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Rancière and Aristotle: Parapolitics, Part-y Politics, and the Institution of Perpetual Politics

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ABSTRACT: This article addresses Rancière's critique of Aristotle's political theory as parapolitics in order to show that Aristotle is a resource for developing an inclusionary notion of political community. Rancière argues that Aristotle attempts to cut off politics and merely police (maintain) the community by eliminating the political claim of the poor *by including it*. I respond to three critiques that Rancière makes of Aristotle: that he ends the political dispute by including the *demos* in the government; that he includes the free masses only incidentally because, by chance, the rule is political, not based on mastery; and that he attempts to close off politics by determining in advance what speech counts as speech. I argue that Aristotle attempts to institute this contest by accepting the incommensurable claims of arithmetic and geometric equality. Aristotle puts this conflict at the root of political life in such a way that serves Rancière's larger project of perpetuating politics.

The wrong by which politics occurs is not some flaw calling for reparation. It is the introduction of an incommensurable at the heart of the distribution of speaking bodies. This incommensurable breaks not only with the equality of profits and losses; it also ruins in advance the

project of the city ordered according to the proportion of the *cosmos* and based on the *arkhê* of the community.

—JACQUES RANCIÈRE, *Dis-agreement*

Renewed efforts to tighten borders over the last decade have recharged the critique of the nation-state whose conceptual apparatus requires what Agamben (1998) has called an included exclusion in order for the state to define itself and assert its power. On this model, some common element justifies the inclusion of each member of the community. This structure requires someone to decide who measures up to the common element, and it involves the exclusion of those judged unable to meet the standard. While Agamben focuses on the paradoxes of sovereignty, Jacques Rancière considers the problem of exclusion in terms of the logic of belonging. Following Marx's insight that we belong to the community not as individuals but as parts of parts, Rancière considers true democracy to be disruptive of neoliberal states since it is the rule of the part that has no part (6–8, 11). The part that has no part is the part that is in the community but has no rightful claim to be a part based on what it contributes to the community. This part makes a claim to belong based on arithmetic equality, in contrast to the geometric equality that requires some claim, some contribution by which one's belonging could be measured. The scandal of democracy is precisely this: that those who contribute nothing still have a part in ruling the community just by being there and so being countable. On Rancière's account, politics becomes the dispute over the border between those who have a part in the rule and those who do not.

For Rancière, politics is “that activity which turns on equality as its principle” (ix; cf. *Pol.* 1282b21, trans. Reeve). Similarly, for Aristotle the question of equality is posed in relation to the value and standard applied to given elements. Rancière claims that disagreement over this question is the site of politics, the contest over who has a claim to rule on the basis of what grounds. Aristotle agrees: “Now everyone holds that what is just is some sort of equality, and up to a point, at least, all agree with what has been determined in those philosophical works of ours dealing with ethical issues. For justice is something to someone, and they say it should be something equal to those who are equal. But equality in what and inequality in what should not be overlooked. For this involves a problem and political philosophy” (*Pol.* 1282b17–22).

There is general agreement that justice is equality, but those who say “equality” mean something different by it. This disagreement is political disagreement par excellence because it is disagreement over which equality or inequality matters for involvement in political life (x). More fundamentally, it is disagreement over which manifestations of the standard are counted as such. Rancière argues that Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes all attempt to end, resolve, or deny this dispute and thus, to close off politics itself in the establishment of community. I argue in this article that Aristotle does not deny or set aside this dispute but keeps it at the forefront of political life and can therefore, be a resource for us for developing a conception of inclusionary politics.

In the first section, I elaborate Rancière’s three criticisms of Aristotle: first, that Aristotle’s politics is based on a miscount because it claims to include the free, but this inclusion is only a ruse to justify geometrical equality and in actuality, to exclude those whose only contribution—freedom—is shared by all; second, that the free are made a part of the *polis* only incidentally because, by chance, the rule is political and not based on mastery; and third, that Aristotle attempts to close off politics by determining in advance whose speech counts as *logos*. After developing Rancière’s reading, I respond in the second section with an analysis of Aristotle’s *Politics* to argue that these critiques are not aptly applied to Aristotle but, rather, show Aristotle to share Rancière’s concern for keeping the question and contest over who belongs at the forefront of political life, a concern that I call instituting perpetual politics.

Rancière’s Critique of Aristotle: Parapolitics and the Miscount

Like Plato before him, Aristotle stands responsible, according to Rancière, for using philosophy to have done with politics. This conflict between politics and philosophy, Rancière maintains, following Arendt (1963, 1990), Plato solved with the philosopher-king. The philosopher-king brings the rule into the cavernous site of the political from outside, introducing knowledge where previously there was only contentious opinion. In the cave, people argued over what was true because they only had opinion. No one particular position could gain ascendancy over another because each person had only a view of shadow opinions to offer. When the philosopher-king returns, having seen the forms, his knowledge organizes political life. Knowledge usurps the rule from the people, establishing true order while

cutting off political discourse, which no longer serves a purpose in the face of the truth. Aristotle, by contrast, famously states that *logos* is the matter of politics (*Pol.* I.2.1253a8–18). That it is not grounded in anything outside of itself means, for Aristotle, that it itself constructs the criteria for its own existence. Such criteria are not developed until it is formed, so there is nothing external to determine it. Such self-grounding means that the contention over politics is a part of politics. Politics is made possible by itself.

Rancière sees something much more pernicious in Aristotle, since Aristotle recognizes the profundity of the dispute and seems to address it and allow it by including into the government all who have a claim. But in effect, Rancière argues, Aristotle's approach results in sidelining the dispute within the order of things as they are. Aristotle ends the dispute by supposing to include and give a part to those without a part and thereby to make them a party to the claim instead of a true disputant.

Political justice in Aristotle is “defined by a quandary” of when and whether there is equality between things and between whom this equality is at work. The political question is, What are the things that are at stake? and, as Rancière says, “Who are these whos?” (ix). Rule, a stake in determining the direction of the community, is what is at stake in political life because community is what is in common, and the role in determining it is what must be distributed. Justice is the choice of the standard by which each part will be credited with the rule (5). So the task of what Aristotle calls political life is to judge who should rule on the basis of the dual common good: the community itself and the end the community sets itself.

This determination of the common good as the standard by which rule is distributed seems to shift the good from the first sense of the common good, the community, to the second, the purpose of the community. This shift closes off the true political dispute of who belongs by raising the matter of justice beyond the calculation of what is due individuals who have community in common to the geometrical equality of proportion wherein what is due individuals is based on what they contribute to enabling the community to reach its purpose.

Rancière argues that the question of equality somehow becomes the question of equality and inequality (ix). Geometric equality asserts that you are due proportionally to what you contribute. As Aristotle writes,

But equality is of two sorts: numerical [*arithmō*] equality and equality according to merit [*axian*]. By numerical equality I mean being the

same and equal in number or magnitude. By equality according to merit I mean what is the same and equal in ratio. For example, three exceeds two and two exceeds one by a numerical amount. But four exceeds two and two exceeds one in ratio. For two and one are equal parts of four and two, since both are halves. But, though people agree that what is unqualifiedly just is what is according to merit, they still disagree, as we said earlier. For some consider themselves wholly equal if they are equal in a certain respect, whereas others claim to merit an unequal share of everything if they are unequal in a certain respect. (*Pol.* 1301b29–38)

No longer is pure numerical equality sufficient—you are one, so you have as much stake in the rule and in the community as another one. Now a person must do more than appear; one must show that one contributes to the purpose of the *polis*. To those who contribute more, more rule or more of a role is due. With the shift from exchange between persons to concern for the common good, political life becomes part-y politics, a matter of the parts that are to be rightly proportioned for the common good. Geometric equality replaces arithmetic equality when political life is grounded in the count of community parts, a count that is always a miscount (6).

The miscount, Rancière argues, originates in Aristotle's account of the various parts of the *polis*: the wealthy, the virtuous, and the free (*Pol.* 1283a15, 1283a41ff.). We can reasonably identify those who are wealthy and virtuous since these are the qualities that are proper to the parts of which they are attributes. Aristotle justifies the shift from arithmetic equality to geometric equality by inventing a quality that gives the *demos* a part: freedom. *Demos*, the Greek word meaning “the people” that is virtually synonymous with “the many,” *hoi polloi*, originates the miscount that founds political life because as those who are only there, the *demos* “attributes to itself as its proper lot the equality that belongs to all citizens” (8). By having the *demos* belong by virtue of being free, Aristotle has the *demos* take for themselves what belongs to everyone, thus acknowledging that they have no claim to rule that is proper to them (8–9). The people have only number and no unique characteristic. They are free because the rich could not reduce them to slavery, which means only that they are free because it is political rule and not mastery that governs the community (8–9). As Aristotle maintains, democracy is not solely where the many rule but where those whose only distinction is that they are free rule (*Pol.* 1290a40). If the

many who are rich ruled, we would not call it a democracy: “Rather, it is a democracy when the free and poor who are a majority have the authority to rule, and an oligarchy when the rich and well born, who are few, do” (*Pol.* 1290a30–1290b2; cf. 1279b39–1280a6).

Because Aristotle introduces this fundamental wrong—that freedom allows the *demos* to identify with the whole of the community—Aristotle is guilty, according to Rancière, of foreclosing the dispute of politics rather than recognizing the *demos* as a true disputant to the very structure of the geometric count. When Aristotle attributes freedom to the *demos*, he gives it a nominal claim, and in this way, he settles the dispute over rule while justifying the many’s practical exclusion from it. Today, undocumented workers across the country occupy the position of the part who has no part. Their claim to freedom, which has force in bringing them into rightful belonging, shows that this rationale for including the *demos* is a fabrication aimed at ending the political dispute. Rancière concludes:

The outrageous claim of the *demos* to be the whole of the community only satisfies in its own way—that of a *party*—the requirement of politics. Politics exists when the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part who have no part. This institution is the whole of politics as a specific form of connection. It defines the common of the community as a political community, in other words, as divided, as based on a wrong that escapes the arithmetic of exchange and reparation. Beyond this set-up there is no politics. There is only the order of domination or the disorder of revolt. (11–12)

It seems that Rancière’s critique rests on three key related suppositions in reading Aristotle that I want to challenge. The first is that Aristotle eclipses the wrong at the heart of politics by an act of legerdemain that overlaps politics with policing, resulting in what Rancière calls parapolitics (74). Rancière argues that Aristotle tries to overcome the threat of the part who has no part in the *polis*—no part of the rule—by bringing that part into the *polis*. Rancière explains that by bringing the *demos* into the oligarchy, the oligarchy is preserved against the threat to its existence that the *demos* presents. What results, Rancière maintains, is parapolitics, the disappearance of the conflict that is politics. This conflict is replaced by the policing of those included in the *polis*, more specifically, the government.

The second point to which I respond is that the free are a part of the *polis* only incidentally because the would-be oligarchs could not reduce the *demos* to slavery. Political rule is between equals, while master rule is between unequals, those who command and those who must obey. What Rancière calls “the natural order of domination” becomes politics when it “is interrupted by the institution of a part” of those “who have no part” (11). There is neither necessity nor reason to this interruption; it is only a disruption without order. In another passage, Rancière writes that such “equality . . . gnaws away at the natural order” (16), which gives the only possible order to society “because some people command and others obey.” Ironically, then, this natural inequality that orders society is possible because there is an underlying equality implicit in the understanding required by those to whom orders are given. This implicit equality is what “gnaws away” at the natural order and makes rule political—between equals—rather than master rule. For Rancière, the need for political rule comes by chance for Aristotle only because it is impossible for the virtuous to rule over the city forever (70): “But this natural order of things is impossible wherever you have a city where ‘all are by nature equal’ so there must be the alternation between the place of the ruler and the place of the ruled” (70); “politics exists only because there are equals and it is over them that rule is exercised. . . . If politics means anything, it is only on the basis of a perfectly peculiar capacity simply unimaginable before the existence of the *demos*: the equal capacity to rule and be ruled” (71). However, I argue that for Aristotle this shift from mastery to political rule is not some chance event that changed the community from the more efficient and more orderly rule of the household; it is the remarkable distinction of political life that Aristotle wishes to perpetuate rather than to close off by careful governmentalization.

The third point regarding parapolitics that Rancière makes is that in Aristotle, political philosophy aims to close off the activity of politics by deciding once and for all who has a claim because it determines what counts as reasoned speech. Aristotle marks the human as political based on having *logos*, in contrast to animals, who have only *phonê* or voice. For Rancière, political philosophy attempts to close off politics because it attempts to judge once and for all which speech counts as speech. Disagreement, he claims, occurs when “contention over what speaking means constitutes the very rationality of the speech situation” (xi). The question of what kind of speaking, what manner of speaking, and what content of speaking give one a stake in political life must be considered to determine who is a citizen.

Rancière argues that political philosophy is the effort to “suppress a scandal in thinking proper to the exercise of politics” (xii). Philosophy then becomes political because “regulating the rationality situation of politics is a condition for defining what belongs to philosophy” (xii).

Rancière argues that there is a duality in *logos* that shows it to be both speech and the account of speech. The conflict at the heart of the claim that *logos* is the signal of a person or a part’s stake in the community is based on a distinction inherent to *logos* as speech since it functions in two distinct ways: as understanding in order to accept the command and understanding in order to give the command. Rancière analyzes this distinction by examining the speech act of the command and the situation that surrounds it. He argues that the phrase “Do you understand?” spoken by the commander to the commanded does not at all invite the commanded to understand but means in its context, “‘There is nothing for you to understand, you don’t need to understand,’ and even, possibly, ‘It’s not up to you to understand; all you have to do is obey’” (45). Thus this question, “Do you understand?” in this context shows the distinction between *logos* that functions as understanding and determining the order and *logos* as accepting the order, which is really to say, *logos* without the power of *logos*, without the power to organize and without the power to show itself to belong and to have a part. Rancière argues that Aristotle’s politics actively excludes those who do not have the *logos* that counts as *logos*, but it does so surreptitiously and hence, more dangerously because it seduces the part who has no part to suppose that it has a part without giving it any real effectual part in the rule.

Aristotle’s Institution of Perpetual Politics

Rancière’s analysis opens up Aristotle’s text in fruitful ways. Yet I believe that we can find resources in the *Politics* for questioning the *polis* by keeping its end in question. It is in this sense that I speak of the “institution of perpetual politics.” I argue that Aristotle does not close off political life but, rather, aims to keep these concerns at the fore so that there might be more politics, more contestation over the *polis*, in light of the incommensurables that are shown to be at work there. It is precisely because of this incommensurability that political life is something that remains a concern ever before us and not an equation that can be solved. I argue that Aristotle

recognizes this incommensurability and maintains that “it is a bad thing for a constitution to be organized unqualifiedly and entirely in accord with either sort of equality” (*Pol.* 1302a2–3). By keeping the incommensurable counts in contest, Aristotle never settles the count.

Against Parapolitics: The Mixed Regime

Another way to read what Rancière calls parapolitics in Aristotle is that Aristotle thinks polity, the mixed regime, is the best regime precisely because it includes all parties with a stake in the *polis*. Rancière has described the *demos* as the part whose stake is really no stake at all because it is the one shared by everyone. Aristotle agrees that the *demos* rule when the free who are many rule (*Pol.* 1290a30–1290b6). He does not deny their claim to rule, and he makes much of the importance of political rule, which is over the free, in contrast to master rule, which makes no one free. Aristotle does not exclude this claim of freedom but maintains that justice and strategic self-preservation coincide such that it is best for each regime to include all who have a claim to rule, where the emphasis is based on those making a claim rather than the determination of the worthiness of their claim (*Pol.* 1308a3–15, 1309a26–30; cf. Nichols 1992, 102–3).

In the section of the *Politics* (V.8) where he counsels rulers to preserve their regimes, Aristotle begins with the observation that some aristocracies and oligarchies, regimes that are typically understood in terms of what they exclude, are preserved by treating those outside of the constitution well. Such treatment is not mere paternalism, which would not amount to a change in constitution. Aristotle continues by explaining how to treat those outside of the constitution well: (a) not being unjust to the nonparticipants and (b) bringing their leading men into the constitution (*Pol.* 1308a3–7). What it means to be unjust to nonparticipants is clarified by the structure of the next recommendation for how to treat those outside the constitution well: (c) not being unjust to those who love honor by depriving them of honor (*Pol.* 1308a8). As the way that you are just to those who love honor is to give them honor, so the way to be just to nonparticipants in the constitution seems to be to give them the participation that they claim is their due. Moreover, Aristotle encourages those who rule to treat one another—fellow citizens—in a democratic way, commenting that it is beneficial to extend equality to those who are similar (*Pol.* 1308a10–12).

In the related proposal at the end of the chapter, Aristotle recommends that democracies treat the rich (who in a democracy, would not have a part in the rule that is equal to their wealth) with restraint (*Pol.* 1309a14). Additionally, the rich should be discouraged from paying for public services that are considered useless, like choruses, torch races, and so forth; this expenditure would make the rich think they should have more of a share (*Pol.* 1309a17–19). In the same way, oligarchies should take care of the poor and even set up offices in such a way that the poor benefit (*Pol.* 1309a19–20). Aristotle recommends that both democracies and oligarchies give preference to those who participate least in the constitution in order to keep them from changing the constitution, even though giving them preference is *de facto* including them in the constitution and, it seems, making the constitution more like a mixed constitution. As commentators have noted, to appear or to act in a certain way to those who are excluded in order to keep them friendly to the constitution becomes strikingly similar to actually including them and treating them justly in their own eyes (Davis 1996, 90; Nichols 1992, 101). As Mary P. Nichols (1992, 100–104) has argued, encouraging the preservation of regimes by including those who are excluded amounts to changing the regime to be more inclusive (*Pol.* 1314a4off.).

Rancière argues that this is all artifice in Aristotle, whose real goal is to set politics to the side (the *para* in *parapolitics*) by encouraging an inclusion in name only, which is not true inclusion, and that Aristotle prescribes to rulers the practices that will result in a community in which the people think themselves included even though they are not. Rancière argues that Aristotle identifies political activity with the police order in order to manage politics and by managing to make it equal to policing.

Rancière draws this distinction between the management and administration of the way things are; of the present affirmation of the count; of the current order, which he calls the order of the police; and of the contestation over that order, which he calls politics. The order of police assigns bodies to their place and task and ensures “that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise” (29). The order of politics “makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise; it makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise” (30). Rancière argues that Aristotle attempts to manage politics by drawing the part that has no part, the *demos*, into the police order, where they can be managed and organized and reduced to no

real role while they are placated since they are included in the government. Rancière makes this argument with reference to the passages in the *Politics* where Aristotle describes the different ways democracy can be modified (*Pol.* IV.4, 9, 13–14; V.1, 8–9; VI.2–5). But in the treatment of polity, the mixed regime, Aristotle counsels those who rule to preserve the regime by challenging the given order, by instituting politics. Instituting politics is not, I argue, a way of policing it but, rather, a way of encouraging the self-evaluation that it prompts in the community to consider whether it is including all those with a claim.

Against Parapolitics: Political Rule

Related to this criticism from Rancière that Aristotle sets politics to the side is that there is politics, which is to say, the free have a claim that is heard, only because by chance the rule is political and not based on mastery. In this section, I argue that political rule and its defense are central, not incidental, to Aristotle's political thought. This distinction between political and master rule is crucial to Aristotle, and it makes freedom critical to his political theory. Aristotle's arguments against master rule, which I take the extreme conditions of his argument for natural slavery to show, are arguments against tyranny. In Rancière's terms, master rule amounts to policing because it denies to those who are ruled the activity of determining what constitutes the purpose that is the concern of deliberating (*ta pros ta tele* [*EN* 1112b12–13, 36; cf., inter alia, Sorabji 1981; Wiggins 1981; contra Kraut 1989]) and limits their activity to considering how to achieve the prescribed end. That is to say, master rule denies deliberation to those who are ruled just as tyranny does (*Pol.* 1254b21–23, 1295a21, 1314a6–8). By contrast, political rule is rule wherein the ruled remain free. In political rule, the ruled as well as the rulers remain concerned with politics, with the question of the purpose of the *polis*, which amounts to the question of who belongs. When the rule is political and the ruled are free, political activity encourages the dispute that is politics. Aristotle draws the distinction between political rule and master rule for this very purpose: to institute the concern for the end that defines the *polis*. Aristotle thereby encourages the activity of politics, which amounts to the continued question regarding both what amounts to living well and whether those who ought to be included in the rule on the basis of that end are included.

Aristotle's specific recommendations for preserving the constitution illustrate the constitution's nature as activity, as an ordering of the community that is susceptible to change. He counsels rulers (citizens) to avoid small violations (*Pol.* 1307b30off.); not to deceive the multitude (*Pol.* 1307b39–40); to remain vigilant concerning property assessments, which might change the citizenry in times of inflation or deflation (*Pol.* 1308a35–39); to use small honors rather than great ones to prevent any individual or group from exceeding the power over other parts involved in the constitution (*Pol.* 1308b11–18); to discourage one part of the city from prospering at a time, a situation that is avoided by giving opposite parts a share in directing the affairs of the community or mixing the poor and the rich to create a more robust middle class (*Pol.* 1308b20off.); and to make it impossible to profit from holding office (*Pol.* 1308b33). As Michael Davis (1996, 10) articulates Aristotle's diagnosis of constitutional decay, constitutions are destroyed when the truth of the constitution, whatever it takes to be living well, becomes a doctrine or an ideology. This reification of the constitution makes the rulers obsessively exclude those who are not considered a part of the *polis*. As a result, the constitution is more insistently assailed. Davis's insight is another way of saying that the constitution is destroyed when it ceases to take itself as a question. Having set the answer in ideological stone, the *polis* becomes susceptible to destruction. As a result, Davis concludes, "all political regimes are for this reason unstable" (1996, 10).

On this reading, Aristotle's advice should not be taken to end the dispute that constitutes politics but, rather, to keep it at the fore. Aristotle's solution can only be taken as parapolitics if the establishment of the regime is the end of politics, as Rancière explains, both in the sense of *telos* as purpose and in being finished and over (75). But Aristotle's contention that political activity is deliberation and its end is living well as it is manifested in the constitution suggests that this contest over politics and who should belong remains a question. This question is manifested in the concern for the preservation of the regime; it is not effaced by policing, as Rancière suggests.

This state of remaining in question is the openness that we need to keep politics a continued possibility, and it has implications for how the free are involved in the community. At *Politics* III.1, Aristotle defines citizens, the ones who have a part in the rule, in a way that does not refer to "what they contribute," in the same terms as the disputes of his time had articulated the issue. As is typical of Aristotle, he takes up the received definition and recasts it. His definition of citizens is cast in terms of activity, the ones

who engage in deliberation and rule, which is what they contribute to the rule: the activity of ruling (*Pol.* 1275a22–23, 1275b16–19, 1278a35–36, 1283b41–1284a3). A citizen participates in the activity because he or she is concerned with the purpose of the *polis*. This activity is the debate over what counts as living well. Making a claim that one belongs, as the free do, is the manifestation of this activity of deliberating, where deliberating is the activity of determining which pleasures and pains to pursue and which to avoid. By making the claim to belong, the free show that they too are political because they too make claims not only about what is pleasurable but about what is just and good. They are judging what is good when they deem it better to be a part of the rule than not. So the inclusion is not based on whether one is wealthy if the end of the constitution is wealth, or virtuous if the end is virtue, or freedom if the end is to do what one wants. The inclusion is based on the human activity that makes one concerned with living well, the end that makes the community political.

Rancière takes Aristotle's recommendations for including those who are excluded in each regime in an effort to preserve the regime and thereby transform it as a way of eradicating this debate. Rancière assumes that Aristotle aims, as the social contract theorists do, to be finished with political activity in order to get on with policing. On this conception of political life, the political work of determining the direction of the community and the members of the community is completed with the establishment of government. The government thereafter designates who belongs based on an initial determination of the standard for belonging. But Aristotle's account, I argue, encourages a community that continues to keep that standard an issue. Aristotle's treatment of political rule in contrast to master rule suggests that he is encouraging rather than discouraging this dispute.

The question that Rancière's analysis raises is whether the existence of an *arkhê*, of any rule, annihilates the contest that is politics. Aristotle's approach appears to be an attempt to reopen the contest that Plato had closed off with the philosopher-king by distinguishing political rule from master rule. Political rule, Aristotle insists, is a shared rule. Moreover, it is rule in which those who are ruled remain free because their capacity to give themselves the end (and thus to be involved in ruling) is not foreclosed by this rule as it is by mastery. In political rule, we deliberately choose to rule and be ruled (*Pol.* 1284a1–3; cf. *Pol.* I.1.1324b38–41, 1325a27–29; cf. Walsh 1987). The problem is that this shared rule tends to be usurped by one group that takes itself to be best at ruling. Aristotle writes: "In most cases

of rule of a statesman, it is true, people take turns at ruling and being ruled, because they tend by nature to be on an equal footing and to differ in nothing. Nevertheless, whenever one person is ruling and another being ruled, the one ruling tries to distinguish himself in demeanor, title, or rank from the ruled; witness what Amasis said about his footbath" (*Pol.* 1259b4–9). For evidence of this phenomenon, Aristotle takes the explanation of the rise to power of Amasis, the king of Egypt. Amasis was scorned by those at the court for his humble beginnings. In response, Amasis had his gold footbath melted down and made into an idol that people then worshiped. He refers to the footbath to explain that the position of the gold as either idol or footbath was incidental and could be as likely one or the other. Aristotle then concludes, "Male is permanently related to female in this way" (*Pol.* 1259b9). He is criticizing the refusal of some to share in the rule because they suppose that there is some element about themselves that makes them unequal and superior, when really, they are like the footbath, which is only incidentally a god.

It is because of this tendency people have to usurp the rule and Aristotle's wish to resist it that he attempts to institute the question of the rule. This explains the confluence of the preservation of the regime and justice in Aristotle's recommendations in the middle books of the *Politics* to encourage the participation of those who would be enemies of the constitution. As Aristotle's recommendations show, political life requires continued concern for the preservation of the regime by opening up this question of whether all those who should be included are.

Aristotle foregrounds this dispute, I argue, because he takes activity to be central to political life. He does not aim to determine in advance who has a claim. His accounts of citizenship and of natural slavery show, I argue, that we perform our belonging in the world, much as Rancière describes the contest that characterizes politics. It is to this point that I now turn.

Against Parapolitics: Performative Politics

When Aristotle affirms the claims of those excluded as claims that must be addressed, he affirms the performativity of the claim to belong. Since that claim is based on affirming that one has *logos*, the claim at the heart of Aristotle's argument that human beings are political by nature (*Pol.* 1253a8–18), making the claim itself affirms its truth. Instead of cutting off this dispute by purporting to include while actually excluding those

without a part in the constitution, as Rancière accuses, Aristotle makes this dispute a part of political life. Rancière's argument can find a parallel in Aristotle's treatment of natural slavery.

To return for a moment to Rancière's analysis of the rationality of disagreement that occurs in the power disparity between those who command and those who are commanded, Rancière maintains that this situation of the commander and the commanded, of the one who claims to understand and who dismisses the capacity of the other to understand, always assumes an underlying equality between them because it assumes that the commanded understand the charge that they are not equal and that they have no claim to belong. The commanded must have *logos* in order to understand that they must not speak and that they are assumed to be unable to speak. Those who command do not think that the voices of the commanded do not work. They assume that they have only voice, not speech, *logos*. The commanded are assumed to only signal their pleasures and pains and to be incapable of organizing their pleasures and pains in the effort to achieve the good and the just (44–53). While those who command deny any understanding, any *logos*, to the commanded, the commanded understand the command—that there is a command that they are expected to follow and not to question and, further, that they are assumed not to have *logos* and so not to use *logos*. By understanding the workings and expectations of the situation, the commanded demonstrate that they also have understanding of the problem, the problem that the commander is supposed to address and to which the commanded are by virtue of the speech situation assumed to have nothing to contribute (46). When the commanded understand the meaning of the utterance and the situation and thus what the commanders mean by what they say, the commanded establish—through their understanding—a common stage upon which they can speak where previously there was no space or language recognized in common. There are two ways, Rancière says, that the commanded understand and thus produce the dispute proper to politics. In the first sense, they show that they understand that the commanders lie when they claim that their language of command is a common language because they—the commanders—use the language to divide those who have language worthy of giving them a part in understanding and those who have language that is not. Those who are commanded understand that what the commanders claim, that everyone has a part in this language, is not the case. Similarly, when Jeanne Deroin, the French woman who presented herself as a candidate for legislative election

in 1849, claims that she can run, she exposes the lie of the regime that purports to include all the French people. She exposes her own exclusion. At the same time, she performs her capacity to have “a say” even though it is prohibited to her by the law. So in this second sense, the commanded in our speech situation perform their unity with the commanders while the commanders claim that the commanded do not share a common *logos* (46). By understanding, the commanded affirm the common *logos* that should make them a part, which should give them a say. In the first case, those excluded from *logos*, and the part in the regime that having *logos* would give them, make explicit their exclusion by making explicit the falsity of the assumption that there is one *logos*. In the second sense, those excluded deny the justice of their exclusion by establishing a shared space in which those who are excluded on the basis of not having *logos*, and the claim it would give them to have a part, show themselves to have *logos* and thus to have a claim to belong. One can conclude from the understanding expressed by the commanded that “the inferior has understood the superior’s order because the inferior takes part in the same community of speaking beings and so is, in this sense, their equal” (49).

Rancière draws on the example of Aventine Hill, where, as Ballanche sets the scene in a way that produces a resonance between the plebeians of Rome and the people of the July Revolution in Paris in 1829, a stage is established where those in power claim no common stage can be set (23–26, 50–54). Ballanche restages Livy’s tale of the origins of the republic as “a quarrel over the issue of speech itself” (23). In his account, the plebs show themselves to be a part of those who speak *by speaking*, by acting as those who speak, as those who have proper names, do. Meanwhile the patricians claim that no agreement can be reached and no conversation can be had “for the simple reason that plebs do not speak” (23). In response, the plebs constitute themselves as speaking beings by engaging in the very same speech acts that patricians do: “They pronounce imprecations and apotheoses; they delegate one of their number to go and consult *their* oracles; they give themselves representatives by rebaptizing them” (24). They act like people who have proper names and who speak and thus perform a common stage where before there was none. Rancière calls this joining of two worlds into one “dissensus.” As Rancière explains these strategies of performance in his essay, “Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?” “They could demonstrate that they were deprived of the rights that they had, thanks to the Declaration of Rights. And they could demonstrate, through their public

action, that they had the rights that the constitution denied to them, that they could enact those rights. . . . They acted as subjects that did not have the rights that they had and had the rights that they had not" (2004, 304).

I spend all this time with this analysis from Rancière because I think that contrary to Rancière's criticism, Aristotle could be understood to follow Rancière's analysis rather than to be a subject of this criticism. I maintain that Aristotle would agree with Rancière's argument that inclusion in politics is performed and activated. Thus one belongs by showing oneself to do that activity of those who belong—activity and habituation in Aristotle. Or one performs the truth of one's exclusion though the regime of policing claims to include those it is excluding. I make this argument by considering Aristotle's treatment of slavery and citizenship.

I maintain that Aristotle's account of the natural slave, when treated with all of the subtlety the text requires, reflects this same kind of performance of belonging. Rancière argues that Aristotle closes off this conflict through philosophy because it judges that a certain *logos* does not count as worthy of inclusion in politics. Since I do not have the space to present a complete defense and rereading of Aristotle's treatment of natural slavery, I will present three points in support of my argument that for Aristotle, we perform our belonging to the political world and any human being who makes a claim to belong would be included in political life.

First, in a direct parallel to the passages in *Politics* III.2–3 and III.6 where Aristotle considers whether lineage makes one a citizen and whether shared territory makes a political community, Aristotle rejects the criteria of the body, which nature does not always make in the same way, for a slave or a free person, and the soul, which we can know even less well than we can know the body, for determining what makes a slave. Rather, it is the activity of the slave that makes him so.

Several of Aristotle's justifications in terms of the activity that would make someone a slave suggest that there is no such human being who could be a slave. Aristotle says that it would be justifiable for someone to be a slave if he were as different from another as a body is from a soul. We know from *De Anima* that the soul is the source of life for the body and gives it direction. If one were, like a body, unable to give oneself direction, unable to give oneself life, then it would be justifiable for one to be a slave. Such a person would not even be recognizable to us.

Beyond the difficulty of such a person being recognizable as such or being useful even as a slave, Aristotle's consideration of the activity of the

slave presents more marked problems. He inserts a disjunction between one who is justifiably a slave—the one who lacks a deliberative quality, lacking *logos*—and one who is a good slave—the one who is good at deliberating. At *Politics* I.5.1254b22–23, Aristotle defines the natural slave as “he who shares in reason to the extent of understanding it, but does not have it himself” and goes so far as to say in *Politics* I.13 that “the deliberative part of the soul is entirely missing from a slave” (1260a12). Yet he says that the slave will become of more help and thus a better slave to the master when he is trained to deliberate. That the slave can be trained suggests that he does have reason that can learn and become capable of deliberating. More important, being good at deliberating makes one a good citizen and a good ruler, not at all a slave. Hence, unlike any other natural thing in Aristotle’s work, the slave who is a good slave is precisely otherwise than the slave who is recognizable as a slave. That one could be a good slave and meet this definition appears to be impossible, and therefore the good slave seems to be an empty set. Acting as one who is a good slave shows one not to be a good slave but, rather, a person who is equal and equally engaged in the political task of determining with others what constitutes happiness, which is to say, what it means to live well, the purpose of political life.

The conventional slave—because the impossibility of the natural slave follows from Aristotle’s analysis—need only follow the recommendations set out by Rancière. He must perform that he deliberates just like a citizen and therefore is unjustly made a slave. Or he must perform that he is treated like a slave—the vulgar craftsman—while proclaimed to have a part in the community. Aristotle’s insistence on activity as marking the citizen and the slave *and* political life itself shows as much.

Conclusion

Aristotle’s account of political life neither denies nor attempts to replace the incommensurability that makes politics a dispute but, rather, works to keep it continually before us so that we might respond. Aristotle’s political project carries in the political without attempting to occlude it in light of Rancière’s claim from the epigraph that the “wrong” by which politics occurs is the “introduction of an incommensurable at the heart of the distribution of speaking bodies” (19). Such an incommensurability prohibits the *polis* from being ordered analogously to the cosmos out of some

fundamental *arkhê* of the community. I argue that indeed this incommensurability is there as Rancière finds it in Aristotle and that Aristotle's account of political life is an effort to keep that incommensurability in view, neither ignoring it nor accepting it but charging forward recognizing both that not all speaking bodies will be counted and that all speaking bodies must be included. Such a work makes politics continue to be politics. In this way, I am neither denying the incommensurability of the structure nor seeking a future structure that overcomes this incommensurability but, instead, showing that the best response is to see that politics keeps upsetting the structure, keeping it and its produced incommensurability in view.

NOTE

1. This article draws on some of the insights developed in my book *Aristotle on the Nature of Community*, due out from Cambridge University Press in 2013.

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