

Aristotle's Two Cities: Reducing Diversity to Homogeneity

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Abstract

It has often been argued, in scholarly debate, that Aristotle's denial of citizenship to the working population of his ideal city in Book VII of the *Politics* constitutes a fundamental injustice. According to this view, although it is true that their way of life prevents them from living a morally virtuous life, it does not follow that the working people are naturally devoid of the human qualities required for such a life. So, rather than finding a just way to distribute citizenship among the diversity a city's population would naturally exhibit (as he does, to a certain extent, in Book III), Aristotle would commit himself to oligarchic measures in Book VII. In this article, it is argued that the main concern of Book VII is less with a just determination of the extent of citizenship (unlike Book III) than with conceiving the most efficient way for a city to be happy: this consists in establishing a community composed of individuals who lay claim to happiness in the same way and to the same degree. In other words, it consists in reducing the diversity of Book III to a certain kind of homogeneity.

Keywords

Aristotle – citizenship – justice – best regime – government – democracy – oligarchy – happiness

I Introduction

When we assert that democracy and philosophy had been invented by the Greeks, we usually forget to add that it is not the same Greeks who invented

the one and the other.' In this passage, Michel Narcy¹ summarizes many of the oddities that grate upon modern liberal sensibilities about democracy when reading philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Although Plato and Aristotle surely deserve to be considered the founders of political science, as we would understand it today,² they were severely critical of democracy and did not accept it as a good regime. However, their anti-democratic attitudes raise serious doubt among scholars about the justice of what they present as their best regimes. Aristotle's version of the best regime, presented in Books VII-VIII of his *Politics*, is thought to be particularly problematic in this respect. According to a widely shared view, in Book VII of the *Politics*, Aristotle excludes farmers, craftsmen, and hired manual labourers from citizenship of his best regime without any convincing legitimate ground. After all, rather than finding a good way to govern the diversity inhabitants of a city would naturally exhibit, Aristotle, sharing the aristocratic values of an average Greek elite, seems to find his ideal in denying citizenship to a certain population of his city.

If, in the city of Book VII, citizenship is thus restricted to a limited number of inhabitants, then one might conclude, as Richard Kraut does, that it is built on oligarchic measures.³ This, however, would create a major problem for Aristotle: If his best regime is a kind of oligarchy, then it is based on an injustice, which makes his project flawed and inconsistent as a best regime.

Against such criticism, Fred D. Miller argues that Aristotle's best regime is not unjust. According to him, the exclusion of the working population from citizenship in this regime may be seen as an inequality (and surely it is), but it

1 'Aristote devant les objections de Socrate à la démocratie' in A. Tordesillas, ed., *Aristote Politique. Etudes sur la Politique d'Aristote sous la direction de Pierre Aubenque* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1993), p. 265.

2 For a portrait of Aristotle as the father of political science, see A.W. Saxonhouse, *Fear of Diversity: The Birth of Political Science in Ancient Greek Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 185-232. The title of her chapter dedicated to Aristotle is significant: 'Aristotle: Diversity and the Birth of Political Science'.

3 On Aristotle's restriction of citizenship to a limited number of inhabitants in *Politics* VII, 9, Kraut says: 'Aristotle now affirms several oligarchic restrictions: those who, on the one hand, make legislative and judicial decisions (i.e., the citizens) and those who, on the other, are engaged in the crafts, commerce, or farming must not share each other's task', *Aristotle. Politics. Book VII and VIII. Translated with a commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 104, note on *Pol.* VII, 9, 1328b24-33. Moreover, Kraut thinks Aristotle's oligarchic measures are even more rigid than those of existing oligarchies because, in those regimes, a craftsman could gain the right of citizenship by becoming wealthy, whereas Aristotle's best regime prohibits such an advance (*Aristotle. Politics. Book VII and VIII*, p. 105).

is not unjust because, from the standpoint of Aristotle's theory of natural justice, 'individuals possess equal rights if, and only if, they are in fact equal according to nature.'⁴ Given that, in the best regime of Aristotle, citizenship is distributed according to the criterion of virtue, then 'in the best constitution of Book VII only a minority of the population will qualify as naturally equal citizens, since the labouring classes are excluded as inferior and incapable of virtue.'⁵

Miller's position certainly begs the question rather than answers it because, as it is, the discussion requires that the naturalness of a labourer's incapacity for virtue is proven, rather than supposed. Julia Annas, criticizing Miller on this point, asserts that his explanation cannot save Aristotle from criticism.⁶ For her, the supposed natural inequality between the labouring population and the citizens of Aristotle's best city can in no way be justified on the basis of mere human nature.⁷ She argues that Aristotle was wrong to take their difference to be a difference in raw human material. Hence, the exclusion of the labouring group from citizenship would be a fundamental injustice. According to her, given that farmers, craftsmen, and hired labourers are, not natural slaves, but freeborn human individuals and natives of the city in which they live, the fact that their way of life prevents them from enjoying a life of leisure (*scholē*)—which is necessary for achieving certain normative ends of human nature (i.e., theoretical life, the life of moral and political virtue, etc.) – in no way means that they are also deprived of mere human nature, which can be developed into full human nature, provided the right type of education. For Annas, Aristotle's denial of citizenship on an allegedly natural basis has no good philosophical grounding; rather, he relies upon, and makes constant

4 F.D. Miller, *Nature, Justice and Rights in Aristotle's Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1995, p. 245.

5 'Aristotle on Natural Law and Justice' in David Key and Fred D. Miller, eds., *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 305.

6 'Aristotle on Human Nature and Political Virtue', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 49 (1996), pp. 731-53.

7 Annas makes a distinction between two senses of nature as it is applied to human beings in Aristotle. What she calls 'mere nature' is 'simply the basic material of human beings, which, so far from having its own reliable built-in goals, can be developed in quite opposite directions by habit and reason', whereas 'nature proper' or 'nature in the full sense' establishes 'a norm, by virtue of being the appropriate end-point of a thing's development' ('Aristotle on Human Nature', pp. 734-35). Nature in the latter sense stands for what is ethically ideal for human beings. See also J. Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 142-58.

reference to, social prejudices of his time regarding the life of labour. Annas argues that, in the absence of any concluding argument in favour of the alleged natural difference between citizens and labourers, there is no way to save Aristotle's best city from its dependence on a fundamental injustice.

I think that, if Miller's explanation is not an adequate defence of Aristotle's position, criticisms like Annas' are based on confusion about the project of *Politics*, VII. The rest of this paper will focus on the source of this dispute over the best regime of Book VII, and can be summarized as follows.

For Aristotle, the identity and the quality of different regimes are determined primarily by the principle according to which they distribute political power and acknowledge political rights. For oligarchies, for example, this principle is wealth; whereas, for democracies, it is freedom. So, the question of political participation is principally a question of distributive justice, which consists in establishing proportional equality between persons on the basis of their relative value with regards to the thing (here, political offices) being distributed.⁸ As an ideal, the city of Book VII ought to be built upon a just distribution of power.

The question of distributive justice is one of Aristotle's major occupations in earlier books. Especially in Book III, he takes pains to settle the question of how to distribute political rights justly among different groups that constitute a city. Criticisms like Annas' accuse Aristotle of injustice in his treatment of this same question in Book VII. In the following lines, it is argued that this judgment reflects confusion about Aristotle's project. Such confusion, concerning the constitution of Book VII, arises because it is expected to be a more idealized version of the one outlined in Book III, and the principle of distributive justice is taken to play the same political role in both cities. However, we will see that Aristotle neither addresses, nor solves, the same problems in one as in the other. Hence, the best regime of Book VII is not simply meant to ameliorate the problems of the city in Book III, and should not be judged according to the same criteria.

8 Aristotle explains his conception of distributive justice in Book V, 3 of his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book IV in the *Eudemian Ethics*). In the 'Supplementary Essay' he wrote for *Aristotle: Politics Books III and IV*, translated by R. Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 125-48, David Keyt gives the following formula for the concept of distributive justice, as it is explained by Aristotle: *the worth of person A: the worth of person B: the value of the thing allotted to A: the value of the thing allotted to B*. Accordingly, a distribution is just 'if the value of the thing it allots to one person stands to the value of the thing it allots to another as the worth of the one person stands to the worth of the other' ('Supplementary Essay', p. 128).

II Parts of a City and the Problem of Distribution

For Aristotle, there are different sorts of constitutions because a city is composed of different parts, which may be arranged in a variety of patterns. Different arrangements of these parts result in different sorts of constitutions. Below is a list of the parts that combine to make a city.⁹ Yet, it is important to keep in mind that, rather than being tangible parts, different titles of this list are capacities (*dunameis*, *Pol.* IV, 4, 1291b2) that a city, including any ideal city,¹⁰ must have if it is to be a self-sufficient political body. So, although they correspond, in practice, to different portions of a given population, the titles below are not necessarily meant to designate determinate groups of actual living persons. A city must have 1) farmers (*geōrgoi*), 2) artisans (*to peri tas technas*, namely, *banausoi*), 3) merchants (*agoraioi*), 4) hired labourers (*thētes*), 5) property owners, 6) warriors, 7) a group deliberating about common affairs and distributing justice, and 8) magistrates running public services.

The question of political participation concerns the last three functions because these functions constitute the governmental body in a city.¹¹ So, they are the proper objects of distributive justice in the political domain. Besides these functions, Aristotle also suggests that every state consists of both quality and quantity, and it is on these grounds that different portions of the population, embodying the first five functions, lay claim to citizenship and governance of their city. Freedom, wealth, education, and good birth (the last two giving rise to nobility and virtue) are the qualitative elements, whereas the numerical superiority of a multitude embodying any (or all) of these qualities is the quantitative aspect.¹² Logically speaking, the number of possible constitutions is equal to the number of possible different combinations between

⁹ For this list, see *Pol.* IV, 4, 1290b39-1291b13.

¹⁰ Aristotle provides a list for his best regime at *Politics* VII, 8, 1328a21-b23, which differs from the one presented here in the following ways: the only named magistracy is the priesthood, and both labourers and merchants are entirely absent. However, on reading Aristotle's entire account, one can easily see that the list of Book VII, 8 is not meant to be comprehensive, and that a complete list will include all of the capacities listed here. For a different view, see P.L.P. Simpson, *A Philosophical Commentary on the Politics of Aristotle* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), p. 220.

¹¹ In the list above, although assembly members and jurors (group no 7) are magistrates in the proper sense, they are nonetheless separated from other magistrates (group no 8) because they constitute the real governing body of a city whereas other offices are mere public services, supervising public affairs. On this point see especially *Pol.* IV, 14-15.

¹² *Pol.* IV, 12, 1296b13-24.

these thirteen factors¹³ (together with all possible differences they could exhibit in themselves).¹⁴ Different sorts of democracies are due to differences (*diaphorai*) between different classes of people, and different sorts of oligarchy and aristocracy are due to differences between and within the wealthy elite (*euporos*) and the notables (*gnōrimos*) in a city.¹⁵ Thus, Aristotle's principle of differentiation between political regimes says: 'It is, therefore, necessary that there be as many constitutions as there are ways of arrangement according to the superiorities and differences of the parts of the city' (*Pol.* IV, 3, 1290a13).¹⁶ An extended version of this principle of superiority is presented at Book IV, 12, 1296b19-35 and reads as follows:

But it is possible that the quality belongs to one of the parts of the city and the quantity belongs to another part (I mean, parts of which a city is composed). For example, the lowborn men may be more in number than the nobles, or the poor than the rich, without, however, exceeding so much in quantity as they are inferior in quality. This is why these two aspects must be judged in comparison with one another. Where the multitude of the poor exceeds in the proportion stated [i.e., so as to outbalance their inferiority in quality] there will naturally be a democracy, and each form of democracy corresponds to the kind of people who compose it. [...] But where the rich and the notables surpass in quality more than they are inferior in quantity, then there is an oligarchy, and, similarly as before, each form of oligarchy corresponds to the superiority of the multitude of the oligarchs.¹⁷

13 These thirteen factors are: the eight capacities listed above, the four qualities (freedom, wealth, education, and birth), and the quantitative superiority of number.

14 At *Pol.* IV, 4, 1290b21-30, Aristotle explains why there are many sorts of constitutions by devising an analogy to the necessary parts of animals: 'And when we take all the possible combinations of these [necessary parts of animals and their possible variations], this will give as many sorts of animals as there are combinations of the necessary parts. The same is, then, true of the constitutions we have mentioned' (1290b34-38). P. Pellegrin, 'Naturalité, excellence, diversité. Politique et biologie chez Aristote', in G. Patzig, ed., *Aristoteles' Politik: Akten des XI. Symposium Aristotelicum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), pp. 124-51, gives special attention to this passage.

15 For different sorts of democracy and oligarchy see *Pol.* IV, 4, 1291b14-1292a38 and all of chapters 5-6 of the same book.

16 All translations from Aristotle are my own.

17 The theoretical reach of this passage can be seen better if we take the terms democracy and oligarchy in this passage in a loose sense, encompassing constitutional government (*polit-eia*) and aristocracy. On this point, see also *Pol.* IV, 8, 1293b31-42 and all of chapter IV, 9.

Although Aristotle seems to accept this as the natural way of settling the question of sovereignty, certain passages from Book III make it plain that Aristotle actually sees here a problem calling for political philosophy.¹⁸ Without any further qualification, the principle of superiority would mean there is no absolute basis upon which to justify any claim to govern. That is to say, any claim can outbalance another on the basis of any kind of superiority; no claim will be more or less justified than any other. This is the very core of the notorious conflict between democrats and oligarchs: the first group, equal in freedom, claims equality in everything, and as the majority, they claim to the right to rule; whereas, the second group, unequal in wealth, claims to be unequal in everything and thereby claims exclusive power in the city. But, if the principle of superiority were strictly followed, then democrats would have to accept that, if some individual or minority group proves to surpass them in any other quality (all being equally free), then they would have to yield power to that superior claim. If it were simply a question of force and violence, then tyranny would be the most apt rival to extreme democracy.¹⁹ The same goes for oligarchs: if the sum total of the wealth belonging to the people (*demos*) were to surpass their own, then oligarchs would have to yield power to the people. As for those who make their claim on the basis of virtue, as we will see, it is not unreasonable for Aristotle to think that the mass of ordinary people may collectively (though not individually) be better than the minority of nobles. Of course, Aristotle is not interested in playing logical games,²⁰ but he does want to show that assigning sovereignty and distributing political rights according to a principle that

18 The relevant passages are to be found mainly at *Pol.* III, 10, 1281a12-37 and 13, 1283a23-b26. I rely on these passages for the rest of this section. They are also at the centre of the next section.

19 The extreme form of democracy is, according to Aristotle, the one in which the multitude and not the law is sovereign. Accordingly, such a regime comes about when the decrees of the assembly override the law (*Pol.* IV, 4, 1292a4-7). This form of democracy is an analogue to tyranny, says Aristotle, because a *demos* of this sort seeks despotic rule by not being ruled by law. For this analogy between tyranny and extreme democracy, see *Pol.* IV, 4, 1292a15-30, V, 11, 1313b32-1314a5, and V, 10, 1312b5-6: 'and the extreme democracy is in fact a tyranny [*kai gar hē dēmokratia hē teleutaia tyrannis estin*].' I. Jordović, 'Aristotle on Extreme Tyranny and Extreme Democracy', *Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 60 (2011), pp. 36-64, gave a detailed analysis of the relation between extreme democracy and tyranny.

20 The logical difficulty with the principle of superiority centres on the need for a third term with which to determine the superior factor among the incommensurables of virtue, number, education, and freedom. Both democrats and oligarchs offer such a criterion, but their common measure is none other than their own defining feature, namely, freedom for the first and wealth for the second. This tactic, of course, cannot establish a *common*

renders any superiority commensurable with every other is bound to be a dead end for everyone.²¹ Even if virtue is good in itself, this cannot be the way it justifies its sovereignty (*Pol.* III, 13, 1283b28ff).

III Book III and the Constitution of Maximum Diversity

Chapters 10 to 13 of Book III are dedicated to this difficulty in determining which group merits the right to govern and on what grounds political rights are to be acknowledged. Throughout these chapters, Aristotle works on the following scenario:²²

But suppose they were all present in the same city (I mean, for example, the good, the rich, the wellborn, and also, besides these, a multitude of citizens), will there be a dispute as to who must govern, or not? [...] After all, we are examining the question how we must distribute [power] when all these groups are present in a city at the same time (*Pol.* III, 13, 1283b1ff).²³

I call Aristotle's solution to this problem his *constitution of maximum diversity*. As mentioned earlier, the main concern of these chapters is to determine a principle for the just distribution of sovereignty among those who claim citizenship. Yet, given the number of possible claims to sovereignty, this task takes the shape of another question, namely, the question of determining the extent of those who are entitled to citizenship. Throughout these chapters, the just distribution of sovereignty and the extent of citizenship are two sides of one and the same question because political power is a good to be distributed among citizens.

measure. As we will see, Aristotle argues that the common measure must be political excellence.

21 F. Wolff, 'Justice et pouvoir (Aristote, *Politique*, III, 9-13)', *Phronesis*, 33 (1988), pp. 273-96, explores this point nicely.

22 Although suppositious here, this scenario reflects the most possible case to be found in any state. In this part of Book III (chapters 10-13), Aristotle seems to study 'the best regime in given circumstances,' which is one of the four categories of 'best regime' that make the range of political science in *Pol.* IV, 1, 1288b10-39 (see also, *Pol.* II, 9, 1269a29-32; IV, 2, 1289b12-17 and IV, 11, 1295a-25-34). The other three categories are: a) the unqualified ideal, b) the best given certain hypotheses, and c) the best in general.

23 The same scenario is formulated in a different way at the beginning of Book III, 10, 1281a11-14.

At the beginning of Book III, Aristotle announces three questions outlining the entire program of that book: what is a *polis*? (*ti estin hē polis*; 1274b33-4); what is a citizen? (*tis ho politēs esti*; 1275a1); and who is to be called citizen? (*tina chrē kalein politēn*; 1275a1). According to Aristotle, since a state is a collection of citizens,²⁴ the last two questions must mediate the first question. We must also concede that an answer to the second question must precede an answer to the third, since it is on the basis of its definition that one determines how far citizenship extends.²⁵ Aristotle sticks to this logical pattern: he defines a citizen as a person with the right to participate in the magistracy before he addresses the question of extent in chapter 5 (1277b33-1278b5). As it is, the question of determining the extent of citizenship becomes the central problem a political philosopher would resolve in an adequate theory of distributive justice. Given a population's inherent diversity (every population will include a variety of persons, each of whom will differently embody different criteria justifying a claim to political rights), the political philosopher must decide who, among those claimants, counts as citizens and how to distribute political offices among them.

In chapter 12, Aristotle makes it plain that, for a just decision on the question of extent and distribution, the principle of superiority has to be considered in a different way from that of existing parties. It has to be reconsidered without making everything commensurable with everything, and with an eye toward the proper end of the work we perform. Since the political community exists for the sake of the good life of its members, the distribution of offices must be proportional to the contribution each member makes to achieve that end. Those who make the superior contribution must have the superior offices in the constitution. To put it differently: distribution in the political domain must be done according to political excellence, which consists in exercising political power for the common interest of the city, and not for the benefit of any single portion of the population. The correct formulation of the principle of superiority would then be:

Hence, those who contribute the most to such a community [a community existing for the sake of the good life] have a larger share in the city than those who, being their equals or superiors in freedom or birth, are nevertheless their inferiors in political excellence, or than those who surpass in wealth but are surpassed in excellence (*Pol.* III, 9, 1281a4-8).

²⁴ *Pol.* III, 1, 1274b41.

²⁵ See also Wolff, 'Justice et pouvoir', p. 276, n.7.

How, then, are political offices to be justly distributed within the diversity at hand? For Aristotle, freedom and wealth are indispensable to a city's existence,²⁶ but education and virtue (or noble birth; cf. 13, 1283a34-36) provide the best means to the good life (1283a19-26).²⁷ In accordance with this perspective, Aristotle assigns the deliberative and judicial functions to the multitude in his constitution of maximum diversity. To the virtuous, he assigns those offices requiring an individual performance of power. This way of arranging a city's offices amounts to assigning the sovereignty of the entire city to the multitude because deliberative and judicial functions are the functions of sovereignty in a constitution.²⁸ Aristotle thinks this will create just distribution since 'it is possible that the many, of whom each is not a good man, can nevertheless be better, when they meet together, than the few good – not individually, but collectively' (11, 1281a42-b2). Not individual, but collective, power for the multitude becomes Aristotle's first restriction on the many. His second restriction limits the type of people (*demos*) entitled to exercise that collective power. Collective power cannot be attributed indiscriminately to all kinds of *demos* because some types of people cannot, even collectively, achieve the requisite political excellence: 'what difference is there, in fact, between some multitudes and animals?' (11, 1281b19-20).²⁹ A correct notion of the city's general interest requires that citizenship does not extend to certain types of people. This is how, in Book III, participation in the constitution is distributed, *to the utmost diversity possible*, among the free male members of the community.³⁰

26 *Pol.* III, 12, 1283a17-19: 'For there must be free men and tax payers in the city, since a city composed entirely of poor men would not be a state, any more than one composed of slaves.'

27 It is in these people of noble birth and high education that ethical and political virtue will coincide (*Pol.* III, 4.) So, they will, by definition, execute their political tasks virtuously and according to justice in the absolute sense, that is with a view toward common interest (see also *Pol.* IV, 7, 1293b1-7).

28 See note 12 above.

29 The *demos* compared with animals here must be craftsmen and hired manual labourers because, with regards to the agricultural class and its sovereignty in deliberative and judicial magistracies, Aristotle has a relatively positive attitude. The kind of democracy in which the agricultural class holds sovereignty is the most moderate kind. In this case, the constitution is governed according to laws because these people 'have a livelihood if they work, but are not able to be at leisure, so that they put the law in control and hold the minimum of assemblies necessary' (*Pol.* IV, 6, 1292b27-29).

30 Throughout chapters III, 11-13, Aristotle considers several objections to this conclusion. His intention, however, is not to be aporetic and raise doubts about the justice of this conclusion. On the contrary he endeavours to increase the cogency of his argument by showing how productive it can be in resolving some other related problems. See for exam-

IV Book VII and the Constitution of Maximum Homogeneity

When he turns his attention to the best city in Book VII, Aristotle posits that it will be built on certain 'hypotheses according to our wish' (*hupotheseis kat' euchēn*).³¹ These hypotheses concern conditions ranging from the geographical location and natural resources of the city to natural characteristics of its population and its educational system. The main principle guiding these hypotheses is the following: this city will be the happiest one, both collectively and individually. Such happiness depends on the way of life its citizens live, which is the life of virtue.

But who will be the citizens of this city? This actually is not the way the question of citizenship is asked in Book VII. 'Who the citizen will not be?' This is the way it is asked; and it is also answered in a hypothetical way. He begins by introducing a distinction between conditions necessary for a city's existence and its proper parts.³² Necessary conditions are not proper parts of a city, nor is there any community between the two elements. Farming, crafts, and manual labour are necessary for a city's existence; political offices are its proper parts because they constitute it *as* a political institution. In Book III, the problem concerning the working classes was to determine a way in which they could exhibit some political virtue. Collective participation in power was the only way Aristotle could find to compensate for their individual incapacities for virtue. Here, in Book VII, Aristotle arranges things in such a way that *this need for compensation for citizenship does not even arise*, which is the function of making an appeal to hypotheses. Aristotle seems to reason as follows: if, he suggests, a population exhibits considerable differences with regards to number, wealth, education, noble birth, and moral virtue, and if, with such a population, we have certain difficulties obtaining a minimum of political excellence indispensable for the good life, then why not simply start with a population in whom those characteristics would not be dispersed to different parts of the population, but rather concentrated in a determinate group of individuals,

ple, 11, 1281b38-1282a41 and 13, 1283b27-1284a3. The last of these passages is an elliptical expression of the idea that, since the mass of people, when gathered, can have a certain degree of virtue, legislation should take them into account and must not restrict its attention to the interest of a few nobles.

31 *Pol.* VII, 4, 1325b33-39. On different categories of the 'best' to be studied by the political philosopher, see note 23 above. Aristotle suggests that the conditions he hypothesizes will be ideal without being impossible (1325b38-39). This makes the best regime of Book VII a mixture of 'the unqualified ideal' and 'the best given certain hypotheses'.

32 *Pol.* VII, 8, 1328a21-b23. Aristotle draws the same distinction between the proper elements of the good life and the indispensable conditions for it at *EE.* I, 2, 1214b6-27.

each of whom embodies the entire set of characteristics required for the good life?³³ Reduce diversity and create your citizen material the way you wish it to be! If the life of labour and commerce is inimical to all kinds of virtue, then simply hypothesize that your citizen does not work:

[In the most nobly administered city] the citizens must not lead the life of an artisan or a tradesman, because such a life is base and opposed to virtue; nor will those who are destined to be citizens be engaged in farming, since leisure is necessary, both for the development of virtue, and for political activities (VII, 9, 1328b39-1329a2).³⁴

Notice that Aristotle does not say farmers, merchants, or artisans will not be citizens; rather, citizens will not be those. The entire point of the argument is to show that citizens should not work.³⁵ The working population of the city will be slaves, barbarians, and other foreign inhabitants (cf. VII, 10, 1330a25-33; also 9, 1329a26 and a36) because they are *naturally* deprived of every legitimate claim to the civic rights of the city they inhabit.³⁶ In other words, they are not excluded from citizenship because they are labourers (as Annas and Miller suppose); but it is because they can have no *natural* claim to be citizens, that they are made labourers.

In different chapters of Book VII, Aristotle works with the same hypothetical method: if property is a necessary condition for a life of leisure, it is enough to recall that citizens, by definition, have it while others are working for them (9, 1329a17-26); if education, noble birth and freedom are indispensable for vir-

33 J. Ober argues that Aristotle conceives an elitist state in Books VII and VIII in response to the difficulty, encountered especially in Book III, of justly apportioning rights between the aristocracy and the masses: 'Aristotle's idea of 'proportionate equality' led him into conundrum, from which he escaped only by retreat to the elitist constitution of the 'ideal state' of *Politics* (Books 7 and 8)'. See *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 295 and p. 164, n. 21. I do not share Ober's understanding of Aristotle's concerns here. Rather, as I shall explain in what follows, Aristotle's concern in Book VII is less with resolving the problem of proportionate equality than with modelling a community that generates the good life most efficiently, both for the state as a whole and for its individuals.

34 For a parallel passage, see also VII, 9, 1329a19-24, where Aristotle evidently follows a measure of exclusion that he thinks to be taken by the regimes of ancient times (*Pol.* III, 5, 1278a6-8).

35 On this point, see also Pellegrin, 'Naturalité, excellence, diversité', p. 144.

36 Those groups are deprived of any legitimate claim to citizenship either because they are natural slaves or they are not born of native citizen parents.

tue, then make the citizens have them all. This way, citizens will embody all that is necessary for the good life. So, rather than worry himself with the extent of citizenship, Aristotle, in Book VII, starts off with a pre-determined group of people, concerning whom the *question of extent does not even arise*. So, in this city, the issue at stake with distributive justice is not determining the extent of those entitled to participate in the constitution, but rather determining how to distribute different political tasks among those who are *already* citizens.³⁷ In this city, no one who is entitled to citizenship is excluded from the constitution because there is no need to do so.³⁸ Consequently, the best regime of Book VII is in no way oligarchic or unjust; it is, rather, a kind of egalitarian aristocracy.

V Conclusion

If Book VII were meant to improve on the work of Book III, then it would be easy to dismiss it as failing to resolve the problems of distributive justice.³⁹ As I have argued here, Aristotle addresses separate concerns in Books VII and VIII from those in Book III. The just distribution of citizenship occupies a central role in Book III but plays a minimal role in Book VII. What is intended to be best about the regime described in Books VII-VIII is not its claim to a just distribution of political offices. Just distribution is a pre-established aspect of the ideal city.

The city of Books VII-VIII is best because it makes the best claim to the good life. It is ideal because its citizens lay claim to happiness in the same way and to the utmost degree. By setting aside the problems of a diverse population (the population of Book III), Aristotle focuses his attention on the common ground all citizens must share for the most efficient pursuit of *eudaimonia*. Especially in Book VII, by reducing diversity to homogeneity, Aristotle describes the type of citizen and the type of city best suited for this task. It is in such a city that the concept of a city finds its most successful fulfilment: if a city is defined as 'a form of partnership of similar people (*homoioi*)' (VII, 8, 1328a35-36;

37 And these will be arranged according to natural differences like age and force at Book VII, 9 and 14, 1332b12-1333a16.

38 On this point, see also Ch. H. Kahn, 'Commentary on M. Schofield', in Patzig, ed., *Aristoteles' Politik*, p. 31 and his 'The Normative Structure of Aristotle's *Politics*' in Patzig, ed., *Aristoteles' Politik*, pp. 376-7.

39 Such an argument will also have to have an account for the chronology of the books.

see also *Pol.* IV, 11, 1295b25-26)⁴⁰ gathered in the pursuit of the good life, the best regime of Books VII-VIII offers the most efficient conditions to that end. Aristotle would never deny that a just distribution of political offices is a necessary condition for a regime to be best. Yet, he would also insist that what makes a regime best is less its success in distributive justice than the soundness of its claim to happiness. And, a state is not happy unless all its citizens are.

Today, we would find Book III more appealing than Books VII-VIII for our democratic concerns. We would say that the exclusion of labouring classes from citizenship substantially undermines the goodness of Aristotle's best regime and that the considerations of Book III still hold: if the labouring classes make a contribution to the existence of the city, they have some just claim to citizenship. We cannot just ignore such a serious question regarding justice, not even in the name of a high level of efficiency in being happy.

I believe Aristotle would reply that he *cannot* share these concerns. He would say that such a criticism fails to distinguish between conditions necessary for a city's existence and its proper parts. After all, even in Book III, the labouring population's claim for political rights is not based on their being a labouring class. It is based on their being free and equal in freedom with everybody else.

Against the 'efficiency without justice' criticism, Aristotle would insist on the justice of his project in Books VII-VIII. Nobody who is *really* entitled to citizenship is excluded from his best regime. Anybody who is a free native member of the community is acknowledged as a legitimate civic member of it. Slaves, barbarians and other foreign inhabitants are made into labourers because they cannot *really* be citizens. Things are not the other way around: these groups are not refused citizenship because they are labourers. In Aristotle's best regime, the difference between the citizen and the non-citizen is a natural one and no movement between these two groups is envisaged by Aristotle.⁴¹

40 The entire passage of Book VII, 8, 1328a35-43 makes it clear that the *aliveness* in question and the unity it implies are of an ethical sort: different people have different manners of pursuing happiness, which is one reason for different kinds of constitution. This kind of unity is to be differentiated from the unity characteristic of, e.g., a military alliance. This is the unity of an aggregate of 'the specifically same' and Aristotle reproaches Plato for reducing political community to such an aggregate (see *Pol.* II, 2, 1261a22-24 and III, 4, 1277a5).

41 Since Aristotle does not see any potential just claim for citizenship, on the part of those who are excluded, he does not make provisions, as does Plato in the *Republic*, for the movement of the naturally deserving and undeserving between the groups. I owe this

While we might like Aristotle to offer more insight into our contemporary concerns for an egalitarian government that respects diversity, we will repeatedly encounter the fact that his interest is not our own. Aristotle assumes that the entire population will not develop or pursue virtue, but he does not let this fact 'stain' his best regime. Indeed, the most Aristotle might grant to our modern investment in equality is to recognize that the best state *should* offer the best education in virtue, maximizing access to living well. He would deny that everyone is able to live well.

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