An Aporia on Citizenship in Aristotle's *Politics*: The Vulgar Craftsmen[1]

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Abstract

This paper aims to elucidate the case of the vulgar craftsmen who are excluded from the citizen body, a case which evidently challenged Aristotle's conception of citizenship, as we find it presented in *Pol*. III,5. I argue that Aristotle's exclusion of vulgar craftsmen from citizenship in his best city, based on their habits, activities, and ways of life, lacks justification, even when evaluated against his own criteria.

Introduction

In *Politics* III, Aristotle deals with the principles of citizenship. After thoroughly examining various aspects of citizenship in the first four chapters, he introduces the case of the vulgar craftsmen in chapter 5 as a puzzle (*aporia*) that still needs to be addressed to complete the inquiry on citizenship. Aristotle's treatment of craftsmen in a separate chapter as an aporia is indeed noteworthy. This paper aims to elucidate the case of the vulgar craftsmen, who are excluded from the citizen body, a case that evidently posed a challenge for Aristotle's conception of citizenship. Aristotle is aware of this case, as we find it discussed in *Pol.* III,5. I

[1] The term *banausoi* is frequently translated into English as *vulgar craftsmen*. Nevertheless, some scholars have favored alternative translations. For instance, Frede uses *mechanical workers* or *lower craftsmen* instead (Frede, 2005, p. 176). In this discussion, I will opt for the common translation. I will occasionally drop *vulgar* and refer only to *craftsmen* for convenience.

argue that, in his best city, the class of vulgar craftsmen is not made up of natural slaves, and yet Aristotle excludes them from citizenship on the basis of their habits, activities, and ways of life, which he believes are inimical to virtue.[2] However, even on his terms Aristotle cannot be justified in depriving this class of education, leisure and citizenship, as their lack of virtue results from later causes and is not inevitable. Since vulgar craftsmen are not identified as natural slaves and since virtue for Aristotle is a matter of habituation and education, vulgar craftsmen should indeed be capable of cultivating virtue. Hence, citizenship can be conferred to them if they are treated in the same way as other free citizens.

In section 1, I present Aristotle's account of a citizen and the *aporia* concerning the political status of craftsmen. In section 2, I illustrate the distinction between the craftsman and the natural slave. I argue that, although Aristotle considers craftsmen to be servile, this servility does not necessarily imply that they are natural slaves. Instead, they can be slavish free men without being considered as natural slaves. In section 3, I set out the physical and mental habits that instil servility in craftsmen and that serve as an impediment to the cultivation of virtue. In section 4, I demonstrate that Aristotle is indeed attentive to the habits, activities, and ways of life that could lead to a distortion of one's nature towards virtue. By depriving craftsmen of the education and leisure necessary for the cultivation of virtue, Aristotle fails to do justice to this class in his best city even on his own terms.

[2] Some commentators have argued that Aristotle speaks about *the best state* at three levels. For instance, Frede mentions that (a) there is the best state that one could wish or pray for which is outlined in a sketchy manner in Books VII and VIII. (b) There is the best state under normal circumstances. (c) And there is also the best state under less than good conditions (2019, p. 266). In this paper I am interested in the best state as understood by Frede, i.e., the best state in *Pol.* VII–VIII.

I. Citizenship and the political status of vulgar craftsmen

In *Pol*. III, Aristotle presents his conception of citizenship. In this book, we also encounter an *aporia* concerning the political status of vulgar craftsmen. Therefore, *Pol*. III, and in particular the first five chapters of this book, include crucial arguments and discussions surrounding the concept of a citizen to which we need to refer.

Aristotle is interested in the nature of a citizen because he wants to establish the nature of a city (*Pol*. III,1,1274b30). For him, the nature of a city depends on the nature of its constitution (*politeia*) and "a constitution is itself a certain organization of the inhabitants of a city" (1274b38). The order which characterises a city is determined by those who participate in the government (1275a19–23).

> [S]omeone who is eligible to participate in deliberative and judicial office is a citizen…and a city-state, simply speaking, is a multitude of such people, adequate for life's self-sufficiency. (*Pol.* III,1,1275b18–21)3

In setting out this definition, Aristotle distinguishes between those who are referred to as citizens by assumption (*ex hypothesi*) and those who hold office. The former category encompasses individuals such as children who are too young to hold office or elderly individuals who have been excused from office. In contrast, citizens in the unqualified or strict sense (*haplôs*) are those without any such defects that require rectification. This category includes only those who actively hold political office (1275a18–20). Hence, Aristotle limits citizenship to those who participate in government and hold office.

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[3] Unless indicated otherwise, translations of the *Politics* are by Reeve 1998, with occasional alterations for the sake of consistency. Translations of Aristotle's other texts are from Barnes 1984 with occasional modifications.

The following inquiry concerns the question of what constitutes a good citizen and a good man, as this is pertinent to the debate about who deserves citizenship and who does not. Aristotle argues that the virtue of a citizen is relative to the particular constitution under consideration, and it is not necessary for a good citizen also to be considered a good man:

> Consequently, if indeed there are several kinds of constitution, it is clear that there cannot be a single virtue that is the virtue – the complete virtue – of a good citizen. But the good man, we say, does express a single virtue: the complete one. Evidently, then, it is possible for someone to be a good citizen without having acquired the virtue expressed by a good man. (*Pol.* III,4,1276b30–35)

Furthermore, even in the best city, not every good citizen has to be a good man, as the virtue of a good man and that of a good citizen are not the same (*Pol*. III,4,1276b20–1277a20). In contrast to despotic rule, where a master rules over a slave (1277a30 ff.), Aristotle's concept of *political rule* is exercised over those who are "free and similar in birth" (1277b7–9). In the best city, all free citizens are expected to take turns both in governing and in being governed. A good citizen must possess the knowledge and ability both to be ruled and to rule, and the ability to understand the governance of free individuals from both perspectives is considered the virtue of a citizen. However, even though both rulers and the ruled are citizens, the individual who is both a good man and a good citizen in the unqualified (*haplôs*) sense is the one who assumes the role of ruler. Thus, the good man and the good citizen converge in the person who "has the authority or is capable of exercising authority in the supervision of communal matters, either by himself or with others" (*Pol*. III,5,1278b2–5). Indeed, for Aristotle only the excellent ruler "is good and possesses practical wisdom, but a citizen need not possess practical wisdom" (*Pol*. III,4,1277a14–16). As for those who are ruled, "practical

wisdom is not the virtue of one who is ruled, but true opinion is. For those [who are] ruled are like makers of flutes, whereas rulers are like the flute players who use them" (1277b25–30).[4]

In a next step, Aristotle reviews the considerations given by others and presents his accounts regarding these matters in a predominantly dialectical manner. He introduces several *aporiai* and then attempts to resolve them one by one. In *Pol*. III,5, he mentions that "there still remains one more *aporia* about the citizen" (1277b34). Hence, the political status of a vulgar craftsman as a citizen is presented as one of the puzzles worth considering in the context of the questions of who a citizen is and what constitutes a *polis*. Let us have the entire passage before us:

> There still remains one more aporia about the citizen: Is the citizen really someone who is permitted to participate in office, or should vulgar craftsmen also be regarded as citizens? If, indeed, those who do not share in office should be regarded as citizens, then this sort of virtue cannot belong to every citizen (for these will then be citizens). On the other hand, if none of this sort is a citizen, in what category should they each be put? – For they are neither resident aliens nor foreigners. Or shall we say that from this argument, at least, nothing absurd follows, since neither slaves nor freed slaves are in the aforementioned classes either? For the truth is that not everyone without whom there would not be a city-state is to be regarded as a citizen. (*Pol.* III,5,1277b34–1278a3)

[4] Cf. Plato's distinction between the cognitive competences of the user and the maker of an instrument in *Republic* X.

Aristotle argues that, if individuals who do not hold public office are considered citizens, then that particular type of virtue will not be a characteristic of every citizen. Since vulgar craftsmen do not partake in holding office, they cannot be considered citizens. Otherwise, the virtue that Aristotle previously argued for, which enables a citizen both to be ruled and to rule, would not apply universally. However, he continues, if this is true, there still remains a problem regarding the social status of this class. They do not fall under either the category of resident aliens or that of foreigners. Here I interpret Aristotle to mean that, if they belonged to either of these societal groups, he would readily deny them citizenship.

Nevertheless, one may wonder why we need to assume from the outset that these individuals will not participate in holding office. Up to this point, Aristotle has not provided an answer to this question. Nevertheless, given that he continues to raise difficulties in an aporetic manner, it is essential to follow his argumentation further.

Concerning the puzzle regarding the social status of craftsmen, he now adds that excluding them from citizenship while not categorizing them as resident aliens or foreigners should not be considered improper. He states, "For the truth is that not everyone without whom there would not be a city-state is to be regarded as a citizen" (τοῦτο γὰρ ἀληθές, ὡς οὐ πάντας θετέον πολίτας ὧν ἄνευ οὐκ ἂν εἴη πόλις) (*Pol*. III,5,1278a2–4). This suggests that the mere fact that craftsmen are indispensable or necessary for the existence of the *polis* is not a sufficient reason to classify them as citizens. To support his point, Aristotle mentions children, who are, similarly, not considered citizens. However, Aristotle's example is somewhat unsatisfactory. Children are not considered citizens in the same way as adult men because they are citizens only by assumption and, thus, are incomplete citizens. One might expect Aristotle to mention workers or farmers, who, like craftsmen, are permanently

excluded from the citizen body, instead of focusing on the children of free men, who are destined to become citizens upon reaching adulthood.[5]

This argument concerning classes that are necessary for the city's existence but are not considered citizens appears to foreshadow a more developed argument about the parts and prerequisites of the best constitution in *Pol*. VII,8:[6]

> Since, as in the case of every other naturally constituted whole, the things that it cannot exist without are not all parts of it, clearly the things that are necessary for the existence of a city-state should not be assumed to be parts of it either, and likewise for any other community that constitutes a single type of thing. For communities should have one thing that is common and the same for all their members, whether they share in it equally or unequally. (*Pol.* VII,8,1328a21–27)

Continuing this argument regarding what is necessary but is not considered as parts and what constitutes the parts of the city, Aristotle informs us that

> Since we are investigating the best constitution, however, the one that would make a city-state most happy – and happiness cannot exist apart from virtue, as was said earlier – it evidently follows that, in a city-state governed in the finest manner, possessing men who are unqualifiedly just (and not given certain assumptions), the citizens should not live the life of a vulgar craftsman or tradesman. For lives of these sorts are ignoble and inimical to virtue. Nor should those who are going to be citizens

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[5] See *Pol*. VII,9, where Aristotle writes: "Farmers, craftsmen, and the laboring class generally are necessary for the existence of city-states, but the military and deliberative classes are a city-state's parts" (1329a35–38). Cf. 1329a2–5.

[6] Cf. also *Eth. Eud.* I,2,1214b26–7 and *Rhet.* I,5,1360b6–7, where Aristotle mentions the parts of *eudaimonia* and distinguishes them from a necessary condition which is not a part.

> engage in farming, since leisure is needed both to develop virtue and to engage in political actions. (*Pol.* VII,9,1328b34–40)

This passage shows that, even though craftsmen and farmers are essential for the city's existence, they are not considered integral parts of its citizen body. It is noteworthy that their exclusion from the citizen body aligns with the ultimate goal of the best constitution, namely happiness and virtue. The lifestyle of a craftsman is regarded as detrimental to virtue, while farmers often lack the leisure time necessary for cultivating and practicing virtue. Aristotle's explanation of the *aporia* regarding craftsmen in *Pol*. III,5 essentially follows the same line of reasoning. Granting citizenship to craftsmen would, in his view, dilute the virtue of the citizen, as he previously argued. However, as he clarifies, such a dilution is not feasible for every constitution, though it may be possible in some cases.

> For since there are several constitutions, there must also be several kinds of citizens, particularly of citizens who are being ruled. Hence, in some constitutions vulgar craftsmen and hired laborers must be citizens, whereas in others it is impossible – for example, in any so-called aristocracy in which offices are awarded on the basis of virtue and merit. For it is impossible to engage in virtuous pursuits while living the life of a vulgar craftsman or a hired laborer. (*Pol.* III,5,1278a14–21)

In both passages concerning craftsmen, the pivotal factor cited in depriving them of citizenship is their ignoble way of life. Craftsmen's lifestyle is such that the pursuit of it renders them incompatible with virtue and happiness. To gain a deeper understanding of what this way of life entails and why it is considered ignoble and detrimental to virtue, we can compare craftsmen with natural slaves, which is the main topic of the next section.

II. The servility of vulgar craftsmen

To illuminate the parallels and disparities between slaves and common craftsmen, we can initially delineate some key aspects of Aristotle's account of natural slavery.[7]

Aristotle believes that some people can be enslaved without injustice on the basis of the nature they have. He defends this view clearly in his account of natural slavery in *Pol.* I.[8] A minority of scholars have claimed that the slave is in fact a legitimate human being who is endowed with the same capacities at birth as a free citizen. These scholars maintain that the reasons that qualify some people as natural slaves are not to be sought in their originally defective nature but rather in their later actions and habituation.[9] It is important to acknowledge here that these scholars are correct in emphasizing the humanity of natural slaves, a point Aristotle himself emphasizes by consistently regarding them as human beings (*Pol*. 1254a14–16, 1259b27; *Eth. Nic.* 1161b5–6). However, although Aristotle treats the slave as a human being who (*ipso facto*) has some share in reason, Aristotle's position remains at odds with the assertion that the rational deficiency in slaves is not congenital but is a result of their actions, upbringing, or education.[10]

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[7] In his conference presentation entitled "Passing the test to become a part of the *polis* and the consequences of failing in Aristotle's *Politics*" Eckart Schütrumpf argued that, in the context of the best *polis*, farmers and craftsmen are considered slaves who would be owned by the free citizens. Aristotle's statement in *Pol*. VII,8, "though property is needed by cities, property is no part of the city, though many parts of property are living things" (1328a34–5), led Professor Schütrumpf to conclude that Aristotle places farmers and craftsmen in the category of living property. Because of their revolutionary tendencies, Aristotle explicitly expresses his wish that, in his best city, farmers should ideally be ethnically heterogenous and spiritless slaves or *perioikoi*, that is, foreigners who live in neighbouring regions (*Pol*. VII,10,1330a25–30). However, as I will show in this section, I do not think that there is evidence that suggests that Aristotle takes craftsmen to be slaves.

[8] While some scholars contend that Aristotle's account of natural slavery in *Pol*. I is inconsistent with later discussions in the same work, others argue that his account exhibits an internal coherence. For a comprehensive survey of viewpoints, see Smith 1991, pp. 142–146.

[9] See e.g., Frank 2004, pp. 95–96 and Bodéüs 2009, pp. 89–91.

[10] In "Rethinking Natural Slavery in Aristotle" (forthcoming in *Aither: Journal for the Study of Greek and Latin Philosophical Traditions*) I examine various interpretations of the 'nature' of a slave as discussed in *Pol.* I and

In *Pol.* I Aristotle provides two definitions of the natural slave.[11] The preliminary definition of the natural slave occurs in *Pol*. I,4 and reads as follows:

> One who is a human being belonging by nature not to himself but to another is by nature a slave, and a person is a human being belonging to another if, being a man, he is an article of property, and an article of property is an instrument for action separable from its owner. (*Pol.* I,4,1254a14–17)12

After providing this initial account, Aristotle proceeds to examine whether individuals meeting this definition actually exist (1254a17–8). Subsequently, he adds that

> it is not difficult either to discern the answer by theory or to learn it empirically. For ruling and being ruled are not only necessary but also advantageous and, in some cases, things are marked out from the moment of birth (ἐκ γενετῆς) to rule or to be ruled. (*Pol*. I,4,1254a21–24)

Aristotle then goes on to illustrate this claim about things that are "marked out from birth to rule and to be ruled" by pointing to various species of things, among which he counts the natural slave and the master. Indeed, the entire argument on the natural ruler and the natural subjects, which includes comparisons such as the body and the soul, man and beast, and male and female, is aimed at the ultimate conclusion regarding the master and the slave. This suggests that the natural slave is destined to be a subject due to his specific nature "from the

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propose that Aristotle considers the slave as a legitimate human being who is, nevertheless, endowed with an ineliminable cognitive deficiency.

[11] See Karbowski 2013, pp. 331–53, on the methodological aspects of *Pol*. I,4–7 with a focus on the definitions of the natural slave.

[12] Aristotle's second and more refined definition of the slave appears in *Pol*. I,5: "For he is by nature a slave who is capable of belonging to another (and that is why he does so belong), and who participates in reason so far as to apprehend it but not to possess it" (*Pol*. I,5,1254b20–22).

moment of birth", and any attributes or limitations ascribed to the slave belong to him congenitally for the most part.[13]

Furthermore, Aristotle unequivocally asserts that slaves are devoid of any participation in happiness or a life guided by deliberative choice or *prohairetic* activity. In a well-known passage, he observes that "the state exists for the sake of a good life, and not for the sake of life only: if life only were the object, slaves and brute animals might form a state, but they cannot, for they have no share in happiness or in a life based on choice" (1280a32–34).[14] This passage explicitly positions slaves alongside animals due to their shared inability to participate in the formation of a city-state. Consequently, it implies that natural slavery is an inherent condition, one which is unalterable from birth. Both non-human animals and natural slaves, by virtue of their nature, remain incapable of establishing states because they lack the capacity for deliberate decision-making and cannot share in happiness.

Therefore, although for Aristotle natural slaves are indeed legitimate human beings who share in reason, the rational deficiency of the slave is not an effect of later causes such as action, habituation, and education. It is rather a consequence of a necessary inborn deficiency related to their first-level capacity.[15]

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[13] See Pellegrin 2013, p. 102, who argues that the characteristics that cause an individual to merit the status of a slave are natural and unrelated to circumstances, "since the people who are natural slaves are so 'right from birth' …and not for example, as a result of imprudence (as in capture by pirates) or bad behavior (as when a person is sold because of his debts)". See also Anagnostopoulos 2018, pp. 181–182 in support of the same conclusion.

[14] See also *Eth. Eud.* 1226b20–21: "Therefore, choice is not present in all other animals, nor in a human of every age, nor in a human of every condition"; *Eth. Nic.* 1177a8–9: "no one thinks of a slave as having a share in happiness, unless he has also a share in life." Cf. *Pol*. 1331b39–42: "Now everyone aims at living well and happiness is clear, but some are capable of these things whereas others are not, because of some misfortune or their nature." Kraut 1997, p. 124 thinks that "here Aristotle has in mind slaves and women, whose reason is so defective that they cannot fully actualize the virtues".

[15] This interpretation does not dismiss the significance of climatic and environmental influences. Aristotle in fact adheres to a theory that acknowledges the impact of climate on the development of natural character traits. In a renowned passage found in *Pol*. VII,7, Aristotle correlates specific climatic attributes with the natural character

Returning to our topic of vulgar craftsmen, while Aristotle does occasionally describe craftsmen as having slavish or servile qualities, he does not categorize them as natural slaves. Thus, the reason why vulgar craftsmen are denied citizenship does not stem from any inherent and inevitable incapacities. In a passage in *Pol*. I,13, where Aristotle compares the virtue of a slave and that of the vulgar craftsman, this distinction becomes evident:

> If what we have now said is true, one might raise the problem of whether vulgar craftsmen too need to have virtue; for they often fail to perform their tasks through intemperance. Or are the two cases actually very different? For a slave shares his master's life, whereas a vulgar craftsman is at a greater remove, and virtue pertains to him to just the extent that slavery does; for a vulgar craftsman has a kind of delimited slavery. Moreover, a slave is among the things that exist by nature, whereas no shoemaker is, nor any other sort of craftsman. (*Pol.* I,13,1260a38–b2)

This passage is somewhat cryptic in delineating the precise distinction between a slave and a vulgar craftsman. On the one hand, Aristotle emphasizes that a slave and a vulgar craftsman belong to different categories; a slave is considered among the things that exist by nature, whereas no kind of craftsman is. However, he also relates the limited virtue that a vulgar craftsman possesses to the degree to which slavery applies to them. The contrast between slaves and craftsmen in terms of nature seems significant. It appears to suggest that while

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traits of distinct groups of people. For an in-depth examination of this passage and its relationship to the concept of natural slavery, see Heath 2008 and Leunissen 2017. See also Chadwick 1983.

both a craftsman and a slave share certain servile characteristics, unlike slaves, the servility of the craftsman is not an innate or inherent aspect of their nature.[16]

A passage in the context of the best *polis* in *Pol*. VIII, where Aristotle mentions two audiences at a music festival, appears to support this interpretation:

> But since theatre audiences are of two kinds, one free and generally educated, the other boorish and composed of vulgar craftsmen, hired laborers, and other people of that sort, the latter too must be provided with competitions and spectacles for the purposes of relaxation. Just as there are souls that are distorted from the natural state, so too there are deviant harmonies and melodies that are strained and over-ornamented, and what gives each person pleasure is what is akin to his nature. (*Pol*. VIII,7,1342a18–28)[17]

One type of audience consists of free (*eleutheroi*) and educated individuals, while the other comprises "a vulgar group composed of craftsmen and workers and others of this sort." It is striking that the souls of the members in the vulgar group "are distorted from the condition that is according to nature". This distortion is why they find pleasure in deviant melodies and harmonies.

Although we may assume that the vulgar audience is made up of free individuals who can attend a music festival alongside the educated audience, the latter group appears

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[16] See Frede 2005, p. 177, who also thinks that this class is composed of freeborn people.

[17] ἐπεὶ δ' ὁ θεατὴς διττός, ὁ μὲν ἐλεύθερος καὶ πεπαιδευμένος, ὁ δὲ φορτικὸς ἐκ βαναύσων καὶ θητῶν καὶ ἄλλων τοιούτων συγκείμενος, ἀποδοτέον ἀγῶνας καὶ θεωρίας καὶ τοῖς τοιούτοις πρὸς ἀνάπαυσιν· εἰσὶ δὲ ὥσπερ αὐτῶν αἱ ψυχαὶ παρεστραμμέναι τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἕξεως – οὕτω καὶ τῶν ἁρμονιῶν παρεκβάσεις εἰσὶ καὶ τῶν μελῶν τὰ σύντονα καὶ παρακεχρωσμένα, ποιεῖ δὲ τὴν ἡδονὴν ἑκάστοις τὸ κατὰ φύσιν οἰκεῖον.

to be free in a different, more aristocratic sense.[18] These individuals are considered qualified to be citizens in Aristotle's best city, whereas the vulgar audience is not. The vulgar audience, which encompasses craftsmen, workers, and the like, possesses natural freedom, distinguishing them from natural slaves. However, they fail to attain the level of freedom associated with educated citizens.

While the vulgar audience possesses an innate deliberative capacity that sets them apart from natural slaves, this capacity is not in a good condition. They have deviated from their natural state and, as a result, have regressed. In the framework of Aristotle's *De Anima*, we can assert that they initially possessed both cognitive and moral capacities at the first level of potentiality,[19] but they failed to develop these capacities to the second level of potentiality.

In *Physics* VII,3, Aristotle additionally argues that excellence can be considered a form of perfection or completion (*teleiôsis*). When something attains its own excellence, it can be called perfect because it is then most aligned with its nature. For instance, when a circle achieves perfection, it becomes a circle in its best form and reaches its highest state of being. Conversely, a defect can be viewed as the destruction of, and deviation from, the nature of a thing (246a10-17). Aristotle continues:

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[18] For a conception of 'aristocratic freedom' "consisting in the rule of reason over desire", see Miller and Keyt 2021, p. 119.

[19] According to *De an.* II,5,417a22 ff. at the first level of potentiality, "something is a knower in the way in which we might say that a human knows because humans belong to the class of knowers" (417a23–24). He is a potential knower at the first level "because his genus and matter are of a certain sort" (a27). At a second level of potentiality – which is equivalent to first-level actuality – "we say directly that the one who has grammatical knowledge knows" (a25–26).

> So just as we do not call the perfection of the house an alteration (for it would be strange if the coping and tiling were called alteration, or if, in being coped and tiled, the house were altered instead of being perfected), in the same way [we speak] also of excellences and defects, and of the things that possess or acquire them. For the first [i.e. the excellences] are perfections and the latter [i.e. the defects] are departures, and consequently neither are alterations. (Phys. VII,3,246a17–246b2, trans. Maso et al.)

Aristotle's denial that tiling or coping a house constitutes alteration implies that such processes do not transform a house into something entirely new that it has never been before. Instead, a house is essentially designed for shelter, and, when tiling or coping is applied, it becomes more fully suited to fulfilling this purpose. Similarly, when a human being acquires certain virtues, they do not undergo a fundamental transformation of their identity. If acquiring a *hexis* (a disposition) were considered as alteration, it would suggest that a human being gains an entirely new quality. However, virtues, although dependent on alterations in certain underlying elements, are not themselves alterations.[20]

Thus, the acquisition of virtue does not represent a change in kind. It does not involve the destruction of a contrary which is replaced by its corresponding contrary. Instead, it is a process of developing and perfecting the inherent nature of what something already is. When human beings acquire virtues, they rather achieve their form as human beings more fully, i.e., by becoming a more complete or perfect version of what they have been all along. Consequently, by acquiring excellences, an individual demonstrates their

[20] For comprehensive discussions of this point, see the commentaries in Maso, Natali, and Seel, 2013.

nature to the highest degree or in the best possible manner, while defects lead to a departure from their inherent nature and result in degeneration.

As I understand the passage from *Pol*.VIII,7, Aristotle considers craftsmen and workers as individuals with defective *hexeis*. In the passage comparing slaves and vulgar craftsmen, Aristotle emphasizes that due to their intemperate character, vulgar craftsmen often fail to perform their tasks properly (*Pol*. I,13,1260a38–b2). In the section discussing the uses of music, they are classified as vulgar, making them suitable for deviant music and performances intended to provide them with pleasure and relaxation (*Pol*. VIII,7,1342a18–28).

According to another passage from the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle associates the political and philosophical life with individuals who are engaged in leisurely pursuits. In contrast, he links a life of indulgence primarily with those who pursue necessities, including vulgar artists, vulgar craftsmen, and individuals involved in business. These activities are presumably centered around bodily pleasures, as workers and vulgar craftsmen are described as intemperate (*Eth. Eud.* I,5,1215a25 ff.).

Here it is worth noting that, despite acquiring defective *hexeis* due to a deviation from their inherent nature in the pursuit of completeness or perfection, the nature of vulgar craftsmen itself remains unaltered, as neither excellences nor defects are considered alterations. These individuals are, thus, legitimate human beings who, however, have failed to fully develop their nature. In this sense, they are fundamentally different from natural slaves, who possess certain cognitive incapacities that are not the result of later causes.

In summary, natural slaves are destined to be the type of human beings which they are, their condition being inherent. In contrast, vulgar craftsmen become the type of human beings they are due to later causes, which are not inevitable and can be influenced by their habituation and choices.[21]

III. Physical and mental distortion as an impediment to virtue

If what I have argued so far is correct, and hence craftsmen are to be distinguished from slaves on the basis of their nature, we still require an explanation regarding the question of how they deviate from their nature and end up developing habits, activities, and ways of life that are inimical to virtue. We can find an answer to this question by examining passages both within and beyond the *Politics*.

In the passage concerning different ways of life in *Eudemian Ethics* I,5, Aristotle clarifies what he means by the group that is concerned merely with necessities. According to this passage, vulgar craftsmen are individuals who lead sedentary lives and work for wages (*Eth. Eud.* I,5,1215a29–32). A passage in the *Politics* further substantiates that some wage earners fall into the category of vulgar craftsmen, while others are unskilled manual laborers (*Pol*. I,11,1258b25–27).

The reference to vulgar craftsmen doing sedentary work implies a physical feature of those engaged in such crafts, namely that their physical condition may not be optimal. In the *Politics*, it is mentioned that democracies which contain a large number of farmers

[21] There is plentiful discussion on the link between nature and moral virtue in Aristotle's ethical and political works. See e.g., Annas 1996; Ward 2005; Lennox 2015 and Leunissen 2017.

and herdsmen are preferable to those dominated by vulgar craftsmen, tradesmen, and workers:

> After the multitude of farmers, the best sort of people consists of herdsmen, who get their living from livestock. For herding is in many respects similar to farming, and, where military activities are concerned, they are particularly well prepared, because they are physically fit and able to live in the open. The other multitudes, of which the remaining kinds of democracies are composed, are almost all very inferior to these. For their way of life is bad, and there is no element of virtue involved in the task to which the multitude of vulgar craftsmen, tradesmen, and laborers put their hand. (*Pol.* VI,4,1319a19–28)

In this passage, the reasoning behind this preference lies in the superior physical fitness of farmers and herdsmen, who are better suited for outdoor living and military activities. In contrast, the other groups including the craftsmen are deemed to lack virtue in their work, and their way of life is characterized as undesirable (*Pol*. VI,4,1319a19–28).

The comparison between these two groups can also be found in the *Economics*, a work whose authenticity is a subject of debate. Here, the author asserts that individuals engaged in vulgar arts and crafts possess bodies that are considered useless or unprofitable. In contrast, the demanding labor of farmers, which involves strenuous work in the open air, brings about their physical fitness, increased courage, and better preparedness for fighting enemies (*Econ.* I,2,1343a25–1343b6).[22]

[22] To revisit our previous point, Aristotle's ideal city is marked by his clear preference for a specific demographic composition among farmers. He envisions a scenario where these agricultural workers are ethnically diverse, comprising individuals who are either spiritless slaves or *perioikoi*, that is, foreigners residing

Aristotle also emphasizes in other writings that the greatness of a city should not be assessed on the basis of its population size but rather on the basis of its ability (*dynamis*) to fulfil its essential functions:

> Most people suppose that a happy city-state must be a great one, but even if what they suppose is true, they are ignorant of the quality that makes a city-state great or small. For they judge a city-state to be great if the number of its inhabitants is large, whereas they ought to look not to number but to ability. For a city-state too has a task to perform, so that the city-state that is best able to complete it is the one that should be considered greatest… A city-state that can send a large number of vulgar craftsmen out to war, on the other hand, but only a few hoplites, cannot possibly be great. For a great city-state is not the same as a densely populated one. (*Pol*. VII,4,1326a8–14, 21–24)

Aristotle stresses that a truly powerful city is not defined by its ability to dispatch a large army to battle, if this were primarily composed of craftsmen and only a few hoplites. This association of craftsmen with warfare and their incapacity to defend a city appears to stem from their physical unfitness and undesirable way of life. In the context of a self-sufficient

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in neighboring regions (*Pol*. VII,10,1330a25–30). Charles 1990, 191, explains the argument that slaves recruited as farmers in the best city cannot be considered natural slaves as included primarily because Aristotle places the prospect of freedom as a reward within their reach. Charles posits that, if these individuals were indeed natural slaves, Aristotle would not recommend such a reward for slave owners. However, I disagree with Charles on this point for two reasons. First, in *Pol*. I and VII, Aristotle affirms that slavery is based on force, as evidenced by the assertion that "to rule despotically over those who deserve to be slaves" serves as a justification for military preparations (1334a2). This implies that those who are targeted for enslavement are likely to resist their subjugation, a process which Aristotle likens to hunting at *Pol*. I,7,1255b38. Consequently, individuals subjected to slavery in this context would indeed be motivated by the promise of eventual freedom. Second, in *Pol*. VII,7, just before recommending freedom as a reward to slaves recruited as farmers, Aristotle introduces the thought that climate can significantly influence the development of natural character traits. He correlates specific features of the climate with the inherent character traits of both Greeks and non-Greeks, identifying the latter as having slavish dispositions. Given this comprehensive discussion on the causal factors influencing the slavish dispositions of non-Greeks, it seems highly improbable that Aristotle would advocate the enslavement of capable free individuals as farmers or craftsmen within his best city.

city, reliance on vulgar craftsmen and workers for defense is unwise. These groups are ill-suited to defend a city due to both their physical limitations and their psychological inadequacies.

Conversely, individuals deemed suitable for citizenship in Aristotle's ideal city must possess the capability to engage in activities essential both during wartime and peacetime. They should be physically fit to serve in the military when they are in their youth, as well as capable of holding political office and enjoying leisure during times of peace.[23]

Some evidence gleaned from *Pol*. VII and VIII reveals that Aristotle was indeed aware of the distorting effects of certain types of bodily training, physical labor and mental habits on the development of human beings. In *Pol*. VII,7 Aristotle emphasizes the paramount importance of bodily training and suggests that it should precede the training of the soul because physical development precedes the development of reason and intelligence (1334b22–28). At the same time, he warns against excessive labor, which can be detrimental to the body. Therefore, legislators should avoid the mistake made by the Spartans of designing a training program that brutalizes children through arduous physical exercises in the hope of instilling courage. Aristotle defends habituating an individual's constitution to labor but cautions against excessive and one-sided work. He believes that a person should be capable of various actions expected of a free individual (*Pol*. VIII,4,1338b31–38).

[23] Aristotle assigns the whole territory and its resources to citizens so that they can meet their needs as ideal citizens with specific capacities (*Pol*. VII,5,1326b30 ff.). See Anagnostopoulos 2018, pp. 179–225, for a discussion on the distribution of resources in Aristotle's best city.

Continuing in *Pol*. VIII,4,1339a7–11, Aristotle argues that individuals should not engage in both physical and mental labor simultaneously, as these two types of labor are opposed to each other. Physical labor hinders the mind, while mental labor hinders the body.

Lastly, in a significant passage in *Pol*. VIII,2,1337b4–15, Aristotle defines any task, craft, or study as vulgar if it renders the body or mind of a free person useless for the pursuit of virtue. He condemns crafts and occupations which are performed solely for wages as worsening the condition of the body and leaving no room for the development of the mind, deeming them vulgar. He advises against overwhelming children with too many necessary and useful tasks, since such preoccupations can deform their bodies and degrade their minds.

These additional passages shed further light on why Aristotle posits that working classes, such as laborers and craftsmen, cannot be citizens in his ideal city. Their disqualification stems from their physical and psychological inadequacies, which prevent them from embodying the virtues of a virtuous citizen. These limitations appear to be a consequence of the nature of their tasks,[24] the manner in which they do their work, their relationship with wealth and other possessions, the way of life they pursue, and similar factors, none of which have their origins in their inherent nature.

[24] However, as we will see in a moment, there is evidence to suggest that Aristotle acknowledges that free men can perform these tasks without experiencing adverse effects.

IV. Aristotle's failure to do justice to vulgar craftsmen

Aristotle's comments regarding specific forms of physical training, physical labor, and mental habits also highlight his awareness of their potential adverse effects on the physical and psychological development of individuals. Consequently, there appear to be at least two issues with Aristotle's disparaging treatment of workers and craftsmen. Firstly, he cannot justify denying this group access to education and training that is afforded to some so-called *free* citizens. If, as our analysis suggests, craftsmen in Aristotle's best city need not be considered natural slaves but are rather free individuals, they should qualify for meticulous physical and psychological training to shield them from the distorting effects of certain mental and physical activities. Secondly, although he may be right in specific cases where individuals are overly preoccupied with wealth accumulation or solely dedicated to a life of physical pleasures, he does not seem to be justified in categorically labelling the tasks and activities associated with craftsmen and workers as vulgar. Aristotle himself appears to acknowledge this point. In the context of delineating the roles of ruling and being ruled among citizens, he states:

> […] it is noble even for free young men to perform many of the tasks that are held to be appropriate for slaves. For the difference between noble and shameful actions does not lie so much in the acts themselves as in their ends, on that for the sake of which they are performed. (*Pol*. VII,14,1333a8–11)

Here, we find that a free individual can carry out the tasks of a servant in a way that still dignifies the action because the nobility of the action in question hinges on the intention or

purpose of the performer.[25] In another passage, it is asserted that essential tasks executed by vulgar craftsmen and laborers should not be acquired or performed by a virtuous citizen unless it is solely for their personal necessity (*Pol*. III,4,1277b3–6). Hence, it is hard to see why the category of actions associated with the tasks of craftsmen or workers should inherently be considered degrading and unsuitable for a free citizen.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Aristotle's exclusion of vulgar craftsmen from citizenship in his best city, based on their habits, activities, and ways of life, lacks justification, even when evaluated against his own criteria. It is essential to recognize that this class comprises individuals who are not inherently destined for servitude; they are free-born, capable human beings with the potential for virtue development. Consequently, they deserve access to education, leisure, and the privileges of full citizenship.[26]

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[25] Annas 1996, p. 747 also notes this point.

[26] Jakub Jinek is sceptical of my conclusion and questions whether I am being fair to Aristotle. He argues that it is incorrect to view the *banausoi* as a distinct social class that Aristotle is specifically concerned with or to interpret the passages about them as his analysis of such a class. Jinek's reasoning is that Aristotle holds an 'epistemic interest' and 'ontological priority' in the free citizen and free government, in which he uses craftsmen, slaves, and despotism as contrasts. Indeed, one could argue that, despite dedicating much of *Pol*. I to the topic of slavery, Aristotle's discussion of slavery is incidental to his broader concern with the diversity of political rulership. However, does this imply that the theory of slavery outlined in book I and the passages defining slavery should not be seen as Aristotle's analysis of this social group, simply because slavery is not his primary focus and he is not chiefly interested in slaves as such? I believe we can assess Aristotle's treatment of the *banausoi* in the same way. While his attention to them might be secondary to his focus on free and virtuous citizens, the passages where he discusses them still offer valuable insights into his theoretical perspective on this social class. The same can be said for his treatment of women as well.

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