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2009

# The Ethics of Aristotle's Politics

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## CHAPTER 26

# The Ethics of Aristotle's *Politics*

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*David J. Depew*

### Politics and Ethics

The most authoritative and architectonic science seems to be political science. For it prescribes which of the sciences are to be used in the polis, who is to learn them, and to what extent. (*Eth. Nic.* 1.1.1094a26–b2)

At the beginning of *Nicomachean Ethics* we find Aristotle searching for the master science in the sphere of human activity by constructing hierarchies in which bridle-making, for example, is instrumentally related, and hence subordinated to, horsemanship, horsemanship to military expertise (*stratēgikē*), and military expertise, finally, to political science (*politikē epistēmē*) (*Eth. Nic.* 1.1.1094a9–26). Other chains converge on political science as well. Moderns – the authors of the American constitution, for example – might admit the primacy of politics in this sense. As founders of a state, and hence practitioners of *politikē*, the framers could not help making it their business to weigh in on economic, legal, social, and educational matters. They said, for example, that religious instruction would not be given by officers of the state or supported by it. We might imagine, however, that their warrants for such judgments were ethical, not political. By their time ethics had been distinguished from politics. So the framers envisioned a state whose citizens were empowered to pursue their own happiness, an ethical concept, by means of justly framed and fairly applied laws. For these lawmakers politics was to be informed and constrained by ethics. But Aristotle, too, declares happiness (*eudaimonia*) to be the “highest of all goods in the sphere of action” (*Eth. Nic.* 1.4.1095a16–18). So shouldn't ethics have been the master science for him as well? Perhaps. Still, the fact is that for Aristotle the buck really does stop at politics (*Eth. Nic.* 1.4.1095a16). His ethics is entirely political.

Why is that? It is not because Aristotle treated individuals as mere cogs in the wheel of the state, as fascists did. He regarded any notion of a happy state not founded on the happiness of its individual citizens as incoherent (*Pol.* 2.5.1264b17–21). But

neither does Aristotle's commitment to the autonomy of each citizen entail a political theory that enjoins merely minimal norms of public conduct in order to ensure that maximal room is left for private persons to identify and realize their own conceptions of happiness. With one wrinkle, his ethical theory identifies, analyzes, and commends a single objectively adequate, if complex, conception of happiness. With the exception of a relatively few theoretical adepts – that is the wrinkle, to which I will return at the end (see also Brown, this volume, chapter 31) – his conception identifies “only those activities [as] part of the human good which are activities of good citizens in the good polis” (Garver 2006: 128; *Pol.* 3.18. 1288a40–b2). If ethics is neither subordinate to politics nor superior to it it is because for Aristotle ethics simply *is* political science in its most normative and least circumstance-burdened aspect.

What aspect of political science is that? Aristotle is keenly aware that the polis-oriented activities that are constitutive of individual happiness depend on the acquisition of certain habits and values. So he insists that socialization (*ethismos*) and education (*paideia*) should be the primary concerns of lawmakers (*Pol.* 7.14.1333a35–b10; *Eth. Nic.* 5.2.1130b22–6). Ethics is the aspect of politics that commends to leaders the set of moral virtues to which citizens *qua* citizens should be habituated and the norms of justice they should embrace in their dealings with one another. It also specifies the forms of affection (*philia*) they should cultivate and the kinds of leisure activities (*diagōgē en tē scholē*), including branches of art and learning, in which they should engage. These four topics – virtue, justice, friendship, and leisure, in this order – structure the table of contents of *Nicomachean Ethics*. In sum, Aristotle's answers to questions about happiness double as first principles of normative politics because they identify the virtues, activities, and values that are required if citizens of Greek poleis, or something very much like them, are to flourish.

Aristotle nowhere relativizes these norms. On the contrary, his ethnocentric contempt for barbarians – with notable exceptions, he simply means foreigners – embodies the notion that there can be no better, or indeed other, form of social and political organization than the Greek polis as a matrix for fully developing and expressing human capacities. Does this mean that his ethics is useless for anyone not living in a Greek city-state? Does it mean that people who embrace Aristotle's ethics must do what they can to bring back the city-state? Or that those who even today claim to find his ethical texts helpful in public as well as private matters, but who live in entirely different sociopolitical worlds, must have misinterpreted him? There are no easy answers to these questions. Nonetheless, in musing about them we would do well to acknowledge that the reception history of these texts usually betrays more about the cultural assumptions of Aristotle's fans at this or that time than about Aristotle himself, even if the most creative of these time-bound appropriations do manage to find partial support in genuinely Aristotelian claims.

Aristotle's medieval interpreters, for example, whether they were Islamic, Jewish, or Christian, could see at a glance that he liked kingship, in large part because he thought it afforded more scope for matching the claims of individuals to their social and moral worth than the ham-handed uniformity of even the best laws, which Aristotle regarded as standing in for virtues that most people do not fully acquire (*Eth. Nic.* 5.10.1137b12–32; Hedrick, this volume, chapter 27). In economic

exchange, qualification for office, punishment for crimes, and constitution making, proportional equality *is* Aristotle's idea of justice (*Eth. Nic* V.3.1131a29–b31). He thought kings could best render justice so conceived because their flexibility in addressing particular circumstances rested on their own (or, suspiciously, their family's, *Pol.* 3.17.1288a16) incommensurably greater virtue, wealth, and freedom of action when compared to other citizens (*Pol.* 3.13.1284a3–10; 15.1288a10–12; 17.1288a26–9). Medievals made Aristotle safe for dynastic kingship by following this line of thought, and anti-republican defenders of the ancien regime followed suit.

Freedom-loving liberals,<sup>1</sup> whether they stress free markets or free personal behavior, including the right not to participate in political life, are offended by such a doctrine, as well as by other unpalatable features of *Politics*, such as its defense of slavery and its denial of citizenship to women. If they read Aristotle's *Ethics* sympathetically, as commending to reflective persons everywhere a philosophically justified way of defining and achieving personal happiness, they will try to find ways to pry the *Ethics* loose from the *Politics*. They might in this event try to make something of the slippage Aristotle himself acknowledges between the good citizen of this or that state, whose conduct conforms to its laws, and the good man as such, whose actions flow from virtuous dispositions and desires tutored by rationality (*Pol.* 3.4.1276b29–1277a4; *Eth. Nic.* 5.1.1130b25–30). If they are honest enough to recognize that, even if not all of Aristotle's good citizens are good men, his good men must also be good citizens, they may still try to make him safe for liberal democracy by limiting the explicitly political application of his moral theory to behaving justly toward others (Striker 2006; see *Eth. Nic.* 5.1.1129b31–5; 2.1130b20–2). If, following this line of thought, they acknowledge that Aristotle's conception of justice as proportional equality seems to stress treating unequal cases unequally more than, like our own, treating equal cases equally (*Pol.* 3.9.1280a9–15), they may try to find ways to show that under scrutiny this theory of justice is closer to our own than we might initially have imagined (F. Miller 1995).

In recent decades, attempts to find either a monarchical authoritarian or a proto-liberal in Aristotle have given way to efforts to find in his stress on virtue a communitarian political theorist. Virtue ethicists use Aristotle's conviction that morality depends on habituation to shared norms of behavior as a stick with which to beat merely proceduralist conceptions of morality and justice, whether utilitarian or Kantian (MacIntyre 1984, 1999). People whose virtuous habits are acquired by the inculcation and subsequent internalization of strong social norms, they argue, are most likely to find and do what morality demands in particular, often complex, circumstances (Hedrick, chapter 27). While not every virtue theorist is a communitarian, those that are argue that ineffectively thin, rule-governed criteria for moral judgment are closely tied to liberal political institutions and that in practice these institutions produce people whose habits, values, and behavior regularly fall short of what common life requires, thereby threatening the very possibility of a good society (Bellah et al. 1985). All communitarians thus agree with Aristotle that orientation toward active participation in some kind of community life is required to turn out good people. That still leaves open what kind of community is required (see F. Miller 1995: 361–6). But most communitarians think that there can be no substitute for orientation to

active citizenship in a political community for forming a moral identity and being able to make prudent judgments in particular cases. In effect, they agree with Aristotle that the good person must be a good citizen. Of those who take this view, some have attempted to refigure liberalism itself in order to accommodate this requirement (Sandel 1996; Walzer 1983; Barber 1984). Others have distanced themselves from liberalism in favor of corporatist political theories (Etzioni 1993).

Politically oriented communitarian virtue theorists are fond of citing Aristotle's warrant for forging a tight connection between morality and citizenship. That warrant, in the words of the would-be historian of philosophy and Aristotle scholar Karl Marx, is that "man is in the most literal sense of the word a *zōon politikon* [political animal], not merely a gregarious [herd] animal, but an animal that can individuate itself only in the midst of society" (Marx 1973: 84; see also 496). Nonetheless, communitarians and virtue theorists generally tend to draw back from the anthropological grounds on which Aristotle himself bases this claim. That, it has been said, is because we moderns no longer share Aristotle's biological teleology, and hence his theory of human nature (MacIntyre 1984: 52–3). There is some worry, too, that whenever a biological "is" is used to enjoin an ethical or political "ought" there almost always lurks an assumption of the biologically grounded superiority of some persons over others. Aristotle's example does nothing to assuage this worry. Accordingly, interpreters of Aristotle's practical philosophy must consider whether or to what degree the anthropology that undergirds his ethical theory imposes insuperable barriers to our appropriation of that theory. To do so we must first recount his anthropology as accurately as we can.

## The Ethical Implications of Aristotle's Anthropology

A human being is by nature [*phusei*] a political animal [*politikon zōon*] ... Actually, the human being [*anthrōpos*] is more political than any sort of bee and every herd animal. For ... alone among the animals the human being has articulate speech [*logos*]. (*Pol.* 1.2.1253a2–9)

For Aristotle, *anthrōpos* is not the only political animal, even though human beings do express this concept paradigmatically, and so define what appears less clear and developed in other cases. In the spirit of this semantics of exemplarity, which is closely related to Plato's theory of forms, Aristotle recognizes in his biological treatises social insects and cranes, in addition to humans, as political animals because they communicate with one another and, by doing so, divide roles in pursuit of a common work (*koinon ergon*) (*Hist. An.* 1.1.488a8; 8.589a3; *Pol.* 1.2.1253a7–9; see Cooper 1990; Kullmann 1991; Depew 1995). Aristotle also notes that the specifically human way of being a political animal relies on our inclination to "couple up" (*sunduazetai*) into permanent male–female pairs (*Eth. Eud.* 7.10.1242a25). (Some nonpolitical and a few other political animals, such as cranes, also do this.) These bonds are very important. Permanent coupling creates natural ties not only between parent and child, but also links that extend across generations through kinship. Households are thus parts of

villages, and villages either of tribes, clans, and nations or, in a less common but superior trajectory of social development, of poleis (*Pol.* 1.2.1252b16–30).

What diffuses these bonds and drives them into highly role-differentiated social structures is the uniquely human capacity for articulate speech (*logos*). All political animals have a way of communicating with one another in order to cooperate. But political animals other than human have only touch or sound to serve as a communication medium, whereas humans also have language. They can thus communicate with one another not merely “what is painful and pleasant . . . but what is useful and useless . . . just and unjust . . . good and bad” (*Pol.* 1.2.1253a11–15). This capacity, Aristotle infers, makes human beings “more political than any bee or herd animal” (*Pol.* 1.2.1253a8–9), presumably because speech, by its intentionality, multiplies the number, intensity, and nature of our mutual engagements far beyond those of other political animals (Cooper 1990). In sum, we are the only species that lives in a niche constituted by the webs of discourse in and through which we interact with one another and the environment. Aristotle views human nature through the eyes of a natural historian (Chappell, this volume, chapter 25). But from this perspective he asserts that the distinctively human way of being biological is to be cultural.

In this respect, the solitary (*monadikos*) animal is the polar opposite of the political. (Between these extremes lie scattered (*sporadikos*) and herd (*agelaios*) animals (*Hist. An.* 1.1.488a2–4; Depew 1995).) Being naturally political in their cultural, discursive way, humans risk forfeiting the sources of their selfhood when they are made, or even worse make themselves, into solitaires.<sup>2</sup> As Marx recognized, the solitary never becomes an individual at all in the sense of a well-realized instance of his natural kind. Rather, he degenerates into a self-absorbed monster, more wild beast than man, whose natural passions are warped into love of violence for its own sake and whose intelligence, rather than serving as a medium of cooperation, is turned into a frighteningly powerful instrument of bestial desires. Armed to the teeth by his cunning, the solitary man “is the most unholy and most savage of animals, and the worst with regard to sex and food” (*Pol.* 1.2.1253a35–7, trans. Lord 1984). His desires are bottomless, like those of the tyrant whose inner life is laid bare in Plato’s *Gorgias* and the final books of *Republic*. If anything, Aristotle is more realistic than Plato in stressing not the frustrations of forever chasing after new pleasures, but the real delight that the greedy man takes in being unconstrained by the claims of others and the very notion of “enough” (*Eth. Nic.* 5.1130b4; Balot 2001a: 25–33; Nagle 2006: 297). We should fear this “clanless, lawless, hearthless” condition (*Pol.* 1.2.1253a4–5, quoting Hom. *Il.* 9.63–4). Moreover, we should pity good people like Philoctetes or Hecuba who through no fault of their own are stripped of the communities that sustain, as well as generate, their identities. Driven to the edges of civilization, their very selves can be unmade (Nussbaum 1986: 378–421).

Admittedly, discursively mediated social bonds come in all shades. But Aristotle’s cultural anthropology is no more relativist than his political theory. He rank orders cultures by the quality of their discursive life. (That is why Aristotle buys into the astounding Greek prejudice that underlies the word “barbarian,” those who go “ba-ba-ba” rather than having fully articulate speech.) The scale on which he measures cultures is the degree to which, in the course of communicative interaction, objects

accessible *only* to speech and thought, and so expressive of the distinctive potentialities of mind (*dianoia*), become the focus of shared life rather than serving merely as more powerful tools for the satisfaction of needs and desires that are shared with other animals (*Eth. Nic.* 1.7.1097b22–1098a19; *de An.* 2.3.414a29–32). In the ideal case, discursive speech becomes a conceptual medium in which aspects of the *kosmos* that are not open to nonrational animals, but have intrinsic value, are constituted as objects of desire, discussion, and contemplative apprehension (on “the open,” see Agamben 2004). This can happen only on the basis of polis life, even when it transcends it, because the discursive activity that makes such revelations possible grows only in the soil of the polis. “Community [*koinonia*] [in perception of the useful just, and good],” Aristotle says, “is what constitutes a household and a polis” (*Pol.* 1.2.1253a18).

The intimate tie between ethics and polis life follows from these supposed anthropological facts. Unless human beings are socialized from childhood in good habits, moral underdevelopment ensues and moral disaster looms (*Eth. Nic.* 1.4.1095b4–9; Burnyeat 1980; McDowell 1996; Hedrick, chapter 27). When, on the other hand, good socialization is succeeded by the practice of deliberative reason-giving – a practice reliably and pervasively available only in and through polis life – the young will become virtuous in proportion as they internalize the noble (*kalos*) values that for Aristotle, no less than Plato, integrate the self. This requires learning to distinguish in everyday practice between internal and external goods and, relatedly, between instrumentally and intrinsically valuable uses of rationality. Because the quality of their discursive interaction is poor, Aristotle infers, such distinctions do not operate in barbarian cultures. They are also at risk in poleis whose “deviant” constitutions substitute the apparent good of particular persons (tyrannies) or classes (oligarchies and democracies) for the common (*koinon*) good of the political community (*koinonia*). Aristotle thinks that internalizing what is intrinsically noble into the core of the self will in turn protect citizens when for one reason or another access to the modest supply of external goods such as health, wealth, and beauty necessary for stable happiness comes under strain (*Eth. Nic.* 1.10.1100b23–33). The cultivation of virtuous activity and leisured activities for their own sake makes the polis more, not less, secure because Aristotle believes that the external goods necessary for its well-being are normally consequences, not direct aims, of its devotion to the pursuit of intrinsic goods through its encouragement of virtuous acts done for their own sake (*Pol.* 7.1.1323a39–b6). This upbeat claim is licensed not only by the view that good values make the self a harmonious whole that is resilient in the face of difficulties, but also by Aristotle’s confidence in the protective and prophylactic webs of polis life. By contrast, he takes barbarian conurbations – pleasure-loving Babylon, for example – to be constantly vulnerable to conquest because their denizens have no public spirit (*Pol.* 3.3.1276a29–30; Garver 1994).

None of this will occur, however, unless highly intrusive, well-conceived public educational norms and practices (*paideia*) are put in place. That is why Aristotle thinks, as I noted above, that the most important aspect of constitutional law and the standard by which founding lawmakers should be judged is provision for a common education (*Pol.* 7.14.1333a35–b10; *Eth. Nic.* 5.2.1130b22–6). Neglecting education, misconstruing it as the Spartan legislator did with his one-sided stress on

military virtues to the neglect of the proper uses of leisure (*Pol.* 2.9.1271b1–7; 7.14.1333b15–23; 8.3.1337b30–3), or just leaving it up to individual heads of households, as Athenian democrats do – all these are recipes for trouble.

We should at this point be clear about Aristotle's ethical theory. He is a moral perfectionist. To be sure, he believes that most citizens of most poleis can be educated by good customs and laws only to the extent of acquiring what he calls "citizen's virtue," which enables them to resist passions that they actually feel (*Pol.* 3.3.1276b33–5). A desire to run away from battle, for example, can be countered by shame (*Eth. Nic.* 3.8.1116a18–b3). But a distinctive aspect of Aristotle's moral philosophy is that citizenly self-control (*enkrateia*) is a poor measure of fully developed human capacities. His version of virtue theory has it that good men, and therefore the very best citizens living in the very best states, can be so fully drawn to what is good and noble that they will enjoy, with no hint of repression, being temperate about food and sex; will be pleased, being friends, to treat fellow citizens justly and generously; and will even be able to take pleasure in courageous acts in battle (on temperance, see Young 1988; friendship, Cooper 1975, 1990; courage, Garver 1994).

This doctrine of perfection will seem less odd if we remind ourselves once more that Aristotle's ethics is political. We ourselves are often pleased to find pretty much the same suite of admirable character traits and, not coincidentally, practically wise decisions that he commends in people like, say, Nelson Mandela. But we have also been inescapably influenced by the rise since late antiquity of the notion that good character traits are to be measured by altruistic acts that extend beyond the circle of one's own (in Christian ethics, for example (Hedrick, chapter 27)). This has led, on one hand, to ethical ideals that are more strenuous than Aristotle's and, on the other, to lower expectations about what is actually possible, given our nature. For his part, Aristotle would simply disagree with Kant, and with the Christian anthropology he inscribed into the notion of practical rationality, that "nothing better can be made out of the crooked wood of humanity" than mere resistance to our pathologies. By the same token, Aristotle would think that Kant's notion that a set of devils or Hobbesian natural solitaries can form a state provided only that they know how to reason validly is doubly incoherent. It misconstrues the state as an alliance or contract between persons whose core identities are antecedent to the relationships into which they enter, as in social contractarian thought experiments. It also misconstrues reason as simply a calculating tool for getting whatever our untutored passions want. For this reason, Aristotle would also disagree with utilitarians like John Stuart Mill, who, even though they are as eudaimonistic as he, believe that moral reasoning reduces, by an unrestricted practice of socially negotiated trade-offs, to the best way of securing for everyone (and not, as Aristotle would have it, in proportion to merit as measured by contribution to the common good of the political community) the external goods whose enjoyment utilitarians take to constitute happiness. (This is the moral theory embedded in our own political practices.) As long as even a hint remains that one's thoughts and actions are instrumentally aimed at securing external goods and satisfying untutored passions instead of being oriented toward intrinsic goods that are accessible to mind, Aristotle will discern cracks between one's actual desires and one's grasp of, attraction to, and choice of what is inherently noble.



As long as such cracks exist the self will not be whole and its happiness will be either inaccessible, imperfect, or at risk.

The same considerations that reveal Aristotle to be neither a deontologist nor a utilitarian also show that neither is he what, in our frame of reference, *we* call an ethical naturalist (for a contrary view, see Chappell, chapter 25). If anything, he is a moral intuitionist. He believes that the intrinsically good, right, and noble are intentional objects of virtuous dispositions (*Eth. Eud.* 2.11.1227b13–1228a3). Even so, Aristotle's denial that moral intuitions are innate to all will surely lead most commentators to reject this characterization; embedding ethics within politics as deeply as he does, he cannot help but affirm that moral insight is comparatively rare and so deeply contingent on good institutions and practices that it depends on "moral luck." At the same time, the dependence of morality on training to acquire good values does serve to show why Aristotle's ethical-political perfectionism is more alive to and repulsed by the evils of which men are capable than any Calvinist, Hobbesian, or Machiavellian. Aristotle's anthropological stress on humans as naturally community-forming animals (*koinōnika zōa*; *Eth. Eud.* 7.10.1242a22–7) leads him to the perception that "the wickedness of human beings is insatiable" when the bonds of community are shattered, perverted, abrogated, or never formed (*Pol.* 2.7.1267b1, trans. Lord 1984).

Does this mean that for Aristotle human nature is "basically" bad? Certainly not. We have seen that unlike modern social contractarians Aristotle does not think of human nature as consisting in a fixed set of passions (*pathēmata*), desires (*epithumiai*), and impulses (*hormai*) that are preformed before our engagements in social life. Nor does he imagine that we maximize and manage these fixed passions by using an equally innate, if incurably self-regarding and content-neutral, calculative rationality. For Aristotle "the nature of each thing, such as a human being, a horse, or a house, is reached only when its process of coming-to-be is finished" (*Pol.* 1.2.1252b30–1253a2). Given this teleological view, naked passion and purely calculative rationality are not the beginning points from which persons or states are formed. On the contrary, they are evidence of failure to actualize the distinctive potentialities of naturally discursively political animals. Reason itself is developed and oriented toward its proper ends by communicative interaction. To define our species without reference to the ends that its highest capacities can reach if properly cultivated by discourse, then, is not only to privilege passions over reason – the distinctive faculty that marks us off from all other animals – but to treat what for Aristotle are species specific potentialities as dissipated into bad habits from the very outset. Unfortunately, he seems to think this defect is both widespread and for the most part irreversible.<sup>3</sup>

A precisely opposed anthropology has been vividly set forth by Thomas Hobbes. That is because Hobbes, who was no mean Aristotle scholar, is simply Aristotle turned upside down. Because he rejected Aristotle's teleological semantics, as well as his teleological conception of nature, Hobbes took human beings to be natural solitaries in Aristotle's sense. He also thought that their naturally solitary lives were as "poor, nasty, brutish, and short" as Aristotle assumed. Hobbes therefore found it easy to imagine that these solitaries would use whatever calculative rationality they

could muster to enter contractually into civil society, which in consequence he clearly saw must exist not by nature, *pace* Aristotle, but by constitutional art (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, "Introduction"; Keyt 1991a; F. Miller 1995). Would Aristotle recognize Hobbes's civil society or any contractually grounded state, including our own, as a political community? Probably not (*Pol.* 3.9.1280a33–40, b29–32), although he might recognize that our political institutions are actually or at least potentially less contractual, and more oriented toward the good life, than our own theories allow us to see. To appreciate this skepticism we must examine the political institutions that Aristotle thinks his own ethical norms call for and rule out.

## The Politics of Aristotle's Ethics

The polis is the sort of community [*koinōnia*] that arises from [the integration of] a number of villages into a completed [*teleia*] community. [It is completed] because it reaches, as it were, a level of full sufficiency [*autarkeia*]. Coming into being for the sake of life itself [*zēn*], it exists for the sake of living well [*eu zēn*]. It is evident, then, that the polis is among things that exist by nature [*phusei*]. (*Pol.* 1.2.1252b27–1253a3)

If Aristotle's ethics are political, what sorts of political institutions do they countenance? We may begin an inquiry into this subject by noting that Aristotle's anthropology does indeed contain the claim that Hobbes rejects, that the polis – not this or that polis, but the polis as a form of human social life – exists by nature because it comes to be by a natural, not an artificial, process of development. Plants and animals, except for those that are spontaneously generated, come into being naturally and exist by nature as well. Since each is a substance, it has been tempting to interpret the natural status that Aristotle ascribes to the polis as conferring on it substantial existence in its own right. This is, however, as incorrect as regarding the polis as a product of constitutional *technē*. If poleis were substances, Aristotle would have to give up his conviction that human beings become individuated within them and that the measure of good poleis is the happiness of the individuals who live in them.<sup>4</sup> Fascists both see this and embrace the inference. Ontologically considered, however, the polis falls under the category of relationship, not substance. It is a certain kind of community (*koinōnia*): a reliably reconstructed, transgenerational pattern of relationships among naturally political human animals that obtains when their characteristically discursive form of communicative interaction reaches its final state of development, its *telos*.

It happens this way. As permanently coupling, socially embedded, discursively communicating animals, human beings are "always already" painfully, universally, and naturally oriented toward social interaction as a way of acquiring mates, offspring, land, food, population, military security, luxury goods, and rest from labor. Getting, and more importantly reliably reproducing, these means of material self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) can be ensured only to the extent that the master–slave, woman–man, and parent–child relationships come to be distinguished within the household by the

assignment of special roles, and appropriate degrees of virtue, to each; and when, not coincidentally, the male heads of these households (*oikonomikoi*) appear in public as citizens (*politai*) who deliberate about the common good with other citizens. Role differentiation of this sort is necessary because if heads of households were simply masters of slaves (*despotai*) they would treat their wives, too, as slaves and not as partners in deliberation, and could never appear in public as freely deliberating citizens. Indeed, only when the household comes to be distinguished from the public deliberative sphere by acquiring full internal role differentiation – Aristotle’s version of Plato’s one-person-one-job criterion (*Pol.* 1.2.1252b1–3) – does it actually become functionally or teleologically defined *as* a household and as a proper, constitutive part of the polis (*Pol.* 1.2.1253a19–21). Aristotle thinks that precisely these differentiations, and consequently the key distinction between “a large household and a small polis” (*Pol.* 1.1.1252a12–13), do not emerge among barbarians, who “take the social position [*taxis*] of the woman and the slave to be the same” (*Pol.* 1.2.1252b4–9).

The polis, then, consists of a number of “polis-households” – not too many or too few to sustain a rationally deliberative, leisured way of life – linked by a variety of permanent, multigenerational bonds (*Pol.* 3.1.1275b17–20; 7.4.1326b3–5; Nagle 2006). The capstone of these bonds is shared commitment to the common good as secured by public deliberation among citizens under the assumption that leisured self-sufficiency is the *telos* of their association. In seeing this we may see more clearly why Aristotle takes economic self-sufficiency to be a good effect, rather than the properly final end, of polis life. The reason is that only in a space of citizenly deliberation, where means and ends are reflexively discussed, can it be recognized that economic security is a means to an end, and that when enough security has reliably been attained the community is in a position to make the very point of its association the maintenance of a leisured sphere in which citizens and the free members of their households spend whatever time is not required by work (*Pol.* 1.8.1256b29–39). The notion that wealth is limited by the ends to which it is put is what protects a society from overreaching and undermining itself.

Some of this leisure time is to be spent in the discursively constituted self-governance that makes greater security, and so enhanced leisure, possible. But citizens can also be expected to treat the shared enjoyment of shared ties and festivals and other ways of “passing time together in a leisured way [*diagōgē en tē schōlē*]” as more end-like (*Pol.* 7.15.1334a32–4). Activities that cultivate and express rationality are so end-like, in fact, that for Aristotle they provide the appropriate measure of whatever external goods are required for a fully realized human life (*Eth. End.* 8.3.1249b17–21; Cooper 1975: 136–9), thereby canceling what Hobbes called “the restless desire of power after power that ceases only in death” (*Leviathan* I.11) that characterizes naturally solitary humans, as well as the presumption of scarcity that continues to shadow all human communities except the polis. This reversal of values is what Aristotle means by the shift from “mere life” (*zēn*) to “good life” (*eu zēn*) in the passage quoted at the outset of this section. The shift leads away from a conception of scarce leisure as rest before renewed labor (*anapausis*; *Pol.* 8.3.1337b36–38a2) toward abundant leisure conceived as civic, religious, artistic, and, in a wide sense of the word,

philosophical engagement (*Pol.* 7.15.1334a32–4; Depew 1991). Along the way, the very meaning of the term self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) changes. From referring to freedom from the dependent, hence slavish, labor (*ponos*) necessary to maintain “mere life” it comes to mean engagement in activities that citizens autonomously, and hence unslavishly, pursue for their own highly pleasurable sake (Cole 1988–9; Brown, this volume, chapter 31).<sup>5</sup>

We are now in a position to observe Aristotle's natural teleology at work in his political theory. The fact that the discursive life of the polis equips it with an end beyond which it will not overreach – the pursuit of leisure in its highest forms – as well as with developed deliberative abilities to attain and preserve that end in particular situations is what makes the polis a natural existence. For the nature of something, we recall, is the point in the unfolding of a natural process that cannot be improved by further change. The polis is the terminal point of social development because leisure activities in civic friendship are themselves so ineluctably end-like (Cooper 1990). Only in the polis, Aristotle thinks, can religious festivals, artistic performances, practices of reflective criticism, and all forms of systematic inquiry appear to all as “the very best [*aristen*] way of passing time” (*Pol.* 7.3.1338a23–31, quoting Hom. *Od.* 9.5–6).

This account of the genesis of the polis as moving naturally from mere life to good life also provides Aristotle with an efficient cause of the step-by-step social complexification that reaches its *telos* in the polis. It is, of course, true that Aristotle's maxim that “nature does nothing in vain” entails that the polis arises because it is necessary for the actualization of human potential (F. Miller 1995: 40–1). But in order to avoid the circular rabbit-out-of-a-hat reasoning that was among the reasons why Hobbes and other early moderns abandoned final causes and natural teleology, Aristotle must adduce a concrete efficient cause for the development of the polis. The efficient cause is not simply the fear of not having enough, which is intensified in animals who deal with their environment by way of forethought, imagination, and anticipation of their own death, but also the positive impulse that naturally political animals have to maximize shared leisure-time activities.

There is, as usual, both a controversial background and a normative implication in Aristotle's analysis. His genealogical account of the polis differs from Plato's in *Republic* by declining to take the division of labor in an exchange economy as the locus that leads by self-purification toward the emergence of the proper parts of the polis. Instead, Aristotle locates the genesis of the polis in the movement from subsistence households through households linked by kinship into villages that “generate more than is required for daily needs” to fully self-sufficient polis-households (*Pol.* 1.2.1252b10–1253a1). He strongly implies that, while Plato's heart is in the right place, the story he tells stresses the quest for security more than the positive reinforcement of pleasurable social leisure activities. Even when transcended, Plato's economism is shadowed by need and want. Accordingly, Aristotle complains that when Plato puts a stop to the imperialist expansion of mere life in his genealogy of the polis in *Republic* he does so by constraining the self-actualizing, enjoyable activities of the citizens by making temperance (*sōphrosunē*), rather than the liberality (*eleutheria*) with which citizens freely share their possessions with one another, the most prominent

characterological presupposition of justice (*Pol.* 2.6.1265a29–37). Moreover, Plato makes justice rather than friendship (*philia*) the bond of men in states.

Aristotle, on the other hand, believes that proportional equality (in claims to office, shares of the common wealth, and redress for crimes) can be as sensitive to the differential merits of claimants in particular cases as the concept of justice requires because (in contrast to Plato's tendency to multiply laws unnecessarily) justice is ringed about by friendship within and between households. "Friendship," Aristotle writes, "is the conscious choice [*prohairesis*] of sharing life together [*suzēn*] for its own sake" (*Pol.* 3.9.1280b39–40). The fact that Aristotle's discussion of justice in *Ethics* is followed by an extended treatment of the many dimensions of friendship, which in turn gives way to reflections on the best ways of using the leisure that economic security confers on citizens (entertainment? political engagement? philosophical inquiry?) shows, if any further proof be asked, just how intimately connected ethics and politics are for him. It also suggests that for Aristotle political morality cannot be restricted to the practice of justice toward one's fellow citizens, no matter how justice is parsed.

Is this account meant to be historical? Whatever the answer, it should be acknowledged that Aristotle is less interested in anthropological facts than in analyzing, differentiating, and integrating the proper parts (in this case the constitutive relationships) of the polis in order to use its natural developmental *telos* as a normative model. His model is, in this respect, as analytical as that of his early modern social contractarian opponents. Still, Aristotle takes it for granted that there are real places, times, and peoples in which the transition from mere life to good life seldom, if ever, occurs and others in which it is more probable. It never occurs, for example, in climates that are too extreme for agriculture, which alone seems to produce the surplus necessary for polis life – a true observation to this day. It occurs especially frequently, he thinks, though not exclusively, in Greece. Whenever and wherever it does occur, however, we must distinguish between the polis as a type of social and cultural integration and this or that actual, historical polis. Athens, Thebes, Carthage, Sparta, or other individual political communities typically come into being when a founding legislator, whose name is usually preserved in collective memory, imposes constitutional form on the proximate matter of the natural polis (*Pol.* 8.4.1325b40–1326b5). This, plus any subsequent constitutional revolutions, individuates *a* polis.

To be sure, in Aristotle's own sketch of a best polis in *Pol.* 7–8 constitutional form sits so lightly on, and emerges so "naturally" from, highly wrought social matter that it is probably better not to see the result as an individuated polis at all, but as deploying the literary genre of ideal states to further draw out the normative implications of Aristotle's genealogy of the polis in *Pol.* 1 and his critique of Plato and other reformers in *Pol.* 2. As we might expect, the citizens of Aristotle's ideal state spend a good deal of time in civic celebration, musical performances, and other forms of leisure (*Pol.* 7.14.1333a31–b3). There is, however, no founding legislator and the laws are customary. Citizens simply take turns ruling and being ruled, the young deferring to their elders until the generational cycle, rather than some explicit constitutional procedure, brings them their turn (*Pol.* 7.9.1329a6–16). The presumption is that a more fully spelled-out constitution is not needed because in this

fantasy Aristotle is imagining that the three *prima facie* just claims on which citizenship rest – free birth, wealth, and virtue (*Pol.* 3.13.1283a30–40; *Eth. Nic.* 5.3.1131a25–8; see Keyt 1991b; F. Miller 1995) – happen to coincide (“as if in answer to a prayer:” *Pol.* 4.1.1288b23; 7.4.1325b37) in each and every citizen and household. Yet this is precisely what fails to occur in the open space that looms up between the natural development of the polis and the achievement of its end in particular, real social circumstances. Practical wisdom affects real history when a lawmaker imposes constitutional form, and often class compromise, on proximate social matter in which the freeborn and the wealthy happen not to be as virtuous as Aristotle’s good men.<sup>6</sup> Those who bring virtue, wealth, and free birth to the table all deserve something. But they hardly ever deserve the same thing (*Pol.* 3.9.1280a9–15; *Eth. Nic.* 5.3.1131a10–30). Aristotle is keenly aware that in circumstances as contingent as these failure to impose a good constitution, or perversion of one, is common.

Enter history, if somewhat typologically. Although Aristotle purports to base his generalizations on data provided by the narrative histories of over 150 poleis (of which only the *Constitution of Athens* has been found), he thinks there are two ways of imposing constitutional form on social matter: those that accord with nature (*kata phusin*) because they conserve, reach, or restore the shared leisured life of the natural polis, and those that are contrary to nature (*kata phusin*). The latter have about them an “element of mastery” because they dedifferentiate the social matter of the polis. They turn it aside (*parekbasein*) from its articulated natural *telos*, in which the master–slave relation is fully contained within the household and disappears from the public sphere.<sup>7</sup> “Regimes that look only to the advantage of the rulers,” Aristotle writes, “are deviations [*parekbaseis*] from correct [*orthōn*] regimes. For they involve mastery. But a *polis* is a community of free persons” (*Pol.* 3.6.1279a17–22, trans. Lord 1984, punctuation amended; see 7.1.1323b41–1324a23; 1325a27–9; 2.1324b3–5; 14.1333a3–6 for more links between slavery, constitutional deviation, and failure to prize leisured freedom).

On each side of the normative divide between correct and deviant constitutions lie three possible generic constitutional forms, allowing Aristotle to re-derive Plato’s sixfold taxonomy of constitutions in *Statesman* from his own theory (*Pol.* 4.2.1289b5–10). When a single person is disproportionately more virtuous (and economically secure) than other citizens kingship accords with nature and justice (*Eth. Nic.* 8.10.1160b4–7; *Pol.* 3.17.1288a16).<sup>8</sup> Tyranny, the polar opposite of kingship and the extreme of all departures from what accords with nature (*Pol.* 4.2.1289b1–2), exists when a single person without virtue establishes unjust mastery over other citizens and denies their rightful claims to participation in self-governance (*Pol.* 3.8.1279b16–17; *Eth. Nic.* 8.10.1160b1–4). An aristocracy obtains when virtue is more evenly divided between a number of citizens and families who rule in accord with the common good (*Pol.* 3.7.1279a34–7). Elite rule degenerates into oligarchy, however, when it is the wealth, not the virtue, of the elite that imposes its norms, values, and interests on both the people and the virtuous (*Pol.* 3.8.1279b17–18; see 2.11.1273a35–b7). When both the virtuous and the wealthy are constrained by the poor, who in almost all cases comprise a majority of the freeborn, one or another sort of democracy exists (*Pol.* 3.8.1279b17–20). Although some are less bad than others,

Aristotle says that all democracies work against nature because they exercise mastery over the virtuous and the wealthy, who do not deserve to be collectively subordinated to the many. This condition can be alleviated if collective action or a wise legislator moves existing states toward what Aristotle calls a constitutional regime or polity (*politeia*), which empowers a moderately wealthy middle class judiciously to allocate different offices and other social goods to oligarchical and democratic elements (*Pol.* 4.6.1293a33–4).

History enters with a vengeance into Aristotle's political theory with his recognition that by his own time the claims of virtue, wealth, and free birth have separated so far that almost all contemporary states take themselves to be either oligarchies or democracies, the wealthy sanctimoniously pretending to be virtuous, aristocratic, and genteel, the people thinking of themselves as the collectively infallible guardians of their polis's spirit (*Pol.* 4.11.1296a21–7). This situation seems to have occurred because of the massive increase of wealth and military power since what Aristotle calls "the olden days" (*ta archeia*, *Pol.* 3.4.1277b2–3, for example). Money and might have combined to enlarge the franchise to meet military needs (*Pol.* 4.13.1297b16–28). This requires paying poor people to abstain from the labor of their bodies and the work of their hands enough to think of themselves as leisured citizens, who promptly dissipate that leisure into mere entertainment (*bios apolaustikos*). Just what, if anything, Aristotle proposes to do about the prevalence of deviant states is not entirely clear. He sometimes recommends constitutional regimes or polities, a proposal that has had wide historical influence (*Pol.* 3.13.1284b19–20). But he also seems to intimate that monarchy (of a certain benevolently absolute type) is in a better position to turn a polis toward the highest uses of leisured self-sufficiency (*Pol.* 4.2.1289a40–b1).

## Ethical Sticking Points in Aristotle's Political Theory

A slave by nature is a possession . . . a human being that is a physically separable organ of action of another human being . . . (*Pol.* 1.4.1254a16–17)

A slave has no deliberative part [of the soul] [*bouleutikon*] at all. A woman has it, but not authoritatively [*akuron*]. A [free] child has it too, but incompletely. (*Pol.* 1.13.1260a11–13)

Aristotle's constitutional taxonomy has had more influence on the subsequent history of political theory than his appeal to nature in grounding it. Especially in the long history of republican theorizing about constitutional states and class compromises, this influence has led to interpretations of the distinction between correct and deviant constitutions as holding between schemes that are and are not governed by law or, alternatively, between those that aim at or subvert the common good. The former view is unsupported by the text. With Plato's Thrasymachus in *Republic* 1, Aristotle recognizes not only that tyrannies, oligarchies, and democracies have laws too, but that enough justice, if not friendship, is embodied in those laws to require citizens to

obey them. The criterion of common good is more supportable – Thomas Aquinas, for example, made much of it – but it has seldom been spelled out in ways that stress Aristotle's substantive conception of the common good as a shared life of leisure pursuits. In this chapter, I have used this substantive conception to draw contrasts between Aristotle *ad litteram* and appropriations of his thought. In one way, the result should feel liberating. When it comes to human beings, as I noted earlier, much of what Aristotle means by nature we call culture. It is in this space that ethical norms appear. In this space, too, arises much that we ourselves can regard as ideal. Still, in the matter of individuating human political animals, Aristotle's implicit conception of culture is "thicker" than even the thickest of contemporary culture concepts (on "thick culture," see Geertz 1973). As a result, his assumptions about the fundamental and irremediable inequality of cultural life reveal real ethical sticking points in his political theory. One can get around these difficulties. But, having done so, it is no longer clear that what remains will be Aristotle's theory.

Consider slavery. The history of Aristotle scholarship and Aristotelian philosophizing is haunted by his doctrine that some people are slaves by nature (*Pol.* 1.4.1254a12–17). This single greatest impediment to the appropriation of his ethics and politics has made desperation the mother of interpretive invention. He didn't really mean it, some say; it is a thinly disguised critique (Ambler 1987). He did mean it, but unreflectively; it was simply a cultural given (Williams 1993). He meant it all right, but only in ways that we too could accept, or at least excuse; his natural slaves are mentally damaged persons who can and should be put to work doing simple tasks (Nussbaum 1995; Schofield 1990). Unfortunately, Aristotle's theory of natural slavery is more deeply embedded in his political theory than any of these interpretations suggest. To be sure, chattel slavery, in which slaves are acquired in a commercial market into which the commodities they produce are fed back, is not justified by that theory. But household slavery is indispensable to it. The leisure-oriented value system that informs and supports political deliberation, choice, and action (*praxis*) depends on freeing not only heads of households, but their wives and children from bodily labor and its orientation toward "mere life," the inherent brutishness of which cannot mentally, emotionally, behaviorally, and even physiognomically (natural slaves are supposed to look like slaves, *Pol.* 1.5.1254b27–32) be transcended. Worse is Aristotle's smug conviction that cultures whose social structures are in his opinion unable to generate and sustain the role differentiations required for political life provide a steady supply of justly enslavable individuals. In particular, he thinks that Asians are fit to be enslaved (by war, not by commerce, *Pol.* 1.8.1256b24–6) – not because they lack intelligence of a calculative, planning sort, but because the social structures that generate them also propagate the deficiency in spirit (*thumos*) on which self-respect, devotion to fellow citizens, ethical norms, and so political life proper depends (*Pol.* 1.2.1252b4–9; *Pol.* 7.7.1327b23–33; Garver 1994).<sup>9</sup> It does not follow, of course, that such persons ought to be enslaved unless Aristotle thinks that since someone is always enslaving such people it might as well be Greeks, who can put them to good use in the construction of a leisured society. Unfortunately, he probably does think this (*Pol.* 3.1285a18–22).



Marx, among others, tried to find a way out by taking on board Aristotle's musings about Homer's fantasy that "each of the [inanimate] instruments might perform its work on command or by anticipation, as they assert those of Daedalus did, or the tripods of Hephaestus . . . so that shuttles would weave themselves and picks play the lyre." In this event, "master craftsmen would no longer have need of subordinates or masters of slaves" (*Pol.* 1.4.1253b34–1254a1, trans. Lord 1984; see *Hom. Il.* 18.376). But Aristotle rejects this technological fix. He thinks that a householder or his wife who constantly uses labor-saving devices would be engaging too directly in tasks whose inherent instrumentalism would render them as vulgar as factory hands (about whose virtues Marx had a decidedly higher opinion). This is why he thinks of domestic slaves as extended organs of the master's physiology, not as instruments of production (*Pol.* 1.4.1254a1–8); why he thinks they must come under the control of moral, not technical, training (*Pol.* 1.13.1259b37–1260a8); and why he is contemptuous of "how-to-run-your slave" advice (*Pol.* 1.7.1255b20–7). It is also why he wants the political system to constrain market activity, with its inherently vulgar values, and criticizes Plato for implicitly conceding the citizenly status of the artisans in *Republic* (*Pol.* 2.5.1264a25–6). In his own ideal state, production and exchange will be consigned entirely to foreigners who live in a port some distance from the polis and who interact with its slave-owning farmer-citizens only in carefully monitored sites (*Pol.* 7.6.1327a37–9). A lesson again and again taught by Aristotle's political philosophy is that its core values are threatened by commercializing and technologizing political life. Every move in this direction threatens his distinction between mere and good life, reducing politics to a function of civil society and construing shared leisure as mere entertainment.

A second ethical stumbling block is Aristotle's argument that even the freest of free women cannot be citizens. To be sure, Aristotle regrets that noble women, such as Helen or Hecuba, are sometimes enslaved (*Pol.* 1.6.1255a23–8). Free women administer the property that their husbands acquire (*Pol.* 3.4.1277b24–5) and play a crucial role in educating their sons to be citizens and their daughters to be wives of citizens, and so themselves must be virtuous and oriented toward good values. "Women are half of the free population and from their children come those who share in the constitution" (*Pol.* 1.13.1260b18–20). Why, then, should they not be citizens themselves? Aristotle's stated reason is that the deliberative judgments of free women are less authoritative than those of their husbands because their reason cannot transform their emotional structure quite as far (*Pol.* 1.13.1260a12–13). We see ideology at work whenever Aristotle's cultural analysis, which is natural in his teleological sense, gives way to reductionistic biological speculations about efficient causes, as in Aristotle's physiognomy of slaves, which even he does not quite believe (*Pol.* 1.5.1254b25–33). In the case of women's lack of authority, this tendency shows itself in his effort to trace the postulated limitation to women's embryological development, which fails to reproduce the paternal form and so constitutes a deviation from it (*Gen. an.* 2.3.737a28; see Mayhew 2004 for an attempted defense of Aristotle against the charge of ideological distortion). Should we conclude that this biologism is a grounded inference from his political-ethical theory, Aristotle's own misapplication of it, or an unreflective reflection of his times? All three, I think.

A third cluster of ethical difficulties arises from Aristotle's assertion that the citizenly life of engagement in the affairs of state and household (*bios politikos*) can be transcended by a relatively few people who are able to lead an even more leisure-oriented theoretical way of life (*bios theōrētikos*). Aristotle himself is among those who lead such a life, which includes raising to consciousness the nature and norms of political life. There has been considerable debate about whether this way of life is so superior that it transcends the bonds of polis life, rendering the intellectual as solitary as a god and as indifferent to social duties (*Eth. Nic.* 10.7.1177a11–1178a8). There is undeniably a tension between the *bios theōrētikos* and the *bios politikos* (Brown, this volume, chapter 31; Kraut 1989: 199). But it can be exaggerated. Aristotle says that, while there is a philosophy of human affairs (*ta anthropina philosophia*, *Eth. Nic.* 10.9.1181b15) and a political science (*epistēmē*), they would not be worth thinking about (humans not being the best things in the universe) if we were not inescapably interested, as human beings ourselves, in what we should do (*Eth. Nic.* 1.1.1095a5–6; 6.7.1141a20–30). It follows that social and political life would be theorized falsely by anyone who did not share in the virtuous norms that reveal its nature to thought. No one who fails to acknowledge and largely act in accordance with these norms could even grasp them. Uncovering the intelligibility of the political world, moreover, is a valuable enterprise; it not only presupposes the moral virtues, but justifies the leisure-oriented values of correct poleis (*Pol.* 7.3.1325b16–21). It follows that good states must do more than merely tolerate philosophers. They should hold them up as exemplars of their own fundamental commitments (Depew 1991; Broadie 1991: 383–98). This, combined with an urge to distance himself from philosophical quietism, is why Aristotle says that the theoretical life is itself a life of action (*praxis*) (*Pol.* 7.3.1325b14–32; see in this volume, Brown, chapter 31; Chappell, chapter 25). Nor was this an entirely idle thought. Under the influence of the Lyceum, the Macedonian rulers of Alexandria predicated the legitimacy of their rule on making the cultivation of artistic and scientific uses of leisure the very point of civilized life. The downside of this program, however, was the establishment of an imperial *raj* over native peoples, often justified by Aristotle's contempt for slavish barbarians (Nagle 2006: 315).

Aristotle's political science is also practical because it takes itself to be able to provide guidance to rulers. The general tenor of this advice is to urge rulers to move from bad to good constitutions, in part by illuminating them about the greater, more differentiated range of possibilities than the simple oligarchy–democracy duality in which fourth century political discourse was mired (*Pol.* 4.1.1289a6–11). A difficulty is that Aristotle is willing to give advice not only to well motivated statesmen who would try to move deviant states to the nearest accessible correct form (*Pol.* 3.13.1284b19–20), but also to those who wish to preserve deviant forms, even tyrannies (*Pol.* 5.11.1313a33–1315b10, sounding very much like Machiavelli). One might blunt this objection by pointing to Aristotle's recognition that social stability is itself a good (*Pol.* 6.5.1319b33–40). This seems right, but only if stability is not seen, as it sometimes is, as a separate, second-best good. Even badly governed poleis are still poleis, that is, communities whose way of life is superior to those of gregarious, scattered, and especially solitary animals. Aristotle is keenly aware that, although virtue armed and well equipped preserves the polis (*Pol.* 1.6.1255a12–16), the

uncoupling of wealth and might from virtue in what he clearly regards as modern times threatens to turn the Greek world toward the viciousness of armed solitaries. Under these conditions stability might not seem to him all that different from political improvement (*Pol.* 4.1.1288b28–30).

Attempts to discount Aristotle's views about slavery, sexism, and imperialism are fruitless. Even when his efforts to ground these practices in embryological considerations are recognized as ideological, they still remain too close to the very point of his political theory to simply ignore. But that does not mean that Aristotle's political ethics is crude realism. On the contrary, his aim is to foster institutions and practices in which the highest capacities of human beings can be developed. We, too, share that aspiration. The problem, as Hegel, that great reader of Aristotle, saw is that his philosophy epitomizes the proposition that "only some are free." The modern separation of ethics from politics, and the concomitant insistence that the former must be the measure of the latter, was and remains an ongoing effort to insist that "all are free." We should never think that that demand has been fully met. Reading Aristotle can help us reflect critically on how embedded in our own institutions, practices, and anthropological assumptions our formally universal ethical norms actually are. It can also help us to see, as he did, that the point of ethics is to foster good politics.

## FURTHER READING

Those working through the text of *Politics* have at their disposal three comprehensive commentaries: Newman 1887–1902; Schütrumpf 1991–2005, which is recent and is especially good on the vast number of Aristotle's intertextual references to Plato's dialogues; and Simpson 1998, which consists of syllogistic reconstructions of the arguments of each chapter written in the spirit, and sometimes under the tutelage, of Thomas Aquinas (who himself wrote an incomplete commentary on *Politics* in the high Middle Ages that has now appeared in English (Regan 2007)). Another commentary that may be usefully consulted is Sussemihl and Hicks 1984. Barker 1946 sometimes shows up on reading lists. It is not entirely trustworthy either as a translation or a commentary.

The student will find various volumes of the compact Clarendon (Oxford) translations and commentaries helpful. Although Saunders's frequent confessions of incomprehension are distracting, Saunders 1995 summarizes the definitional and theoretical problems of the first two books of *Politics*. In reading these arguments it becomes clear that one cannot understand Aristotle's view about the polis unless one understands his account of the household (*oikos*). Brendan Nagle has written an informative book on the subject (see Nagle 2006). Nagle argues for a tighter fit between Aristotle's political theory and Greek political reality than has been customary. The Clarendon series also offers David Keyt and Richard Robinson's translation of and commentary on *Politics* 3–4 (Keyt and Robinson 1995) and Keyt's translation and commentary on *Politics* 5–6 (Keyt 1999). Keyt 1999 deals with the principles of justice and political realism. The same topics are at the heart of F. Miller 1995. In his Clarendon translation and commentary on *Politics* 7–8 (1997), Richard Kraut deals intensively with the tension between the active and philosophical lives, as he does in Kraut 2002. See also Natali 2001.

Scholarly articles on the most interesting and persistent problems in Aristotle's *Politics* can be found in Keyt and Miller 1991 and in Patzig 1990.

Treatments of Aristotle's ethical treatises are numerous. Those most helpful in the present context take seriously the relation between ethics and politics. Among these are Cooper 1975; Broadie 1991; and Garver 2006.

## NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own. Many of these are adapted from Lord 1984. In my view this is the best English translation currently available. Where I adopt Lord's rendering *in toto* I cite him.

- 1 I am using the term liberal in its foundational nineteenth century sense. It refers to a politics built on equal access to the laws, universal voting rights, laissez-faire economics, and freedom to behave as one wants in private. Twentieth century conservatives and liberals are both liberal in this sense, even though their stresses differ.
- 2 It is sometimes said that humans who exceed political life by engaging in the theoretical life proper to gods are solitary animals as well. For reasons against this, see Depew 1995: 176–7.
- 3 For Aristotle a species-specific capacity (*dunamis*), once taken up by an individual's ontology (first nature) and habituation (second nature), is no longer available for any further actualization. Its potentiality has become the capacity to continue to be its substantial self, as it were. See Kosman 1984; 1987: 366. Thus barbarians, having come to be the individual human beings they are by internalizing the dispositions, behaviors, and ways of life of their cultures have no remaining capacity for polis life either as heads of households or citizens. Accordingly, from the fact that “political animal” refers paradigmatically to capacities for life in a polis household and active engagement in political life it by no means follows that every real human being has an accessible capacity for such a life. Inside most human beings there does not lurk a frustrated citizen just dying to get out – any more than there exists the rational economic man that for the last three centuries has been Europe's replacement for this mythical being.
- 4 The technical reason is that complete substances cannot be parts of complete substances.
- 5 Chappell, this volume, chapter 25, uses the “material needs” sense of *autarkeia* to gloss Aristotle's “natural” as “based on needs, desires, and urges.” Through this lens, he sees Aristotle as less subtle, if more empirical, than Plato. This analysis does not recognize that Aristotle follows Plato in tracing the genesis of the polis to a point where the satisfaction of material needs dialectically reverses itself, although, in contrast to Plato, he takes the family rather than the exchange economy as the locus of differentiation and self-limitation. Chappell's approach finds self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) in the philosopher's rejection of bodily needs, but not in the nonslavish freedom from needs possessed by political communities that consciously limit the pursuit of mere life to what is needed for leading the good life.
- 6 The addition of constitutional art to the social polis poses difficult questions for the natural status of individual poleis. See Keyt 1991a and F. Miller 1995 for statements of the problem and possible solutions.
- 7 That Hannah Arendt (1958) makes much of these differentiations is not odd; Aristotle was her source. But she exaggerates the difference between the citizenly sphere and the household, conceiving the former as permeated by friendship (*philia*) and the latter by violence (*bia*). The issue turns on the status of household slavery, which Arendt believes undermines

the very possibility of friendship in the household. It is difficult to find in Aristotle a claim anything like this. The issue was first posed by Hegel.

- 8 Aristotle argues that the definition of a citizen (*politēs*) is best realized in a democracy (*Pol.* 3.1.1275b4–5). That is not because he favors democracy, but because even kingship of an absolute sort logically depends on judgments of relative merit that are conceptually available only on the assumption of citizenly deliberation. Just as the concept of citizen emerges from the concept of householder (*oikonomikos*), so the concept of ruler (*archontos*) emerges from that of citizen (*politēs*) (*Pol.* 3.4.1277a20–3). Aristotle makes Plato's inadequate differentiation of these differences a guiding theme of his entire political theory (*Pol.* 1.1.1252a7–17).
- 9 The assumption that all normal humans are born with a more or less equal and equally accessible capacity for rational deliberation and can flourish as soon as they are placed in an appropriate environment has generated the notion that human rationality is simply the generic calculative capacity we call IQ. This assumption dominates the literature on Aristotle's natural slaves. Garver (1994) has shown that Aristotle's natural slaves are not especially deficient in calculative intelligence; their incapacity for deliberation and choice derives from affective weaknesses that are endemic according to Aristotle in many societies.