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ARISTOTLE'S FOUR CONCEPTIONS OF POLITICS

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Aristotle's Four Conceptions of Politics

Abstract

There is an ambiguity in Aristotle's Politics concerning the character of a good regime. This ambiguity has its roots in conflicting conceptions of politics entertained simultaneously by Aristotle. Sometimes Aristotle treats politics as a service rendered by art, and sometimes still as an attempt at self-protection through the rule of law. But the primary conceptions of politics are as an instrument of education, on the one hand, and as a reward apportioned to the meritorious, on the other. The difficulty with these two primary conceptions is that the educational responsibilities of the polis require power-sharing among all groups, whereas the operation of distributive justice necessitates the concentration of power in the hands of a worthy few. The political association therefore is at once egalitarian and elitist and points both to democracy/polity and to aristocracy/monarchy as the best regime.

Aristotle's Four Conceptions of Politics

It is a demanding task to follow Aristotle in the Politics as he elucidates the character of a good regime. At one time or another Aristotle's favor turns to monarchy, to aristocracy, to polity, to some mixture of the three, or to any sort of constitutional order in which the rule of law is paramount. The reason for the ambivalence is that Aristotle entertains two radically different conceptions of the political association and of the uses of power. Aristotle supposes that politics is a didactic activity for the improvement of citizens but also that politics is an allocation of power in recognition of past accomplishments. The first regards politics as education, the second, politics as reward. The difficulty is that these two conceptions are not readily compatible since the precondition of one is undermined by the realization of the other. They thus force Aristotle to try a solution that is apolitical and, to a degree, impractical, a solution which may also incline us to wonder if the naturalness of the polis affirmed by Aristotle is a proposition to be taken seriously.

In addition to the two main conceptions of politics, there are at least two others which circle about the periphery to be acknowledged and utilized by Aristotle as the occasion warrants. These are politics as art supplying a service and politics as law affording protection for the individual. There are then four definitions in all, and the competition among them is what makes politics difficult to define.

I. Politics as Art¹

Let us begin with one of the peripheral definitions of politics, politics conceived as art. Initially Aristotle repudiates this notion which he associates with Plato his master. In the second paragraph of the Politics,

Aristotle takes exception to the argument that the statesman, the monarch, the household manager, and the despot are essentially identical figures. Plato adopts this position in the Statesman (258e-259d), claiming that politics is a science, an art of ruling, that retains its uniform character regardless of the number and quality of those who are ruled--citizens, subjects, children, and slaves are all governed by one and the same science. Aristotle observes that one consequence of treating politics as science comparable to any of the technical arts is that the distinction disappears between a small polis and a large household. Plato very clearly welcomes this result (259b), but not so Aristotle who declares in his opening paragraph that the polis is the most sovereign of all associations and thus implicitly distinct.

To a remarkable degree, Plato intellectualizes politics, for he transforms the activity of ruling into a learnable body of knowledge, and he restricts the use of power to the people who know. For instance, in the Republic the first human community is a society of artisans, rather than the family and the household. Human beings have limited physical needs which Plato finds are best satisfied by a few mutually supporting crafts. The farmer, expert in agricultural matters, provides food for the carpenter who in turn provides tools for the farmer--and so on. In each case a man of technical competence meets a need and supplies a service for others who lack his training and have not the ambition to rival him in the performance of his particular craft. Expertise is both an entitlement to act and an instrument for serving the unskilled. Plato's "ship of state" analogy, also in the Republic (488a-489a), would have us see politics as the straightforward application of technical knowledge. The utter folly of allowing a ship to be piloted, not by an experienced captain, but by its deaf and blind owner or by those sailors adept at seizing command suggests that politics, the analogue, is properly conducted only when the public business is discharged

by competent practitioners of the art of rule.

As has been said, Aristotle is eager to dissociate himself from Plato's understanding of politics, but Aristotle is not able to disengage altogether. Several times in the Politics, Aristotle has recourse to Plato's identification of politics as an art. For instance, at the beginning of Book IV Aristotle develops an outline for a comprehensive science of politics which he models

after gymnastics and which he says is applicable to medicine, shipbuilding, tailoring, and all the sundry arts. The study of politics, just like gymnastic training, needs to consider what is the best constitution simply, what is best for a specific body politic, how existing constitutions came into being and how they can be made to endure, and what type of constitution is best suited to the average community (IV.1.1288b10-34).² Elsewhere in the Politics, Aristotle remembers the art analogy even while explaining his own contrary principle of rotation through office. He treats as an ideal the professionalism and expertise that comes through devotion to a single task and the constant exercise of power. It is only the equality of people--when and where this equality exists--that renders the ideal of craftsmanship unsuitable to politics, this along with ^{an} intuition that justice ^{somehow} demands citizen participation in office (II.2.1261a37-1261b9; cf. III.16.1287a32-41). On another occasion, when discussing the mechanics of distributive justice, Aristotle employs the example of the flute player, who owing to his talent is given preference over the wealthy and the well-born in the distribution of good flutes (III.12.1282b30-41). If the person who can best use the flute is the one to receive the flute, so also the person who can best use political power is the party to exercise political power. Both here and in the example just above, Aristotle recognizes that in one of its aspects politics is a job, the execution of which belongs properly to the individual most skilled. Aristotle may not endorse all of the ramifications of the art analogy,³ but he cannot resist its central logic that argues for services being rendered by trained and responsible people. Indeed, even in democratic America we routinely ask of office-seekers that they show us their credentials. A law degree or success in business may be a long way from the philosopher-king, but in demanding of candidates some proof of their competence, we too treat politics as an art.

One consequence of equating politics with art is a ruler-ruled relationship that is radically unequal. When political authority rests on knowledge rather than consent, a great gulf separates the knowledgeable few from the ignorant multitude. Plato's standard metaphor for indicating this disparity is the shepherd tending his sheep. By Plato's lights, the true and natural ruler is a higher order of being indisputably superior to those under his sway. There is in fact much sense to this--rule is inherently unequal given that some command and others obey; if it must be exercised, better by a person who is deserving. Power conferred on reason or on the rationally deserving is Plato's definition of justice, and Aristotle takes it partially as his own.⁴ He maintains that every compound is a natural hierarchy of ruling and ruled elements (I.5.1254a28-32). The human being, for instance, is a compound of body and soul with soul the rightful ruler of body (I.5.1254a34-35). Seemingly, the perfect compound is one in which all ambiguity as to ruling and ruled elements is eliminated. Aristotle is able to conceive of a natural slavery in part by comparing the slave to body and the master to soul (I.5.1254b16-20). Slavery is legitimate to the degree that the slave approximates an animal or the master a god. Legitimate rule depends on inequality.⁵ Hence man's rule over animals is an unproblematic authority. On the other hand, man's governing of his fellows is difficult to justify. Aristotle has explained that human beings rule each other in a variety of ways: there is parental rule, conjugal rule, and despotic rule; also, there is political rule, the rule of a statesman over citizens.⁶ Statesman and citizens are equal, Aristotle contends; and political rule is essentially the rule of equals by equals. But if this is so, then politics is presumptively unjust since the political association, the compound, consists of equal elements. Equality makes politics illegitimate by depriving the compound of a ruling element unambiguously suited to the task.

Needless to say, Aristotle does not travel very far in this direction. Equality is taken to be a likely fact of political existence. Time and again the equality of citizens is affirmed by Aristotle, both as a point of principle and as an empirical observation (I.7.1255b20, I.12.1259b5-6, II.2.1261b1-2, III.16.1287a10-18, IV.11.1295b23-28, VII.14.1332b16-29). The contrary possibility, of unchallenged personal superiority, is for Aristotle the exception to the rule. Accordingly, politics is caught in the moral dilemma of equals governing equals and can do no better than to minimize the injustice.⁷ On the other hand, Aristotle is not displeased with the egalitarian character of politics, for the rule over equals is a more excellent rule than the rule over inferiors (I.5.1254a25-28). Better, says Aristotle, to govern a man than an animal, an adult than a child, and a free and equal citizen than a subject or a slave. The science of ruling slaves is "nothing great," Aristotle insists, and responsibility for it is generally delegated to stewards so as to free the master for philosophy and politics (I.7.1255b33-37). Aristotle's point is that the quality of the ruler is a direct correlate of the quality of the ruled. Political rule is exalted for the simple reason that more talent and more intelligence are needed to govern one's peers as opposed to one's inferiors.⁸ Finally, and by way of anticipation, there is something to be said for an association in which excellence is distributed throughout rather than concentrated in its leadership. A quote from Shakespeare's Julius Caesar best conveys this republican sentiment; it is Cassius' bitter denunciation of Caesarism:

Rome, thou has lost the breed of noble bloods!
 When went there by an age, since the great flood,
 But it was famed with more than with one man?
 When could they say (till now) that talked of Rome,
 That her wide walks encompassed but one man?
 How is it Rome indeed, and room enough,
 When there is in it but one only man.

II.ii.151-57

II. Politics as Education

There is a republican dimension to Aristotle especially apparent in his treatment of politics as education. Education, I have said, is one of Aristotle's primary understandings of the political association. In Book I, Aristotle observes that the polis is a more perfect association than the family or the village because it brings to completion distinctively human faculties, the exercise of which is the better part of happiness; and happiness is self-sufficiency since the happy man needs nothing that he does not already have. Those faculties that define human nature are reason and speech. Aristotle does not mean here calculative reasoning or the conveyance of mere information, but moral deliberation and collective discourse about just and unjust policy (I.2.1253a7-18, I.2.1253a37). The polis has as its purpose the development of moral intelligence and the transformation of the citizen into a moral being (Salkever, 1974, pp. 82, 84). The family, on the other hand, although not indifferent to considerations of character (I.2.1253a15-18), is occupied with satisfying daily recurrent needs (I.2.1252b15-16); and the village, as an extended household, serves mainly the purpose of exchange (I.9.1257a19-28). The polis, therefore, is the most natural of the three associations, at least when viewed teleologically.

The pedagogical function of the polis is of course carried out by the public education of children (Books VII and VIII), but it culminates in the political activities of adults. It is through the exercise of power that adult citizens perfect the virtues of justice, moderation, and courage, as well as the statesman's virtue of prudence (III.4.1277b25-26). Prudence particularly is a virtue which depends for its development on the possession of power. With Aristotle power ennobles, or at least it can. Responsibility for the well-being of others is the surest way to develop one's prudential judgment and one's moral capacities. Hence, Aristotle recommends rotation

through office as a device whereby the opportunity for moral education can be extended to all citizens.⁹ The polis, it seems, has this republican bias to it in that it proves its naturalness as an association by bringing its members to the fulfillment of their natures as human beings (VII.13.1332a36-38). And Aristotle admits that his general definition of a citizen, as someone who shares in the deliberative and judicial functions of a polis, does point in the direction of democracy (III.1.1275b5-6).

Aristotle is not a democrat, however, despite his refrain that the polis is a community of equal citizens who take their turn at ruling and being ruled (III.4.1277b7-10, VII.3.1325b7-8, VII.8.1328a35-37).¹⁰ The reason is that not all residents are judged worthy of citizenship. Mechanics, merchants, and farmers are singled out as individuals whose occupations do not allow them the leisure for productive involvement in politics (III.5.1278a8-11, VII.9.1328b37-1329a2, VII.9.1329a19-21). Such people as these have not the time to participate, but also their daily activities are deemed menial and illiberal since they injure the body and are done merely for the sake of gain (VIII.3.1337b8-14). The final judgment on the working class is that they cannot benefit from political life, for they lack the capacity to grow in moral virtue through the exercise of power. Aristotle's point, it seems, is that the rights of citizenship should be extended to all who, by sharing the offices of state, can improve themselves as human beings. But to extend citizenship beyond these parameters and to include all free men is to lower the tone of political life and thereby to do violence to the pedagogical purpose of the polis. Presumably, there is a principle of diminishing returns which necessitates the disfranchisement of a segment of the population and which thus argues for some form of aristocratic regime (Barker, 1958, p. li; Voegelin, 1957, p. 331).

III. Politics as Law

There are moments in the Politics when Aristotle is not so confident of the morally edifying qualities of political participation. Sometimes he speaks as if politics were little more than a struggle of passions with the political process a captive to the selfish interests of individuals and groups. On these occasions Aristotle reminds us that political power, contrary to previous expectations, does not always ennoble; in many cases it corrupts, for office-holders are not infrequently ruined by the prerogatives and temptations of power. Accordingly, Aristotle suggests that the discretionary authority of political office be limited--to protect politicians from giving in to their own worst instincts (VI.4. 1318b39-1319a1), but also, and more obviously, to safeguard those left subject to the rule of others against the possible abuse of power. From these reflections Aristotle is led to the conclusion that a government of rightly constituted laws may be preferable to a government of men:

He therefore that recommends that law shall govern seems to recommend that God and reason [noun] alone shall govern, but he that would have man govern adds a wild beast also; for appetite [epithumia] is like a wild animal, and also passion [thumos] warps the rule even of the best men. Therefore the law is wisdom [nous] without desire [orexeos] (III.16. 1287a28-32).¹¹

The special property of law is that it is a neutral judge as opposed to an interested party. Aristotle remarks that "when men seek for what is just they seek for what is impartial [meson]; for law is that which is impartial" (III.16. 1287b3-5). Law offers therefore, by the neutrality of its procedures, the best guarantee that judgments will be rational, objective, and fair. In Book IV, when Aristotle is discussing extreme democracies, the rule of law is recommended as a substitute for political participation on the part of the citizenry. Aristotle's belief is that in defective regimes the rule of

law can best be established if the public life is held to

a minimum. For this reason Aristotle favors an agricultural democracy over an urban democracy since the occupation of farming allows the least amount of time for political involvement (IV.6.1292b25-29; Salkever, 1981, pp. 493-94).

There is, however, one problem with the rule of law. Aristotle states that law can be no better than the people who make it, that having been legislated by one class or another, law will likely reflect their interests and biases (III.11.1282b6-13)--there cannot be pure law but only democratic law weighted towards the redistributive demands of democrats, or oligarchic law favorable to the property interests of oligarchs. Law is not untouched by politics, and so the rule of law, conceived as some apolitical arbiter, is mostly a fiction. But it is not completely a fiction, for law once made does impose restraints and does generally insure the reasonable impartiality of due process.¹²

What we are speaking of now is procedural justice. Aristotle later suggests that substantive justice might also be achieved if the society is large enough to feature a middle class, for a middle class can side with democrats against the predations of oligarchs and with oligarchs against the envy of democrats (IV.11.1295b34-1296a3). The rule of law in a middle class polity is likely to be both procedurally and substantively just because the multiplicity of classes prevents the unjust dominance of any one. With this observation, Aristotle anticipates the argument of James Madison in Federalist 10.

IV. Politics as Reward

A fourth conception of politics and the second of Aristotle's primary understandings is politics seen as reward. Here the subjects are sovereignty and distributive justice.

The sovereign power, says Aristotle, is the citizen body (politeuma), or rather that portion of the city's inhabitants who exercise the full rights and prerogatives of citizens and who share in the political life of the polis (III.6.1278b8-11, III.7.1279a25-27). Not everyone is a citizen, even in a democracy, but those who enjoy this status form the sovereign body. It often is the case, no doubt, that the ruling class attains its position by force or fraud. But as they endeavor to explain themselves to others, they practice what Aristotle says is distributive justice; for sovereignty is the thing they distribute--to themselves--and their rational defense of this distribution is its justice (Zuckert, 1983, p. 204).

Human beings would seem to be in agreement about nothing political, for the history of mankind is a record of endless strife and commotion, of factional disputes, foreign wars, and revolutions. And yet amidst the turmoil there is one small patch of common ground upon which contending parties can^{stand and} state their case. This is Aristotle's concept of distributive justice. Monarchs, aristocrats, oligarchs, and democrats all attest to its validity. They all agree that political power is a reward, and sovereign power is the supreme reward. They furthermore agree that rewards should correspond to contribution or to merit (they agree, that is, when they are not behaving in the manner of tyrants, as did the Athenians at Melos). Finally, they agree that equality within the political community is a proportional equality. Where they disagree is on the meaning of meritorious contribution (III.9.1280a18-19). If distributive justice is likened to a geometrical ratio ($A:B :: C:D$), as it is by Aristotle,¹³ then disagreement centers around the terms of the first proportion ($A:B$)--around the relative values assigned to A and B--but not around the terms of the second ($C:D$).

Aristotle constructs a dialogue of sorts to show the exact point of disagreement as well as the manner of its resolution. His cast includes,

in order of appearance, an oligarch, a democrat, and an aristocrat, with concluding remarks spoken on behalf of a king. The oligarch leads off stating that property is an entitlement to rule for the advantages it provides the city (III.9.1280a25-31). Conceived as a partnership or a mutual stock company, the political association must benefit its members with dividends converted into political power. As is true of joint investments where interest accruing on a sum is divided among investors, not equally, but in proportion to their contributions, so proportionate distribution is also true of politics. If an oligarch contributes to the public coffers, say in the form of taxes, ten times the amount of his democratic neighbor, the oligarch is deserving of a similar amount of political power, say in the form of a weighted vote (Newman, 1973, pp. 266-67). "One man one vote," where all the voters are not equal, is thus a demonstrable injustice. In addition, the oligarchs as a class are deserving of sovereign power because judged by the goal of property they are the city's most successful and worthy members; they therefore can best lead the city towards its collective aims.

Such is the cogency of distributive justice that none of this reasoning is objectionable, even to the democrat, so long as property is conceded to be the raison d'etre of the political association. For the democrat to contest the justice of oligarchy, he must identify a rival purpose to which he and his class can make significant contributions. The disagreement then between democrat and oligarch is over the meaning of who contributes what and of what is deemed valuable, and not over who gets what, this latter question being but a deduction from the former (Newman, 1973, p. 248). The democrat must prove his contribution relevant, and himself an equal contributor, if he is to share equally in power and if the regime is to be a democracy.

The democratic counter-claim runs as follows. Not property but defense is the thing most needed by the state (III.4.1280a34-35). Contributions

to defense are made by the sacrifice of one's person--one's life and liberty. Because the life and liberty of each individual are equal, contributions paid out in this currency are also equal.¹⁴ Athens became democratic in the fifth century because its last war with the Persians was won by the navy which was manned by the poorer elements of the population. Their contribution to the survival of the city necessitated the reward of political power (V.4.1304a22-24, VI.7.1321a13-14).¹⁵

Second to defense is economic intercourse (III.9.1280a35-36). Aristotle explains in the Nicomachean Ethics that mutual need is the lubricant of a society of exchange (V.5.1133a17-1133b11). House builders need shoemakers, and shoemakers need physicians. All are buyers and sellers of goods and services. For exchange to occur, different commodities must be present, and their differences must be rendered commensurate. Generally speaking, money is the device that performs this service. Also, needs must be equalized; the producer must need to sell as much as the consumer needs to purchase. The standard means for equalizing needs is price. If the consumer is not prepared to buy at a set price, he may buy if the price goes lower. Buyers and sellers are equal in another sense, for no issue is made of the moral character of either--saints and scoundrels both buy at the same price. Given this mutuality of need, given also this technique for equalizing needs where otherwise they are unequal, and given finally this deliberate indifference to inequalities of rank and character, it follows that the business of exchange is dominated by equality and that all participants contribute equally to it. As a political objective, therefore, exchange supports the cause of democracy.

It now is the aristocrat's turn to speak his piece. What the aristocrat argues is that distributive justice can rightly take its bearings only from the highest purpose of the association and not from any of its lesser needs (III.9.1280a25-1281a8). True, the oligarch makes his contribution to the community's material life, as does the democrat in a different way. But while

the community originates for the sake of mere life, it exists for the sake of the good life (I.2. 1252b29-30). The good life, once again, is the happy, self-sufficing life of a human nature brought to its completion and wanting nothing, i.e., the life of moral and intellectual virtue. Those who contribute to this life and participate in the true purpose of the polis are deserving of political power. It is the aristocrats therefore who are to rule. When the true nature of the polis is thus understood, distributive justice ceases to be a controversial matter, because now it is known what counts as a contribution--it is virtue that counts.

The polis is defined by its persistent interest in the character of its citizens. All cities, to a degree, assume this pedagogical responsibility, for all cities, to a degree, regard the law as a teacher of the community's way of life, not as a mere covenant guaranteeing the rights of individuals in their pursuit of personalized life styles. But all cities are not aristocracies. This simply means that many cities violate the principle of distributive justice by failing to give sovereign power to those citizens who most fulfill and best promote the higher purposes of the association--by failing to be aristocracies. Or more likely it means that many cities degenerate from a polis to an alliance.¹⁶ If oligarchies and democracies are true to the educational purpose of the polis, they are unjust in their distribution of power, for their failure to give power to aristocrats; if they are just in their distribution of power, making sovereign the oligarchs or the democrats (because what is valued are contributions to the city's wealth or defense), they are untrue to the real purpose of the polis (namely, virtue), and their communities are no longer poleis. Aristocracy alone is a just polis, because only an aristocracy both encourages virtue and rewards it.

It would appear that we have reached a consistent conclusion with regards to the choice of constitutions: Aristotle approaches the political phenomenon

basically from two distinct points--politics as education and politics as reward--and each approach brings him to aristocracy as the best regime. In the following passage Aristotle draws together these two conceptions:

. . . the political fellowship [politikēn koinōnian] must therefore be deemed to exist for the sake of noble actions [kalōn praxeōn], not merely for living in common. Hence those who contribute most to such fellowship have a larger part in the state than those who are their equals or superiors in freedom and birth but not their equals in civic virtue [politikēn aretēn], or than those who surpass them in wealth but are surpassed by them in virtue (III.9.1281a2-8).

However, within the space of one page Aristotle is doubting the sufficiency of this solution. It seems that aristocracy debar from citizenship and public office too large a section of the population:

But ought the good [epiekeis] to rule, and be in control [kyrious] of all classes? If so, then it follows that all the other classes will be dishonoured [atimous], if they are not honoured [timōmenous] by holding the offices of government; for we speak of offices as honours [timas], and if the same people are always in office the rest must necessarily be excluded from honour [atimous] (III.10.1281a29-32).

Aristotle does not here explain why the exclusion of some classes should be viewed with disfavor, but we might suppose that his reservations derive from his two standard conceptions of the polis. As an educational association the polis is called upon to improve, through political activity, as many of its people as possible. In this connection it may be noted that Aristotle defines polity as a regime in which a middle class, possessing martial virtue and subject to the constraints of law, rotate their members through office (IV.11-12.1295b1-1297a12, III.7.1279a37-1279b4, III.17.1288a12-15). A polity is not an aristocracy, but there are points in Aristotle's discussion where the two regimes very nearly converge (aristocracy suffers a double demotion from its initial definition as the regime devoted to excellence: its name is also given to any mixture in which merit is overtly recognized (IV.7.1293b1-21], and finally to that democratic-oligarchic mixture weighted towards oligarchy (IV.8.1293b34-36, V.7.1307a15-16]--polity is a similar

mixture only weighted towards democracy). Also, when examining democratic rule, Aristotle practices a not-too subtle reform, such that democracy comes to defend itself on the basis of collective virtue rather than on mere strength of numbers (III.11.1281a42-1281b21) (Jaffa, 1972, p. 133). Moreover, democratic man is discovered to have real political knowledge attributable to his experiences with past government policies (III.11.1282a17-23); he is not simply ignorant "matter" suffering the legislative "forms" of his superiors. In sum, democracy can be awakened to its potential virtue, and polity seems already to possess that republican virtue spoken of by later authors;¹⁷ and both regimes do better by inclusiveness than does aristocracy. Perhaps then polity, or reformed democracy are the best regimes?

The quotation above suggests that aristocracy can also be faulted on the score of distributive justice. Other classes are excluded because their contribution to excellence is judged insufficient. But still they make contributions to the overall life of the city, and more than once does Aristotle remind his readers that the city is a compound made up of radically different elements (II.2.1261a22-24, III.4.1276b20-1277a10) (Crick, 1972, pp. 17-18). Would not distributive justice require that each contribution necessary to the community's existence be recognized and rewarded with its share of power? And would not distributive justice then conclude for the mixed regime as the best regime with power apportioned among aristocrats, oligarchs, and democrats alike?

To the first of these objections Aristotle furnishes no clear response beyond what was presented above, that the educational goals of the polis can be set no higher than the average capacity of its citizens, for which reason it is important that citizenship be selectively conferred. When Aristotle devises in Book VII his model of a perfect regime, he precludes in effect a demos of free men who by lesser standards would prove themselves capable of citizenship. His best regime consists of a single citizen class

whose members, when young, devote themselves to martial pursuits, when mature are property-owners and governors, and when old serve the community as its priests--all members have a share in public life and either will have (the young) or have had (the old) a share in the specific activity of ruling. This one class of citizens sits atop a class of spiritless slaves, not of free men, who provide for it materially (VII.10.1330a25-28). Thus under ideal circumstances (a citizen body uniformly qualified for rule at some time in their lives and a class of slaves uniformly unqualified) Aristotle's regime, counted perhaps an aristocracy because of its single-minded concern for virtue,¹⁸ is not exclusive but extends educational opportunities to all who are not slaves.

With respect to distributive justice and its imperatives, Aristotle is apologetic but precise. He distinguishes between what is a natural part of a compound and what is a necessary condition for its existence (VII.8.1328a21-35, III.5.1278a1-2). In the case of the political compound, natural parts are those activities which participate in the higher functions of the city. Aristotle lists arms bearing, public worship, political office, and property owning; he excludes farming and manufacture. Elsewhere, he likens the natural parts of a polis to the mind and the necessary parts to the body (IV.4.1291a24-28). As the mind is more important to a living being than the body, so the natural parts--now said to be war, justice, and deliberation--are more important to the political compound than are those activities which merely supply its physical wants. Once again the mind-body hierarchy produces a compound of radically unequal parts, where the ruling elements are treated as essential and the ruled elements as merely instrumental.

If Aristotle has succeeded in beating back the challenge to aristocracy from the democratic left, so to speak (that the inclusiveness of polity and reformed democracy better satisfies the educational and distributional requirements of politics),¹⁹ he will not do so well in protecting aristocracy from the monarchical right. More importantly, and regime considerations aside,

he will find it difficult to maintain that the twin functions of political power, to educate and to reward, are in the final analysis compatible.

We return now to Aristotle's dialogue, or what we have taken as dialogue, and we hear from someone who articulates the rationale underlying kingship. The logic of aristocratic justice, which divides power in proportion to merit, is open to the possibility that one man will be supremely virtuous relative to his fellows and thus alone deserving of sovereign power (III.13.1283b20-23). Aristocracy points beyond itself to monarchy, for the few who are good must give way to the one who is best. Aristotle remarks that the extraordinary individual (or a small group too few in number to constitute the civic body) cannot be handled by political institutions which imply citizen equality, such as rotation through office or government by law. Distributive justice is miscarried if a superior is treated as an equal. The individual pre-eminent in virtue is a law unto himself (III.13.1284a10-11). He cannot be ruled by his inferiors and so must either have sovereignty surrendered to him or be ostracized from the city. Aristotle is not prepared to condemn ostracism, but he objects to its use by the best regime (III.13.1284b22-34). Thus, a true aristocracy would perforce become a monarchy should it face the problem of unsurpassing excellence.

Aristotle does allow for monarchy as the best of constitutions when circumstances conspire to locate all the community's excellence in one individual. The difficulty is that a polis cannot be governed monarchically. A polis is by definition a community of equals. Now that community can be large as in the case of democracy, or very small as in the case of aristocracy or oligarchy. But the community of equal citizens cannot be confined to one person (Barker, 1959, pp. 332, 336; Newman, 1973, p. 230). Because the king is the sole citizen in a monarchy, he does not live in or rule over a polis.²⁰ His association is rather a large household or an uncivilized village (I.2.1252b19-22).²¹ If Aristotle believes that political life is necessarily

superior to family or village life, as he does, then he cannot conclude that monarchy is an appropriate political regime, least of all the best regime--but this he also does. Here we have what on the face of it looks to be a contradiction.²²

There is another and more elaborate way of arriving at this same impasse. Aristotle discusses in Book III the differences between a good man and a good citizen. The two are unlike, in the first instance, because the excellence of the citizen, as a part of a specific whole, is relative to his function and to the city in which he lives. All citizens may share in some collective good (e.g., preservation) which gives to them a common identity apart from their several occupations; but that common identity is still limited by the particular identity of the city: all democrats within a given city may be alike, and all oligarchs within another city also alike; but democrats and oligarchs are never alike. The good man, by contrast, possesses an excellence or virtue that is complete and universal. Hence the good man differs from the good citizen.

Next, Aristotle considers the good man in the good city. While it is true that not all residents of a good city can be good men, because a city is a compound consisting of unlike elements, still, those citizens can be good men who rule a good city. There is a coincidence of citizen and human virtue in the person of the statesman ruling over a good city, presumably an aristocracy. But is a good citizen a good man only during those periods when the citizen occupies political office? The answer is both yes and no, for the activities of ruling and being ruled are seen to be intertwined. Aristotle cites approvingly the general opinion that the virtue of ruling, of issuing commands, depends on the contrary virtue of obeying commands. As the military officer needs first to have been a subordinate, so the power-wielding statesman must first have been a law-abiding citizen. Aristotle states that political rule is the government of free and equal men by other men who are free and

equal themselves; furthermore, that effective governing of free and equal citizens requires the experience of having been governed oneself as a free and equal citizen (III.4.1277b7-16, VII.14.1333a2-3).

If submission to rule is not exactly the activity of the good man, it is nonetheless preparatory to the development of prudence, justice, moderation, and courage which in their fullness constitute the virtue of the good man. Aristotle's point is that being ruled is an instrumental good, comparable, he says, to flute-making, while ruling others is a final good, comparable to flute-playing (III.4.1277b29-30)--that which makes is for the sake of that which uses (I.4.1254a7-8); flute-making is for the sake of flute-playing. But if being ruled is only instrumentally good, why is it advantageous for the individual, who has already known the rule of others, to trade in his office for household duties or for some less active role in public life.²³ Certainly it is good for those out of power if those in power agree to step down, but why is it good for those presently in power? The military parallel might be employed again. The lieutenant must begin as a private, and the general must pass through the rank of lieutenant. But having once risen to the highest military grade, the general does not rejoin the rotation and become a private again.²⁴ What awaits the general is retirement, brought on by old age, or, if sooner, required of him in order to make room for others. Removal does occur, but never would it be presumed that the loss of rank benefits the general in his life as a military man. It is rather a sacrifice and a diminution.

Is not the same situation true of the political man? Does he not suffer a diminution when out of office (III.4.1277a24-25)? Aristotle argues that prudence is a virtue which develops best under the pressures of rule and which is most characteristic of the statesman. He also maintains that virtue is an activity, not a latent or quiescent capacity;²⁵ one must act virtuously in order to be virtuous. If the prudent man then must have occasion to behave prudently, and if prudent behavior, in its full measure, depends on the responsibilities

of political office, no statesman can relinquish power without curtailing his opportunities for virtue and without seeing his virtue diminish (Salkever, 1974, pp. 82, 84). Winston Churchill, as a case in point, became the great statesman of the twentieth century when world war brought the prime ministership to him; but victory in war meant the end of his tenure and a return to private life occupied by painting and writing. Aristotle himself, in Book VII, doubts the wisdom of quitting power, although in context his intention seems to be to dissuade rulers from taking on responsibilities which overtax their competence. Says Aristotle,

Yet on the strength of these decisions somebody might perhaps suppose that the highest good is to be the master of the world [kyriōn pantōn], since thus one would have the power to compass the greatest number and noblest kinds of actions, and therefore it is not the duty of the man that is capable of ruling to surrender office to his neighbor, but rather to take it from him . . . (VII.3.1325a34-38).

It is said that the polis is the natural association because of its contribution to the good life, that it brings human capacities for virtuous conduct to their completion and thus makes people happy and self-sufficient (I.2.1252b27-1253a3). But the polis provides this service by involving citizens in the exercise of political power, which power, for other reasons, the polis also takes away. In rescinding power, the polis cannot avoid injuring its citizens, and not tangentially, but at the very center of their humanity. Is the polis then a natural association? As described by Aristotle, the polis suffers this contradiction: It is charged with the educational mission to develop the moral and intellectual virtue of its citizens. Consistent with this responsibility, the polis is defined as a community of equals who rule and are ruled in turn. But in proportion as excellence is a consequence of political life, the individual does himself no favor by submitting to the rotational scheme of the polis. The surrender of power may be good for the association, but it is bad for the individual.²⁶ Secondly--and this now returns us to the discussion on monarchy--because the polis is dedicated to excellence, it is inclined, if

indeed not duty-bound, to celebrate the achievement of excellence whenever and wherever it occurs. This means of course that the city must honor its best citizens, and following the requirements of distributive justice, that it must honor them by the reward of political power.²⁷ But the rewards of political power, no less than the citizen's desire to excel, are disruptive of the equality of the city, for some citizens will succeed while others will fail. If the competition is continued in a tournament of excellence, so to speak, the net result will be one winner and many losers. Both the competition to excel and the collective desire to honor those who have excelled create a momentum which narrows the field of competitors until only one alone, the champion, remains. In politics this champion is a monarch who emerges from the class of aristocrats. The production of a monarch, of a truly excellent man, is the supreme achievement of the polis; but this achievement runs strangely afoul of the association's basic character, for when a king mounts his throne, the equality of the polis disappears.²⁸

The polis then moves in these several cross directions: It has a need to maintain equality on the one hand and to encourage excellence on the other. Its solution is "egalitarian excellence" in which the city as a unit progresses towards virtue. But the collective virtue of the city compromises the personal virtue of the individual, since the citizen, made virtuous by public office, is in turn called upon to relinquish public office. This injury done to the individual casts doubt upon the naturalness of the polis, which is thought to be natural precisely because it benefits the individual by developing his specific humanity to the full.²⁹ Finally, the polis cannot protect its equality against the workings of distributive justice, which mandate, given virtue as the stated goal, that equally good aristocrats step aside for the supremely virtuous king. We can best see the contradiction of the polis when we look at what Aristotle says about ostracism. The requirement that the polis be an education in virtue for its citizens necessitates that the man of outstanding virtue be exiled;

otherwise the res publica becomes a private affair. But the exile of the city's best man is an intolerable violation of distributive justice, for it is the purpose of the city, when dedicated to excellence, to produce this man, and thereafter it is the obligation of the city to honor him. In other words, politics as education and politics as reward do not coincide in their objectives.³⁰

V. Theoretical Solutions

Besides the expedient of ostracism, Aristotle suggests several other escapes from this dilemma. These concern the philosopher, the politician, and the magnanimous man; in each case the individual is asked to abandon the political arena to others or to lessen his involvement therein.

Late in the Politics Aristotle observes that political service after all is not the highest activity, nor is prudence the foremost human virtue. This honor rather belongs to the philosopher in his life of contemplation (VII.15. 1334b15). Aristotle is like Plato in subordinating action to thought, although Aristotle quickly stipulates that thought is the ^{quintessential} ~~penultimate~~ activity (VII.3. 1325b16-25), and later that speculative thought is superior to practical thought (VII.14. 1333a16-30). Now if the statesman has awaiting him a higher existence outside the political realm, the surrender of power is no sacrifice and injury.³¹ On the contrary, when viewed from the heights of philosophical investigation, political participation is a distraction and imposition which a philosopher-king would all too gladly do without. The problem, however, concerns the likelihood of philosopher-kings--that is, of political men, unrivaled in their practical virtue, who at the same time possess the capacity and inclination for speculative philosophy. Are there Churchills and Lincolns who hope for the leisure to become Platos and Aristotles? Unless it can be argued that political engagement is the appropriate training ground for a life of contemplation and that every philosopher therefore must first be a statesman,³²

the appearance of a man doubly suited to politics and philosophy is a rare and coincidental occurrence. Certainly most rulers do not await the hour when political burdens can be set aside. And certainly most rulers, in retirement, do not write philosophy; they write their memoirs.³³

Aristotle's brief and elliptical consideration of philosophical reasoning has gone unmentioned until now in order that Aristotle might be seen as a wholehearted partisan of political life. Aristotle follows this procedure himself by remembering the philosophical alternative only in Book VII and by examining politics throughout from the perspective of the citizen. Prior to Book VII, therefore, and with the exception of some remarks about law, middle class politics, and urban democracies, Aristotle's tribute to the political life and the political man would appear to be unqualified. However, there is a passage in the Nicomachean Ethics which bears significantly upon Aristotle's true assessment of politics. It reads as follows:

Also happiness is thought to involve leisure [scholē]; for we do business in order that we may have leisure, and carry on war in order that we may have peace. Now the practical virtues are exercised in politics or warfare; but the pursuits of politics and war seem to be unleisured [ascholoi]--those of war entirely so, for no one desires to be at war for the sake of being at war, nor deliberately takes steps to cause a war . . . . But the activity of the politician also is unleisured [ascholos], and aims at securing something beyond the mere participation in politics--positions of authority and honour, or, if the happiness of the politician himself and of his fellow-citizens, this happiness conceived as something distinct from political activity . . . (X.7.1177b4-15).³⁴

Placed in context, this passage is a recommendation for the contemplative life as the one genuine form of leisure. But as explained just above, philosophy is an activity available only to a gifted few, and those gifted for philosophy stand in no necessary relation to those successful at politics. The question that arises then is whether a mode of leisure exists that is less demanding than philosophy, and yet higher and more intrinsically human, more "for its own sake," than political participation.

A recent book by Carnes Lord, Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle,³⁵ answers this question in the affirmative. Lord contends that Aristotle not only ranks philosophy ahead of politics but that like Plato he betrays a real ambivalence towards the spirited passions which underlie political life. Spiritedness makes for friendship among citizens and government in the interest of the governed, but it also engenders the desire for dominion and for hegemonial rule over foreigners. Spirited citizens, who value political activity above all else, may well respect the freedom and equality of one another and so content themselves with rotational rule; but in dealing with neighboring cities they will likely be aggressive and imperialistic; and should they come to power, their rule will tend towards the despotic. Hence spiritedness and political life both point in the direction of despotism. The conclusion drawn by Lord is that the educational system devised by Aristotle in Books VII and VIII has as its point the demotion of politics relative to music or literary culture. The leisured activities of the citizens of this ideal regime are not concerned to make them philosophers, merely liberally educated gentlemen who sense that theater, poetry, history are more deserving of their attention than the exercise of political power.

Lord's analysis, if it is correct, suggests a theoretical solution to Aristotle's problem. That problem, once again, is the contradictory requirement that politics be open so as to provide an education in virtue and that politics be closed so as to serve as a reward for the meritorious. But if the education afforded by politics is surpassed by an education in the liberal arts, then many individuals can be drawn out of political life without damage done to their virtue. In other words, by developing a taste for literary culture among political men, an opportunity is provided for a virtuous existence away from politics. Those who would be Cassiuses in a Roman Republic function instead as administrators under Caesar's Empire; but they are satisfied nonetheless because in addition to their modest duties they exercise a quasi-contemplative virtue

characteristic of refined men of leisure. What we have here in effect is an educational project designed to persuade, say Winston Churchill, that painting and writing are more choiceworthy activities than a political career. When stated as such, the practicality of Aristotle's proposal seems somewhat questionable, for it is not academics but the politically accomplished who are expected to regard politics as necessary work in the service of higher pursuits.³⁶ Perhaps it would be hasty merely to dismiss this solution (consider, for example, Churchill's novel Savrola and his essay on painting),³⁷ but its prospects for general success do seem remote. More to the point, however, a liberal education to depoliticize political men is applicable only to Aristotle's ideal regime; other regimes, including real aristocracies, lack this educational system and so cannot count on achieving similar results. With regards therefore to the many regimes of Books III through VI, the tension between personal excellence and political equality persists.

It is arguable that the magnanimous man described in the Nicomachean Ethics affords some resolution of the city's joint dedication to excellence and equality. On the one hand, the magnanimous man is not a philosopher, a lover of wisdom, for he is defined instead by his love of honor; nor is he politically active, for the typical honors of the city are beneath his dignity. Aristotle implies that the magnanimous man withdraws from political competition in order to save himself for some great deed which only he can perform (IV.2-3. 1123a34-1125a35). The magnanimous man would thus seem to be perfect on all counts: the city is pleased to have him as confirmation of its concern for human achievement, and since he willingly retires from the ordinary business of politics, the public life is opened to his inferiors who among themselves are equals. There is, however, no detailed discussion of the magnanimous man in the Politics,³⁸ and so we are left to guess whether he is that god who lives outside the city (but can love of honor, even on the level of magnanimity, ever effect so radical

a transcendence?), whether he is the man of pre-eminent virtue who demands and who is given absolute political power (but then magnanimity merely explains the problem while doing nothing to resolve it), or whether he is some new type of human being altogether (but if he cannot be found in the Politics, how common an occurrence and how useful a solution could be be?).³⁹

VI . Good Regimes

I wish now to attempt a somewhat expansive summary, one which will specify more completely the regime consequences of what has gone before, and one which may help to place in its proper context the contradiction uncovered in Aristotle. When surveying the political domain, Aristotle does not confine himself to a single perspective; he rather attributes to politics a number of competing objectives, from which he then derives a number of criteria for assigning sovereign power. The confusion stems in part from Aristotle's well-known distinction between what is simply best and what is best for this or that community (IV.1.1288b10-37). But it is also caused, and I think more importantly, by Aristotle's awareness of the fundamental complexity of the political phenomenon. Perhaps Aristotle does not so much contradict himself as help us to realize how multi-faceted is this thing called politics.

Aristotle says in Book III that political power is rightly exercised when it serves the common good and not the special interests of the ruling class (III.6.1279a17-19). By this standard, three regimes prove themselves true to the nature of politics, while three others betray their perversity. The good regimes are monarchy, aristocracy, and polity; they represent respectively government by the one, the few, and the many. In each case the commonweal is what orients and legitimates the use of power. Aristotle here is interested in the motives of those in authority, and he concludes that the only worthy motive is public service. Politics, Aristotle implies, is a service performed by rulers for the benefit of the ruled. We have been over this ground before--politics conceived as service. Here, where good intentions determine who is to serve, we are left with any of three possible regimes. Aristotle does not say this, but were a choice to be made among the three contenders, it would perforce turn on their respective capacities. Whoever possessed the knowledge, combined with the honorable intention, would rule. It seems then that politics as service follows the paradigm of the technical arts and so distributes power to those who know

(Newman, 1973, p. 216).⁴⁰ Since artisan-experts tend to be few in number, the regime which best suits this particular conception of politics is aristocracy or monarchy, although Aristotle does not rule out some participation from the demos (III.11.1281a39-1282b41).

A second of Aristotle's criteria, one based especially on his description of the polis in Book I, would have political life open to as many as could grow in virtue by the opportunity to rule. Politics here is education. The political association is judged self-sufficient and peerless because it is the instrument whereby human beings come to lead a good life. Initially at least, the regime which best meets this requirement is a polity since polity brings the advantages of city-living to the greatest number of people; and initially Aristotle's discussion of the polis, with emphasis on equality and rotation through office, does seem democratic. But in the end Aristotle concludes that it is aristocracy which strikes the correct balance between popular participation and educational excellence. When politics is given the moral development of citizens as its objective (which is not necessarily the same objective as the common good), then aristocracy comes forward as the best regime.

Aristotle's support for political life is not unqualified, however. He acknowledges that politics can breed corruption along with virtue and that in some instances it is desirable if the citizens are discouraged from active involvement in the management of the city. On these occasions Aristotle proposes the rule of law as a replacement for the rule of men. Politics conceived as law is thus an attempt to minimize political life for the sake of self-protection, either from the personal corruption that accompanies the exercise of power or from the misuse of power in the hands of others.

The regime implications of government under law are various: constitutional monarchy, constitutional aristocracy, constitutional democracy; all are acceptable so long as the ruling class respects its own legal procedures. Nevertheless, the substance of law does tend to promote the interests of those in power. Hence

it is advisable to seek assistance outside the constitution, in a middle class that can arbitrate between the factions of rich and poor. According to this reasoning, a middle class polity would seem to be the preferred regime.

Apart from serving the common good, encouraging human excellence, and protecting individuals from the abuses of power, politics is also responsible for doing justice. This it accomplishes by treating political power as a reward conferred on citizens in recognition of meritorious contribution. Every community distributes power proportionate to service, making sovereign that group deemed indispensable to the community's well-being. Distributive justice operates in all regimes; it provides their basis for rule and is their claim to legitimacy. When rival claimants to rule are present in the same community, power-sharing is one method of resolving this dispute. The result then would be a mixed regime. On several occasions Aristotle does move in this direction (III.12.1283a14-22, III.13.1283bff.) (Barker, 1958, p. liii.), only to draw back and reiterate that power belongs to those who contribute to the community's ultimate purpose, not to its basic needs. Aristocracy, therefore, is the regime of Aristotle's choosing, as it was before. However, the principle which brings aristocrats to power, that sovereignty be exercised by the virtuous, would dislodge aristocrats and replace them with a king were there to arise one man of incomparable excellence. Kingship then is the best regime, except that kingship, with its citizen body confined to one person, is incompatible with the political association defined as a community of equals. In any event, distributive justice, or the requirement that rewards be proportionate to merit, allows any number of regimes to rationalize their existence, and it makes difficult Aristotle's task of determining which among them is the best.⁴¹

It is a common observation by scholars that Aristotle's Politics is an incomplete work. For this reason, and for others, the Politics redounds with

inconsistencies and equivocations. Ernest Barker characterizes the Politics as a thought experiment, a quasi-dialogue in which Aristotle converses with his predecessors and with personae of public opinion. The result of this dialectic is tentativeness in presentation, repetition, revision, and numerous aporetic dead-ends (1959, pp. 251-55). Carnes Lord says as well that the argument of the Politics is partly rhetorical in that Aristotle is addressing mature gentlemen and wishes to take seriously their opinions and to avoid offending their prejudices (1982, pp. 32-33). The point of this paper is not to refute these claims regarding Aristotle's method, but to note that the substance of the Politics is an additional, and perhaps more significant, explanation for the hesitancy and indecision of the work; for there are present in the Politics four separate accounts of what politics is, resulting in multiple answers to the question, who should rule? Aristotle does answer this question--does specify that aristocracy or monarchy is the best regime and does provide a description of the ideal regime--but these regimes are best and ideal in light of certain conceptions of politics and only when certain goods and not others are required of the political association. The fact of the matter is that no one conception comprehends the whole of politics, nor is any one regime indisputably just.⁴²

Notes

1. In this paper there are some eight terms used to described Aristotle's four "conceptions of politics." Four of these terms treat politics as an instrument or as an activity, while four others define politics by the end it means to achieve. Hence politics conceived as art, as an instrument, has service to others as its purpose (those with technical knowledge provide skilled service for those lacking in knowledge). Likewise, politics as education, as an activity, seeks to develop virtue in citizens; while politics as law aims at protection for citizens, and politics as reward endeavors to do justice by citizens. In every case politics is classified by the term designating the instrument in use (art, law, reward) or the activity at work (education). These terms were thought to be generally more descriptive, and clarity demanded that classificatory terms all be taken from the same list.

2. Line references are to the Oxford critical edition, 1957, edited by W. D. Ross. Chapter divisions are those found in Barker, 1958.

3. Aristotle distinguishes politics from art while reviewing the ideal city of Hippodamus: whereas the technical arts are capable of a progress that is mostly salutary, changes in political life threaten the habits and customs necessary to the rule of law (II.8.1269a19-24). Also, the motives of political men are oftentimes suspect; thus it is important that their actions be prescribed by written rules. Artisans, on the other hand--for instance doctors--are free of such regulations because it can be safely presumed that they work for the benefit of others (III.16.1287a33-41). See Newman, 1973, p. 245.

4. Newman (1973, pp. 279-81) speaks of this near generic superiority as a "natural" thought and one which underlies Aristotle's conception of the pambasileus, the absolute king.

5. Aristotle goes on to explain that a community of interest ties together the unequal elements of the compound. It is in the interest of the natural slave

that he be subject to the natural master (I.5.1254b14-20, I.6.1255b6-15). Hence just government depends on the presence of natural hierarchy and on a rule that is mutually beneficial. See Zuckert, 1983, pp. 189-90.

6. For a discussion of these various kinds of rule, see Wilson, 1980.

7. One way to minimize the injustice of political rule is to insist that government serve the interests of the governed (III.6.1279a17-19). Another way is to rotate citizens through the offices of state.

8. Aristotle's argument is wonderfully intricate. On the one hand, nature and justice demand that rulers be superior to the ruled. But the polis is defined as a community of equals, where people rule and are ruled in turn; hence the polis is an unnatural and unjust association. Nature would seem to require that equal beings associate anarchically. But anarchy is no real society, or it is a society that rises no higher than Plato's city of pigs (III.9. 1280b20-29). The moral intelligence of human beings, says Aristotle, cannot be adequately developed in either families or villages, and ^{it} certainly cannot be developed outside of ruling-ruled relationships. If only the human race had generated a superior class of beings to rule their inferiors as humans now rule over animals--politics then would be natural! But little if any virtue is involved in the government of inferiors. Virtue rather is called into play as men confront the difficult and unnatural task of ruling their equals. It is against nature, as it were, that men develop their nature as rational and virtuous human beings. What this ^{reasoning} thus suggests is that the polis is a natural and just association (the association which brings human nature to its completion) precisely because the relationship among its elements is unnatural and unjust (equals ruling equals).

9. Arendt (1958, pp. 30-37) places the emphasis on freedom rather than on virtue--Greek political life as an arena for the activities of free men. She goes so far as to say that ruler-ruled relationships belong to the household

and that politics is an escape from all forms of submission. See Salkever, 1974, pp. 89-90.

10. At VI.2.1317b1-17 Aristotle states that ruling and being ruled is one of two notions of liberty characteristic of democratic government. Democrats make much of political participation as a means of affording themselves sovereign power, since the poor are likely to be the majority. At the same time, democrats regard political liberty (ruling and being ruled) as second best to personal liberty (living as one likes without interference from or responsibility to the community as a whole). Aristotle seems to agree that the democratic poor are predominantly apolitical, for he stresses that monetary incentives are necessary to secure their participation (the same is sometimes true of oligarchs [IV.9.1294a37-41, V.8.1308b34-36, VI.4.1318b9-17]). But Aristotle does not support them in their preference for personal liberty over political liberty; he rather attributes their choice to intemperance and a lack of discipline (VI.4.1319b30-32). See Zuckert, 1983, p. 200.

11. Quotations from Aristotle's Politics are taken from the Rackham translation, 1944, with key Greek words inserted.

12. See Clor, 1974, pp. 583-84. Clor finds in Aristotle's somewhat contradictory presentation of law (that law is an amoral reflection of the regime and that law is rational, impartial, and just) the seeds of the current dispute between legal positivism and natural law.

13. Nicomachean Ethics V.3.1131a22-1131b16. $A:B::C:D$ if $A:B::A+C:B+D$. The relative condition of two people should be the same after receiving shares as it was before. Person A should be to person B as person A plus his share C is to person B with his share D. If person A and person B are each valued for their time at work, and A works one hour and B works two hours, the compensation they receive must reflect this 1:2 ratio: hence a \$3 payment to A necessitates a \$6 payment to B. Notice that A plus his reward (1+3) is one half of B plus his reward (2+6).

14. Sometimes Aristotle speaks as if the principle of proportional equality typifies only aristocratic and oligarchic regimes, that democracy, and to a lesser extent polity, espouse the contrary principle of numerical equality (V.1.1301b29-32, V.7.1307a20-27, VI.2.1317b3-7, VI.2.1318a4-6, VI.6.1321a1-3). It is possible to see how a democrat would equate justice with strict equality of treatment, but it is also possible to see how this equality could be further defended on grounds of equal (and thus proportionate) merit. This Aristotle does at III.9.1280a22-25, V.1.1301a28-36, and V.1.1301b35-1302a1. That proportional equality is important to the self-understanding of all regimes, democracy included, is proven by the fact that the chief cause of sedition in all regimes is disagreement over questions of distributive justice (V.1.1301a35-39). See Newman, 1973, p. 266.

15. See also Aristotle's Constitution of Athens xxvii.1; and Bowra, 1971, p. 18. Recently the United States became more democratic (extending the suffrage to eighteen-year olds) while engaged in the Vietnam War and in response to the argument that if a person is old enough to fight for his country, he is old enough to vote.

16. A political alliance is no true city unless it makes virtue its aim. Those associations which settle for lesser aims are more properly regarded as alliances (III.9. 1280b6-35). Hence a democracy is an alliance of families and tribes for the purpose of mutual safety and equitable exchange. A democracy, however, can take on the look of a city insofar as it inculcates a way of life and pays heed to the character of its citizens.

17. Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws, II.3, IV.5-8, V.2-7. The martial virtue which Aristotle attributes to polity gives the regime its republican look, this along with the widespread participation on the part of citizens. But there are important differences between Aristotle's polity, a mixed regime with a prominent middle class, and Montesquieu's democracy, a small, frugal, and

homogeneous society animated by the principle of virtue. See Strauss, 1964, p. 36.

18. Barker implies that the regime of Books VII and VIII is not an aristocracy (1958, p. 153). Lord, on the other hand, asserts that it is (1981, p. 471).

19. Says Newman: "If Aristotle had said that the State exists not only for the realization of the highest quality of life, but also for the development in all within it of the best type of life of which they are capable, he would have made the elevation of the mass of men one of its ends. But this he hardly seems to do" (1973, pp. 286-87).

20. Sophocles Antigone, 1.737.

21. Aristotle's repeated definition of the polis as an association of equals has a logic to it which necessitates this conclusion. But Aristotle is not always consistent. He says, for instance, " . . . for just as the master's rule [oikonomikē] is a sort of monarchy in the home, so absolute monarchy [pambasileia] is domestic mastership over a city [poleōs], or over a race [ethnous] or several races" (III.14.1285b31-33). Aristotle also counts the Spartan kingship as a bastardized form of monarchy, as well as the dictatorships of ancient Greek cities. But neither of these examples, because of their exceptional characters, suggest a real compatibility between the political association and monarchy. Aristotle typically assumes that true monarchy is either absolute and thus comparable to paternal authority in the household (III.14.1285b29-31), or that monarchy belongs to the primitive stage of social existence and thus is like a chieftain's power over a village or a tribe (III.14.1285b20-25, III.14.1285b10-11).

22. Newman allows that absolute kingship is not wholly inconsistent with Aristotle's conception of the state because, he says, "it is the means of placing

the individual in constant contact and connexion with Reason," which is for Aristotle the end of the state (1973, p. 289).

23. At IV.15.1299a20-28 and again at VI.7.1321b1-1323a10 Aristotle provides a description of the various types of magistracies and their duties.

24. Virtue, according to Aristotle, is a part of a person's character; once present it does not require constant reinforcement, and if reinforcement is necessary, then virtue is not yet present. Hence it cannot be argued on Aristotelian grounds that an experienced officer needs always to be under the command of another, to be taking orders at the same time he is giving them.

25. Nicomachean Ethics I.7.1098a6-17, I.8.1098b29-1099a6.

26. Aristotle cautions, following close upon the quotation cited above (VII.3.1325b3-14), that continual rule, unless over inferiors, is potentially corrupting and that in a city composed of equals ruling and being ruled is best. Aristotle next states that where there is inequality among citizens, the superior is to rule always. What Aristotle fails to repeat here is that a true polis is dedicated to the excellence of the individual (and natural for this reason), that it is thus responsible for producing a superior human being and afterwards is obliged to reward him with permanent political power.

27. To some extent the city educates by what it honors. If the city rewards virtue by making a virtuous man king, citizens are taught that virtue is supremely valuable. But virtue is not acquired through exhortation alone. Virtue is an activity, and in a monarchy the activity that produces and constitutes virtue--politics--is foreclosed to all (save the king), while in an aristocracy it is foreclosed to most.

28. See Jaffa, 1982, pp. 269-70. Jaffa observes that self-government can mean both political freedom and moral freedom, but that political freedom is egalitarian whereas moral freedom is anti-egalitarian (mind ruling passion) and indeed monarchical. To make moral excellence the object of politics, says Jaffa,

is to re-establish "in authority the monarchic principle."

29. There were three other reasons for doubting the naturalness of the city: (1) that the good citizen is not a good man unless he happens to live in a good city (the Nazi provides a convenient illustration); (2) that the good citizen is not a good man unless he also rules in a good city (a stipulation which reduces the number even further); and (3) that the good citizen in fact cannot always rule in a good city but must be satisfied with rotation through office. See Ambler, 1985, pp. 173-79. Ambler supplies several additional reasons for thinking the city unnatural, or not fully natural, and suggests that Aristotle appeals to other standards, along with nature, in making his defense of political life. See also, Nichols, 1983, pp. 171-76.

30. Voegelin (1957, pp. 325-42) detects some incongruity between the teachings of Book I and Book III, arguing that the former inquires into the nature (physis) or the best ordering of the polis, while the latter looks to its form (eidos). He also contends that Aristotle bases himself on three successive Platonic models, one taken from the Statesman (the three types of regimes and their perversions), another from the Laws (the mixed regime), and a third from the Republic (the deteriorating sequence of regime transformation).

31. In the early chapters of Book VII, Aristotle considers a number of opinions about the best life for individuals and the best life for cities; throughout the discussion Aristotle assumes, much like Plato in the Republic,

that the city is a magnification of the soul and that what is good for one is good for the other. Of the three opinions reviewed, two are taken seriously, while a third, that tyranny is the best life for men, is rejected out of hand. Aristotle supposes that the real choice is between the active life of politics and the contemplative life of philosophy. When the debate is actually joined, however, those contending for philosophy are replaced by others contending for privacy and freedom (VII.3.1325a18-21); the defense of philosophy Aristotle reserves for himself. Aristotle finds both opinions credible but also defective. Against those who argue for a private life disengaged from politics, Aristotle says that happiness is the product of activity. Against the advocates of a public life of political ruling, Aristotle states that permanent rule is unjust in a city composed of equals. In order to strike a balance between private inaction and public action, Aristotle declares that the theoretical life, which is essentially private, is also an active life. I understand this as an attempt on Aristotle's part to persuade the political man, who has been celebrated at other points in the Politics, to surrender his office in exchange for a life that is even more active than the one he has come to know. I find Aristotle doing something similar in Book III, ch. vi when he speaks of political office as a burden which equal citizens are willing to share. This, says Aristotle, is the natural system that prevailed in earlier times, but that at present people grow wealthy in office and wish to hold on to it continuously (III.6.1279a8-16). Aristotle is plainly denigrating political life (when done properly it is a burden); his reason, I suspect, is that he fears that the attractions of politics would otherwise prove irresistible. For a different interpretation of Book VII, ch. 3, see Jaeger, 1972, pp. 281-82. That Aristotle would call contemplation an activity is taken by Jaeger as evidence of an "inevitable conflict between [Aristotle's] philosophical and his sociological conscience."

32. See Rousseau's First Discourse, 1964, p. 63. Consider also the character of Prospero in Shakespeare's The Tempest.

33. Newman (1973) seems not to think that there is any difficulty here, saying simply that Aristotle's best city promises a "varied life of arms, politics, and philosophy" (p.312). He further states that the rulers of this city "pass their years of maturity in political activity and philosophical speculation" (p. 329). Aristotle, however, does not specifically say that the rulers are to practice philosophy. He does identify philosophy as a worthy pursuit, but the purpose of this earlier discussion is to indicate a way of life that is non-political, not to subsume philosophy into politics, as Newman seems to believe.

34. Rackham translation, 1934.

35. Lord, 1982, pp. 159-202.

36. This same sort of practical objection can be raised against friendship as an activity superior to politics. Would sufficient numbers of political men ever agree that the intimacy of friends surpasses in excellence the exercise of power?

Aristotle's discussion of friendship in the Nicomachean Ethics might permit one to think that the virtue practiced among friends is superior to the virtue practiced by statesmen, the reason being, presumably, that the quality of one's associates conditions the quality of one's virtue (IX.12. 1172a10-14). But the context of this discussion does not pit friendship against politics; rather it asks more modestly whether friendship plays any role in the self-sufficient life of a virtuous man (IX.9. 1169b2-1170b19). (Aristotle replies that friendship is an external good.) Thus, some extrapolation is required in order to conclude that friendship occasions greater virtue than political rule. Secondly, the friendship praised by Aristotle is that between supremely good men. It is deemed conducive to virtue, in part, because of the sharing of conversation and thought (IX.9. 1170b10-14). True friendship, therefore, would seem to labor under the same disadvantage as philosophy, namely, that very few people are capable of it.

37. Churchill, 1956, pp. 78, 80, 81, 129, 229, 233-34, 236, 241; and Churchill, 1932, pp. 305-18. Cited by Emmert, 1976, pp. 306-08.

38. Megalopsychos does occur at VII.7.1328a9-10 and at VIII.3.1338b3 where the topics are respectively the kind of ferocity appropriate to the magnanimous man and his appreciation of beauty as opposed to utility. See Lord, 1982, pp. 65, 201. Lord supposes that the citizen body of Aristotle's ideal regime is composed entirely of magnanimous gentlemen. But a multitude of magnanimous men would seem to be incompatible with the account of magnanimity given in the Ethics.

39. For a discussion of the magnanimous man, see Jaffa, 1979, pp. 116-41. In Crisis of the House Divided Jaffa presents Lincoln as an example of the magnanimous man (1982, pp. 211-25).

40. Politics, when viewed as a reward for contributions made, is closely aligned to politics as an art providing a service; the former takes cognizance of past achievement, the latter focuses on future goods. Newman (1973) observes these two conceptions of politics and says that Aristotle passes imperceptively from one to the other (p. 250). Later Newman treats them as if they were quite different (p. 267).

41. The diagram below locates regimes on a quality/quantity axis, where the opposing objectives of excellence and equality are accounted of equal worth. Actual regimes are ranked by their nearness to, or distance from, the theoretically best regime, which combines maximum virtue with maximum number. Kingship scores highest on the quality index but lowest on the quantity index and thus is no better than polity, which scores highest on the quantity index but lowest on the quality index. Arrows emanating from regime names indicate that a regime might rise or fall across either index.

42. Zuckert argues that no regime can make politics perfectly just (1983, pp. 185-206). See also Ambler, 1985, p. 178.

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