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ARISTOTLE'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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Aristotle (384–322 BCE) left his home in Macedonia and came to Athens as a young man to study in Plato's Academy. He left Athens after Plato's death nearly twenty years later, spending time in Asia Minor and in Lesbos before returning in 343 BCE to Macedonia to tutor Alexander. When Alexander took off to conquer the world, Aristotle returned to Athens to set up his own school in the Lyceum (335 BCE), where he remained until an outbreak of anti-Macedonian sentiment in Athens upon the death of Alexander (323 BCE), at which time he was charged with impiety. He fled to nearby Chalcis where he died about a year later. Aristotle's most influential political ideas connect human nature and its flourishing with political activity, ideally under a constitution in which virtuous citizens take turns at ruling and being ruled, but also non-ideally, under constitutions which "mix" oligarchic and democratic principles.

This essay falls into three parts. Section 1 describes how *Politics* Book I, which includes Aristotle's famous claims that the human being is by nature a political animal (*politikon zōon*) and that the *polis* (city-state) is natural and naturally prior to the individual, and his infamous claim that it is just to enslave those who are slaves by nature, may be connected with the rest of the *Politics*, which is about *politeiai* (constitutions). Section 2 examines Aristotle's ideal *politeia* in *Politics* VII-VIII in the light of his criticisms of other *politeiai* in Book II. Section 3 discusses non-ideal constitutions in *Politics* III-VI.

1. Political Animal

The texts Aristotle composed for publication are mostly lost, and Aristotle's surviving works are compilations by later editors of things written for use within his school. Consequently, the unclear structure of the *Politics* has led commentators to wonder if it is a unified work rather than "a loosely connected set of essays on various topics in political philosophy" (Keyt and Miller 1991: 3). But the topic of Books II-VIII is *politeiai* and their laws, and since the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) ends by saying that the next topic is *politeiai* and legislation (1180b29–81b22), the puzzle reduces to how Book I fits in, given that it does not mention these topics.

Politics I opens with an argument that since every association aims at some good and the *polis* is the supreme association, the *polis* must aim at the highest good (1252a1-8). The

discussion then immediately turns to arguing against a view defended by Plato (*Statesman* 258d–259e): that the expertises of the statesman (*politikos*), king, household-manager and slave-master are one expertise, *politikē* (political expertise) (1252a9–17, cf. 1253b15–23). Aristotle argues against this strange view to show that there is something distinctive, and distinctively valuable, about exercising *politikē*—it is not just a burdensome duty, as Plato maintained (*Republic* 347a-e, 519e), but an activity in which humans can exercise distinctive human virtue and thereby flourish.

Aristotle argues that the expertises of the *politikos*, king, householder and master differ, because the character of the ruled is by nature different in these different cases (1260a3). To this end, he emphasizes how a slave is by nature different from a free person: the slave is to his master as the body is to the soul (1254b15–19); the slave can comprehend, but not originate, orders (1254b22); the bodies of natural slaves are strong for servile labor, whereas the bodies of free men are upright (1254b26). All this makes the appropriate way to rule over a slave different from the appropriate way to rule over a free person (1255b16–20). Arguing for this difference opens the door to showing how political rule—rule over a free person—is something finer than the rule over a slave, which Aristotle likens to the use of a tool. Aristotle also ranks the "political" rule by the head of household over his wife (who is by nature able to deliberate but whose decisions are unauthoritative) and the "kingly" rule over his children (who are immature (1259b1-17)) according to this principle, which is captured in his slogan "the rule is always better when the ruled are better" (1254a25).

Plato had ranked willing rule as superior to rule by force (*Statesman* 276e) and described how wise rule can secure the willingness of the ruled (*Republic* 431e-32a) and the recognition of how the rule benefits them (463a-b), so that even if the ruled are as slaves to their rulers, they are also friends (590c-d). But Aristotle's position is that the superiority of beneficial, and recognized-to-be-beneficial-by-the-beneficiary, rule to exploitative rule is too crude a criterion, erasing the difference between the ruled, who differ by nature in how much benefit they can enjoy. Natural slaves can at best be rendered useful to their masters' ends; women can at best have their deliberation made authoritative in the sphere of the household; but free male children can be prepared for a life of citizenship. Aristotle's discussion of natural slavery makes the point that Plato envisions nothing better for the ruled than the condition of a naturally enslaved natural slave.

A further shortcoming of Plato's conception of good rule in terms of its recognized benefit by the beneficiary is that it does not show why it is good for rulers to rule. In order to show how ruling (if done well) can be an exercise of the full range of human virtues, with equals ruling and being ruled in turn, Aristotle argues that humans are by nature political (1253a2–3), that the *polis* is natural (1253a1–2), and that the *polis* is naturally prior to the family and individual (1253a18–19, 25–26).

Aristotle begins with the naturalness of the *polis*, evidenced by the evolution of cities from the most primitive unions formed for the sake of reproduction and survival—i.e. from associations that come to be for the sake of life—to an association for the sake of the good life

(1252b29-30). One might object (cf. Keyt 1987/1991) that the evolution of the *polis* may be due to human reason and craft rather than nature: nature is defined in *Physics* II.1 as a natural thing's internal principle of motion and rest in virtue of the thing it is, and this is contrasted with a craft-product, which is moved from without; indeed, Aristotle says that the *politikos* is the craftsman of the *polis* (*Politics* 1325b40–1236a5); finally, given that what's prior by nature is supposed to be capable of existing without what's posterior by nature (*Metaphysics* 1019a2-14), the evolutionary account would suggest that the family is naturally prior to the *polis*.

But perhaps the reason-nature opposition is not applicable to human beings, whose nature is rational (1134b15). *Poleis* may be natural insofar as they are the endpoints of the activities of natural human potentialities, which include our innate potentiality to form cooperative associations in order to bring about a common end (like ants and bees), and specifically to do so by speaking to each other about what is advantageous and just. (Not all things said by Aristotle to exist by nature have an internal cause of their change and rest; for example, spider webs and birds' nests are natural (*Physics* 199a7–8, 29–30—although strictly speaking, what Aristotle says is that it is natural for spiders to make webs and birds to make nests.) On this interpretation, "the *polis* exists by nature" means that the *polis* exists for the sake of the fulfillment of human nature, which is political (Miller 1995). And the natural priority of the *polis* to the family and individual citizen would be that of whole to functional part: the individual would not be a citizen and the family would not be the productive association that prepares people for citizenship that an integrated household is (cf. Nagle 2006; 1252a24-b3), without the *polis*.

Further evidence for human beings' political nature is our desire to live together even when we have no need of help from one another (cf. *Politics* 1278b20–22; cf. the claim that friendship belongs to the happiest life, as nobody would choose to live alone even if they had all of the other goods (*EN* 1169b18)). In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1097b25–1098a17) Aristotle argues that human happiness consists in the excellent exercise of our distinctive capacity for reasoning, i.e., in activities expressing the virtues of justice, moderation, courage, and wisdom. Insofar as political activity expresses these virtues, it enables us to live well in two ways: we make our communities better, and we ourselves engage in an activity that fulfills our nature. It is in this sense that the *polis* exists for the sake of living well.

What activity counts as political activity? According to Aristotle, the *politēs* (citizen) is distinguished by participating in judgment and office (1275a22–24, 1275b18–20), the function of which is to preserve the *politeia* (1276b28–30). So political activity and the activity of the *politēs* is *participating* in government—rather than, say, opposing it, trying to change it, or discussing individual and social virtue, as Socrates did. Insofar as Aristotle distinguishes citizen virtue and unqualified virtue (1276b34–36), there is room to argue about which exercises of citizen virtue are also manifestations of human virtue, and whether the value of participating in the constitution decreases as the quality of the constitution decreases.

Finally, what is the connection between our natural desire for society and the particular form our association is supposed to take for living well? Why are judging and holding office properly political, rather than, say, playing sports and going to the theater together? The *Politics*

answers by giving a specification of the idea from the *Nicomachean Ethics* that happiness consists in the excellent exercise of our rational capacities. Aristotle points to our sense of justice and our capacity for speech. Human beings have a sense of good and bad, just and unjust, and we can communicate what is beneficial or harmful, just or unjust in speech (1253a8–18). Thus it is our rationality in the sense of our capacities to value and to communicate value that are our distinctive capacities, and we achieve our distinctive good by improving and then exercising those capacities. Judging and holding office give us the opportunity to do this.

This gives us a way to answer a serious charge against Aristotle's ethics and politics: that the highly formal account of virtue in terms of the human function of reasoning in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is only given content by the account in the *Politics* of the best *politēs* in the best *politeia*, with the result that human virtue turns out to be an excellent condition for a leisured male (Adkins 1991). Although Aristotle thinks that judging and holding office belong to the leisured male "by nature," it is not because of the content of judging and holding office that this is so, but because of Aristotle's false assumptions about which kinds of people have the ability to engage in judging and holding office. Similarly, the hateful doctrine of natural slavery wrongly assumes that there are any natural slaves and that anyone exists by nature "for" anyone else, but it makes a point that clarifies our relationship to "man's best friend": of course, a good dog-owner does not exploit his dog but makes the life of his dog much better than it would be if the dog had to fend for itself, but this is compatible with the relationship's being for the sake of the owner's security or emotional well-being. And even if the owner aims at the dog's well-being and not his own, that relationship is likely to call on fewer virtues than a relationship with an equal, in which one must sometimes be willing to be ruled.

2. The Best *Politeia*

By the time Aristotle wrote his *Politics*, political thinkers of several generations had written accounts of the best *politeia*, conceived as the way of life of a *polis* (1295a40-b1). Examples of these are Plato's *Republic* (from *res publica*, the Latin for *politeia*) and *Laws*, and Xenophon's *Politeia of the Lacedaemonians*. These works describe the laws, institutional arrangements, and customs that would be causes of the way of life in an ideal *polis*. They typically begin with the physical situation, move on to the production of healthy offspring, and then to the physical and moral education of the young.

Unfortunately Aristotle's account of the best *politeia* (Books VII–VIII) is incomplete, breaking off in the middle of a discussion of musical education. By this point, Aristotle has discussed the questions of extent of the territory and the size of the population of the ideal city, as well as the character and occupations of the citizens. He answers these and other questions by reference to the twin goals of self-sufficiency (economic sustainability, rather than that which by itself makes life worth living, *EN* 1097b15) and virtue. Thus the best *politeia* requires a population just large enough for self-sufficiency but small enough that the citizens know one another; a territory large enough for self-sufficiency but small enough for the purposes of

defense and commerce (VII.4–5); whether it engages in trade and has a naval empire or not depends on how these measures contribute to or detract from the goals of self-sufficiency and virtue (VII.6). Similar considerations apply to the provision of common meals and the distribution of land (VII.10), and the layout of the city for the health and safety of its inhabitants (VII.11–12). The goal of virtue requires that citizens be both intelligent and spirited in nature (VII.7) and bars from citizenship farmers, craftsmen, laborers, and in general money-makers (VII.8–9). This restriction of citizenship puts Aristotle not only at odds with democracy, but also with Plato's *Republic*, which, although anti-democratic, considered members of the economic class ("producers") to be citizens. We will look at why Aristotle restricts citizenship below, after considering the account of education which forms the bulk of Aristotle's description of the best *politeia*.

Immediately prior to the account of education, Aristotle reiterates the goal of the *polis*: to make happy citizens (VII.13). Because happiness consists primarily in virtuous activity, the account of citizens' physical and moral education that takes up the rest of the work is directly concerned with producing virtue. Although Aristotle discusses the sort of education that is necessary and useful—instrumental towards performing one's social function, for example, and physical education—his focus is on music (*mousikē,* which also includes poetry and drama), because that, he says, has to do with how we use our leisure. Virtue pertains not only to the socially useful things we do but also to that for the sake of which we have done this work, namely those activities that are not useful for the sake of anything else, but are good in themselves. Music in fact serves three purposes: education, relaxation, and right use of leisure. First, because music represents emotion most exactly, listening to and playing the right kind of music trains us, from childhood on, to have the right kinds of emotions for virtue. An important political idea in this discussion is that participation in an activity makes one a better judge of that activity (VIII.6 1340b24–25): hence, we may infer, participation in ruling makes one a better judge of the rulers when one is being ruled. This would not only make one appreciative of good decisions, but perhaps also sympathetic of decisions that involved some loss for oneself. Second, music as relaxation refreshes us for work. Kraut (2002: 200–2) elaborates on music's third purpose, suggesting that traditional poetry expresses wisdom and listening to it is the ordinary citizen's approximation of the best human activity: philosophizing or contemplating God and the way that divine activity results in an orderly natural world.

We may fill out Aristotle's incomplete sketch of the best *politeia* by consulting Book II's discussion of actual and theoretical *politeiai* that have been put forward by others as particularly good. Studying the views of both the specialists and ordinary people on a given topic is Aristotle's standard procedure; he uses these views to formulate problems and measures his progress by his ability to solve these problems (*EN* 1145b1–8; *Metaphysics* 995a24–995b4). His discussion of actual and theoretical *politeiai* helps us to distinguish what is right and useful from what is wrong, and to see the need for a *politeia* different from those that have been proposed (1260b29–36). We can adopt the criteria by which he faults the *politeiai* surveyed in Book II to

understand what motivates the institutions of the best *politeia* he describes, and to supplement his account where he falls silent.

Politics II criticizes, among others, the best *politeia* of Plato's *Republic* (II.2–5) and the second-best politeia of Plato's *Laws* (II.6), Phaleas of Chalcedon's property-egalitarian best *politeia* (II.7), and the actual *politeiai* of Sparta (II.9), Crete (II.10), and Carthage (II.11). In these discussions, Aristotle points out the lack of fit between the virtue these *politeiai* aim at and the institutional means by which they seek to achieve it. For instance, Plato's best *polis* aims at the greatest possible unity among citizens (*Republic* 462a–d), but the guardians' holding all possessions in common in fact undermines that goal, for that policy leads to a diminution in each individual's sense of responsibility for the care of those possessions (*Politics* 1261b32–40), and deprives individuals of the opportunity to exercise generosity towards fellow-citizens (1263a40–b14). The *Republic*'s goal, "the greatest possible unity", requires a degree of unity inappropriate to the *polis*, which is a naturally plural entity (1261a16-22). Further examples: Phaleas of Chalcedon's *politeia* aims at economic equality among citizens, but unless the initial equal distribution of property is matched by a controlled population policy, there will be poor citizens (1266b8–14). Sparta's *politeia* aims at military virtue, but its inheritance laws are such that not enough men meet the property qualification to make a sizeable defense, and its policy of encouraging births increases poverty (1270a19–33140b5).

But the most general misfit is between the aim of the *politeiai*—virtuous citizens—and the reliance on institutional arrangements rather than education to bring about citizen virtue. Aristotle often criticizes the authors of these *politeiai* for misdiagnosing the cause of social ills, taking them to come from economic inequality rather than vice. Thus Phaleas' egalitarian *politeia* is built on the assumption that the source of political conflict lies in inequality of resources. But, according to Aristotle, equality in honors among men who are not equal is a significant source of political conflict (1266b37–1267a2); further, injustice is committed not only by those who lack necessities, but also by those whose desires are excessive (1267a2–17). Similarly, Aristotle thinks that Plato misdiagnosed the source of disputes over property, supposing them to come from the institution of private property when they in fact come from vice. Evidence of this is the presence of property disputes within families (1263b19–29). Finally, Aristotle notes that quite apart from whether the distribution of resources is equal or unequal, it matters how much citizens have: too much and they will live too luxuriously; too little and they will be poverty-stricken (1266b24–31). But to avoid luxury it is necessary that desires be moderated, and so a constitution must give thought to education (1266b28–34).

Aristotle's criteria for the correctness of a *politeia*—legislating for the common advantage (1283b35–1284a2) and distributing political functions according to merit—are not foregrounded in these discussions, presumably because he is only discussing *politeiai* that have a claim to be correct. (The criteria themselves are closely linked to his account of justice: *EN* Book V distinguishes two senses of justice: (1) general justice, i.e. obedience to the law, which aims (or should aim) at the common good; general justice comprises the whole of virtue insofar as other people are concerned (1129b11–26). (2) Particular justice, insofar as it is distributive, is

concerned with equality (1130b10), apportioning goods such as honor and wealth to merit (1131a22–25); insofar as it is corrective, particular justice restores to the offended party what he has lost to the offender in an unjust transaction, irrespective of their merit as persons (1132a2–3, 25–29).) However, he does raise the worry about apportioning offices to merit that the *Republic's* appointment of permanent rulers would give rise to faction from the military (1264b6–10). This is a reminder that Aristotle regards (and expects others to regard) ruling as a privilege to be shared among the deserving, and not merely as a job to be done that is shared among the qualified.

Yet the idea that citizens should share in ruling and being ruled because political participation is a good for whoever cultivates sufficient virtue to engage in it properly, is in tension with another idea we see in Aristotle: that wherever there is a ruler sufficiently superior to others, the superior should be the one to rule (1332b12–40, cf. 1288a15–29). Aristotle says such conditions don't obtain, but this just papers over the tension. Suppose that we could be ruled by gods. Insofar as they would do a better job of ruling, they should. But politics was supposed to be an arena for the expression of practical wisdom for us, and the goodness of political activity for us doesn't disappear just because there are others who can do it better.

Aristotle's best *politeia* reveals another tension in the ideal of ruling and being ruled, for he excludes from citizenship farmers, craftsmen, and in general money-makers (1328b33–1329a1). The reason for excluding the economic producers is not innate mental incapacity for ruling (as Book I says is the case for women and natural slaves) but because economic activity impairs the mind of its practitioner and leaves him too little leisure time to develop virtue and engage in political activity. Aristotle seems to think there is something about money-making that distorts one's outlook. Perhaps it is difficult for the businessman to subordinate profit to virtue when he switches to running a *polis*? Perhaps it is difficult to adjust to valuing noble action for itself and a noble collective way of life for itself when one is accustomed to acting for the sake of making a product the standards for which are set by someone else? Kraut (2002: 216–17) proposes that such occupations involve a narrowly restricted use of reason, deliberating about means to a pre-determined end, and instrumentalizing others.

In *Politics* VII.8–9, Aristotle engages in some tortured reasoning to justify the exclusion of the economic classes from citizenship. He applies to the *polis* a distinction between what is necessary for something and what is part of it. For instance, the housebuilding art is necessary for the house it produces but is not part of it. Aristotle then claims that there is nothing in common or shared between the merely necessary and the part, as there is nothing in common between the housebuilder and the house. Then, enumerating all the functions necessary for the *polis*—providing food, defense, judgment, etc.—Aristotle argues that only those who provide defense, judgment, and religious services can live a life of virtue, which is the common good shared by all the parts of the polis. But the economic producers' inability to live a life of virtue is the result of institutional arrangements which deprive them of the necessary leisure to do so. An alternative to assigning to some the life of the farmer and to others the life of a priest would be to have people alternate between economic and political activity. At one point, Aristotle expresses

the hope that the farmers will be slaves (1330a25) —presumably natural slaves—registering a preference for the *polis* to have its necessities provided for by the labor of those who are incapable of virtue rather than subjecting those capable of virtue to live a life without it. For it would seem to be an unjust arrangement that assigns the economic life to some who have the natural capacity to lead a political life, and then excludes them from political life on the grounds that their economic life doesn't allow them to develop and exercise the virtue required for political life. In aiming at happiness, Aristotle's ideal *politeia* takes on not just the task of enabling virtuous citizens to be active, but also of making those citizens virtuous who are capable of becoming virtuous.

Aristotle seems to be caught in a bind. If someone is a citizen, the *politeia* is supposed to aim at his virtue and happiness. But if his role in the *politeia* blocks him from developing virtue and happiness (as Aristotle thinks happens with economic activity), the *politeia* can hardly be said to aim at his happiness. And yet the *politeia* cannot function without his economic activity, for on Aristotle's view, virtuous and happy citizens require that someone else produce.

3. Justice, Equality, and the Mixed Constitution

Aristotle is explicit that his political theorizing about the best *politeia* involves a number of assumptions that do not hold in most circumstances, even though none of those assumptions involve impossibilities (1325b38–39). But just as an expert personal trainer should be able to advise both Olympic athletes and ordinary people who are just trying to become fitter, so too should the political expert be capable of giving political advice in a range of nonideal circumstances (1288b10–20). The political expert should be able to determine what is unqualifiedly best, but also what is best for particular cities, what works best for most cities, and what would be best given certain hypotheses—for example, hypothesizing that the city must be an oligarchy (1288b20–1289a1). This discussion of nonideal constitutions, which occupies Books IV–VI of the *Politics*, has been thought to reflect a different period of Aristotle's theorizing or his turning to a more 'realist' mode of political analysis (especially discussing stability in Book V), but it can also be read as applying principles Aristotle introduces elsewhere to more complicated circumstances (see Riesbeck 2015).

One way into the issue of nonideal constitutions is to consider Aristotle's discussion of oligarchic and democratic justice. In *Politics* III.9, Aristotle writes that both oligarchs and democrats "grasp a sort of justice" but do not grasp justice as a whole (1280a9–11). Democrats take justice to be equality, which Aristotle says is true, but only for equals; oligarchs take justice to be inequality, which Aristotle says is also true, but only for unequals (1280a11–13). We see democratic justice operative in the principle of 'one person, one vote'. Insofar as we are equal as citizens, this entitles us to an equal share of votes. The composition of an Athenian jury was determined by random lottery, where no distinctions were made between citizens, and nobody's vote counted for more than anybody else's. This is the paradigm of democratic justice. By contrast, we see oligarchic justice when stakeholders in a company are granted unequal votes on

the grounds that they own unequal numbers of shares. Because wealthy Athenians were called upon to finance diplomatic embassies, public festivals, or the building of warships (*EN* IV.2), the rich have a plausible claim for deserving unequal treatment from those who contributed less or nothing. But fair unequal treatment could be justified on criteria other than wealth: the old might deserve more respect than the young, and the knowledgeable and experienced might deserve more time to speak than the uneducated and ignorant. Athenian military generals were appointed by election rather than lottery to allow citizens to choose whom they thought was best qualified for the job. It would be *unfair* to let an incompetent person be a general if competent people were eligible. Aristocratic justice—unequal treatment on the basis of superior virtue—is thus a species of oligarchic justice.

Presumably, then, a complete account of justice would determine when democratic justice is correct and for whom, and when oligarchic justice is correct and for whom. As not every difference is a relevant difference, the person with a complete understanding of justice will know when justice requires equality and when justice requires inequality, and on what grounds. Aristotle's discussion of constitutions in *Politics* III.6–18 is primarily centered around three claims to authority and conceptions of justice: justice based on the fact that citizens are equal in their status as free (democratic justice), justice based on the fact that some citizens are richer, from better families, and contribute more than others (oligarchic justice), and justice based on the fact that some people are more virtuous than others and thus superior in judgment and deliberation (aristocratic justice; see also *EN* 1130a24–28).

So Aristotle does not think that democrats and oligarchs are simply wrong about justice; rather, they are both partially right. Nor is Aristotle's preferred aristocratic conception of justice inconsistent with democratic or oligarchic justice, as many political questions are not correctly settled by determining who has the best character (1309a39–b8). This observation helps to explain why *Politics* IV and VI argues that good, feasible constitutions are often proper mixtures of oligarchic and democratic institutions.

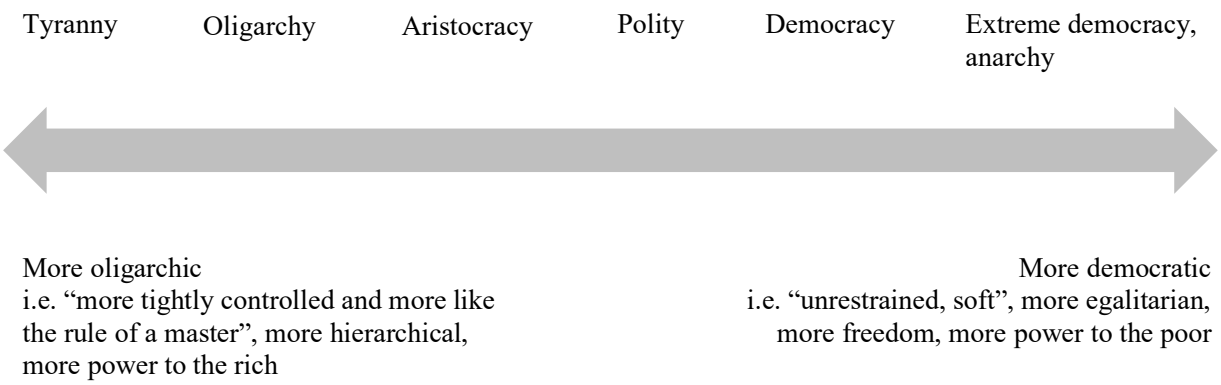
Aristotle provides two classifications of constitutions in the *Politics*. The most famous classification comes in *Politics* III.7, where Aristotle divides constitutions according to whether the number of rulers are one, few, or many (as did Herodotus (*Histories*, III.80–82) and Plato (*Statesman* 291d)); Aristotle then subdivides those constitutions depending on whether the rulers rule for the benefit of the ruled or rule for their own benefit, making three correct varieties and three deviant varieties (figure 1).

Figure 1: The simple analysis of constitutions

	Correct constitutions (rule for the benefit of the ruled)	**Deviant constitutions (rule for the benefit of the rulers)**
One person rules	Kingship	Tyranny
Few people rule	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many people rule	Polity	Democracy

But in *Politics* IV.3, Aristotle introduces a scalar way of thinking about constitutions, where there are two main kinds of constitution: oligarchy and democracy, such that aristocracy is a kind of oligarchy, and polity is a kind of democracy (1290a10–25). Although Aristotle says this is what people think, it is "truer and better to distinguish them" by saying that "two constitutions (or one) are well formed, and that the others are deviations from them" (1290a24–26). Thus on the Book IV analysis, well formed constitutions—aristocracy and polity—involve good mixtures of democratic and oligarchic principles, while the other constitutions are deviations from those constitutions insofar as some constitutions are stricter and rule more like a master, while others have a softer and looser character (1290a27–29; see figure 2).

Figure 2: The scalar anaysis of constitutions



The scalar way of analyzing constitutions is introduced because cities have a number of parts. Different ways of ordering the parts and different ways of distributing power within those parts affect the overall character of the constitution (1289b27–1290a13). Thus, Aristotle's more sophisticated analysis of constitutions will track which parts of the city are ordered according to democratic principles, oligarchic principles, or some mixture of the two.

As an example, consider the practical upshot of Aristotle's discussion of the wisdom of the crowds in III.11. There Aristotle claims that citizens are *not* equally capable of holding some important offices as individuals—not everybody has the skills to be a good general—but citizens *are* capable of engaging in forms of deliberation and judgment as part of a collective, so they should be able to participate in elections and sit on juries as equals. Aristotle thus recommends that major offices are best determined by oligarchic modes of selection which allow people to distinguish between the quality of candidates (primarily, by election), but other political positions should be open to the citizen body at large and be filled using democratic modes of selection, such as appointment by random lottery (1266a5–26; 1273a13–30; 1273b40–41; 1292b1–4; 1293b7–21; 1294b6–13; 1294b29–34; 1298b5–11; 1300a8–1300b5). So, some political offices

should have more of a democratic character, and others should have more of an oligarchic or aristocratic character.

Aristotle provides two main discussions as to how to mix a constitution well so that neither oligarchy nor democracy preponderates in the city: an institutional approach in IV.9, and an economic approach in IV.11. The institutional approach recommends three strategies for constitutional mixing (1294a35–b20):

> (1) Taking legislation from both constitutions (e.g. paying the poor to sit on juries, as democracies do, and fining the rich for not attending council sessions, as oligarchies do);
> (2) Taking the mean between both kinds of political arrangements (e.g. having neither a high property requirement for attendance at the assembly, nor having no property requirement, but having a low property requirement);
> (3) Taking elements of both political arrangements (e.g. appointment by election is oligarchic and appointment by lottery is democratic, so the mixture would be having some offices appointed by election and others by lottery)

Aristotle's strategy here reveals why the simple analysis of constitutions is insufficient for explaining the huge number of possibilities for how the offices of the city could be arranged: if a constitution is well-mixed, one could not say that a government is straightforwardly oligarchic or democratic; rather, one would have to say that it is oligarchic or democratic in some respect, even though the constitution might lean more one way than other in aggregate, with polities being slightly more democratic and aristocracies being slightly more oligarchic (Lockwood forthcoming) . This analysis also explains Aristotle's dizzying lists of the parts of the city and the many ways to arrange offices and elections (see IV.4, IV.14, IV.15), as each part provides an opportunity to include or exclude different groups, to use different methods of appointment, and to use a different conceptions of justice or merit.

The economic approach for mixing constitutions in IV.11 emphasizes the importance of having a large middle class. On Aristotle's analysis, the rich tend to favor oligarchic conceptions of justice and the poor tend to favor democratic conceptions of justice. But both the rich and the poor both have their own characteristic vices, and as the gap between them increases so too does the resentment and hostility between the groups. The solution is to ensure that the city has a large middle class who bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. The middle class are said to be in the best position for developing virtue, best learn how both to rule and be ruled, make it easier to form civic friendship and community as inequality makes friendship difficult or impossible, experience less danger and injustice as they neither plot for gain nor are objects of envy, are politically moderate and are often the best legislators, and best prevent civic conflict. Although Aristotle does not provide recommendations for how to ensure relative economic equality over time or how to correct existing wealth inequalities, cities with a large middle class will naturally tend towards a well mixed constitution which incorporates both oligarchic and democratic elements.

Aristotle's discussion of political stability and conflict (*stasis*, faction) in Book V can be seen as the natural consequence of what happens when groups within the city do not have the

share in the constitution that they think they deserve, or when a group is treated in ways they think are unfair. Although he identifies a number of more particular causes of faction, Aristotle claims that "faction is everywhere due to inequality, when unequals do not receive what is proportionate... since people generally engage in faction in pursuit of equality" (1301b26–29). So conflict will arise both when people are not treated equally but see themselves as equal, and when people are treated equally but see themselves as unequal (1302a24–28). Aristotle remarks that these desires are sometimes just, sometimes unjust (1302a28–29), reminding us that what matters for stability is how people perceive their current political situation, and not what is in fact true. So if a city has a large group of powerful, wealthy citizens, then the city will need to learn more in the direction of oligarchy to avoid dangerous factions arising (especially if they have horses, 1321a5–9). But Aristotle also says that cities have become so large now that it is hard for them to be anything other than democracies (1286b20–22), and that "when a large number of poor people are deprived of honors... the city is necessarily full of enemies" (1281b29–30). The best way to resolve these tensions is to mix the constitution in such a way that each group shares in governance in a way they think is just. As Aristotle puts it, a city should survive "not because a majority wishes it (since that could happen in a bad constitution too), but because none of the parts of the city-state… would even want another constitution" (1294b34-40). Aristotle does not say whether justice is more important than stability (or vice versa), but his analysis suggests that a good feasible constitution arises from the careful adjudication of existing conceptions of justice.

Dedication

We would like to dedicate this chapter to the memory of our former colleague and teacher Jerry Gaus, who was a co-editor of the earlier edition of this book. Although we fondly recall his saying that he had no idea what "reasonable" could possibly mean when discussing Aristotle's political philosophy, Jerry was an astute scholar of political history and an inspiration for our thinking about politics. We are lucky to have had him as an interlocutor.

Related Topics

Plato's Political Philosophy, Aquinas, Virtue Ethics and Political Philosophy, Natural Right, Equality and Inequality

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