
Distributive Justice in Aristotle's *Ethics and Politics*

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1. Introduction

Aristotle's political philosophy, like his zoology, has two phases. In the analytic phase Aristotle divides the object of his investigation, the polis, into its parts (*Pol.* I.1.1252a18–23; IV.3.1289b27–1290a5, 4.1290b38–1291b8; VII.8¹). In the synthetic phase he describes the various ways these parts can be put together to form a polis (*Pol.* IV.4.1290b21–39; and see *Top.* VI.13.150b23–26). The way the parts of a polis are put together is its form;² its form is its constitution (*Pol.* III.2.1276a17–b13); and a constitution in turn is a kind of justice. “All constitutions”, Aristotle says, “are a kind of justice; for they are communities, and every community is held together by what is just” (*E.E.* VII.9.1241b13–15). Aristotle distinguishes two kinds of (particular) justice: distributive (*διαμεμητικόν*) and corrective (*διορθωτικόν*) (*E.N.* V.2.1130b30–1131a1, 4.1131b25–29). Although a polis is held together to some extent by corrective or judicial justice, the justice of the *dikast* or juror (*Pol.* I.2.1253a37–39), a constitution is primarily a kind of distributive justice. Aristotle defines a constitution as “an ordering of the offices³ in a polis, *in respect of the way they are distributed*, and of the questions what is the supreme element of the constitution and what is the end (*τέλος*) of each community” (*Pol.* IV.1.1289a15–18; see also III.1.1274b38, 6.1278b8–11). Thus the large part of Aristotle's political philosophy that is concerned with the description, classification, and evaluation of constitutions is essentially a theory of distributive justice. The basic principle of this theory is introduced and given mathematical expression in Aristotle's essay on justice, one of the common books of the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics* (*E.N.* V = *E.E.* IV); but it is only in the *Politics* that the theory is fully developed and applied.

In his theory of distributive justice Aristotle tries to steer a middle course between Protagorean relativism according to which “whatever things *appear* just and fine to each polis *are* so for it as long as it holds by them” (Plato, *Theaet.* 167C4–5) and Platonic absolutism with its appeal to transcendent standards (*E.N.* I.6.1096b31–1097a3;

Plato, *Rep.* V.472A8–E6, IX.592A10–B4). This is a project with obvious attractions. How is it carried out? One aim of this paper is to answer this question by tracing Aristotle's theory of distributive justice to its foundations.

A second aim is to show how three divergent and seemingly incompatible elements in the *Politics* are connected. The first element is the description in Books VII and VIII of the best constitution. What Aristotle describes is a form of constitution under which a polis is ruled by its older citizens, all of whom are men of complete virtue – the sort of constitution that elsewhere in the *Politics* he calls a “true” aristocracy (IV.7.1293b1–19, 8.1294a24–25). The second element is the defense of democracy against Platonic criticisms in Book III, Chapter 11. “That the many ought to be supreme rather than the few best men would seem to be held”, Aristotle says, “and to present some difficulty *but probably to be true*” (1281a40–42). The third element is the justification of absolute kingship in Book III, Chapter 17 (see also III.13.1284a3–17, b22–34; 14.1285b29–33; VII.14.1332b16–23). Under this “first and most divine” constitution (IV.2.1289a40) an individual who is “like a god among men” (III.13.1284a10–11) rules according to his own wish unrestricted by law.

It is tempting to seek an explanation of these divergent elements of the *Politics* in Aristotle's complex personal situation as a former member of Plato's Academy, a resident alien in democratic Athens, and a client of the Macedonian monarchy.⁴ One who succumbs to this temptation will find in the close similarity of the best polis of Books VII and VIII to the Cretan polis of Magnesia described in the *Laws*⁵ an offset to Aristotle's earlier criticism of the *Republic* and the *Laws* in Book II and a proclamation of Aristotle's fealty to Platonic ideals.⁶ He will see Aristotle's defense of democracy as a sop thrown by a resident alien, aware of the fate of Socrates, to the Athenian populace. And he will believe that the justification of absolute kingship is addressed to Aristotle's Macedonian patrons.⁷ One who seeks such extraphilosophical motivation for these divergent elements of the *Politics* may also be blind to the underlying unity of Aristotle's political philosophy and to

the fact that all three elements have their origin in a single conception of distributive justice.

2. The principle of distributive justice

Distributive justice for Aristotle is concerned primarily with the distribution of political authority (*πολιτικὴ ἀρχή*) and only secondarily with the distribution of wealth.⁸ It is the virtue of both the *νομοθέτης*, or lawgiver, and the *ekklesiast*,⁹ or assemblyman, and there are occasions for its exercise when the lawgiver is called upon to establish a constitution, “an ordering of the offices in a polis” (*Pol.* IV.1.1289a15–16), and when the *ekklesiast* is called upon to select particular men to fill these offices. Its principle, a refinement of an idea of Plato’s (see *Gorgias* 507E6–508A8 and *Laws* VI.756E9–758A2), is a political application of the mathematical idea of geometric proportion, whose formula is:

$$\frac{A}{B} = \frac{C}{D}.$$

Geometric proportion (*γεωμετρικὴ ἀναλογία*) (*E.N.* V.3.1131b12–13) is so called on account of the large role it plays in geometry: for example, in the definition of the similarity of rectilinear figures.¹⁰ It is contrasted with arithmetic proportion, the mathematical idea underlying Aristotle’s principle of corrective justice. Geometric proportion is an equality of ratios (*ισότης λόγων*) (*V.3.* 1131a31); arithmetic proportion, of differences.

The just, Aristotle says, “requires at least four terms; for those for whom it is just are two, and that in which it resides, the things, are two” (*E.N.* V.3.1131a18–20). This statement suggests that Aristotle intends the following application of the formula of geometric proportion:

$$(1) \quad \frac{\text{Callias}}{\text{Coriscus}} = \frac{\text{Parcel}_1 \text{ of land}}{\text{Parcel}_2 \text{ of land}}.$$

This is often the way he is taken by his commentators.¹¹ But, as his commentators are well aware, this proportion does not have any meaning until the respect in which the men, on the one hand, and the parcels of land, on the other, are being compared is specified. The parcels of land might be compared in size, location, productivity, and so forth; and the men, in age, height, physique, wealth, lineage, moral virtue, and so forth. What Aristotle is weighing is, in general, the *ἀξία*, or worth, of the persons (1131a24–26) and the positive or negative value of the things (1131b19–23). The application of the formula is thus more complex:

$$(2) \quad \frac{\text{The worth of Callias}}{\text{The worth of Coriscus}} = \frac{\text{The value of parcel}_1 \text{ of land}}{\text{The value of parcel}_2 \text{ of land}}.$$

Now, ‘the worth of Callias’ expresses the application of the function *worth of* to Callias, and ‘the value of parcel₁ of land’ expresses the application of the function *value of* to parcel₁ of land. The notation for functional application is $\varphi(a)$. $\varphi(a)$ is the value¹² of the function φ for the argument a . If ‘ Q ’ signifies the function *worth of* and ‘ V ’, *value of*, (2) can be written:

$$(3) \quad \frac{Q(\text{Callias})}{Q(\text{Coriscus})} = \frac{V(\text{parcel}_1 \text{ of land})}{V(\text{parcel}_2 \text{ of land})}.$$

Thus in the notation of modern mathematics the general formula is:

$$(4) \quad \frac{Q(x)}{Q(y)} = \frac{V(s)}{V(t)}.$$

A simple manipulation of (4) yields:¹³

$$(5) \quad \frac{Q(x) + V(s)}{Q(y) + V(t)} = \frac{Q(x)}{Q(y)}.$$

This is a modern rendition of Aristotle’s principle of distributive justice (1131b9–10). The reason Aristotle prefers (5) to (4) is that he wants his formula to display the yoking together (*ἡ σύζευξις*) of s and x and of t and y . He wants his formula to show that s is the thing assigned to x and that t is the thing assigned to y . But (5) can be improved upon by a further exploitation of modern functional notation. For ‘the thing assigned to x ’ expresses the application of the function *thing assigned to*¹⁴ to x . Thus if ‘ T ’ signifies the function *thing assigned to*, $T(x) = s$ and $T(y) = t$. By substitution (4) becomes:

$$(6) \quad \frac{Q(x)}{Q(y)} = \frac{V(T(x))}{V(T(y))}.$$

This formula combines simplicity with the proper logical multiplicity. In ordinary language, a distribution is just to the extent that the value of the thing it assigns to one person stands to the value of the thing it assigns to another as the worth of the one person stands to the worth of the other.

Aristotle believes that everyone shares this general principle (*E.N.* V.3.1131a10–14, *Pol.* III.12.1282b18–21) and that people agree in their evaluation of the things being distributed (*Pol.* III.9.1290a18–19). Where they disagree is over worth. “All agree”, Aristotle says, “that the just in distribution must be according to worth of some sort (*κατ’ ἀξίαν τῶν*¹⁵), though all do not recognize

the same sort of worth; but democrats say it is freedom, oligarchs wealth or birth, and aristocrats virtue" (*E.N.* V.3.1131a25–29). People disagree over *ἀξία*, or worth, because they evaluate it according to different standards. Adopting an idea of John Rawls' (1971, pp. 5–6, 10), we can distinguish the *concept* of distributive justice from the various *conceptions* of it.¹⁶ If the letter 'Q' in formula (6) is regarded as a variable ranging over the various standards of worth, the formula expresses Aristotle's concept of distributive justice. When the letter is replaced by an expression for one of these standards, the formula that results expresses one of the various conceptions of distributive justice that fall under the general concept. Thus if 'Q' is replaced by 'the wealth of', the resulting formula expresses the oligarchic interpretation of Aristotle's principle of distributive justice or, in short, the oligarchic conception of justice.

Do the various interpretations of Aristotle's principle of distributive justice have any content? Do they determine definite distributions of the apportionable goods? In particular do they determine definite distributions of political authority? Suppose one were an ancient Greek lawgiver given the task of devising a democratic constitution for an Athenian colony – a Protagoras charged with writing a constitution for a Thuri. Would the democratic conception of distributive justice provide a helpful guide?

The first step in applying the formula for democratic justice is to understand its standard of worth, *ἐλευθερία*, or freedom. As the standard that in a democracy determines citizenship, freedom is contrasted not only with slavery but also with foreignness. To be free in this narrow sense is to be a freeman as opposed to a slave (an *ἐλεύθερος* as opposed to a *δοῦλος*) and a native as opposed to a foreigner (an *ἄσπός* as opposed to a *ξένος*).¹⁷ Freedom in this narrow sense is a matter of citizen birth, not simply of free status; and in the *Politics* Aristotle indicates the scale by which Greek democracies graded a person's extraction (III.5.1278a26–34, VI.4.1319b6–11):

- (a) Both parents citizens
- (b) Citizen father, alien mother
- (c) Citizen mother, alien father
- (d) Citizen father or mother, other parent a slave

As Aristotle's remarks in the passages just cited make plain, freedom was an elastic standard in Greek political history that could be stretched or shrunk depending upon the needs of a given democracy at a particular time or the political aims of its leaders. In good times a democracy would count as free and admit as citizens only those of

grade (a); as times got harder it would gradually relax its standard until even those of grade (d) were admitted.

Two other restrictions, those of sex and age, narrow the application of the formula still further. Every historical (but not every invented) Greek polis excluded women from full citizenship. And of course only an adult could be a full citizen.¹⁸ (In Athens a male who was free in the narrow sense was enrolled as a full citizen upon reaching eighteen [*Ath. Pol.* 42.1].)

Even though the standard that an adult male had to satisfy to be counted as free and registered as a citizen of a Greek democracy was elastic, there were no degrees of freedom among those who met the standard: one man's freedom was equal to any other's. "Democracy arose", Aristotle says, "from those who are equal in any respect whatever thinking they are absolutely equal (because they are all alike *free*, they claim to be absolutely *equal*)..." (*Pol.* V.1.1301a28–31; see also III.9.1280a24–25). The democratic argument, then, is that since the freedom of one man is the same as that of any other, the value of the things assigned to one free man should, by the democratic conception of justice, equal the value of the things assigned to any other (V.1.1301a34–35). This is easily symbolized. (Let 'F' signify the function *freedom of*; let 'V' abbreviate 'for each'; and let the variables 'x' and 'y' range over the free men of a given polis.)

- (1) $(\forall x)(\forall y)\left(\frac{F(x)}{F(y)} = \frac{V(T(x))}{V(T(y))}\right)$ (The democratic conception of justice)
- (2) $(\forall x)(\forall y)(F(x) = F(y))$ (Equal freedom)
- (3) $\therefore (\forall x)(\forall y)(V(T(x)) = V(T(y)))$ (Equal awards)

Aristotle distinguishes a constitutional principle (*ἀξίωμα*, *ὑπόθεσις*) (*Pol.* VI.1–2.1317a39, 40) such as (3) from "all the things... appropriate to the principle" (*ἅπαντα τὰ οἰκεία ... πρὸς τὴν ὑπόθεσιν*) (VI.1.1317a36–37). In the case of democracy he distinguishes the principle of democratic justice (*τὸ δημοτικὸν δίκαιον*) (VI.3.1318a18) from the institutions designed to realize the principle (*τὰ δημοτικά*) (VI.1–2.1317a19, b18). Political egalitarianism, which follows from (3) when the thing being distributed is taken to be political authority, is the primary expression of democratic justice.¹⁹ The Greek institutions that were designed to realize it are sketched in *Politics* VI.2. It is democratic for "the ekklesia [to which all free men are admitted] to be supreme over all things or the most important" (1317b28–29) and for the dikasteries, or law courts, to be selected from among all free men and to deal with all

matters “or with most and the greatest and most important, such as the scrutiny of the conduct of officials and constitutional matters and private contracts” (b25–28). It is democratic for administrative, executive, and military offices to be open to all free men (b18–19) and thus to require no property qualification or at most a minimal one (b22–23), to be filled by lot wherever no special experience or skill is required (b20–21), and to have short terms (b24–25) and minimal power (b29–30). It is democratic, furthermore, for repeated tenure of the same executive or administrative office to be restricted or prohibited (b23–24) and, so far as funds allow, for all who exercise political functions to be paid – ekklesiasts, dikasts, and officers (b35–38).

All of these institutions are devices for maximizing political equality within the bounds of the practicable. The ideal situation according to political egalitarianism would seem to be one in which no free man *at any time* has more political authority than any other. But this is not practicable since not everyone can be a dikast or city treasurer or general at the same time (see *Pol.* II.2.1261a32–34). The political egalitarian, when forced by practical consideration to depart from his ideal, always gives up as little or possible. Each of the democratic institutions that Aristotle lists in *Politics* VI.2 can be brought under one or another of four successively weaker egalitarian maxims. (1) No free man *at any time* should have more political authority than any other. In conformity with this ideal maxim all free men are members of the ekklesia; and, along with this, the power of the ekklesia is maximized and that of individual officials minimized. (2) No free man *during an average lifetime* should have more political authority than any other. Although it is not practicable for every free man to sit on every dikastery, it is practicable in a Greek polis for every free man during an average lifetime to sit on as many as every other. This second maxim is one expression of the democratic motto “to rule and be ruled in turn” (1317b2–3). (3) The *probability* of being selected to fill a particular position of authority *sometime during one’s life* should be the same for all free men and should be as high as practicable. The use of the lot makes the probability the same for all; short terms and restrictions on the repeated tenure of the same office increase the probability of selection.²⁰ (4) If an office requires experience or skill, it should be filled by election; but every free man should be eligible to stand for election and every free man should have exactly one vote. The point of providing pay for ekklesiasts, dikasts, and officers is to ensure that no free man is forced to forego his share

of political authority by the daily pressure to grind out a living. It seems, then, that the democratic conception of justice, charitably interpreted, does have content.

The institutions designed to realize oligarchic justice (*τὰ ὀλιγαρχικά*) (*Pol.* V.9.1309b21, 37) are the opposite of those designed to realize democratic justice (see VI.6.1320b18–21). It is oligarchic, first of all, for the governing class to be determined by wealth rather than freedom (VI.6.1320b20–33). Thus it is oligarchic to select the dikasteries from the rich (IV.16.1301a12–13), to restrict membership in the ekklesia²¹ to those who satisfy a high property-qualification (IV.9.1294b3–4), and to set a still higher property-qualification for the higher administrative, executive, and military offices (VI.6.1320b22–25). Secondly, it is oligarchic to appoint officers by election rather than by lot (IV.9.1294b7–9, 31–33). Thirdly, it is oligarchic, if the ekklesia and the dikasteries are composed of rich and poor, not to pay the poor for attending but to fine the rich for nonattendance (IV.9.1294a37–39, 13.1297a17–19, 21–24, 14.1298b16–18). Fourthly, it is oligarchic, in vivid contrast to democratic practice, for offices to be few in number, to be held for long periods by the same individuals, and to have maximal power (II.11.1273a15–17; IV.9.1294b31–34; V.1.1301b25–26, 6.1306a12–19; and *E.N.* VIII.10.1160b12–16). It is oligarchic, finally, not to equalize political power among citizens but to proportion it to wealth (VI.1.1318a18–21).

As devices for realizing oligarchic justice the institutions that Aristotle describes are not comparable in ingenuity to those invented by Greek democrats for realizing democratic justice. Comparisons of wealth can be given precise numerical values; for, as Aristotle remarks, “by wealth we mean everything whose worth is measured by money” (*E.N.* IV.1.1119b26–27). Let ‘*W*’ signify the function *wealth of*, let *m* and *n* be nonnegative integers, and let $n \neq 0$. Then:

$$(1) \quad \frac{W(x)}{W(y)} = \frac{m}{n} .$$

The oligarchic conception of justice is:

$$(2) \quad \frac{W(x)}{W(y)} = \frac{V(T(x))}{V(T(y))} .$$

Consequently:

$$(3) \quad \frac{V(T(x))}{V(T(y))} = \frac{m}{n} .$$

The institutional problem is to discover devices for realizing (3) – in particular, to find ways of exactly proportioning political authority to wealth. Although the oligarchic

institutions that Aristotle describes have the general effect of giving the very wealthy most of the political authority in a polis, they do not proportion political authority to wealth very exactly. This is due to a failure of imagination or of conviction on the part of Greek oligarchs, for it is not difficult to think of ways of approaching the oligarchic ideal more closely. One device that comes immediately to mind, of which the last item on Aristotle's list of oligarchic institutions may be a glimmer, is to think of a polis as a joint-stock company and to proportion votes to wealth (III.9.1280a25–31; see also *E.N.* V.4.1131b29–31). If Callias is twice as wealthy as Coriscus, he is given twice as many votes as Coriscus. By adopting this device an oligarchy would not need to restrict membership in the *ekklesia* to those who satisfy a given property-qualification. Every free man could be a member and have exactly as much weight in its actions as he has wealth. A second device that comes to mind is to proportion terms of office to wealth, to allow Callias, if he is twice as wealthy as Coriscus, to hold a given executive, administrative, or military office twice as long as Coriscus. Consequently, there are institutions through which the oligarchic conception of justice, as well as the democratic, can be realized.

The problem of applying the aristocratic conception of justice will be considered in Section 4.

3. The correct standard of worth

In the middle section of the third book of the *Politics*, the philosophical core of the entire treatise, Aristotle attempts to mediate the claims of the various rivals for the supreme political authority (*τὸ κύριον*) in a polis (III.9–13). Should the many have supreme power, or the rich, or the good, or the one best man, or a tyrant (III.10.1281a11–13)? In answering this question Aristotle begins where he left off in *E.N.* V.3. The view of the *Ethics* that distributive justice is a matter of geometric proportionality is generally accepted, he says; what remains to be determined is the standard of worth to combine with it (III.12.1282b18–23; see also III.9.1280a7–25). The problem Aristotle tackles in this section of the *Politics* is thus that of evaluating and ranking the various standards of worth advanced by the various rivals for political power and of ascertaining, if he can, which is the absolutely correct standard (*ὁ ὀρθὸς ὄρος*) (see III.13.1283b28).

Aristotle begins by considering the idea that, other things being equal, “superiority in any good” is a legitimate ground for distributing political offices unequally (III.-

12.1282b23–27) and offers two arguments against it (1282b27–1283a9).²² Both arguments have the same form: *modus tollens*. The first, the “fitness and contribution” argument, divides into three segments. In the first segment Aristotle points out that if the idea under consideration is true, then any personal attribute whatever even height or complexion²³ will be part of a correct standard of worth. The consequent of this conditional strikes Aristotle as transparently false (1282b30), and so he infers (implicitly) that the antecedent is false. (Aristotle does not mean to deny that such irrelevant properties as height or complexion are never used as standards of worth. Remembering his Herodotus [3.20], he notes in another context that in Ethiopia offices are distributed according to height [IV.4.1290b4–5].) In the second and third segments of the argument Aristotle explains the transparent falsity of the consequent by reference to “the other sciences and abilities” (1282b30–31) – by reference, in particular, to the art of flute-playing. In staging a performance of flute music, it would be proper, he observes, to distribute the better flutes to the better flutists. In this situation skill in flute-playing is the only standard of worth that is relevant. Generalizing from this case we get the “fitness-for-the-job” criterion: “The one who is superior at the work (*ἔργον*) should be given the superiority also in instruments” (1282b33–34; compare *P.A.* IV.10.687a7–15).²⁴ Pressing the point still further, Aristotle goes on to say in the third segment of the argument that even if the person who excels as a flutist falls short in birth and beauty and if the value of each of these exceeds the value of skill in flute-playing more than his skill exceeds the skill of one who is well-born and beautiful,²⁵ he should still, nevertheless, get the better flute. For birth and beauty do not contribute to a musical performance; skill in flute-playing does. This suggests a second, distinct criterion: contribution to the task (*εἰς τὸ ἔργον συμβάλλεσθαι*) (1282a1; see also III.9.1281a4–8).

In the second argument,²⁶ the “incommensurability” argument, Aristotle points out that if every personal attribute were part of a correct standard of worth, all goods would have to be commensurable.²⁷ It would have to be possible to weigh the height of one man against the virtue of another. And if height can be weighed against virtue, then a good height must be equal in worth to some fraction of virtue. (Similarly if the goodness of a man is commensurable with the goodness of a dinner, then some number of good dinners – a million, say – must be equal in worth to a good man.) But this is absurd. Virtue and height are goods in different categories: the one is a good in the category of quality; the other, in the category of quantity (compare

E.N. I.6.1096a19–29). In addition, one is a good of the soul; the other, of the body. They are no more commensurable in worth than a pen, a taste of wine, and a musical note are commensurable in sharpness (*Top.* I.15.107b13–18, *Phys.* VII.4.248b7–10). Consequently, not every personal attribute can be part of a correct standard of worth.

Aristotle concludes from these two arguments that “it is on the ground of the elements of which a polis is composed that the claim [to political office] must be based” (1283a14–15). The elements he enumerates – the free, the wealthy, the wellborn (who drop out as redundant²⁸), and justice and military²⁹ virtue (a16–20) – make a heterogeneous list. Justice and military virtue are qualities; the other items are groups. Since each group consists of individuals who possess a given attribute, we have the following progression:

- (1) an attribute (*e.g.*, ἀρετή, virtue)
- (2) its possessor (*e.g.*, ὁ ἀγαθός, the good man)
- (3) the group of its possessors (*e.g.*, οἱ ἀγαθοί, the good)

Although Aristotle moves carelessly from one sort of item to another, the first and third members of this progression find their home in separate stages of Aristotle’s overall argument. A group taken as a whole can possess an attribute that its individual members lack. Thus although every worker in a polis may be poor, the wealth of the whole group of workers may be enormous. This point is the nub of Aristotle’s summation argument³⁰ and is important in adjudicating the claims of the wealthy, the free, and the good to political authority. But the summation argument, which considers the attributes of various groups, is separate from and posterior to the search for a correct standard of worth, which is a search for an attribute or a conjunction of attributes.

To determine which attributes enter into the correct standard of worth Aristotle appeals, as we have seen, to two second-order attributes: contribution and fitness. Aristotle does not explain how contribution differs from fitness; indeed, he gives no indication that he even regards the two as distinct. Consequently, in interpreting this crucial part of Aristotle’s theory of distributive justice one is forced to develop Aristotle’s rather meager suggestions. One attractive line of interpretation, which preserves both plausibility and consistency, takes contribution as the primary criterion and fitness as a secondary and supplementary criterion. By this interpretation, for an attribute to be part of the correct standard of worth of the principle of distributive justice it must either enable or have enabled its possessor to make a contribution of some sort to the

enterprise whose goods are being apportioned by means of the principle. Furthermore, if the good being apportioned is a function (ἔργον) of some sort, the attribute in question must fit its possessor to fulfill the function.

Suppose, for example, that the enterprise whose benefits and functions are being apportioned is a performance of flute music. Skill in flute-making and skill in flute-playing, but not height or good birth, contribute to such a performance. So by the contribution criterion both attributes are relevant when the roles, the proceeds, and the honors connected with the performance are being distributed. However, skill in flute-making fits its possessor to manufacture flutes whereas skill in flute-playing fits its possessor to play a flute. Therefore, by the fitness criterion the flute maker should be assigned the role of manufacturing flutes; and the flute player, the role of playing the flute. Both should share, though perhaps not equally, in the profits and honors of the performance.

Suppose the enterprise is a polis. In this case the application of the two criteria is not so straightforward. For what sort of enterprise is a polis? Neither criterion can be applied until this question is answered. Defenders of oligarchy think of the polis as a joint-stock company whose end is to enrich its shareholders (*Pol.* III.9.1280a25–31, IV.9.1294a11, *Rhet.* I.8.1366a4–5). Champions of democracy regard it as a free society where one is able “to live as one wishes” (*Pol.* VI.2.1317b11–12). Advocates of aristocracy regard it as an ethical community directed to education and virtue (*Pol.* IV.8.1294a9–11, *Rhet.* I.8.1366a5–6). Now, a contribution to one of these enterprises may not be a contribution to another. Virtue, for example, may lead its possessor – think of Plato’s *Republic* – to fear freedom and to scorn wealth. Thus the contribution criterion yields different results given different conceptions of the polis. So too does the fitness criterion. The job of the ekklesiast, for example, is to deliberate about things to come (*Rhet.* I.3.1358b4–5). Shrewdness may fit a person for this job when the aim is the preservation or the increase of wealth, but practical wisdom (φρόνησις) will be required when the cultivation of virtue is the goal (see *Rhet.* I.8.1366a2–8).

Aristotle’s theory of distributive justice thus comes to hinge on a fundamental question, What is a polis?³¹ The fullest discussion of this question is in *Politics* III.9. Aristotle, naturally, seeks, not a nominal (*An. Post.* II.10.93b30), but a real definition of ‘polis’ (*Pol.* III.9.1280b6–8), a definition that expresses the essence (τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι) of a polis (*Top.* VII.3.153a15–16, *Met.* Z.5.1031a12). A standard Aristotelian definition defines a species by its genus and differentia (*Top.* I.8.103b15–16, VII.3.153b14–

15, *et passim*); and if the species (unlike, say, triangle and square) has an end, or *τέλος*, the differentia will be its end (see *De An.* I.1.403a25–b7). In genus a polis is a *κοινωνία*, a community or association (*Pol.* I.1.1252a1, III.3.1276b1, *et passim*). To find its end and differentia Aristotle considers six candidates and tries to show that all except the sixth yield defective definitions. The six are:

1. Property (*Pol.* III.9.1280a25–26)
2. Self-preservation (a31)
3. Mutual defense against outsiders (a34–35, 40, b26–27)
4. Trade and mutual intercourse (a35–36)
5. Prevention of injustice to each other (a39, b4–5, 30–31)
6. Good life (a31–32, b33–35, 39)

One way to rebut a definition is to show that it is too wide, that the feature it picks out is not peculiar (*ιδίως*) to the species being defined (*Top.* I.4.101b19–23, VI.1.139a31–32). And this is the strategy Aristotle uses. Taken severally or jointly the first five candidates, Aristotle claims, differentiate at most a *συμμαχία*,³² or alliance, not a polis (*Pol.* III.9.1280b8–33; see also II.2.1261a24–25).³³ So he infers that the sixth candidate is the right one and defines a polis as “a community of households and clans in living well, for the sake of a perfect and self-sufficient life” 1280b33–35; see also VII.8.1328a35–37). Then, combining this definition with the contribution criterion, he concludes that “those who contribute most to such a community have a larger share in the polis than those who are equal or superior in freedom and birth but unequal in political virtue, or those who exceed in wealth but are exceeded in virtue” (1281a4–8).

There are three objections to Aristotle's argument. First, the six ends he considers do not compose an exhaustive list. One end (among others) that Aristotle notices elsewhere but omits from his list here is the end of the constitutions of Sparta and of the polises³⁴ in Crete: conquest and war (*Pol.* II.9.1271b2–3, VII.2.1324b3–9, 14.1333b12–14; see also VII.2.1325a3–4). Secondly, not every Greek philosopher would concede that a polis is more than an alliance. For some early political theorists a polis is simply a mutual protection society. The sophist Lycophron, as Aristotle points out in *Politics* III.9 itself, maintained that “the law is an agreement and... a guarantee to one another of what is just, but not something able to make the citizens good and just” (1280b10–12). Glaucon in the *Republic* (359A1–2) mentions the same view in almost identical words. And Hippodamus, the city-planner and political theorist, limited law to the negative functions

of protecting person and property. According to Aristotle's report, he thought that law should be confined to three matters only: insult, harm (to person or property), and homicide³⁵ (II.8.1267b37–39). The third objection to Aristotle's argument is that the definition it arrives at is too narrow: it applies to few, if any, historical city-states. Thus, according to these objections, Aristotle's argument, though valid,³⁶ consists of two false premises and a false conclusion.

Aristotle's reply to the first objection, that the possibilities he considers are not exhaustive, would be, I think, to bring all the possible ends of a polis under one or another of three general heads that seem more plausibly to exhaust the field, namely, bare life, shared life, and good life – *τὸ ζῆν*, *τὸ συζῆν*, and *τὸ εὖ ζῆν*. The difference between bare life and shared life is explained in the *Eudemian Ethics*: “It is clear that just as life [*sc.* for man] is perception and knowledge, so also shared life is shared perception and shared knowledge” (VII.12.1244b24–26; see also *E.N.* IX.9.1170b10–14). Good life in turn, to reduce Aristotle's moral philosophy to a simple motto, is life in accordance with reason (*κατὰ λόγον ζῆν*) (*E.N.* I.7.1098a7–20, II.6.1106b36–1107a2, *E.E.* III.1.1229a1–2, 7, *et passim*). Shared life is a part of a good life: “No one would choose to have all good things all by himself; for man is a political being and formed by nature to share his life (*συζῆν*)” (*E.N.* IX.9.1169b17–19). But not all shared life is good life, for example, that of a band of thieves. In *Politics* III.6 these three general ends are presented as a hierarchy. Thus Aristotle says (1) that “men come together... and maintain the political community for the sake of life itself (*τοῦ ζῆν ἕνεκεν αὐτοῦ*)” (1278b24–25), (2) that “even when they need no help from each other, they none the less desire to live together (*δρέγονται τοῦ συζῆν*)” (b20–21), and (3) that the end of the polis is good life (*τὸ ζῆν καλῶς*³⁷) (b21–24). This three-step progression is only slightly less prominent in III.9. Bare life and good life are items (2) and (6) on Aristotle's list of possible ends, and good life and shared life are sharply distinguished at the end of the chapter. Aristotle says that the various ways of sharing life such as marriage connections, brotherhoods, and religious sacrifices “are the work of friendship; for the pursuit of shared life is friendship.³⁸ The end of the polis is good life, whereas these things are for the sake of the end” (1280b36–40). He goes on to say that “it must be laid down that the political community exists for the sake of good actions but not for the sake of shared life” (1281a2–4). Aristotle's idea seems to be that to associate for the sake of property, or freedom, or conquest, or

mutual defense, or trade, or the prevention of injustice is to enter a friendship for utility or for pleasure, not a friendship of good men.³⁹ Consequently, such an association is a mode of shared life but not of good life. This interpretation is born out by a passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics* where alliances are characterized as friendships for utility: "...men call friends those who associate for utility, just as polises are called friends (for alliances seem to arise among polises for the sake of expediency)..." (VIII.4.1157a25–29).

Aristotle's reply to the second objection, that, contrary to his claim, the polis is only an alliance, can be gleaned from an analysis of the argument contained in the first two sentences of the *Politics*: "Since we see that every polis is a kind of community and that every community is formed for the sake of some good (for all men do all their actions for the sake of what seems good), it is clear that whereas all communities aim at some good, the one that is most supreme (*κυριωτάτη*) of all and includes (*περιέχουσα*) the others aims especially at the good that is most supreme of all. This is the so-called polis and the political community" (I.1.1252a1–7). The argument of this passage runs as follows:

- (1) Every community aims at some good. (Premiss)
- (2) Therefore, the community that (a) is most supreme and (b) includes all others aims at the most supreme good. (From [1])
- (3) The polis is the community that is most supreme and includes all others. (Premiss)
- (4) Hence, the polis aims at the most supreme good. (From [2] & [3])

Adding a premiss that describes the supreme good, we reach the conclusion that the end of the polis is good life:

- (5) The most supreme good is good life and eudaimonia (*E.N.* I.4.1095a14–20). (Premiss)
- (6) Therefore, the polis aims at good life and eudaimonia (From [4] & [5])

The advantage of this argument over the one of III.9 is that it tries to establish Aristotle's thesis directly rather than by refuting every alternative to it.

In this argument the polis is given a twofold characterization. First of all, it is called the supreme community (*ἡ κυριωτάτη κοινωνία*). *κυριωτάτη* is the superlative of the adjective *κυρία*, which means "having authority over". Thus the polis is a community with a system of authority. "Every political community", Aristotle says, "is composed of rulers and ruled" (*Pol.* VII.14.1332b12–13). Furthermore, the authority of a polis in a given territory is ultimate. Its rulers can, for example, overrule the authority of a

father within his family. The polis is said, secondly, to be the community of which all other communities are parts. Aristotle presumably does not mean by this that the polis is the widest community, for in Greece there were panhellenic festivals such as the Olympian and Pythian Games which while they lasted were communities of wider extent than the polis. He seems to mean rather that the end of the polis embraces the ends of all other communities:

The other communities aim at what is advantageous in fragments; for example, sailors at what is advantageous on a voyage with a view to making money or something of that sort, fellow-soldiers at what is advantageous in war, desiring either money or victory or a polis... All of these seem to be under the political community, for the political community aims, not at what is advantageous for the moment, but at what is advantageous for all of life... Thus all the communities seem to be parts of the political community (*E.N.* VIII.9.1160a14–29).

This is Aristotle's idea again that only in the polis does man attain complete self-sufficiency. It also seems to be Aristotle's reason for holding that the polis is more than an alliance. The end of an alliance, unlike that of a polis, encompasses only a part of a man's life.

Aristotle's twofold characterization of the polis has led some scholars to claim that his argument that the polis aims at good life and eudaimonia, the crux of his theory of distributive justice, plays upon an ambiguity in the word 'polis'. Aristotle uses the word, so it is maintained, in an "exclusive" and an "inclusive" sense. In the exclusive sense the word 'polis' refers to "the institutions [of a city-state] concerned with control over the rest of society"; in the inclusive sense it refers to "the whole of [city-state] society, including both the controlling, 'political' institutions and the other communities which they control".⁴⁰ The distinction between these two senses is similar to that between 'state' and 'society' in modern political philosophy. All that Aristotle's argument establishes, so the criticism goes,⁴¹ is:

- (6') The polis (understood as city-state society as a whole) aims at good life and eudaimonia.

But Aristotle believes he has established:

- (6'') The polis (understood as the city-state institutions concerned with control over the rest of society) aims at good life and eudaimonia.

Consequently, he favors using the coercive power of the state in pursuit of the end: "He believes that the statesman, through the law and other institutions of government, should exercise general control over the citizens in order to make them achieve the good life...".⁴² Aristotle has

thus invalidly derived a kind of "authoritarianism"⁴³ or "paternalism".⁴⁴

There is another, more charitable, way of analyzing Aristotle's argument that rescues it from the fallacy of equivocation. Since the polis is the subject of Aristotle's political philosophy, it would be unfortunate if the *Politics* were infected with a hidden ambiguity in the word 'polis'; for this would mean that throughout this work Aristotle was discussing two distinct subjects without being aware of their difference. The way to rescue Aristotle from the charge of equivocation is to note that the two expressions 'the most supreme community' and 'the community that includes all others' are different descriptions, not different definitions, of the polis. Aristotle believes that both expressions refer to the polis:

The polis = the most supreme community = the community that includes all others.

Indeed, this assertion is a premiss of his argument – line (3). But given this identity premiss, there is no equivocation: (6'') follows from (6') together with (3). The Homeric scholar who believes that 'the author of the *Iliad*' and 'the author of the *Odyssey*' both refer to the same man and who draws inferences about this man from both poems indifferently may be making a mistake, but he is not committing the fallacy of equivocation. He is different from the student who confuses Thucydides, son of Olorus, (the historian) and Thucydides, son of Melesias, (the Athenian statesman). Aristotle is like the Homeric scholar, not the student. He is acutely aware that there are many different conceptions of the polis and even that the word 'polis' is ambiguous (*Pol.* III.13.1276a23–24). He is aware in particular of the views of those who hold a protectionist conception of the polis and deny his identity premiss.⁴⁵ Aristotle may be mistaken in this premiss, but he is aware that it is a premiss.

Furthermore, it is not an ultimate premiss of Aristotle's political philosophy; for it seems to be a consequence of his organic theory of the polis (*Pol.* I.2.1252b27–1253a1, 18–29, VII.8.1328a21ff). When a natural object has an end, it always has a part whose job it is to realize that end. For example, one end of every plant and animal is to generate another like itself, and to realize this end every plant and animal has a reproductive soul (*De An.* II.4 416b23–25, *G.A.* II.1.735a17–19). Since the all-embracing community is a natural entity and since it aims at good life and eudaimonia, there must be a part of this community whose job it is to realize this end. And there seems to be no other candidate in sight for the job except the governing

class. This sort of defense of the identity premiss is suggested by the following passage:

If one would count the soul more a part of an animal than the body, one should also count the corresponding elements of polises – the military and the part engaged in judicial justice, and in addition to these the part that deliberates, which is the work of political intelligence – more truly parts than those directed to necessary use (*Pol.* IV.4.1291a24–28; see also *E.N.* IX.8.1168b31–33).

The third objection to the argument of *Politics* III.9 is that its conclusion is false since few, if any, polises have good life and eudaimonia as their end. (One way to defeat a definition, as Aristotle points out in the *Topics*, is to show that it is not true of every member of the species being defined; "for the definition of 'man' must be true of every man" [VI.1.139a25–27].) The only constitutions that aim at good life and eudaimonia are the two best: absolute kingship and true aristocracy (*Pol.* IV.2.1289a30–33, VII.2.1324a23–25). But Aristotle is unable to cite an example of either. When he considers the polises that are reputed to be well-governed in *Politics* II.9–11, he mentions only Sparta, Carthage, and the polises of Crete. These are so-called or secondary, as distinguished from true, aristocracies (*Pol.* IV.7.1293b1–19) and do not have good life and eudaimonia as their end. Sparta and the polises of Crete aim at power (*τὸ κρατεῖν*) (*Pol.* II.9.1271b2–3, VII.2.1324b5–9, 14.1333b12–14), and Carthaginian law honors wealth more than virtue (*Pol.* II.11.1273a37–39). Furthermore, Aristotle says that even this inferior sort of aristocracy is beyond the reach of most polises (*Pol.* IV.11.1295a25–34). Thus Aristotle concedes himself that most polises do not pursue the end that he claims differentiates a polis from other communities. He does not in fact know of a single polis that satisfies his definition.

How, then, is Aristotle's definition of 'polis' and his theory of distributive justice, which hinges on it, to be saved? Aristotle's strategy is to distinguish constitutions that are according to nature (*κατὰ φύσιν*) from those that are contrary to nature (*παρὰ φύσιν*). The correct (*ὀρθαί*) constitutions are according to nature; the deviations (*παρεκβάσεις*) from these are contrary to nature. Thus Aristotle says:

There is that which is by nature (*φύσει*) fitted for rule by a master, and another for rule by a king, and another for rule under a polity, and this is just and expedient; but rule by a tyrant is not according to nature (*κατὰ φύσιν*), nor are any of the constitutions that are deviations; for these come about contrary to nature (*παρὰ φύσιν*) (*Pol.* III.17.1287b37–41).

The correct constitutions are the three general types that “look to the common advantage”: kingship, aristocracy, and polity. The deviations from these – tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy – “look only to the rulers’ own advantage” (*Pol.* III.6.1279a17–20). Once these general types are divided into subtypes, Aristotle distinguishes degrees of correctness. The *most* correct (*ὀρθοτάτη*) constitution is the best constitution, the one that aims at good life and eudaimonia, of which there are two species: absolute kingship and true aristocracy (*Pol.* IV.2.1289a31–33, 8.1293b23–27, VII.2.1324a23–25). So-called or secondary aristocracies and polities are deviations from the best constitution; and tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy are deviations from these first deviations. Strictly speaking, the only constitution that is according to nature is the best or most correct. Aristotle says this explicitly in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “one [sc. constitution] alone is in all places according to nature – the best” (V.7.1135a5).⁴⁶

With this distinction in hand Aristotle can draw upon his theory of freaks of nature (*τέρατα*).⁴⁷ “Freaks of nature are failures of that for the sake of which” (*Phys.* II.8.199b4) and are contrary to nature (*G.A.* IV.4.770b9–10). They inherit the generic form of their parents but not the specific form. Aristotle says, for example, of a freak of nature born of human parents that it is “not even a human being but only a sort of animal” (*G.A.* IV.3.769b8–10).⁴⁸ Now, a polis that does not aim at good life and eudaimonia is a failure of that for the sake of which and is contrary to nature. So it would seem to be a kind of freak of nature and not to deserve the name ‘polis’ at all. And there are passages in the *Politics* that say just that. In one place Aristotle says that the polis truly so called (*ἡ ὡς ἀληθῶς ὀνομαζομένη πόλις*) must be concerned about virtue (III.9.1280b6–8). In another he describes city-states with deviant constitutions as despotisms (*δεσποικαί*) whereas “the polis is a community of the free” (III.6.1279a20–21). By this strict doctrine the word ‘polis’ can be applied to a city-state with a deviant constitution only in virtue of an equivocation. In the strict sense, the word only applies to communities that aim at good life and eudaimonia although in a loose sense it also applies to city-states that deviate in one degree or another from this end.⁴⁹ The word ‘polis’ thus turns out to be ambiguous in the *Politics* after all. The ambiguity is not, however, that generally alleged between city-state society as a whole and those institutions of a city-state concerned with control over the rest of society, between society and state, but rather between a community whose rulers seek good life and eudaimonia for all those within

the community capable of attaining it and an alliance of families whose rulers seek only their own advantage or at any rate some end inferior to good life and eudaimonia.

A polis with a deviant constitution differs from a freak of nature in the animal kingdom in one important respect. A freak of nature in the animal kingdom is an anomaly, a deviation from what happens for the most part (*ἐπὶ τὸ πᾶσι*) (*G.A.* IV.4.770b9–13). That which is contrary to nature is the complement of that which is according to nature; and that which is according to nature, Aristotle holds, is that which happens always or for the most part (*Phys.* II.8.198b35–36, *De Gen. et Corr.* II.6.333b4–7, *et passim*). Hence that which is contrary to nature is that which happens on those rare occasions when what happens for the most part does not happen (*Phys.* II.6.197b34–35, 8.198b36; and see *Met.* E.2.1026b27–1027a17). In Aristotle’s political philosophy this situation is reversed. The best polis, the only one that strictly speaking is according to nature, occurs rarely, if ever, whereas polises that deviate from this norm and are contrary to nature are the rule.

So Aristotle has a problem. His theory of distributive justice requires a true standard of worth; this standard is tied to his definition of ‘polis’; and his definition is anchored to his concept of nature. But rather than supporting his definition his philosophy of nature seems to undermine it. A crucial question for Aristotle is why the best polis is according to nature even though it rarely, if ever, occurs. This question will be considered in the next section.

Eudaimonia, the end of the polis, is “an actualization and a sort of perfect use of virtue” (*Pol.* VII.8.1328a37–38; see also VII.13.1332a7–10, *E.N.* I.7.1098a7–20, *E.E.* II.1.1219a38–39, *et passim*). It is an actualization of the intellectual as well as the moral virtues and of the theoretical as well as the practical intellect. A good life for Aristotle includes both politics and philosophy (*Pol.* I.7.1255b35–37, VII.2.1324a23–32, 3.1325b14–21, 14, 1333a24–b3, 15.1334a11–40). But *σοφία*, or philosophical wisdom, the virtue of the theoretical intellect, does not *fit* a person for political office or other civic duties even though theoretical activity by being a part of good life and eudaimonia does *contribute* to the end of the polis. The difference between the two criteria, fitness and contribution, makes itself felt at just this point. The relevant virtue in distributing political authority is political virtue (*πολιτικὴ ἀρετή*) (*Pol.* III.9.1280b5, 1281a7, VIII.6.1340b42–1341a1), the virtue exercised in the political life (*ὁ πολιτικός βίος*) (*Pol.* I.5.1254b30–31; VII.2.1324a32, 40, 3.1325a20; *et passim*). This virtue is a combination of the virtues of

character and the virtue of the practical intellect – of the *ἠθικαὶ ἀρεταὶ* and *φρόνησις*.

Although political virtue is for Aristotle the most important part of the correct standard of worth, it is not the only part. For the exercise of political virtue requires an ample supply of material goods (*E.N.* I.8.1099a31–b8; X.8.1178a23–b3, 1178b33–1179a13; *Pol.* VII.1.1323b40–1324a2; VII.13.1331b41–1332a1). Small sums of money are required, for example, for the exercise of liberality (*ἐλευθεριότης*); and large sums, for the exercise of munificence (*μεγαλοπρέπεια*) (*E.N.* II.7.1107b8–21, IV.1–2). (Munificence, like bravery, is an important part of political virtue; for it is munificence that ensures that the various liturgies such as equipping a trireme are properly discharged.) A good man who is impoverished will find it difficult to lead a political life. Consequently, the standard of worth that Aristotle ultimately endorses is “virtue fully furnished with external means” (*ἀρετὴ κεχορηγημένη*) (*Pol.* IV.2.1289a31–33; see also VII.1.1323b41–1324a1). Since Aristotle clearly does not mean to admit slaves or aliens to office, his standard tacitly includes freedom. Thus his correct standard of worth embraces all of the original candidates: virtue, wealth, and freedom. I shall call this the *Aristotelian* standard of worth and the conception of distributive justice resulting from it the *Aristotelian* conception of distributive justice.

4. True aristocracy

Aristotle's theory of distributive justice rests in the end on his description of the best polis (*ἡ ἀρίστη πόλις*) (*Pol.* VII.1.1323b29–31) in Books VII and VIII of the *Politics*. The best polis, a true aristocracy (*ἡ ἀληθινὴ καὶ πρώτη ἀριστοκρατία*) (IV.8.1294a24–25), embodies the Aristotelian conception of distributive justice. Consequently, if the best polis is absolutely just, the Aristotelian conception of distributive justice is absolutely just. But, Aristotle argues, the best polis *is* absolutely just. For it is according to nature, and everything (within the field of human conduct⁵⁰) that is according to nature is absolutely just.⁵¹ Therefore, the Aristotelian conception of distributive justice is absolutely just. Aristotle's argument raises two fundamental questions. First, why does Aristotle regard true aristocracy as natural even though it seldom, if ever, occurs? And, secondly, why does he believe that everything (within the field of human conduct) that is natural is absolutely just?

The social and political structure of the best polis is

laid out in three stages in *Politics* VII.8–10. Aristotle first lists the occupations and offices that every polis needs; he then introduces groups representing the various occupations and offices; and, finally, he divides these groups into a higher and a lower order.

The occupations and offices, the *ἔργα*, that every polis needs are (8.1328b4–15):

- (1) food
- (2) arts
- (3) arms
- (4) “a certain abundance of wealth”
- (5) “the superintendence of religion, which they call a priesthood”
- (6) “judgment of what is advantageous and what is just toward one another”

This is a typical Aristotelian list, a jumble of items of different types. Food is a product (of agriculture); arts are states (*ἔξεις*) (*E.N.* VI.4.1140a9–10, 20–21); arms are implements (of war); wealth is a possession; and superintendence and judgment are actions (*πράξεις*). The list is held together, to some extent at least, by the different senses of *ἔργον*, which can mean (1) a capacity (*δύναμις*),⁵² (2) the exercise (*χρήσις*, *ἐνέργεια*) of a capacity, or (3) the product of the exercise of a capacity (see *E.E.* II.1.1219a13–18, *Pol.* II.11.1273b10, III.4.1277b3, IV.15.1299a39). The English word ‘work’ has the same three senses. By the “work” of a cobbler one can mean (1) his occupation, (2) his toil, or (3) the shoes his toil produces.

The groups, or *γένη* (VII.9–10.1329a20, 27, 41, b23), of the inhabitants engaged in these various endeavors are (VII.8.1328b20–23):

- (1) farmers
- (2) artisans
- (3) the fighting class
- (4) the wealthy
- (5) priests
- (6) “judges of the necessary and advantageous”

This cannot be regarded as a complete list of the occupational groups in Aristotle's best polis. Other remarks in Book VII make it plain that the best polis will contain at least three additional groups:

- (7) day-laborers
- (8) traders
- (9) seamen

The group of day-laborers (*τὸ θητικόν*) is added to the list at the end of Chapter 9 (1329a36; see also VIII.7.1342a20). The group of traders (*τὸ ἀγοραῖον*) consists of merchants (*ἔμποροι*) and shopkeepers (*κάπηλοι*) (*Pol.* IV.4.1291a4–6, 16).⁵³ Since Aristotle's best polis will, to some extent

at least, import and export commodities (VII.6.1327a11–40), merchants will be necessary. And since both foreign and domestic commodities will need to be distributed, shopkeepers are implied. Aristotle, in fact, provides his best polis with a commercial agora distinct from the free agora where the citizens spend their leisure (VII.12.1331a30–b13). He also thinks that for security a polis ought to have a navy (VII.6.1327a40–b15), which means that his best polis will contain seamen.

These nine groups, or *γένη*, are “things without which a polis would not exist” (*Pol.* III.5.1278a3, VII.8.1328b2–3). But not all things that are indispensable for the existence of a polis are parts⁵⁴ (*μέρια*, *μέρη*) of a polis (1328a21–25); some are only accessories. The distinction between a part and an accessory, which is crucial to Aristotle’s account of the best polis, is illustrated but never explained. In the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle says that eating meat and taking a walk after dinner are for some people indispensable for health but are not parts of health (I.2.1214b11–27). And in *Politics* VII.8 he says that a craftsman and his tools are indispensable for the existence of a house but are not parts of a house (1328a30–33). The explanation that these illustrations suggest is that one thing is an accessory of another if, and only if, the one is indispensable for the existence of the other but does not enter into the essence of the other. Thus a particular group is an accessory of a polis if, and only if, the group is indispensable for the existence of the polis but does not enter into the essence of the polis. A polis is defined, it will be recalled, as “a community of households and clans in living well for the sake of a perfect and self-sufficient life” (*Pol.* III.9.1280b33–35). It would seem, then, that a particular group would not enter into the essence of a polis if the life characteristic of that group is incompatible with the sort of life that defines a polis, namely, a life of moral and intellectual virtue. And this is the way Aristotle argues. The group of craftsmen and the group of traders are not parts but mere accessories of a polis since the life of an artisan or a trader “is sordid and opposed to virtue” (VII.9.1328b39–41; see also 1329a19–21 and III.5.1278a17–21). The group of farmers is an accessory since the life of a farmer lacks the leisure necessary “for the growth of virtue and for political activities” (1328b41–1329a2). The groups in Aristotle’s best polis thus divide into two orders, a higher order of parts and a lower order of accessories (a34–39):

The higher order

- (1) hoplites⁵⁵
- (2) officeholders⁵⁶

- (3) priests
- (4) the wealthy

The lower order

- (5) farmers
- (6) traders
- (7) artisans
- (8) seamen (VII.6.1327b7–9)
- (9) day-laborers

The population in a normal Greek polis fell into four juristic categories: citizens (in the broad sense), metics (*μέτοικοι*), foreigners⁵⁷ (*ξένοι*), and slaves (see *Pol.* III.1.1275a7–8, 5.1277b38–39, VII.4.1326a18–20, b20–21). Aristotle recognizes four kinds of citizen. First, a man who “is entitled to share in deliberative or⁵⁸ judicial office” is a *full citizen* (*πολίτης ἀπλῶς*) (III.1.1275a19–23, b17–19). Secondly, a boy or a young man who will in the future be entitled to be enrolled as a full citizen is an *immature citizen* (*πολίτης ἀτελής*) (1275a14–19, 5.1278a4–6). Thirdly, an old man who was a full citizen but is now exempt from political duties is a *superannuated citizen* (*πολίτης παρηκμαῶς*) (1275a15–17). Fourthly, a woman or a girl of the proper descent is a *female citizen* (*πολίτις*) (III.2.1275b33, 5.1278a28). Metics were resident aliens. They were excluded from all political offices; could not own land; had to have a citizen as a patron (*προστάτης*) (see III.1.1275a8–14); were subject, unlike citizens, to a head tax (in Athens 12 drachmas a year for adult males, 6 for women living on their own); and were liable, if male, for military service in the army or navy.⁵⁹

In Aristotle’s best polis the higher order and the body of citizens, that is, adult male citizens, coincide (VII.9.1328b33–1329a2, 17–19). (Women are ignored in *Politics* VII.1–15 except for one disparaging remark at 3.1325b3–5.) Hence the lower order has no share in ruling the best polis. Furthermore, the best polis is ruled exclusively in the interest of the higher order. The welfare of the lower order is of concern to the rulers only in so far as it contributes to the welfare of the higher order. This is the point of the distinction between parts and accessories. Since the lower order is not a part but only an indispensable condition of the existence of the best polis, the rulers will have exactly the same concern for it as they would have for a foreign polis they were dependent upon for their grain supply.⁶⁰

Aristotle does not discuss the juristic status of traders and artisans; but presumably, as in Plato’s *Laws* (VIII.846D1–847B6, XI.920A3–4), they will be metics or foreigners. The main occupation of the lower order, farm-

ing, is assigned to slaves or serfs. "Those who will farm", Aristotle says,

ought best of all, if our prayer be answered, to be slaves, but neither all of the same stock (*δμοφύλων*)⁶¹ nor of high spirit (for thus in regard to work they would be serviceable and in regard to abstaining from insurrection, safe). As a second-best they ought to be barbarian serfs (*βαρβάρους περιούκους*) resembling in their nature those just described. Of these those on private estates ought to be the private property of those who own the estates whereas those on public land ought to be public property. How slaves ought to be treated,⁶² and why it is better to hold out freedom as a reward to all slaves, we will say later⁶³ (VII.10.1330a25–33; see also VII.9.1329a25–26).

The slaves referred to here must be natural slaves since only they are justly slaves. But Aristotle's idea that freedom should be held out as a reward to all slaves, though it appears humane and though Aristotle in his will extended such a promise to his own slaves,⁶⁴ is in fact inconsistent with his justification of slavery. For, by Aristotle's account, a person who is by nature a slave would not benefit by being free and might even perish without a master to exercise forethought in his behalf.

This system of slaves or serfs is Aristotle's solution to a basic political problem – how to secure leisure for the citizens of a polis. The problem is posed early in the *Politics* in the course of Aristotle's examination of the institutions of the two historical polises that deviate least from his ideal, Sparta and Carthage:

The arrangement of the Carthaginians deviates from aristocracy toward oligarchy chiefly in respect of a certain idea that commends itself [not only to the Carthaginians but also] to the many; for they think that the rulers ought to be chosen not only on the basis of virtue but also on the basis of wealth, since it is impossible for the poor man to rule well and to occupy leisure well (II.11.1273a21–25).

That poverty is a bar to a political life Aristotle agrees; but he thinks that the Carthaginian practice of filling the highest offices, those of king and general, on the basis of wealth alone is wrong (a35–b5). The proper solution is not to make wealthy men rulers, but to make the best men well-off:

For from the outset one of the greatest necessities [*sc.* for the lawgiver] is to see that the best men may be able to have leisure and to avoid unworthy occupations (*σχολάζειν καὶ μηδὲν ἀσχημονεῖν*) not only while in office but also while living a private life (a32–35; see also b5–7).

Aristotle prefaces his discussion of the Spartan helot system with a similar remark: "That a polis that intends to be well-

governed must have leisure from necessary work is something agreed; but how this is to be realized is not easy to ascertain" (II.9.1269a34–36). The difficulty is that this leisure from necessary work is likely to be purchased, as it was in Sparta and Thessaly, at the price of a constant threat of insurrection from those performing the work (II.5.1264a34–36, 9.1269a36–b7).

Aristotle offers no justification for the subservient position of the lower order of his best polis beyond that which is implicit in his theory of natural slavery, which is not mentioned in Book VII. In this book itself Aristotle is more interested in justifying the distribution of those occupations fit for citizens: arms, politics, and religion. Each (male) citizen engages in all three occupations but during different periods of his life. As a young adult he is a hoplite; during middle age, an ekklesiast, dikast, and official; and in old age, a priest (9.1329a2–34). The distribution of the occupations of arms and politics is justified as follows:

It remains then for the [best] constitution to assign both of these [occupations] to the same men, not however at the same time, but in the way that strength occurs naturally in younger men, practical wisdom in older; therefore it is advantageous and just for the distribution to be made to both [age-groups] in this way; for this division is according to worth⁶⁵ (a13–17; see also 14.1332b35–41).

This is a striking passage. It contains all the key concepts in Aristotle's theory of distributive justice: justice, distribution (*νενομῆσθαι*, a16), worth (*κατ' ἀξίαν*, a17), and nature (*πέφυκεν*, a14). Furthermore, the argument of the passage proceeds through just the stages that his theory requires. The content of the principle of distributive justice depends upon a standard of worth, which in turn is determined by a second-order attribute – in this case, fitness-for-the-job:

- (1) Strength (*δύναμις*⁶⁶) fits a man to be a hoplite; practical wisdom (*φρόνησις*) fits him for political office.
- (2) Hence, it is just according to the principle of distributive justice for service as a hoplite to be distributed on the basis of strength and for political office to be distributed on the basis of practical wisdom.
- (3) [Only]⁶⁷ younger men (*οἱ νεώτεροι*) are strong.
- (4) [Only]⁶⁷ older men (*οἱ πρεσβύτεροι*) are practically wise.
- (5) Therefore, it is just to restrict political office to older men and service as a hoplite to younger men.

The social and political structure of Aristotle's best polis is meant to be a perfect institutional realization of the Aristotelian conception of justice. Since the standard of worth of this conception is "virtue fully furnished with external means" (*Pol.* IV.2.1289a31–33, VII.1.1323b41–1324a1), in the best polis political authority is distributed to those free men, and to only those free men, who possess both practical wisdom and wealth:

$$(1) \quad (\forall x) (\forall y) \left(\frac{P(x) \cdot W(x)}{P(y) \cdot W(y)} = \frac{V(T(x))}{V(T(y))} \right).$$

In this formula '*P*' signifies the function *practical wisdom of*, and '*·*' signifies multiplication. The other symbols are the same as before. The variables '*x*' and '*y*' range over the adult male inhabitants of Aristotle's best polis who are free in the narrow sense, that is, are neither aliens nor slaves. This last device is a symbolic representation of the fact that Aristotle, reflecting contemporary opinion, takes it for granted that the widest conceivable distribution of political authority in a polis would be to its free native adult males. Multiplication (when the factors are neither greater than one nor less than zero) is a convenient analogue for conjunction. Among other things the two operations give the same result for a null component. Just as practical wisdom and wealth have no weight by themselves under the Aristotelian conception of justice, so a product is zero if either of its factors is zero.

All the free men in Aristotle's best polis are endowed by nature with intelligence and high-spiritedness and through learning and habituation acquire moral virtue and practical wisdom by the time they reach their mental prime, which Aristotle places at forty-nine (*Rhet.* II.14.1390b9–11) or fifty (*Pol.* VII.16.1335b32–35):

$$(2) \quad (\forall x) (Mx \rightarrow P(x) \neq 0)$$

(In this formula '*M*' signifies the property of having reached one's mental prime, and the arrow stands for material implication.) Conversely, only those who have reached their mental prime are practically wise:

$$(3) \quad (\forall x) (P(x) \neq 0 \rightarrow Mx)$$

Moral virtue and practical wisdom are reciprocally related: "it is not possible to be genuinely good without practical wisdom, nor practically wise without moral virtue" (*E.N.* VI.13.1144b31–32; see also 12.1144a36–b1 and X.8.1178a16–19). This is the reason moral virtue can be omitted from the formulations. Practical wisdom is the virtue of the practical intellect (*νοῦς πρακτικός*) (*E.N.* VI.5.1140b24–28 together with *De An.* III.10.433a14–

15 and *Pol.* VII.14.1333a23–27). It is the capacity to deliberate correctly and to make the right choices about those things that are good or bad for man (*E.N.* VI.5, 9.1142b28–33, VII.10.1152a8–9, *Rhet.* I.9.1366b20–22). It sets the standard for moral virtue in the sense that the right or virtuous action in given circumstances is the one that the man of practical wisdom would perform (*E.N.* II.6.1106b36–1107a2). Since practical wisdom is perfect moral marksmanship – the capacity to always hit the bull's eye in practical matters (1106b28–35) – a person cannot possess more or less of it. Practical wisdom does not come in various degrees. Hence if two men both possess practical wisdom, they both possess the same amount:

$$(4) \quad (\forall x) (\forall y) [(P(x) \neq 0 \ \& \ P(y) \neq 0) \rightarrow (P(x) = P(y))]$$

Practical wisdom and moral virtue, though highly esteemed *human* qualities, are not, however, the highest moral state. There is a higher, "a certain heroic and divine virtue" (*E.N.* VII.1.1145a19–20), which excels human virtue by as much as gods and heroes excel ordinary Greeks (a15–30). The implications of this higher state for Aristotle's political philosophy are considered in Section 5.

The distribution of political authority in Aristotle's best polis is unaffected by the inequalities of wealth that Aristotle is apparently prepared to tolerate among its households (see *Pol.* VII.10.1330a5–8) even though wealth is a part of the Aristotelian standard of worth. Since the wealth a man needs for the exercise of the moral and intellectual virtues, the wealth he needs to be a good warrior, officeholder, and head of a family, has a limit (*Pol.* I.8.1256b26–39) and since the wealth available to every free man from his family estate or the public lands equals or exceeds this limit, every free man has all the wealth that is relevant to the Aristotelian standard of worth:

$$(5) \quad (\forall x) (W(x) = 1)$$

(where '1' represents the limit of "true wealth" [b30–31]).

From (1) through (5) it follows that only the older free men in Aristotle's polis should have political authority and that they should all have equal shares:

$$(6) \quad (\forall x) (\forall y) [(Mx \ \& \ My) \leftrightarrow (V(T(x)) = V(T(y)) \neq 0)]$$

Aristotle sums up this entire argument in two sentences:

...it is clear that for many reasons it is necessary for all [the citizens of the best polis] to share alike in ruling and being ruled in turn. For equality requires the same [shares] for those who are alike... (VII.14.1332b25–27).

The Aristotelian conception of justice does not entail the aristocratic, democratic, or oligarchic conceptions. Suppose that the population of Aristotle's best polis is increased by two: one free man who is poor and landless but good and a second who is wealthy but worthless. Suppose further that political authority is distributed in this new polis according to the Aristotelian conception of justice. Since at least one good man, one free man, and one wealthy man are not full citizens in this new polis, it exemplifies Aristotelian justice without exemplifying aristocratic, democratic, or oligarchic justice. This is worth noting because it highlights the fact that Aristotle's best polis does exemplify (in a fashion at least) all four conceptions at once. For in Aristotle's polis the wealthy, the free (of an appropriate age), and the practically wise are exactly the same persons. Thus the aristocratic conception of justice, whose standard of worth is practical wisdom and moral virtue by themselves, is fully realized. The democratic conception is realized in the sense that every free man who does not die prematurely eventually becomes a full citizen. And the oligarchic conception is realized to the extent that those, and only those, who own land are full citizens. Thus no free man in Aristotle's polis, be he aristocrat, democrat, or oligarch, can reasonably object to the way it distributes political authority. Hence Aristotle's best polis is in a strong sense perfectly just.

But only from the perspective of its free men. Other members of its population might harbor some doubts. The full citizens of Aristotle's best polis are just those members of its population who exemplify in their persons or in their lives the popular Greek values of the fourth century. These may be tabulated in an Hellenic Table of Opposites where the first item of each pair is the one taken to be the more valuable:⁶⁸

(1) good/base	σπουδαῖος/φᾶῶλος
(2) dignified/sordid	γενναῖος/βάνανσος
(3) leisure/work	σχολή/ἀσχολία
(4) mature/immature	τέλειος/ἀτελής
(5) male/female	ἄρρην/θῆλυς
(6) native/foreigner	ἄσπότης/ξένος
(7) Greek/barbarian	Ἕλληνας/βάρβαρος
(8) free/slave	ἐλεύθερος/δούλος

This table expresses some of the common opinions, or *ἔνδοξα*, with which political philosophy is supposed to be in accord.⁶⁹ Common opinions are those subscribed to "by everyone or by the majority or by the wise, that is, by all of the wise or by the majority or by the most notable and distinguished of them" (*Top.* I.1.100b21–23). Aristotle's

idea that one test of truth in political philosophy, as in philosophy in general, is accord with common opinion is at least part of the explanation of his conservatism in political philosophy. The common opinions embodied in Aristotle's description of his best polis are prior to the description in one sense and in another sense not. They are prior to us (*πρότερον πρὸς ἡμᾶς*) but not prior in nature (*πρότερον τῇ φύσει*) (*E.N.* I.4.1095a30–b13; for the distinction see *An. Post.* I.2.71b33–72a5 and *Top.* VI.4.141b3–14). That is to say, they are epistemically but not ontologically prior to the description. Ontologically his description of the best polis rests on his conception of what is natural.

The more dubious items in the Table of Opposites – free/slave, male/female, dignified/sordid, and Greek/barbarian – were already questioned in the fourth century, as the *Politics* itself makes plain. Aristotle's theory of natural slavery is an answer to those who maintain that all slavery is unjust. "Some hold", Aristotle reports,

that slavery (*τὸ δεσπόζειν*) is contrary to nature (for it is by law [*νόμῳ*] that one man is a slave, another free, by nature [*φύσει*] there is no difference); therefore it is not just; for it is based on force (I.3.1253b20–23).

In Book II he comments on Plato's idea in the *Republic* that "women must follow the same pursuits as men" (5.1264b5–6; see *Rep.* V.451D–457C). Plato was intent in particular that the occupations Aristotle assigns to male citizens, those of warrior and ruler, be open to women (*Rep.* V.457A, VII.540C). In Chapter 5 of Book III Aristotle deals with the question whether artisans (*βάνανσοι*) can be full citizens. Athenian democracy, by answering this question in the affirmative, denies the political relevance of the distinction between dignified and sordid occupations. Finally, the respect Aristotle accords the institutions of Carthage and Egypt implies that he himself did not regard all barbarians as inferior to Greeks. He ranks the Carthaginian constitution above even the Spartan and just below the best constitution (IV.7.1293b14–19) and appeals to the example of Egypt in support of his separation of farmers and warriors in his best polis (VII.10.1329a40–b5, 23–25).

Aristotle thinks that his conception of distributive justice is absolutely just because he thinks that the best polis, which embodies it, is absolutely just. He thinks the best polis is absolutely just because he thinks it exists by nature. And he has several reasons for thinking it exists by nature. First, it realizes the true end of human life. Secondly, it distributes military, political, and religious offices to

its adult male citizens in a manner that corresponds to the natural states of life. Thirdly, it distributes these offices only to the naturally superior sex (*Pol.* I.5.1254b13–14, 12.1259b1–3). And, finally, its bifurcated social structure reflects the distinction between natural master and natural slave. These considerations are apparently strong enough in Aristotle's mind to outweigh the fact that the best polis does not satisfy his main criterion of the natural, namely, happening always or for the most part.

Thus we reach the foundation of the Aristotelian conception of justice. But is the foundation rock or sand? In inferring that the best polis is absolutely just because it exists by nature Aristotle is alleged to have committed the fallacy of deriving an "ought" from an "is". Mulgan (1977, pp. 19–20) writes:

Assuming that certain characteristics can be identified as natural or innate does it follow that these characteristics ought to be developed rather than restricted? Is this not an unjustifiable inference from what is to what ought to be? We must accept that Aristotle's assumption that the natural is necessarily best and the best necessarily natural is not logically sound. Of anything natural one may always ask whether it is good or bad and either answer is logically possible.

This raises the second of the two fundamental questions about the argument from nature that grounds Aristotle's theory of distributive justice.⁷⁰ Although it is a large and difficult question, the general explanation of Aristotle's linkage of nature and justice is clear enough. Aristotle subscribes to a teleological view of nature according to which "nature makes everything for the sake of something" (*P.A.* I.1.641b12, 5.645a23–26; *Phys.* II.8; *Pol.* I.2.1252b32) where this something, the end or *τέλος* of the making, is something good (*Phys.* II.2.194a32–33, 3.195a23–25; *Met.* A.3.983a31–32; *Pol.* I.2.1252b34–1253a1).⁷¹ Thus, according to Aristotle's teleology, whatever is according to nature is good (see *I.A.* 2.704b15–18 *et passim*). To get the conclusion that everything (within the field of human conduct) that is according to nature is just one need only add the plausible (but not unquestionable) assumption that everything (within the field of human conduct) that is good is also just. The premiss linking nature and justice in Aristotle's argument is thus a corollary of his natural teleology. Aristotle's theory of distributive justice rests firmly on his philosophy of nature. Whether his philosophy of nature is satisfactory is another matter and beyond the scope of this paper.

5. The summation argument

Aristotle usually regards democracy as a deviant constitution (*Pol.* III.7.1279b4–10, IV.2.1289a26–30, 38–b11), but he considers one justification of democracy, the famous "summation" argument, according to which democracy would seem to be absolutely just in some circumstances and not a deviant constitution at all (*Pol.* III.11). This argument is interesting for its clever application of Aristotle's principle of distributive justice, an application which, if valid, would seem in other circumstances to justify absolute kingship. The strategy of the argument is to apply the principle of distributive justice to men taken collectively as well as individually. In terms of our formulation of the principle in modern functional notation the strategy is to allow the individual variables 'x' and 'y' to range not only over individual free men but also over groups or bodies of free men.

Aristotle envisions a situation, which he thinks may sometimes occur (*Pol.* III.11.1281b15–21), where the worth of the free men in a polis, though individually quite negligible, is nevertheless collectively greater than that of the few best men (1281a42–b2; and compare VII.13.1332a36–38). The collection envisioned is not a random collection, an unordered set of the free men in the polis but an organized body of them – the many *meeting together* (*οἱ πολλοὶ συνελθόντες*, 1281b1, 5, 35, 1282a17), as in the *ekklesia*. The worth of such an organized body may be greater or less than or equal to the worth of the corresponding unordered set, which is simply the worth of each of its members added to that of the others. (Similarly, the value of a complete collection of coins of a certain kind has a value for a collector that is greater than the sum of the values of the individual coins.) To call Aristotle's argument a "summation" argument is thus a misnomer.

Aristotle infers that in the circumstances envisioned, where the worth of the many meeting together is greater than that of the few best men, the many ought to be supreme (1281a40–42). This inference rests upon an unstated major premiss that links greater authority to greater worth. The only such principle of linkage that Aristotle ever appeals to is his principle of distributive justice. So it seems reasonable to find this principle in this argument.

The argument in favor of the many is intended to overthrow the exclusive claims to political power of the few best men.⁷² Strictly speaking, it does not justify making the many supreme over *every* other group of free men. For the circumstances envisioned leave open the possibility that

there might be some group consisting of more than the few best men but less than all the free men whose worth is greater than that of the many. (We might get such a body by excluding from the ekklesia all those who are especially stupid or cowardly.) To reach the conclusion that the many should be supreme over every other group of free men a stronger minor premiss is required to the effect that the worth of the free men in the polis meeting together is greater than the worth of any individual among them or of any other (actual or possible, large or small) body of them.

A remarkable feature of this justification of democracy is that it employs the Aristotelian standard of worth – virtue fully furnished with external means. The many are first compared with the few best men in respect of virtue and wisdom (*ἀρετή και φρονήσις*) (1281b4–5), of character and thought (*τὰ ἦθη και ἡ διάνοια*) (b7) or, in other words, of the moral and intellectual virtues.⁷³ But later in the chapter wealth also enters the picture. Aristotle remarks in regard to the members of the ekklesia, the boule, and the dikasteries in a democracy that “the assessed property of all of these together is greater than that of those who hold great offices individually or in small groups” (1282a39–41). When the argument is repeated twice in a later chapter, the two factors of virtue and wealth are conjoined (III.13.1283a40–42, b30–35). Thus Aristotle’s argument in favor of democracy is not simply aporetic. If the free men in a polis meeting together have the sort of superiority that Aristotle describes, then by the Aristotelian conception of justice they should be supreme. And Aristotle does indeed indicate that the view under consideration is “probably true” (1281a42).⁷⁴

In the circumstances Aristotle envisions, the worth of the many meeting together is greater, but not incommensurably greater, than that of the few best men. So the principle of distributive justice would not justify completely excluding the few best men from office. Furthermore, the summation argument provides no rationale for opening executive and administrative offices, even minor ones,⁷⁵ where the duties are discharged by single individuals or small bodies, to free men in general. The argument only justifies giving authority to the many when they meet together and act as a body. Thus Aristotle recommends that the many be admitted to the ekklesia, the boule, and the dikasteries (1281b31, 1282a24–b1) but not to the highest offices (1281b25–28) such as those of war and finance (1282a31–32; see also VI.8.1322a29–b12), which by implication will fall to the few best men.

If the many do not hold the highest offices, in what

sense are they supreme? The only political functions that Aristotle assigns to the many in *Politics* III.11 are the election of officers and the scrutiny of their conduct (1281b33, 1282a13–14, 26–27). But he regards these functions as higher than those discharged by the individual officers themselves (1282a24–38; see also Plato, *Laws* 945B3–E3). Furthermore, he may have intended⁷⁶ for the ekklesia of free men to have all of its usual powers, which by his own account were quite extensive: “The deliberative part is supreme about war and peace, and alliance and disalliance, and about laws, and about death and exile and confiscation, and about the election of officers and their scrutiny” (*Pol.* IV.14.1298a3–7).

Aristotle’s principle of distributive justice yields different results in different cases. In one situation it justifies democracy; in an opposite situation it justifies kingship. And in one passage Aristotle explicitly connects the two justifications:

Therefore if [1] the many also really ought to be supreme because they are superior (*κρείττους*) to the few, then too [by parity of reasoning], [2] if one person, or more than one but fewer than the many, were superior (*κρείττους*) to the rest, they ought to be supreme rather than the many. (*Pol.* III.13.1283b23–27).

The word *κρείττων* is ambiguous. It can mean “stronger” (*Pol.* II.8.1268a25; III.10.1288a23, 15.1286b36; IV.12.1296b15, *et passim*) or “better” (II.3.1262a7, 9.1271b9) or “superior (in any respect)”.⁷⁷ Both the antecedent and the consequent, both (1) and (2), demand that it be taken in the third or generic sense.⁷⁸ For the antecedent sums up a justification of the rule of the many given earlier in the same chapter that appeals to superiority in three respects (strength, wealth, and goodness) (1283a40–42), and the consequent generalizes from a discussion in which Aristotle points out that it would be just by the oligarchic (democratic, aristocratic) conception of justice for one man who is richer (better born, more virtuous) than everyone to rule over everyone (b13–23).⁷⁹ The three justifications of one-man rule just mentioned are all vague about whether the one man is superior to everyone collectively or individually. There is no such vagueness in the justification of the rule of the many: they make their claim because they are superior collectively to the few (b33–35). Thus if the antecedent is to support rather than conflict with the consequent, the claim of the one or the few must rest on the opposite assumption that the one or the few are superior to all the others put together. Consequently, both the antecedent and the consequent, both (1) and (2), express

versions of the summation argument.⁸⁰ The second version regarded as an instance of Aristotle's principle of distributive justice is as follows: if the worth (by a given standard) of one person or of a small body of persons in a polis is greater than the worth of all the other free men in it put together, then the value of the things assigned to the one person or to the body of persons should be greater than the value of the things assigned to all the others put together.

The argument favoring absolute kingship⁸¹ is more than merely the reverse of that favoring democracy. The conclusion of the one is much stronger than that of the other and, consequently, is derived from a stronger premiss. Unlike the many in a just democracy, the absolute king has a monopoly on the political authority in a polis. He is supreme over everything and rules according to his own wish untrammelled by law (*Pol.* III.13.1284a13–14, 14.1285b29–30; 16.1287a1–3, 8–10). Like a tyrant, he has all the authority and his subjects none. He differs from a tyrant in ruling over willing subjects for their benefit rather than his own and in pursuing the (morally) beautiful (*τὸ καλόν*) rather than pleasure (*Pol.* III.7.1279a32–34, b6–7; IV.10.1295a17–23; V.10.1310b40–1311a8; *E.N.* VIII.10.1160a35–b12). To say that the king pursues *τὸ καλόν* is presumably to say that he pursues the true end of the polis, namely, a life of moral and intellectual virtue for everyone of his subjects capable of leading such a life.

The standard of worth of absolute kingship is a bit more complex than that of true aristocracy. In addition to the aristocratic factors of virtue and wealth (*Pol.* IV.2.1289a30–33) it comprises political ability (*πολιτικὴ δύναμις*) (*Pol.* III.13.1284a3–10; see also V.9.1309a33–37 and VII.3.1325b10–14) and possibly even bodily superiority (*Pol.* VII.14.1332b16–23; compare I.5.1254b34–1255a1). (Bodily superiority is helpful to silence doubts about moral, political, and intellectual ability.) Thus a list of the factors constituting the standard of absolute kingship consists of five items: moral and intellectual virtue, wealth, political ability, bodily excellence, and freedom.⁸² Aristotle's justification of absolute kingship, however, appeals to only two of these: virtue and political ability.

In a labyrinthine sentence Aristotle explains the circumstances under which absolute kingship is justified:

If there is some one man who differs so much in excess of virtue, or more than one but not enough to be able to make up the complement of a polis, that the virtue and the political ability of all the others is not commensurable with theirs, if they are more than one, or if one, with his alone, then these men must no longer be reckoned a part of the polis; for they will be treated unjustly if deemed worthy of equal things, being so

unequal in virtue and political ability; since such a man is in all likelihood like a god among men (*Pol.* III.13.1284a3–11; see also a11–17, III.17.1288a15–19, and VII.14.1332b16–27).

Aristotle in effect distinguishes three cases: (1) where there is one man whose virtue and political ability are outstanding, (2) where there are several but not enough to make up the complement of a polis (*πλήρωμα πόλεως*),⁸³ and (3) where there are enough.⁸⁴ In case (3) true aristocracy is presumably the appropriate constitution with the exceptional individuals ruling and being ruled in turn. Case (2) is a plural kingship (as in Sparta). To say that the godlike man of case (1) should not be reckoned a part of the polis is to say that he should not share authority with others in the polis – that he should rule as an absolute monarch (compare *Pol.* III.17.1288a26–29). Such rule is justified according to Aristotle when “the virtue and the political ability of all the others (*τῶν ἄλλων... πάντων*) is not commensurable (*μὴ συμβλητῆν*)... with his...”. Both Greek expressions require comment.

First, what does *συμβλητός* mean? Two things are *συμβλητά* in respect of a given attribute if, and only if, the attribute can in both cases be measured by the same standard (*De Gen. et Corr.* II.6.333a20–27, *E.N.* V.5.1133a19–26). Thus two musical notes are commensurable in sharpness; but a pen, a taste of wine, and a musical note are not (*Top.* I.15.107b13–18, *Phys.* VII.4.248b7–10). Incommensurability need not preclude all comparisons. Although knowledge and wealth are measured in respect of goodness by different standards (*E.E.* VII.10.1243b22), still knowledge is better than wealth (*Pol.* VII.1.1323b16–18). We might say in this case that the one standard is higher than the other. The virtue and political ability of the absolute king must be both superior to and incommensurable with that of all the others in the polis. It must be superior to justify giving political authority to him rather than to the others, and it must be incommensurable to justify giving him all of it. If his virtue and political ability were commensurable with theirs, then it would seem that in justice they should have a share of authority, though perhaps a small one.

The second expression requiring comment is *οἱ ἄλλοι πάντες*. As Aristotle points out in the course of his criticism of the communism of Plato's *Republic*, *πάντες* is ambiguous: it can mean everyone individually or everyone put together (*Pol.* II.3.1261b20–30). It might seem that in the passage under discussion it must be taken in both ways. For the virtue and political ability of an absolute king, if his rule is justified, must be incommensurably superior to that of

all the others individually and collectively. However, on the basis of a plausible assumption – that the worth of a body of men (all of whom are commensurable in worth) is commensurable with the worth of its individual members – the one is equivalent to the other. For if two things are commensurable in respect of a given attribute, whatever is incommensurable with the one in respect of the given attribute is also incommensurable with the other. Thus it is a matter of indifference which way *πάντες* is taken in the above passage.

As I have mentioned, Aristotle's justification of absolute kingship is not the mirror image of his justification of democracy. For one thing, the concept of incommensurable superiority figures in the one justification but not in the other. For another, in his justification of democracy Aristotle compares the worth of the whole body of free men in a polis with that of the few best men *among them* whereas in his justification of absolute kingship he compares the worth of the godlike man with the worth of all *the others* – not with the worth of a group of which the godlike man is himself a member. Strictly speaking, for absolute kingship to be justified by the Aristotelian conception of justice the candidate must be incommensurably superior in worth, not only to all others in the polis both individually and collectively, but also to every (actual or possible) group that contains the candidate himself. But might not an ekklesia with the godlike man as its leader be at least commensurable in worth with the godlike man himself? Aristotle thinks not. If a godlike man were to arise in a polis, there are three ways of dealing with him: he can be removed (killed, exiled, or ostracized), he can, like an ordinary citizen, be asked to rule and be ruled in turn, or he can be obeyed as an absolute king (*Pol.* III.13.1284b25–34, 17.1288a24–29). Aristotle dismisses the second alternative as unnatural (1288a26–28): to ask such a man to submit to being ruled would be like claiming “to rule over Zeus” (1284b30–31).

6. Conclusion

The symbolism introduced earlier provides a convenient vehicle for examining the status and consistency of Aristotle's three diverse justifications and for explaining how he means to avoid Protagorean relativism without embracing Platonic absolutism.

When the variables ‘*x*’ and ‘*y*’ are allowed to range over the groups of free men in a given polis as well as over individual free men, the formula for the Aristotelian con-

ception of justice expresses the major premiss of Aristotle's three justifications:

$$(1) (\forall x)(\forall y) \left(\frac{P(x) \cdot W(x)}{P(y) \cdot W(y)} = \frac{V(T(x))}{V(T(y))} \right)$$

Democracy is justified by adding a minor premiss to the effect that as a group the many (*m*) are superior (>) in virtue and wealth to the few best men (*f*):⁸⁵

$$(2_d) (P(m) \cdot W(m)) > (P(f) \cdot W(f))$$

$$(3_d) \therefore V(T(m)) > V(T(f))$$

Absolute kingship is justified when a godlike man (*g*) appears in a polis who is incommensurably superior (>>) in virtue and wealth to all the remaining free men (*r*):

$$(2_k) (P(g) \cdot W(g)) \gg (P(r) \cdot W(r))$$

$$(3_k) \therefore V(T(g)) \gg V(T(r))$$

True aristocracy requires a more complex justification, which was symbolized in Section 4.

These justifications are compatible with each other since they apply to different situations. The polises where democracy and true aristocracy are justified contain no godlike men, and the polis in which democracy is justified differs from that in which true aristocracy is justified in containing a large group of free men who individually have little virtue (*Pol.* III.11.1281b23–25, 1282a25–26).

Each of the justifications is a valid deductive argument. Aristotle affirms the major premiss they share on the basis of a twofold appeal to nature. The principle of distributive justice, the *concept* as distinguished from the various *conceptions* of distributive justice, is itself according to nature (*Pol.* VII.3.1325b7–10) and so too is one particular standard of worth, the standard of the best polis. Consequently, the question of the status of these three justifications, whether they are purely hypothetical or not, is a question about the minor premiss or premisses of each.

In the case of the democratic premiss Aristotle's answer is straightforward: it is sometimes but not always true (*Pol.* III.11.1281b15–21). Hence the justification of democracy is not purely hypothetical. Nor is the justification of absolute kingship.⁸⁶ The man who is “like a god among men” (*Pol.* III.13.1284a10–11) would be a man of heroic virtue (see VII.14.1332b16–27); and such a man, Aristotle says, is “rare” (*σπάνιος*) (not nonexistent) (*E.N.* VII.1.1145a27–28).⁸⁷

The minor premisses of the aristocratic argument describe a situation where all of the free men in a given polis have sufficient wealth for the exercise of the moral and intellectual virtues and where all of the older free men of the

polis are men of practical wisdom. In the *Politics* Aristotle makes only the modest claim that such a situation is possible:

It is not possible for the best constitution to come into being without appropriate equipment [that is, the appropriate quality and quantity of territory and of citizens and noncitizens]. Hence one must presuppose many things as one would wish them to be, though none of them must be impossible (*Pol.* VII.4.1325b37–38; see also II.6.1265a17–18).

But Aristotle appears to subscribe to the principle that every possibility is realized at some moment of time (*Top.* II.11.115b17–18, *Met.* Θ.4.1047b3–6, N.2.1088b23–25).⁸⁸ This principle together with the claim that the situation described is possible entails that the situation sometimes occurs. Thus even Aristotle's justification of true aristocracy is not purely hypothetical.

The final question is Aristotle's way of avoiding Protagorean relativism without embracing Platonic absolutism. The relativist, along with everyone else (*E.N.* V.3.1131a13–14, *Pol.* III.12.1282b18), can accept the principle of distributive justice:

$$\frac{Q(x)}{Q(y)} = \frac{V(T(x))}{V(T(y))}.$$

And he can concede that particular instances of this principle, particular conceptions of justice, accurately describe the modes of distributing political authority that appear just to particular polises and to particular philosophers. What he denies is that there is any basis for ranking these various conceptions of justice or for singling one out as the best (Plato, *Theaet.* 172A–B). Aristotle, following in Plato's track (*Laws* X.888D7–890D8), maintains against the relativist that nature provides such a basis. But he departs from Plato in his conception of nature. For Plato "the just by nature" (τὸ φύσει δίκαιον) (*Rep.* VI.501B2) is the Form of justice, an incorporeal entity (*Phdo.* 65D4–5, *Soph.* 246B8) that exists beyond time and space (*Tim.* 37C6–38C3, 51E6–52B2),⁸⁹ whereas for Aristotle the sensible world is the realm of nature (*Met.* Α.1.1069a30–b2). Thus in appealing to nature Aristotle does not appeal to a transcendent standard. Nor does he appeal to his main criterion of the natural, namely, happening always or for the most part. Aristotle's theory of justice is anchored to nature by means of the polis described in *Politics* VII and VIII, and he regards this polis as natural because it fosters the true end of human life and because its social and political structure reflects the natural hierarchy of human beings and the natural stages of life. Thus the nature that Aristotle's theory of justice is ultimately founded on is human nature.⁹⁰

Notes

¹ References to the *Politics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* are to the editions of Ross and Bywater respectively in the series of Oxford Classical Texts. All translations of Aristotle are my own.

² See especially εἶδος τῆς συνθέσεως ("form of the compound") at 1276b7–8.

³ The offices Aristotle has in mind are of course political as distinguished, say, from religious offices (*Pol.* III.6.1279a8–9, IV.15.1299a18, VI.8.1322b17–18, VII.3.1325a19).

⁴ For a recent account of Aristotle's life see Guthrie (1981, pp. 18–45). Passages from ancient and medieval writers bearing on Aristotle's relations with Philip and Alexander are collected in Düring (1957, pp. 284–299).

⁵ For Aristotle's debt to the *Laws* in Books VII and VIII see Barker (1947, pp. 380–382) and Wood and Wood (1978, pp. 245–248).

⁶ Wood and Wood (1978, p. 248) claim that a comparison of the two descriptions reveals "the common aristocratic, authoritarian, and anti-democratic pattern of the political thought of the two philosophers".

⁷ Kelsen (1937, p. 37) holds that Aristotle's "apology for royalty was intended to be the ideology of one definite hereditary monarchy" – namely, the Macedonian.

⁸ For the items distributed see the relevant occurrences in the *Politics* of the verbs for distributing and apportioning: νέμειν, ἀπονέμειν, and διανέμειν. νέμειν: II.6.1265b25; III.12.1282b24; IV.1.1289a16, 8.1294a10, 12.1297a9; V.8.1309a28; VI.5.1320a30; VII.9.1329a16, 10.1330a16. ἀπονέμειν: IV.8.1293b41; V.8.1309a21–22, 11.1315a6–7. διανέμειν: III.10.1281a15, 18, 17.1288a14; IV.3.1290a8, 4.1290b4; VI.5.1320a37, b2; VII.4.1326b15.

⁹ The νομοθέτης is distinguished from the ekklesiast and the dikast at *Rhet.* I.1.1354b5–8. See also *E.N.* VI.8.1141b24–33.

¹⁰ See Aristotle's definition of such similarity at *An. Post.* II.17.99a12–14, which corresponds exactly to Definition VII.1 of Euclid's *Elements*.

¹¹ See, for example, Stewart (1892, Vol. I, pp. 427–428) and Joachim (1955, p. 142).

¹² The mathematical use of this word is not to be confused with its axiological use elsewhere in this paragraph.

¹³ (1) $\frac{Q(x)}{Q(y)} = \frac{V(s)}{V(t)}$

(2) $\frac{Q(x)}{V(s)} = \frac{Q(y)}{V(t)}$ (1131b5–7) Euclid, Proposition V.16

(3) $\frac{Q(x) + V(s)}{V(s)} = \frac{Q(y) + V(t)}{V(t)}$ Euclid, Proposition V.18

(4) $\frac{Q(x) + V(s)}{Q(y) + V(t)} = \frac{V(s)}{V(t)}$ Euclid, Proposition V.16

(5) $\frac{Q(x) + V(s)}{Q(y) + V(t)} = \frac{Q(x)}{Q(y)}$ Euclid, Proposition V.11

It is presupposed of course that all denominators differ from zero.

¹⁴ To insure that this relation is a function the items assigned to each person are treated as a single thing. Thus if a person is assigned both an estate and a political office, the estate and the office are

treated as one thing, namely, his portion according to the given assignment.

¹⁵ This is the broadest use of *κατ' ἀξίαν*. Aristotle often uses the expression in two narrower ways. Sometimes *κατ' ἀξίαν* is contrasted with *κατ' ἀριθμόν* and distinguishes *virtue and wealth* from freedom (*Pol.* V.1.1301b30–1302a8, VI.2.1317b3–4). Other times *κατ' ἀξίαν* is associated with *κατ' ἀρετήν* and marks *virtue* off from wealth and freedom (*Pol.* III.5.1278a19–20, V.10.1310b33). See Newman, Vol. III, p. 177.

¹⁶ In drawing the distinction between the concept of justice and various conceptions of justice Rawls refers to the section of Hart's *The Concept of Law* entitled 'Principles of Justice'. From the footnotes to this section it is clear that Hart wrote it with *Nicomachean Ethics* V before him. Thus it is not surprising that Rawls' distinction fits Aristotle so well, for it derives from Aristotle. Only the terms marking it are new.

¹⁷ For the word *ἀσπός* see *Pol.* III.5.1278a34, IV.16.1300b31–32, and Plato, *Gorgias* 515A7. Aristotle never explicitly opposes *ἐλεύθερος* and *ξένος*, but *ἐλεύθερος* clearly has this narrow sense at *Pol.* IV.4.1290b9–14 where Aristotle remarks that at one time in Apollonia and in Thera the only ones counted as *οἱ ἐλεύθεροι* were the descendants of the original settlers.

¹⁸ For the four kinds of citizen see below p. 34.

¹⁹ But not the only expression. Other forms of egalitarianism mentioned by Aristotle as characteristic of democracy are parity of rearing and education and of food and dress (IV.9.1294b19–29; compare III.16.1287a12–16).

²⁰ Aristotle remarks several times that a *boule* is a democratic institution whereas a committee of *probuloi* ("precouncillors") is oligarchic (*Pol.* IV.15.1299b30–32, 37–38; VI.2.1317b30–31, 8.1322b16–17, 1323a6–9). This is sufficiently explained by the one difference that Aristotle mentions: a committee of *probuloi* is much smaller than a *boule* (IV.15.1299b34–36). (The one appointed in Athens in 413 B.C. in the wake of the Sicilian disaster consisted of only ten members.) For the larger the body the greater the probability that any given citizen will be appointed to it. In Athens, where the *boule* had 500 members who served for one year and were eligible after an interval to repeat only once, the probability that a citizen would be a *βουλευτής* at least once in his life was quite high – almost 1/2. Thus it is not surprising that Socrates should have been a member of the *boule* on a notable occasion (Plato, *Apol.* 32A–C).

²¹ If one exists. Not every oligarchy had an *ekklesia*. See III.1.1275b7–8.

²² The general structure of this passage was clarified for me by Charles Young.

²³ *χρῶμα*. Since Aristotle is considering how political authority should be distributed among the free men of a Greek polis, all of whom will be Greek, he is presumably referring to light and dark complexion rather than to white and dark races as Susemihl and Hicks suggest *ad loc.*

²⁴ The comparison between skill in flute-playing and political excellence goes back at least as far as Protagoras's Great Speech in Plato's *Protagoras* (327A–C).

²⁵ $B(y) > B(x)$ and $V(B)/V(S) > S(x)/S(y) > 1$ where '*V*', '*B*', and '*S*' signify *value of*, *beauty (of)*, and *skill in flute-playing (of)* respectively.

²⁶ Although the text of this argument is very uncertain, Aristotle's point is clear enough.

²⁷ For the concept of commensurability see p. 40 below.

²⁸ As Newman remarks in his note to 1283a33, "the [wellborn] are in a superlative degree what the [free] are in a positive degree" (see 1283b19–20). A man is wellborn if in addition his ancestors are ancestry. A man is free if his ancestors are neither slaves nor aliens (see p. 25 above). A man is wellborn if in addition his ancestors are virtuous and rich (IV.8.1294a21–22, V.1.1301b3–4).

²⁹ Reading *πολεμικῆς* with the majority of manuscripts rather than *πολιτικῆς* with a small minority and Ross.

³⁰ See Section 5 below.

³¹ For the question see *Pol.* III.1.1274b32–34.

³² In war, a *συμμαχία* is an offensive and defensive alliance in contrast to an *ἐπιμαχία*, which is an alliance for defense only.

³³ An Aristotelian polis is thus neither a Hobbian commonwealth, whose end is the protection of life (*Leviathan*, Chapter XVII), nor a Lockian commonwealth, whose end is the preservation of life, liberty, and estate (*The Second Treatise of Civil Government*, Chapter IX).

³⁴ The word 'polis' has now even invaded English poetry:

We can at least serve other ends,
Can love the polis of our friends.

W. H. Auden, *New Year Letter*, III.51

It ought, therefore, to be regarded as a fully naturalized word of English and no longer as a transliterated Greek word. Acting on this conviction, I write it unitalicized and use the English rather than the Greek inflection ('polises' rather than 'poleis'). The Greek plurals of third declension nouns never establish themselves in English as the fate of 'metropoleis' bears witness.

³⁵ ὕβρις, βλάβη, and θάνατος.

³⁶ (1) Either *p* or *q* or *r* or *s* or *t* or *u*.

(2) It is not the case that either *p* or *q* or *r* or *s* or *t*.

(3) Therefore, *u*.

³⁷ τὸ εὖ ζῆν = τὸ ζῆν καλῶς = τὸ εὐδαιμονεῖν (*E.N.* I.4. 1095a19–20, *E.E.* I.1.1214a30–31).

³⁸ For the connection between friendship and shared life see also *E.N.* VIII.5.1157b19; IX.9.1170b10–14, 10.1171a2, 12.1171b32.

³⁹ For these three types of friendship see *E.N.* VIII.2–3 and *E.E.* VII.2.

⁴⁰ Mulgan (1977, pp. 16–17).

⁴¹ "It may be unexceptionable to say that the *polis* aims at total human good if the *polis* is thought to include all aspects of human society. It does not follow from this that the exclusively 'political' institutions of the *polis* should be directly concerned with the achievement of all facets of the good life, many of which may be left completely in the control of other institutions, groups or individuals" (Mulgan, 1977, p. 17).

Fred Miller (1974, p. 68) writes: "The end of the *community*, which is the fundamental justification for its existence, is the good and happy life, in the sense that the fundamental reason *individuals* have for living in communities and for engaging in a wide variety of community relations is to lead good and happy lives, i.e., to realize themselves and be virtuous. But it does not follow at all that the function of the *state* is to use coercive force against its citizens so as to *make* them virtuous and happy. Aristotle, in making

such an inference, is confusing the two senses of 'polis', and is assigning to the polis, in the sense of 'state', a function which belongs properly to the polis, in the sense of 'community'."

⁴² Mulgan (1977, p. 17).

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Miller (1974, p. 67).

⁴⁵ See above p. 39.

⁴⁶ In a long note on this line of text Mulhern (1972, pp. 260–268) considers whether it means (1) "There is only one constitution that is best by nature for every place" or (2) "For every place, there is only one constitution that is best by nature for it". He is concerned, that is, about the order of the quantifiers in Aristotle's assertion. Is it (1) $(\exists x)(\forall y)$ or (2) $(\forall y)(\exists x)$? The first alternative, which is the traditional rendering, seems incompatible with Aristotle's view that absolute kingship is best in some places whereas true aristocracy is best in others; and so Mulhern concludes that (2) must be the correct interpretation. However, the alleged incompatibility vanishes once one notices that Aristotle's best constitution is a genus whose species are absolute kingship and true aristocracy (*Pol.* IV.2.1289a31–33).

⁴⁷ For which see *G.A.* IV.3–4 especially 767a36–b15 and 770b9–17.

⁴⁸ Similarly in the *Politics* the claim that "man is by nature a polis-oriented animal" (*πολιτικὸν ζῷον*)(I.2.1253a2–3) is followed by the assertion that he who is unable or has no need to live in a polis "is either a beast or a god" (not a man)(a27–29).

⁴⁹ A helpful analogy here is Aristotle's account of friendship. "There are several kinds of friendship", Aristotle says, "firstly and strictly that of good men *qua* good, the others [*i.e.* friendships of utility and of pleasure] by resemblance [to true friendship]..." (*E.N.* VIII.4.1157a30–32). Similarly first and strictly there is the polis of good men; all others are polises by resemblance to this one.

⁵⁰ This qualification is necessary since many things that are according to nature lie outside the sphere of justice altogether. For a plant to send down roots is according to nature, but it is neither just nor unjust. Even the field of human conduct is a bit broader than the sphere of justice since justice and injustice, for Aristotle, always involve at least two persons (see *E.N.* V.1.1129b25–27, 1130a10–13, and 11.1138a19–20).

⁵¹ For this principle and the contrapositive of its (approximate) converse, namely, "Everything (within the field of human conduct) that is contrary to nature is unjust", see *Pol.* I.3.1253b20–23, 5.1254a17–20, 1255a1–3, 10.1258a40–b2; VII.3.1325b7–10, 9.1329a13–17. The latter principle is not equivalent to the true converse of the former since the two principles together leave open the possibility that some things that are just are neither according to nature nor contrary to nature.

⁵² What in *Pol.* VII.8 Aristotle calls an *ἔργον* in *Pol.* IV.4 he calls a *δύναμις* (1291b2). In one place the conjoins *ἔργον* and *δύναμις* (*Pol.* I.2.1253a23); in other places he conjoins *ἔργον* and *τέχνη* (*Pol.* III.11.1282a10–11, VIII.5.1339a37).

⁵³ For the distinction between *ἔμποροι* and *κάπηλοι* see Plato, *Rep.* II.371D5–7 and *Soph.* 223D5–10.

⁵⁴ Parts in the strict sense (*οικεία μόρια*) (VII.4.1326a21). In a loose sense every group on the list is a *μόριον* or *μέρος* of a polis (see *Pol.* IV.4.1290b24, 39, 1291a32, 33; but notice also 1291a24–28).

⁵⁵ And (presumably) cavalrymen. Cavalry is not mentioned in Book VII, but elsewhere in the *Politics* cavalry and hoplites are linked (VI.7.1321a5–21). Only the well-to-do (*οἱ εὐπόροι*) could afford heavy armor; only "those who possess large property" (*οἱ μακρὰς οὐσίας κεκτημένοι*) could afford to keep a horse.

⁵⁶ Ekklesiasts, dikasts, and officials. In VII.8–9 Aristotle mentions only the first two (1328b13–15, 1329a3–4, 31) though a number of officials make an appearance later in the book (VII.12.1331b4–18). See *Pol.* IV.15 and VI.8 for a detailed account of the various executive and administrative offices in a polis.

⁵⁷ In the *Laws* Plato distinguishes four types of foreigner: merchants, tourists, ambassadors, and intellectuals (XII.952D5–953D7).

⁵⁸ Retaining in 1275b19 the η of all manuscripts.

⁵⁹ See MacDowell (1978, pp. 76–78), Austin and Vidal-Naquet (1977, pp. 99–101), and Whitehead (1977).

⁶⁰ See Newman, Vol. I, p. 119.

⁶¹ For examples of what Aristotle regards as difference of stock (*τὸ μὴ ἀμόφυλον*) see *Pol.* V.3.1303a25–b3.

⁶² The dilemma faced by a master in dealing with his serfs is outlined in *Pol.* II.9.1269b7–11.

⁶³ An unfulfilled promise.

⁶⁴ Diogenes Laertius V.14–15.

⁶⁵ This is a translation of Ross's text, which is heavily emended. For the emendations see both Susemihl-Hicks and Newman *ad loc.* The sense of the passage is not affected.

⁶⁶ For *δύναμις* = *ισχύς* see VII.17.1336a4 and VIII.4.1339a4.

⁶⁷ To justify the complete separation of military service and political office Aristotle's argument requires the complete separation of strength and practical wisdom in a citizen's life; hence the bracketed word. Aristotle does hold that practical wisdom, since it requires years of experience, is beyond the scope of a young man (*E.N.* VI.8.1142a11–16; see also I.3.1095a2–4). But is there no period in a citizen's life when he is old enough to have acquired the practical wisdom needed for political office yet still young enough to fight as a hoplite?

⁶⁸ If evidence be needed that this table does reflect popular Greek values of the fourth century see Dover (1974): item (2): pp. 32–33; item (4): pp. 102–3; item (5): pp. 95–102; items (6) and (7): p. 83; item (8): pp. 114–116.

⁶⁹ For the methodology involved see *E.N.* I.8.1098b9–12 and especially VII. 1.1145b2–7 together with Stewart's notes *ad loc.*

⁷⁰ See above p. 43.

⁷¹ In one passage these two points are combined: "... we say that nature makes for the sake of something, and that this is some good..." (*Somn.* 2.455b17–18).

⁷² See Newman, Vol. III, note to 1281a40.

⁷³ Compare *Pol.* VIII.2.1337a38–39, and for the distinction between the moral and intellectual virtues see *E.N.* I.13.1103a3–10.

⁷⁴ Two subsidiary arguments in favor of democracy also make an appearance in Chapter 11: the safety-valve argument and the shoe-pinching argument. To totally exclude those who are poor and of little merit from political power, since there are so many of them, Aristotle warns, creates a situation that is frightening (*φοβερός*) (1281b21–31). Thus to avoid a political explosion the many must be given a modicum of political power. Furthermore, Aristotle argues (using houses, rudders, and feasts as his examples rather than shoes), as the man who wears the shoes is the best judge of how

they fit and where they pinch, so those who are ruled are the best judges of their rulers and thus should be the ones who elect them to office and scrutinize their conduct when their term is over (1282a17–23).

⁷⁵ Elsewhere Aristotle suggests that under certain circumstances free men in general might be admitted to minor administrative offices. See *Pol.* V.8.1309a27–32, VI.5.1320b9–14, and Newman, Vol. III, note to 1281b31.

⁷⁶ Contrary to Susemihl and Hicks, p. 39.

⁷⁷ To signify one of the specific senses without risk of ambiguity, a Greek writer could conjoin *κρείττων* in the generic sense with a prepositional phrase indicating the appropriate respect. Thus on occasion Aristotle uses the phrases *κρείττων κατὰ δύναμιν* (“superior in respect of strength”) and *κρείττων κατ’ ἀρετήν* (“superior in respect of goodness”) for ‘stronger’ and ‘better’ respectively (*Pol.* I.6.1255a10, VII.3.1325b10–11).

⁷⁸ Contrary to Newman (*ad loc.*), who takes it to mean “stronger”.

⁷⁹ I am indebted to Charles Young for this analysis.

⁸⁰ Strictly speaking, (1) is an argument (“*q* because *p*”) whereas (2) is a conditional proposition (“if *r*, then *s*”).

⁸¹ *παμβασιλεία*, which means “kingship over everything” (Newman, Vol. III, note to 1285b36).

⁸² See Newman, Vol. I, p. 275, Note 1.

⁸³ For the expression see *Pol.* II.7.1267b16 and IV.4.1291a17.

⁸⁴ The three cases correspond to those mentioned at *Pol.* III.18.1288a35. See Susemihl-Hicks *ad loc.*

⁸⁵ If as a group the many are superior in practical wisdom to the few best men and if practical wisdom does not come in degrees, it follows that the few best men are not men of practical wisdom (*φρόνιμοι*). Thus their virtue is not virtue in the strict sense (*ἡ κυρία ἀρετή*) (*E.N.* VI.13.1144b14–17).

⁸⁶ Contrary to Mulgan (1977, p. 87), who writes that “[a] god among men would... be an anomaly of nature which Aristotle the biologist would not happily countenance. ...The discussion [of absolute kingship] in Book Three is purely hypothetical...”.

⁸⁷ Notice, too, that when the justification of absolute kingship is summed up in a complex sentence at *Pol.* III.17.1288a15–19, the subordinate clause, which contains the minor premiss, begins with ‘when’ (*ὅταν*) rather than ‘if’.

⁸⁸ See Hintikka (1973) especially Chapter V.

⁸⁹ For the identification of the realm of nature with the world of Forms see *Phdo.* 103B5, *Rep.* X.597B5–7, C2, 598A1–3, and *Parm.* 132D2.

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