as the kind of rule “exercised over those who are similar in kind [τῶν ὁμοίων τῷ γένει] and free.”⁵⁷ Locutions like this confirm that, as we’ve seen, Aristotle doesn’t think everyone involved in political rule has to be *exactly* as virtuous as everyone else. Whether by nature, luck, or their own initiative, Aristotle takes it for granted that some citizens in any city will outshine others, at least a little. Commentators, however, typically take this as a trivial qualification, a gesture at differences too small to mention or irrelevant for the purposes of politics. In this vein, they often speak—as I too have done earlier in this chapter—in terms of Aristotle’s commitment to political rule for people who are “equal or nearly equal” in value.⁵⁸

But when Aristotle talks about similar and equal people, he often reaches for examples that fit poorly with this interpretation. For example, in section (2) of our passage, he writes that political rule would not be appropriate for a community including both normal people and gods or heroes. These examples are obviously not designed to evoke just any differences between

⁵⁷ *Pol.* III.4, 1277b7. See also, e.g., *Pol.* VII.8, 1328a35–6.

⁵⁸ For one example among many, see Fred Miller, “The Rule of Reason,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Politics*, edited by Marguerite Deslauriers and Pierre Destrée (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 62, which concludes by saying that in spite of Aristotle’s regrettable views about women and slaves, he remains relevant because he recognized “that shared governance when citizens have comparable rational capabilities.”

people. Rather, Aristotle is trying to bring to his readers' minds the very largest differences in value available to the Greek imagination. This is a pattern. Again and again, when he wants to explain the role of equality of value in human life, Aristotle indicates not that we are all essentially the same, but quite differently that none of us towers over anyone else as much as a god. When in Book III he sketches what a person would have to be like to deserve to be a king; for example, he says such a person "would reasonably be regarded as a god among human beings."⁵⁹ Again, to highlight the role of value equality in friendship, he points out that no one could be friends with a god (and that kings are not friends with those who are "much their inferiors").⁶⁰ These passages about equality are not designed to contrast equal-or-nearly-equal people with unequal ones, but to distinguish everyday inequalities from truly enormous ones. They suggest that when Aristotle says that the members of political communities are "similar or equal," he does not mean that they must be identical or nearly so, but only that their inequality must not be extraordinarily vast.

And if this is so, then the problems we saw in Part V start to dissolve. When Aristotle says that people are suited to politics when they are equal in value, he means that they must meet some minimum standard of similarity. The bar is set low enough to leave lots of room for inequalities that will need to be addressed within the community, so that the various kinds of justice, including those presupposing inequality, will still have a place. To be suited for politics, people need not be exactly equal, very nearly equal, or even approximately equal to each other—they need only be equal enough for politics. The practices of equalization we saw earlier take over from there.

⁵⁹ *Pol.* III.13, 1288a13–17

⁶⁰ *EN* VIII.7, 1158b30–14.

In section (2) of our passage, Aristotle leaves the mythical examples behind and suggests where the dividing line between the two degrees of inequality—normal inequality appropriate for political rule versus extreme inequality inappropriate for it—might lie.⁶¹ Hierarchical rule is best, he says, just when the person ruled finds the superiority of the ruler “to be evident and indisputable” (ἀναμφισβήτητον εἶναι καὶ φανεράν). How difficult does Aristotle think it is for people to meet this standard? When it comes to free adult men in the Greece of his time, Aristotle is clear that hardly anyone can be expected to agree with his neighbours about who is better than whom.⁶² In fact, this kind of disagreement is the underlying cause of the debate between democrats and oligarchs that we touched on earlier. Aristotle, as we have already seen, thinks that these partisans disagree with each other because they “strip away” or “abstract” (ἀφαιροῦσι) considerations about the value of those they compare themselves to, and therefore come up with wrongheaded standards of human value. That is, these people focus on some narrow human quality like wealth and free birth. Aristotle thinks such features have some political importance—and in the middle books of the *Politics*, he shows how they may enter into various kinds of political thought. But to focus on any one of them not only overlooks the others, but, more crucially, overlooks the “most authoritative consideration,” virtue, which determines the just ἀπλῶς. Human beings are prone to make this mistake, as Aristotle explains, because of a deeper problem, a widespread weakness in human judgment. “The judgment” these partisans make, he says, “concerns themselves [περὶ αὐτῶν ἢ κρίσις], and most people [οἱ πλεῖστοι] are

⁶¹ Some scholars interpret Aristotle’s references to the superiority of gods in terms of the claim *Politics* III.11 that if a king’s virtue is greater even than the total created by adding together everyone else’s virtue, then the many truly have no claim to rule. See Fred Miller, “The Rule of Reason,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Politics*, edited by Marguerite Deslauriers and Pierre Destrée (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 38–66.

⁶² He allows, however, a possible exception in the best constitution, where he suggests that a group of virtuous free men might agree to the justice of assigning different political powers based on age, charging young men with war, mature ones with civic duty, and very old ones with religion.

pretty poor judges about matters close to them [φαῦλοι κριταὶ περὶ τῶν οἰκείων].”⁶³ Even doctors, as he says later, tend to consult other doctors when they get sick, “their assumption being that they are unable to judge truly because they are judging about their own cases, and while in pain.”⁶⁴ The implication of this passage seems to be that in order to avoid the political conflict that arise from our inability to judge our own worth, we would need to find gods and heroes to rule us. But as Aristotle says in part (3) of our passage, it is “not easy” to find people that surpass normal Greek men that much; indeed, there “are not” kings who are like that, notwithstanding the tall tales of explorers like Scylax.⁶⁵ This means that in normal communities, we must decide who rules on some basis other than worth.

I’ve restricted this analysis to free men because, notwithstanding the talk about gods and heroes, Aristotle certainly doesn’t think that it’s impossible to find *human beings* who differ from each other this much. For a start, he surely assumes (as perhaps we do too) that children will recognize themselves as vastly inferior to adults and therefore find it appropriate to submit to their authority. Likely, he thinks that the same thing goes for women and natural slaves—that they are not only inferior to free Greek men, but that this is so obvious that under normal circumstances they will themselves recognize it and accept their subordination without much

⁶³ *Pol.* III.9, 1280a15, my trans. About 5 lines later, Aristotle repeats the point: people disagree about the ‘οἶζ’ of justice “διότι κρίνουσι τὰ περὶ αὐτοῦς κακῶς.” This doctrine is connected to the claim late in the discussion of friendship to the effect that one of the benefits of having virtue friends is that they allow a clear glimpse of one’s own virtue, which would otherwise be hard to behold clearly.

⁶⁴ *Pol.* III.16, 1287a26–b2. Does Aristotle’s doctrine of the *phronimos* (an exemplary virtuous person) contradict this? The idea of a *phronimos* does indeed suggest that we can imagine (and quite possibly identify) people who are more virtuous than we are, and who could therefore act as models for us. I don’t think, however, that this is a problem. For while judgments about who is and who is not a *phronimos* are not strictly speaking judgments about one’s own value, they closely akin to them. For one thing, if I think that there are any real-world *phronimoi*, they will likely be my friends and ancestors—that is, they will broadly belong to the class of things that are mine. Second, my judgments about who is a *phronimos* will reflect my values. If I am a money-loving oligarch, I will think that Ischomachus and Warren Buffet are *phronimos*, while my political opponents will think otherwise. In short, disagreements about *phronimoi* will closely track disagreements arising from people’s poor judgment about their own worth.

⁶⁵ Cf. *Pol.* V.10, 1313a3-5, where he writes that kingships no longer come to into existence. (“If monarchies do arise,” he says, “they tend to be tyrannies.”)

fuss.⁶⁶ And just a few lines after our passage, Aristotle argues that in the city of our prayers—where, of course, he assumes against reasonable expectation that all citizens will be virtuous— young men in military duty will not chafe at being ruled, nor think themselves better than their rulers, at least not when they know they will get their chance to rule over the next round of young soldiers when they are older (ἀγανακτεῖ δὲ οὐδεὶς καθ’ ἡλικίαν ἀρχόμενος, οὐδὲ νομίζει εἶναι κρείττων, ἄλλως τε καὶ μέλλων ἀντιλαμβάνειν τοῦτον τὸν ἔρανον ὅταν τύχη τῆς ἰκνουμένης ἡλικίας).⁶⁷

The key phenomenon that defines this approach to equality—i.e, the approach contrasting ‘normal’ inequality to ‘clear, indisputable’ inequality—is *dispute* about people’s worth. By his own lights, Aristotle has good reason to make this central to his political theory. For he thinks the disagreements that proliferate in the absence of any clear and indisputable differences in value are among the greatest political evils.⁶⁸ The *Politics* returns again and again to the importance of civic harmony and stability, the preservation of which is worthwhile even in very flawed regimes. And it returns again and again to the ways that disaster follows when people think themselves equal to their neighbours but get worse treatment than they do, and when they think themselves superior but get treated equally.⁶⁹ Cities whose members cannot agree about each other’s worth are powder kegs, prone first to faction and then collapse, and Aristotle assumes this is disastrous for everyone, even people who would in principle have been better off under some other regime. This is the danger Aristotle has in mind in section (4) of our passage, where he repeats that rule by turns is necessary precisely because it is “difficult for a constitution

⁶⁶ As tragedy and comedy amply testify, many women and slaves did not themselves think that their subordination was grounded in unquestionable differences in value. Their testimony evidently left Aristotle unmoved.

⁶⁷ *Pol.* VII.14, 1332b, 37–40.

⁶⁸ See not only *Pol.* V on how to prevent faction, but also such passages as *Pol.* II.5, 1264b8–10: “Also, the way that Socrates selects the rulers is hazardous; for he has the same persons always ruling. This can become a cause of factional conflict.”

⁶⁹ *Pol.* V.1, 1302a16.

to last” (χαλεπὸν μένειν) if it is not founded on the principle of like treatment for similar people. It is primarily to avert the danger of faction, rather than to achieve anything intrinsically valuable, that Aristotle thinks we should rule and be ruled by turns; and this is itself appropriate not because of the equality or near equality we all enjoy, but rather because most everyone has lousy judgment.

VII. SAMENESS, DIFFERENCE, AND PRACTICAL WISDOM

Suppose that you and I are extremely virtuous (though not, alas, as outstanding as gods and heroes), and we find ourselves in a political community, alongside decent people we know perfectly well to be our inferiors. The *Politics* is directed in large part to people like us.⁷⁰ What does its treatment of political rule mean for our actions and deliberations?

Aristotle writes that we belong to the group most justified in trying to overthrow the existing regime, and least likely to do so.⁷¹ He also indicates quite clearly how we must understand our situation. Since we are just, we recognize what people deserve, and we want to help them get it. In particular, we recognize that that we ourselves deserve the honour of permanent rule; we also wish for our moderately virtuous neighbours to receive the benefits we would secure for them if we were permanently in charge. But these considerations don't carry the day. Most centrally, this is because we recognize that faction would subject us and our neighbours to many misfortunes (including of course the misfortune of unjust distribution, since over the course of the conflict people would take losses they don't deserve). And Aristotle

⁷⁰ In the *Republic*, Glaucon and Adeimantus are like this too. For an interesting discussion, see Chapter 1 of G.R.F. Ferrari's *City and Soul in Plato's Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁷¹ *Pol.* V.1, 1301a 39–40.

emphasizes that since we can count on being outnumbered by our inferiors (who will not recognize our superiority), our takeover is bound to fail anyway.⁷²

Alongside these reasons not to revolt, we have positive reasons to embrace the existing political order. One is that, given the choice, it is better to use superior tools than inferior ones, so too it is always better to rule over superior subjects (ἀεὶ βελτίων ἢ ἀρχὴ ἢ τῶν βελτιόνων ἀρχομένων).⁷³ Better subordinates, as Aristotle explains, are necessary to do better work—a point that underlies the idea we have already seen that even *ruling* over slaves is tainted with slavishness. And a political regime will give us at least some chance to rule over free, moderately virtuous people. Another is that by taking part in politics, we can check the power of the (other) magistrates, who will likely be prone to rule unjustly otherwise.⁷⁴ But perhaps the most important reason is that a stable political regime provides a context in which political animals like us can achieve our end. It gives us and our neighbours both the opportunity to exercise the ethical virtues, which take their fullest form when they are directed toward others and guided by νόμος, and the leisure to reflect philosophically and so take steps toward wisdom. This is to say that supporting and participating in political rule is a good way to pursue happiness—our own, and also that of our friends and the city as a whole. And that, as we learn in the famous opening arguments of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is the ultimate goal of everything we do: every art, inquiry, action, and pursuit.

Furthermore, even though preserving political rule means that people will not get exactly what they deserve, we can console ourselves with the fact that we have at least applied a rough approximation of the principle of desert. For in political rule, similar treatment is accorded to

⁷² *Pol.* V.4 1304b2–5.

⁷³ *Pol.* I.5, 1254a25.

⁷⁴ This is an important part of the famous argument for the ‘wisdom of the multitude’ in III.11. On this point, see Richard Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 408.

“similar” people, in a legitimate if qualified sense of the term. Moreover, people with a moderate share of virtue get a moderate share of power and honour, as they would not if they were permanently ruled by their superiors.⁷⁵

Thus if we support an existing political regime, we will prevent bad things from happening, contribute to the conditions necessary for good ones, and achieve at least a rough approximation (Aristotle might call it a *μίμησις*) of just distribution. This comes together into a messy, qualified, and perfectly intelligible set of reasons for Aristotle to recommend political rule to his audience. Similar considerations suggest setting up institutions that equalize the citizens in the various ways we considered earlier. At the beginning of his discussion of faction, Aristotle says explicitly that no community can last if it doesn’t involve two kinds of equality. “It is a bad thing” (*φᾶλλον*), he says, for a constitution to be organized “unqualifiedly and entirely” according to either arithmetic equality or equality according to worth.

This is evident from what actually happens [*ἐκ τοῦ συμβαίνοντος*], since no constitution of this kind is stable [*οὐδεμία γὰρ μόνιμος ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων πολιτειῶν*]. The reason is that when one is in error from the beginning and in one’s principles [*ἀπὸ τοῦ πρώτου καὶ τοῦ ἐν ἀρχῇ ἡμαρτημένου*], it is impossible to avoid encountering something bad in the end [*μὴ ἀπαντᾶν εἰς τὸ τέλος κακόν τι*]. Hence arithmetic equality should be used in some cases, and equality according to merit in others.⁷⁶

Aristotle is thinking of ‘mixed’ *πολιτεῖαι* incorporating both democratic institutions and oligarchic ones, for example by restricting civic participation with a minimum property qualification but ‘also increasing it by paying qualified farmers to participate.’⁷⁷ But the point is

⁷⁵ *Pol.* III.10.

⁷⁶ *Pol.* V.1, 1302a2–7

⁷⁷ *Pol.* IV.9.

broader. Notice that while Aristotle stresses bad principles (i.e. identifying worth with mere freedom or wealth) can lead us astray, he does not suggest that knowing the right principle of equality makes it easy to do politics. That needs prudence, which does not call for any single kind of equality, but rather for mixing them and picking and choosing based on circumstance. This means introducing equality into people's relationships in a variety of ways, sometimes directly, and sometimes obliquely. In the first instance, we must do this to avoid conflict, but we must also do it to acknowledge as far as possible a variety of other considerations too. We must give high honours only to the best people, as when we give the most powerful offices only to members of an elite. Not only is this what they deserve, but it is necessary to prevent resentment, and to make sure truly important decisions are in the right hands. On the other hand, if we are judges, we will not have the time or insight to fully and correctly evaluate everything relevant to a case. We will have to make do with a rough and ready practice of seeing how much each of two parties have lost and gained in a single transaction. And in still other cases, we must give undeserved special treatment to others, as when we honour and obey an undistinguished magistrate during his randomly assigned tenure. This is required both by the metaphysical fact that rulers must be different than their subjects and the psychological fact that rulers and subjects hew better to their roles when those differences are visible. Taken together, such practices ensure that our neighbours' pride is never wounded so deeply that they give up on cooperation altogether, but that merit and competence nevertheless direct public life as much as possible. And insofar as we are imperfectly virtuous, Aristotle's philosophy will remind of us the considerations that matter when *pleonexia* might otherwise drive us to seek out too much power over others, or (supposing we think ruling is a hardship) to give up on politics altogether, handing it over to people who don't deserve it and cannot be trusted.

Such considerations are typical of Aristotle's approach to practical wisdom, where we must as a matter of course adjust our actions to conflicting considerations and adapt ourselves to imperfect circumstances of various kinds. And they are necessary to explain why Aristotle endorses both the exchange of power between similar people and the variety of forms of justice that he recommends within political communities. Distribution according to desert plays a role here, but it is only a small one—and that is why the standard interpretation of political rule is so misleading.

We have, then, one answer—indeed, the main one—to the question I asked at the beginning of this chapter, about what is good about political rule. We can now see that although political rule can indeed usually be treated as a good thing for Aristotle's students, this value should be qualified in two important ways. First, from the point of view of a virtuous agent, political rule is (at best) *contingently* valuable. If you live in a normal city, you will have a reason to embrace it—but not if you have the misfortune to find yourself surrounded only by grossly inferior people, the good fortune to take up with someone of godlike virtue, or the extraordinary good fortune to be divinely virtuous yourself. Second, when political rule is appropriate, it in large part *instrumentally* good. In particular, one of its main virtues is its effectiveness in staving off disaster, making room for happiness. Yet for all that, under normal circumstances engaging in political rule expresses the virtues, particularly justice and practical wisdom. And this means that it can be partly constitutive of happiness.

VIII. POLITICS AND CHOOSING THE BAD

That's about as much as we can say about how political rule looks from the perspective of the individual agent. It goes without saying that this point of view is fundamental to Aristotle's

practical philosophy.⁷⁸ But by no means can all the evaluative claims in the *Ethics* and *Politics* be reduced to advice to individual agents. Indeed many important doctrines are only distantly related to anything anyone can do. This is true for Aristotle’s treatment of equality and political rule. Consider, for example, this explanation of the two ways virtue can be used, from *Politics* VII.13:

By “conditional” (ἐξ ὑποθέσεως) I mean those that are necessary; by “unqualified” (ἀπλῶς), I mean those that are noble. For example, in the case of just actions, just retributions and punishments (αἱ δίκαια τιμωρία καὶ κολάσεις) spring from virtue, but are necessary uses of it (ἀναγκαῖαι δέ), and are noble only in a necessary way (τὸ καλῶς ἀναγκαίως ἔχουσιν), since it would be preferable if neither a man nor a state needed these things (αἰρετώτερον μὲν γὰρ μηδενὸς δεῖσθαι τῶν τοιούτων μήτε τὸν ἄνδρα μήτε τὴν πόλιν).⁷⁹

In the last sentence here, Aristotle is imagining something that’s effectively impossible for human beings: cities and individuals with no need for punitive justice. At first sight, it’s strange that he should say this kind of situation would be preferable. Virtuous actions (which certainly include the administration of just punishment) constitute our τέλος, they are καλά, and they should be done for their own sake. Still, immediately after expressing this point, Aristotle digs in his heels. The problem with punitive justice, he continues, is that dishing out punishment and just retribution (unlike honours and resources) involves “the choice of something bad” (κακοῦ τινὸς αἴρεσις). Ross and other editors strike this phrase from their editions. Aristotle, they suppose,

⁷⁸ Not only does he signal this when at the beginning of the *Ethics* he famously writes that his goal is not to know what virtue is, but “that we become good”; as Richard Bodéüs persuasively argues in *Le philosophe et la cité* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1982), many passages throughout the two treatises—most notably, the transition to *Politics* in *EN* X.9—also suggest that practical philosophy is directed especially toward guiding would-be legislators.

⁷⁹ *Pol.* VII.13, 1332a10–16. Trans. Reeve, modified.

most likely meant not that punitive justice involves the *choice* of something bad, but rather its “destruction” (ἀναίρεσις). But perhaps this emendation is unnecessary. For it is a general feature of Aristotle’s treatment of life in the sublunar realm that things may be legitimately described both as bad and good. Aristotle suggests this, for example, at *EN* X.8 1178b15, as he considers the activities suited to gods. It would clearly be ridiculous, he says, to imagine (as the epic poets do) that the gods can be brave, moderate, and so on. For the gods, there are no threats to be afraid of, no base appetites to domesticate, and so on. “Everything about practical doings,” Aristotle says, “if one looks through all the kinds, will obviously turn out to be petty and unworthy [μικρὰ καὶ ἀνάξια] of gods.”

We may better grasp the point of claims like this if we compare them to ideas in Aristotle’s metaphysics and natural philosophy. The closing pages of Book I of the *Parts of Animals*, for example are usually remembered as a celebration of biology: the study of perishable sublunar things, like the study of the heavens, has its distinctive charms (χάριν), since as Heraclitus said, there are gods in the humblest places. But we should not forget that, in the same breath, Aristotle takes pains to reassert the inferiority of perishable things to their heavenly counterparts. A faint glimpse of the latter, he says, greatly outweighs even precise knowledge of the former, and the study of biology involves things that are not only “ignoble” (ἀτιμότερον), but that no one can look at without “much repugnance” (πολλῆς δυσχερείας).⁸⁰

The religious language here is no accident. This passage draws on a core piece of Aristotelian doctrine: that attributes and activities are good when they contribute to the goals built into an organism, but that these kinds of good are distinct from (though grounded in) the goodness of the divine beings in and beyond the heavens. This doctrine gives a philosophical

⁸⁰ Faint glimpse vs. precise knowledge: *PA* 644b32–5a1; “ignoble” *PA* 645a7 and a15; “much repugnance,” *PA* 645a29.

point to saying that things may be good and bad simultaneously. We can evaluate things both from the point of view of an animal species, but also from a cosmic or divine point of view. So, for example, if we study the basset hound according to the canons of Aristotelian biology, we will notice the ways that its long ears, its shuffling gait, and its characteristic habitat (whatever that might be) contribute to its distinctive way of life, and we will therefore see how each of those things is good. But the evaluative story doesn't end there. Moreover, the organs and activities of basset hounds allow them to survive and reproduce, which allows their kind to live forever even though the individuals cannot.⁸¹ And this clears the way for a second evaluation. For the highest end of a basset hound will be only a pale imitation of the unqualified good of divine immortality. From the point of view of a basset hound, drool and runny eyes are good, for they clear away the dust it is exposed to in its life close to the ground. But the gods have no need for drool and runny eyes—indeed drool and runny eyes are regrettable necessities that fall out from the suboptimal features of the hound's circumstances. The goodness of the gods is not relative to a species but absolute. So while philosophers can learn to see traces of the divine in the lowliest creatures, when they return from the menagerie, they will also (and without contradiction) see as clearly as anyone that those creatures are more than a little bit disgusting.⁸²

This approach allows Aristotle to incorporate the Greek opposition between the toil and hardship of human life and the blissful leisure of the immortals into his scientific program, and to reconcile it with his teleology.⁸³ Sometimes, as in the discussion with which we started this

⁸¹ *GA* II.1, 731b29–35. I'm attached to the basset hound both because of its remarkable features and because it's such a charming creature. But I should probably point out (i) that the basset hound is a breed, not a species and (ii) that its peculiarities are a result of breeding by humans, the effectiveness of which probably isn't consistent with Aristotle's biology.

⁸² The *IA*, *HA*, and *PA* are full of discussions of features like this. See, e.g., the discussion of the telescoping undulations of leeches and worms at *IA* 9, 709a25–30.

⁸³ For a general statement of the relationship between the human goods that presuppose evils and the divine ones that don't, see *EN* X.8, 1178b8–22. There are many examples of antecedents. See, e.g., the Isles of the Blessed in Hesiod's *Works and Days*, and Calypso's island in Books V and VI of the *Odyssey*.

section, he talks in terms of things that are good ἐξ ὑποθέσεως. In the same passage, he also spells this out in terms of “necessity,” along the lines of the two definitions of that concept in *Metaphysics* Δ:

We call “necessary” that without which, as a condition, a thing cannot live; as breathing and food are necessary for an animal; and the conditions without which good cannot be or come to be, or without which we cannot get rid or be freed of an evil; e.g. drinking the medicine is necessary in order that we may be cured of disease, and a man’s sailing to Aegina is necessary in order that he may get his money.⁸⁴

This, I want to suggest, is ultimately the perspective we need to understand the value of political rule, and especially the practices that we have lingered on in this chapter, involving disregarding or falsifying differences in value between people.

It belongs to an approach to politics that Aristotle describes at the beginning of *Politics* IV. The philosopher, he says there, must be able to determine not only what constitution is what we would pray for, provided there were no external impediments (μηδενὸς ἐμποδίζοντος τῶν ἐκτός) but also what is best under certain conditions (ἐκ τῶν ὑποκειμένων), and based on certain presuppositions (ὑποθέσεως).⁸⁵ He returns to this project at IV.11, where he finally settles on the best constitution and way of life “for most cities, and for most people,” based on the levels of virtue and education they are liable to share.⁸⁶ It is in this melancholy context that he writes that the city “wishes to be made up of equal and similar persons as far as possible.”⁸⁷ With this in mind, let’s return to a passage we saw earlier, in which Aristotle insists very explicitly that ruling

⁸⁴ *Met.* V.5, trans. Ross. Cf. the definition of “necessary goods” in the *Republic*, VIII 558e: “Desires that we cannot divert or suppress may be properly called necessary, and likewise those whose satisfaction is beneficial to us, may they not? For our nature compels us to seek their satisfaction.” Trans. Shorey.

⁸⁵ *Pol.* IV.1, 1288b22–26.

⁸⁶ *Pol.* IV.11, 1295a25–32.

⁸⁷ *Pol.* IV.11, 1295b25.

by turns is this kind of second-best option, a practice to which we resort because the option we might hope for is not available. Citizens, as you will recall,

cannot all rule together, but must change at the end of the year or some other period of time or in some order of succession. The result is that upon this plan they all govern; just as if shoemakers and carpenters were to exchange their occupations, and the same persons did not always continue shoemakers and carpenters. And since it is better that this should be so in politics as well, it is clear that while there should be continuance of power where this is possible, yet where this is not possible by reason of the natural equality of the citizens, and at the same time it is just that all should share in government (whether to govern be a good thing or a bad), and for equals thus to submit to authority in turn imitates their being originally dissimilar; for some govern and others are governed by turn, as though becoming other persons.⁸⁸

Aristotle here emphasizes the contrast between the arrangement that would be best if we could achieve it—uninterrupted rule by political experts—and the alternative practice that we must fall back on, granted our imperfect conditions.

I've already argued that when Aristotle describes the citizens of political communities as naturally equal (as he does here), he doesn't mean that everyone is as good as everyone else, but that they're similar enough to disagree about who should rule. We may now add to that argument that the cognitive features that make political rule necessary for normal Greek men—in particular, bad judgment with regard to one's own worth—are contextual problems that force human beings to fall away from the kinds of rule more suitable to gods.

⁸⁸ *Pol.* II.2, 1261a34–b5.

Granted that Aristotle says political rule “imitates” permanent, hierarchical rule, we might expect that if it is conditionally good, the hierarchy will be absolutely good, associated with the divine. We’ve seen that he certainly does make this association to some extent, since gods and kings are both immeasurably superior to run-of-the-mill human beings. But it also seems likely that the connection runs deeper, and that Aristotle accepts a tradition, passed down by Plato, where perfect hierarchy is associated with the divine, while the rule of near equals over one another is an all-too-human falling away from that ideal. Plato famously introduces that distinction in the myth of the *Statesman*, where he contrasts the perfect stewardship of Cronos with the more stopgap stewardship of human rulers in our own age, when πολιτικοί “are much more like their subjects in nature.”⁸⁹ But the most telling passage in Plato is not from the *Statesman*, but from the *Laws*, where Plato identifies the very practice of geometrical, as opposed to arithmetic, equality with divine rule. “The two kinds of equality,” he says,

are called by the same name, but are in reality in many ways almost the opposite of one another; one of them may be introduced without difficulty by any state or any legislator in the distribution of honours; namely, that of measure, weight, and number, which he ensures by lot. But there is another equality, of a better and higher kind, which is not so easily recognized. This is the judgment of God; among men it avails but little; that little, however, is the source of the greatest good to individuals and states. For it gives to the greater more and to the inferior less, and in proportion to the nature of each; and above all, greater honour always to the greater virtue, and to the less less; and to either in proportion to their respective measure of virtue and education.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ *Statesman* 275c.

⁹⁰ *Laws* VI, 757a–c.

The basic complaint here, about the blindness of the law to specificity, and the contrast of such unfair systems with the rulings of a judge who, like Zeus, uses his discretion to settle each case according to its merits, is of course not at all foreign to Aristotle. On the contrary, he complains that the law, since it is necessarily universal, cannot correctly apply to all relevant cases, and insists that we must correct it with appropriate amendments and with judicial decrees whenever exceptional cases arise.⁹¹

This helps to explain why, as we have seen, Aristotle emphasizes the ways that corrective justice ignores desert. There is every reason to think that for Aristotle as for Plato, a perfect judge would not, as in his account of corrective justice, treat a “decent adulterer” (whatever exactly he has in mind when he says this) in just the same way as a wicked one. Rather, he thinks that we resort to arithmetical equality only when circumstances force us to fall short of the divine, because of the complexity of life in the *polis* (the difficulty of finding consistently excellent judges, the prohibitive number of adultery cases to get through in a week), or the unlikelihood, given human weaknesses, that a society relying on the discretion of judges will tend to get things right. And this may be the reason that Aristotle says, without further explanation, that geometrical equality is the “primary kind” of equality when it comes to justice.⁹²

I opened this chapter with the question whether political rule is good. I’ve now answered that from the perspective of the virtuous agent, political rule is indeed good (some of the time, and assuming certain widespread conditions), because it allows us to reach our goals. If we shift

⁹¹ *EN* V.1, 1137b11–31.

⁹² *EN* V.7, 1158b29–33. “Equality in friendship, however, does not seem to be like equality in matters of justice. In the sphere of justice, ‘equal’ means primarily according to desert, whereas equality of number is secondary.” Trans. Rackham, modified: ἔστι γὰρ ἐν μὲν τοῖς δικαίοις ἴσον πρῶτως τὸ κατ’ ἀξίαν, τὸ δὲ κατὰ ποσὸν δευτέρως, ἐν δὲ τῇ φιλίᾳ τὸ μὲν κατὰ ποσὸν πρῶτως, τὸ δὲ κατ’ ἀξίαν δευτέρως.

to the perspective of the human species, we still find that political rule is good—although again in a qualified sense, one for it presupposes not only that humans fall short of the gods even at their best, but also that we rarely come close to achieving our best. And if we shift again to the perspective of the cosmos, we find that political rule is really not very good at all, since it falls far short of the perfect kingship of a god, and because it means ignoring differences in value that a god would recognize.

If this is so, then Aristotle's position is something of a mirror image to much later political thought. Many thinkers have suggested that if human nature were better than it is, there would be no need for states, which, however legitimate they might be, empower some people to coerce others. On this view, anarchy is as it were the constitution of our prayers. But, so the story goes, human beings are flawed and prone to violence, and we are forced contrary to an idealized version of justice, to put some people in power over others, and we must do what we can to mitigate the injustice inherent in that practice. This is just what Kant says in the lines immediately preceding his famous quote about the crooked timber of humanity.

Man is an animal which, if it lives among others of its kind, requires a master. For he certainly abuses his freedom with respect to other men, and although as a reasonable being he wishes to have a law which limits the freedom of all, his selfish animal impulses tempt him, where possible, to exempt himself from them. He thus requires a master, who will break his will and force him to obey a will that is universally valid, under which each can be free.⁹³

Aristotle too believes that we are cobbled together from crooked timber. But for him the ideal and the stopgap are reversed. If we were blessed with perfect judgment of our own and each

⁹³ Kant, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View*, 6th thesis. Trans. Lucas.

others' worth, and if we were surrounded by the best neighbours we could hope for, we would naturally fall out into permanent, unchanging hierarchy. It is only because we fall short of this ideal that we must resort—alas—to treating each other as equals.

CONCLUSION

I. REVIEW OF THE ARGUMENT

“The sage,” Aristotle apparently liked to say, “falls in love and takes part in politics; he gets married and he spends his life with the king.” According to the list of sayings that provides this quote, he also said that “friendship is a single soul living in two bodies.”¹ It’s doubtful that these *bon mots*, reported by Diogenes Laertius, are Aristotle’s words, and they may sound more like the ideas of Stoics than Aristotle. But if the argument I’ve just finished making is right, they capture something important about his ideas. For Aristotle, I’ve argued, much of what is most important in human action belongs to close, hierarchical, relationships. And when two people cooperate, this knits together sundry parts of their souls.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Aristotle thinks that one person rules another when goals established in the first person’s soul dictate the psychic activities of the second. This gives persuasive speech a special role in human interactions—not, as we might think, because it allows the subjects of rule to think for themselves before following orders, but because it allows rulers to impose ends directly on their souls. In Chapter 2, I argued that Aristotle thinks rule is coextensive with cooperation, and that he uses the concept of rule to divide communities and relationships into species, based not only on who is ultimately in charge, but also on how powers and responsibilities are entrusted to people lower on the hierarchy. In Chapter 3, we saw that Aristotle encourages the ambitious young men in his audience to pursue one sort of rule in

¹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, V.20 (μία ψυχή δύο σώμασιν ἐνοικοῦσα) and V.31 (ἐρασθήσεσθαι δὲ τὸν σοφὸν καὶ πολιτεύσεσθαι, γαμήσειν τε μὴν καὶ βασιλεῖ συμβιώσεσθαι).

particular: political rule, which requires that citizens treat each other as free and equal, ruling and being ruled by turns. But we saw that while Aristotle thinks this kind of cooperation has much to recommend it, he looks on it with real ambivalence. In most situations, he thinks political rule is good for human beings, but only because, alas, we are flawed animals forced to pursue justice in communities in which it's hard to agree about who is better than whom.

I've tried to show that this adds up to a substantive and philosophically rich theory—Aristotle has a general account of what rule is, he divides it into well-articulated smaller types, and he connects it with his broader views about the good. This theory is grounded in his philosophical commitments about action, community, and value, and it ties together parts of the *corpus* that we too often read in isolation. Rule, for Aristotle, is not just at home in the *Politics*, but also in the *Ethics* and even the *Rhetoric*; it isn't just about the domination of slaves and women, but also about the interactions of virtue-friends and fellow citizens; and it's not just about the fixed institutions of the household and the city, but rather about the countless ways one human being can cooperate with another.

II. ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF RULE AND MODERN POLITICS

Perhaps it's already clear that I think that one of the main lessons of Aristotle's theory of rule is that he's less of a liberal (or perhaps I should say *even* less of a liberal) than Aristotle scholars often think.² In Chapter 1, I argue that Aristotle advises masters to persuade their slaves with rational arguments because this helps to dominate them more effectively and completely—not

² Liberalism is notorious for eluding definition. I take it, though, that it's uncontroversial to assume that it would mark an affinity with liberalism to believe (i) that rational beings are entitled a fundamental equality of status and a concomitant a set of equal rights; (ii) that just social arrangements prevent (or minimize) hierarchies in which one person imposes his or her will on another without consent; or (iii) that one of the main goals of politics—and perhaps the only one—is to acknowledge and protect the freedom and equality of human beings, taken as autonomous individuals. These are the claims that I think are often attributed to Aristotle, and that I have been claiming he doesn't hold.

because he thinks we should do right by them as rational beings. In Chapter 2, I argue that he says that rule comes in several kinds largely in order to encourage rulers to recognize differences in the *ways* their subordinates are inferior to them—not to distinguish a good egalitarian kind of rule from a bad hierarchical one. And in Chapter 3, I argue that when he recommends political rule, and thereby gives freedom and equality important places in his political philosophy, he does it, in a certain sense, with a heavy heart.³

In this respect, I've been stressing what scholars inevitably call Aristotle's "strangeness" or his "distance from us." Now, it's become a commonplace in some parts of the academic world that these characteristics provide the best reasons to study historical texts. On this view, historical distance is particularly useful in illuminating our own unquestioned assumptions, making available to us ideas that we wouldn't otherwise thought of, and shedding light on the contingency of modern-day thought. Commonplace or not, I pretty well agree with this.

But I'd now like to briefly consider some of the ways that the distance between Aristotle and his present-day successors goes beyond mere disagreement. Two thinkers can have very different doctrines, but be closely related dialectically. After all, when one thinker develops the ideas of another, the new ideas may go so far beyond the original that they differ from their source in almost every respect. And one thinker can develop a position by rejecting another's ideas, sometimes pretty well point-by-point. In both sorts of cases, there is plenty of disagreement in substance, but clear and direct connections remain: the thinkers remain

³ In making these claims, I accept the view that it's more useful and interesting to stress the differences between historical thinkers and their present-day successors than their similarities. The most important sources of the approach I have in mind are Quentin Skinner and the so-called Cambridge School in the history of ideas (see especially Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8:1 [1969], 3-53); and Michel Foucault's Nietzschean genealogy ("Nietzsche, la généalogie, l'histoire," *Hommage à Jean Hyppolite* [Paris: P.U.F. 1971]). This thesis as a whole is indebted to both and to the scholarly traditions that have grown out of them. For several illuminating discussions of these traditions and related questions, see *Philosophy and its History*, edited by Mogens Laerke, Justin E. H. Smith, and Eric Schliesser (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

neighbours dialectically or historically. I think that one lesson that we stand to learn from Aristotle's theory of rule is that his political philosophy is different from its modern successors in this way as well as in its content.

This point isn't just relevant to those who think of Aristotle as a proto-liberal. In fact, one of the reasons Aristotle scholars sometimes exaggerate his continuities with liberalism is to answer another influential group of people who distort him by exaggerating his *disagreements* with it, for example by treating him as the father of an anti-liberal communitarianism. Although I haven't lingered on them, I think such overstatements of Aristotle's difference from liberalism are mistakes too.⁴ There are twin tendencies to exaggerate *both* similarities *and* differences between Aristotle's political thought and liberalism, and both are misleading. In fact, I think both are symptoms of exaggerating the kind of direct, dialectical relationship between Aristotle and modern political thought that I was just describing.

One crude version of this error springs from a certain way of thinking about the history of Western political thought. The story I have in mind begins with the hierarchy and paternalism of the Homeric world, which supposedly survives more or less intact, if heavily intellectualized, in Plato's *Republic*. But, the story continues, Athenian democrats soon started to overturn this sort of politics. Under their influence, political thinkers started to realize the political importance of freedom and equality. In this story, Aristotle took an important early step on a path that—after being interrupted by the Middle Ages—was taken progressively further by Hobbes (who, notwithstanding his authoritarianism, makes human equality the fundamental precondition of politics), by Locke, and by Kant. According to this story, to quote a widely-used political

⁴ On some of the problems with communitarian readings of Aristotle's politics, see Bernard Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

philosophy textbook) “every plausible political theory has the same ultimate value, which is equality.”⁵

The history of Western political thought that I’ve just given is of course a cartoon, and it has come under heavy fire from several quarters over the past fifty years. But in some version it is certainly implied by the tables of contents of many survey books and the reading lists of many introductory courses. I’m frankly not sure how many scholars in the history of philosophy would nowadays accept a suitably elaborated and qualified version of it. But even those who wholly reject it might still think that there are direct ties between Aristotle and liberalism. After all, they might point out, the founders of modern political thought almost always had well-thumbed copies of the *Politics* in their libraries, and their work is full of technical language and fragments of arguments that indisputably originate with Aristotle.⁶ Surely (so goes the argument), this shows that much modern philosophy is to some great extent made up of extensions of Aristotle on the one hand and responses to him on the other.

There are certainly many resemblances and connections between Aristotle’s *Politics* and various founding liberal texts. But they often conceal not just disagreements in doctrine, but systems that scarcely have anything to do with each other. Perhaps just one example (particularly relevant to the argument I’m bringing to a close) will suffice to illustrate the dangers. In Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*, he writes the following:

⁵ Will Kymlicka. *Contemporary Political Theory: An Introduction*, Second Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 3 (1990 is the date of the first edition). Kymlicka builds mainly on arguments by Ronald Dworkin in *Taking Rights Seriously* (London: Duckworth, 1977). I take it that the *status quo* represented by Kymlicka is tattered but still in place.

⁶ Indeed, the very words ‘democracy’ and ‘oligarchy’ entered vernacular language as specifically Aristotelian jargon: they first appeared alongside hundreds of other Greek-isms, in Nicole Oresme’s French translation and commentary of the *Politics*. See Albert Douglas Menut, ed. “Le Livre de Politiques d’Aristote, Published from the Text of the Avranches Manuscript 233,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series 60:6 (1970), 1-392.

The Power of a *Magistrate* over a Subject may be distinguished from that of a *Father* over his Children, a *Master* over his Servant, a *Husband* over his Wife, and a *Lord* over his Slave. All which distinct Powers happening sometimes together in the same Man, if he be considered under these different Relations, it may help us to distinguish these Powers one from another, and show the difference betwixt a Ruler of a Common-wealth, a Father of a Family, and a Captain of a Galley.⁷

Obviously, this passage looks a lot like a passage from the *Politics* that is one the main subjects of this thesis. J.S. Maloy makes the case (persuasively enough, I think) that in writing the *Two Treatises*, Locke intentionally aligned himself with Aristotle, against the quasi-Platonic project of modeling the power of the king on that of a father, a project that follows naturally from the analogy between family relationships and the relationships within the guardian class in the *Republic*.⁸ Now it scarcely needs to be said (and Maloy acknowledges) that Locke's political philosophy departs radically from Aristotle. But this isn't just because, as everyone will agree, other aspects of Locke's philosophy are incompatible with Aristotle's basic commitments (Locke, for example, thinks that people may or may not consent to being ruled by others, that the best reason to do submit to political rule is to protect one's property rights, etc., etc.). Nor is it just that the idea he is purportedly taking from Aristotle—political rule—is stripped of crucial associations with the political life in ancient Greece, including especially the practice of rule by turns. Rather, Locke's supposedly Aristotelian conception of political rule is itself defined in terms of a sort of equality that—as I argued in Chapter 3—had no place at all in Aristotle's thought. If Locke is inspired in some sense by Aristotle, this doesn't mean that he adopts,

⁷ *Two Treatises of Government*, 2.2

⁸ J.S. Maloy, "The Aristotelianism of Locke's Politics," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70:2 (2009), 235-57. Maloy argues that in doing this, Locke allied himself with a broader radical seventeenth-century tradition of using the Aristotelian distinction between political rule and despotism to criticize monarchy.

develops, modifies, or even understands his ideas. I submit (though I won't make the argument) that *many* of the Aristotelian echoes in liberal thought, from the seventeenth century onward, are rather like this passage from Locke.

And this is what we might expect considering the period between Aristotle and Hobbes, missing from the cartoonish narrative above. Not only did political thought continue through late antiquity and the middle ages, but it continued along lines that do not fit comfortably into the narrative I gave above. Among other things, the long period between Aristotle and Hobbes testifies neither to the collapse of hierarchical political philosophy nor to the rise of equality in its place. We've seen that Aristotle's political philosophy is in large part a counsel of *noblesse oblige* that justifies his students' claim to rule the people around them even as it limits and redirects it. This kind of thought continued in several forms through the Hellenistic period and the Renaissance. There was, for one thing, the tradition of mirrors to princes, running from Xenophon and Isocrates through the Hellenistic period to Machiavelli and beyond.⁹ Likewise, neo-Platonists and their students elaborated on the theme of the philosopher king, exploring the connection between philosophical knowledge and political expertise.¹⁰

And insofar as Aristotle's views soon came to be challenged or eclipsed by various rivals, these weren't only or primarily egalitarian, nor were they based on the ideal of freedom. One prominent strand of social thought running from late antiquity to the modern period, for example, turned from the question of *how to rule* to the question of Plato's *Apology: how to obey*. Obedience to God and to his human representatives are for example recurring themes in

⁹ For the period immediately following Aristotle, see D.E. Hahm, "Kings and Constitutions: Hellenistic Theories," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, ed. Malcolm Schofield and Christopher Rowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.), 457-76. For the renaissance, see Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

¹⁰ See Dominic O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

Augustine, as is the view that docility is an essential aspect of human development.¹¹ Others continued to emphasize this question through to the beginning of the modern period. Thus Francis Bacon opens his essay “Of Great Place” by appealing to a long tradition of literature about the ways that service shapes all human life. Even the most powerful people, he says, “are thrice servants—servants of the sovereign or State, servants of fame, and servants of business; so as they have no freedom, neither in their person nor in their actions, nor in their times.”¹²

In short, if Aristotle’s political philosophy contains the seeds of liberalism, not only did they take a long time to sprout, but they have no special priority over any number of other Aristotelian ideas that could have developed (and sometimes did develop) into a wide variety of unfamiliar, non-liberal forms. Thus, attending to the ideas in Aristotle might help to shed light on a number of issues in the subsequent history of political thought that have not, so far as I know, gotten much attention. For example, it might also be useful to consider whether what I have called ‘rule pluralism’ has analogues or descendants in the centuries that followed. Similarly, we might try to trace consider the fortunes of the idea that human social relationships inevitably involve some people acting as final causes on the souls of others.

I think, for similar reasons, that attention to Aristotle’s theory of rule might also provide tools for thinking about politics in the present. Although, as I’ve said, liberal neo-Aristotelianism

¹¹ For a helpful survey of early Christian discussions of obedience and docility, I’m indebted to Amy Barnes’s forthcoming doctoral thesis, *Authenticity and the Ascetic Self*. Barnes connects Augustine to a tradition including figures like Athanasius and John Cassian. She argues that according to this the Christian conception of the virtue of obedience and the value of docility. In this tradition, she argues, hierarchical relationships don’t simply involve removing the agency of the person ruled and replacing it with the will of the authority figure: “great strength is shown by these men when they overcome pride and attain docility or a true capacity to be shaped by authoritative instruction and to imitate the examples of those they understand to be good.”

¹² Whately, Richard (ed.) *Bacon’s Essays*, (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1856), 87. I don’t know of much work by philosophers that focuses on themes of service or obedience, but I understand that it has lately become a central concern among scholars of early modern English literature. See especially David Schalkwyk’s *Shakespeare on Love and Service* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), which surveys the ways the question ‘how should one serve’ runs through Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets: Some characters, like Kate, progress from unhappy service-as-bondage to loving service-as-freedom; others, like Cordelia, show that the truest, deepest service involves disobeying or challenging a master; others, like Iago, exploit the access and trust granted to servants.

is less Aristotelian (and more neo) than we might think, and the causal relationships between them are more complex than we imagine, there are likenesses of Aristotle's theory of rule in several places where they have seldom been noticed, and the concepts and associations in Aristotle's theory of rule might well help us understand them more clearly. We might, for example, point to the typologies of power developed by Max Weber and Robert Dahl, and to Michel Foucault's thesis that there is no avoiding power relationships. Or we might turn to the topic—suddenly ubiquitous in popular left-wing thought—of privilege, which, like Aristotle, takes it as a given that some people have power over others, and asks what they should do about it. Beyond the academy, there is the familiar idea in popular discussion of sports, business and in popular thought that something called “leadership” is essential for effective cooperation, and some kinds of leadership (kinds, perhaps, that executives might learn at expensive seminars) are better than others.

If the story I've told here is correct, these strands of thought share certain concerns with Aristotle. But it seems to me that many of them might also benefit from engaging more closely with the claims that we've seen here: that the thoughts and actions of some are yoked to values and projects of others; and that when we confront power relationships (both when others wield it over us, and that when we wield it over them) we should keep an eye on their variety, their complexity, and on the difficulty of negotiating them appropriately in a world that is further from the ideal than we might wish.

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