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Is Human Virtue a Civic Virtue? A Reading of Aristotle's *Politics* 3.4

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Abstract Is the virtue of the good citizen the same as the virtue of the good man? Aristotle addresses this in *Politics* 3.4. His answer is twofold. On the one hand, (the account for Difference) they are not the same because what the citizen's virtue is depends on the constitution, what preserves it, and the role the citizen plays in it, and the good citizens in the best constitution cannot all be good men, whereas the good man's virtue is uniform. On the other hand, (the account for Identity) the two virtues are identical in the good men in the best constitution, in which all are good citizens, each possessing the ability for ruling and for being ruled. This nuanced answer can be seen as Aristotle's synthesis of a Periclean view (contribution to state blots out personal wrongs) and a Socratic view (no good citizen is without justice). Its nuances reflect the extent to which Aristotle's conceptions of good citizenship and the best constitution accommodate deviations of what is probable from the human ideal set out in his ethical writings. In the present chapter, I will first address three puzzles regarding the nuances of Aristotle's answer. Second, I will consider one question about its implication: Does Aristotle's account for Difference turn out to entail something ultra-Periclean: that no one can simultaneously be a good man and a good citizen in any constitution other than the best? I shall argue the negative. [p.94]

1 Introduction

Is the virtue of the good citizen the same as the virtue of the good man? Aristotle addresses this question in the part of his *Politics* that has come down to us as book 3, chapter 4. His answer is clear

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enough *in outline*: they are not the same without qualification (call this the Difference Thesis), but identical in the case of the good men in the best constitution (call this the Identity Thesis). More specifically, he holds these theses on the following accounts:

Aristotle's account of the Difference Thesis

The virtue of a good man and that of a good citizen cannot be the same without qualification (*Pol* 3.4 1277a12-13), both

in the sense that the former is one and complete while the latter varies, depending on the constitution (and what preserves it) and the citizen's task in it (1276b20-35), and

in the sense that citizens in the best constitution must each have the virtue of a good citizen, and yet it is impossible that they would all have the virtue of a good man (1276b35-1277a12).

Aristotle's account of the Identity Thesis

The virtue of a good man and that of a good citizen are identical in the case of the good men in the best constitution (1288a37-39),¹ in which all citizens are good citizens (1277a1-3), each possessing the ability necessary for ruling and for being ruled (1277b13-16).

Richard Kraut describes *Pol* 3.4 as “one of the most difficult and important chapters in the *Politics*”.² Its importance lies in the accounts Aristotle gives of the two Theses, which are each significant in their own ways. The Identity Thesis, of all the things that have been said in book 3, is one of three conclusions that Aristotle chooses to summarize at the end of the book. And at least in part from this Thesis, that

it is necessary that the virtue of a man and that of a citizen of the best *polis* be the same...

he infers that

...in the same way and through the same [means], both a man becomes excellent³ and one would put together (*sustêseien*) a *polis* ruled by an aristocracy or a king, so that almost the [p.95] same education and habits, too, are what make a man excellent and what make him statesmanlike or kingly. (*Pol* 3.18 1288a38-b2)⁴

¹ Aristotle introduces this topic by asking, “will there be the same virtue of someone, both an excellent citizen and an excellent man?” (1277a14-15) He states his answer, straightforwardly in the positive, in 3.5 (1278a40-b5) and the lines in 3.18 I cite in the running text.

² Kraut 2002, 358.

³ σπουδαῖος in the Greek. For the current study, in direct quotations, I will usually translate σπουδαῖος as “excellent” and ἀγαθός as “good”. However, in the passages I go on to discuss, Aristotle seems to use the two Greek adjectives interchangeably: they do not seem to track any distinction that would bear on the issues discussed. So, in paraphrase, reconstruction, and discussion of the content, I will use “good”/ἀγαθός even where “excellent”/σπουδαῖος is the word used in the corresponding passage.

⁴ Translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

Upon this, Aristotle immediately announces the need to discuss how the best constitution (*politeia*)⁵ is established. In our time, it is a striking approach to treat the two topics, as Aristotle seems to do, as more or less the same.⁶ For, nowadays, it may be more common to regard how the best constitution is established strictly a political question and regard how a person becomes good strictly a moral-psychological question. And to the extent that Aristotle infers this topical sameness from his Identity Thesis in 3.4, the unity of his political and ethical inquiries is grounded in how he takes civic and human virtue to be identical. To understand this unity, then, it is important to understand Aristotle's account for Identity in chapter 3.4.

Aristotle's account for the Difference Thesis is striking in a different way. For example, readers of *Nicomachean Ethics* books 1 and 10 or *Politics* book 7⁷ will have the following impression: the life and activity of a good man is the goal and measure of a *polis*; a *polis* exists *so that*, in it, men may lead lives exercising the good man's virtue. With this impression, we may find the account of Difference in *Politics* 3.4 surprising. It says that the citizen's virtue is not the same as the good man's partly because (the citizen's "task" (*ergon*) is the safety of the constitution (1276b20-34), so that) the citizen's virtue is relative to the type of constitution he lives in. Surely, if the good man and the constitution he lives in do not fit one another, is it not the constitution that is inadequate? Can the presence of the good man not only make the community better? What different virtue shall we ask of him? Furthermore, it seems to follow from the account of Difference that "the good man *cannot* be a good citizen (in the sense of contributing to the preservation of the constitution)" in any constitution other than the best without ceasing to be a good man, as Newman concludes on Aristotle's behalf.⁸ For example, what Aristotle calls a democracy, a deviant constitution by his light (*Pol* 5.9 1310a25-35), is preserved perhaps only if enough citizens value the freedom to do whatever they like. Since this attitude helps preserve democracy, it seems to be part of the civic 'virtue' for it, according to the account of Difference. Can a good man who finds himself in such a society, dismissing such 'freedom' with contempt, not be a good citizen, according to Aristotle?

[p.96] The Difference and Identity accounts, recall, are the two sides of Aristotle's answer on whether the virtue of the good citizen is the same as that of the good man. Each side may appear striking perhaps because Aristotle is trying to strike a delicate balance. He may want his conception of civic virtue, on the one hand, to account for constitutions that are deficient but still pass as constitutions (that are worth preserving) and, on the other, to reflect the primacy of the best

⁵ "Constitution" is how I translate *πολιτεία* whenever Aristotle uses it generically to mean the organization or the form of any polis. (Where he uses *πολιτεία* to mean constitution of a specific kind, I would translate it as "polity", following Reeve 1998.)

⁶ This unitary vision also surfaces in 8.1 1337a14-18: "The character proper to each constitution usually guards it as well as establish (*καθίστησιν*) it from the beginning (e.g. the democratic character, a democracy; and the oligarchic one, an oligarchy), and a better character is always causative of a better constitution."

⁷ For ease of citation and reference, here I will follow the traditional ordering of the eight books of the *Politics*. So, e.g. 'book 7' refers to the book that begins at 1323a14.

⁸ Newman 1887-1902, vol. 3, 155.

constitution and the virtue of a good man.⁹ As William Lambert Newman observes, in *Pol* 3.4 Aristotle seems to be holding a middle course between two pre-existing views.¹⁰ According to one, a man is good and honorable insofar as he serves the advantage of his *polis*, whatever its constitution *and* whatever personal flaws the man has. A sentiment of this kind is expressed, for example, in Pericles's Funeral Oration, as it is related in Thucydides 2.42. According to the other, it is impossible to have civic virtue without moral virtue. For example, Socrates, as reported in Xenophanes's *Memorabilia* 4.2.11, elicits his interlocutor's agreement that one cannot be a good citizen without being just. In effect, Aristotle agrees with Socrates by affirming that the virtue of a good citizen is that of the good man – but only under the *paradigm* constitution. And he accommodates the Periclean sentiment as he acknowledges the safety of the state as the function of the citizen, granting that civic virtue is relative to the given constitution, but he denies that any such virtue is *thereby* what makes one a good human being. The nuances of Aristotle's 'middle way' reflect the extent to which his conceptions in the *Politics*, of good citizenship and of the best constitution, accommodate deviations of what is probable from the human ideal set out in his *Ethics*.¹¹

Politics 3.4 is not only important but also difficult, and it is difficult precisely in its nuances. For although Aristotle's accounts for Difference and Identity are simple in outline, they are perplexing upon closer scrutiny. I aim to solve three puzzles about the two accounts. The first puzzle pertains to the account of Difference, which claims that it is *impossible* for the citizens even in the best constitution all to be good men. In what sense might it be the case? The second puzzle: How could those who are good citizens (even in the best constitution) but not good men be capable of ruling well as the account for Identity claims, given that only a good man has what qualifies one to be a ruler (in the best constitution)? Lastly, from the accounts of both Theses arises the third puzzle, which is about the a good man in the best constitution. It is part of the account of Identity that, in the best constitution, in which the good man's virtue *is* his citizen-virtue, all citizens must have the ability needed to rule *and to be ruled*. This apparently implies that the virtue of a good man, too, has to exhibit both the ability to rule and the ability for being ruled. How, then, could Aristotle consistently maintain, in his account of Difference, that the virtue of a good man differs from that of a citizen by being uniform *despite the variation in civil role*?

[p.97] After reviewing, in §2, an existing interpretation by Richard Kraut, I will take on the three puzzles one at a time in §§3-5. At the end, in §6, we will revisit a question about *Politics* 3.4's implication. Does Aristotle's account of a good citizen – in particular, his account for Difference – really entail the ultra-Periclean conclusion as Newman claims, that no one can simultaneously be a good man and a good citizen in a constitution other than the best? No, I argue, on the ground that

⁹ How much is Aristotle's *Politics* driven by what the human ideal calls for or by the observed prevalence of shortfalls? This is extensively discussed in Chap. 2 of this volume.

¹⁰ Newman 1887-1902, vol.1, 235-236.

¹¹ I include the *Eudemian Ethics* here in order to be neutral on where the 'common books' originally belong.

being a good man is also a way that contributes to the safety of a constitution of other forms – even a deviant one.

2 An existing proposal

In his well-known book on Aristotle's political thought, Richard Kraut treats the virtue of a man and the virtue of a citizen as two sorts of virtues for two classes of members in a political hierarchy: the (supreme) rulers and the subjects.¹² According to his interpretation, although the good man has in his youth also acquired the virtue of letting himself be ruled, as an adult he will always exercise his excellence as a ruler in the best *polis*. Even though civic virtue also involves some ability to rule, it qualifies its possessors to hold only minor offices, and remains different from the ability of a good man as supreme ruler.

On this reading, the second puzzle – about how power is distributed in the best constitution – is solved in the sense that a good citizen who is not a good man is capable of ruling well, but only as a minor official. And the third puzzle – about whether, in the best constitution, the good man's virtue varies according to its civic role – would not arise for this interpretation. For it supposes that the few good men would always rule over the rest of the community and never take turns to be ruled – a claim that Kraut extracts from *Pol* 3.17-18. There, Aristotle states that, if the virtue of someone or some family exceeds that of all the others, they are to be in control, not by turns, but rather without qualification (1288a15-29). If a good man in the best constitution is never ruled, then it does not belong to the virtue of a good man to exhibit a capability for being ruled. On this reading, the virtue of a good man in the best constitution does not vary according to his civil role just because *his civil role* does not vary. This way, Kraut's reading maintains the peace between the statements that virtue of a good man is uniform, on the one hand, and, on the other, that what the citizen's virtue is varies from one civil role to another.

Kraut's immediate solution to the second puzzle is plausible: for Aristotle, it belongs even to an average citizen – in a rule of free men *by* free men, anyway – to be able to participate in the governance and management of the *polis* to some extent.¹³ But Kraut bases his overall interpretation on the supposition that as long as [p.98] someone is a good man, he is never a subject in the best constitution. This is a lot to suppose and it does not sit well with Aristotle's mention of the possibility of the good man's being ruled (1277b16-19).¹⁴

Kraut rightly reads 3.4 in tandem with Aristotle's statement in 3.17-18 – since the latter passage clearly references the former. But it is not at all obvious that the *antecedent* in the statement is

¹² Kraut 2002, 364–68.

¹³ Cf. e.g. 3.1 1275b17-19, where Aristotle *defines* a citizen as one “who is eligible to participate in deliberative and judicial rule”. And by this he means, in the first instance, the position of one assemblyman among many and one juror among many, in a democracy (1275b5 ff.), which are each not of supreme authority.

¹⁴ This issue will be discussed at greater length in §4.2.

a condition inherent to the best constitution: that only one individual or one family exceeds all others in virtue. So the argument in 3.4 about the best constitution, I contend, is not likely to depend on the antecedent that there are exiguously few good men in the *polis*. Therefore, the interpretation of 3.4 should be independent from this particular, albeit possible, scenario. And there is further evidence, I will show, that Aristotle (1) leaves open the possibility for the good man to be a subject in the best constitution, (2) includes more possibilities about the political structure and constituency of the best city here than what he focuses on in the later chapters of book 3, and (3) conceives of civic virtue in a more complex way than Kraut supposes. But before we can see these points more clearly and envisage an alternative solution to the interpretative puzzles, we need first reconstruct Aristotle's argument in detail.

3 The Difference Thesis

3.1 Aristotle's Account of the Difference Thesis

In the first half of chapter 4 of book 3 of the *Politics*, Aristotle presents three considerations in favor of the thesis that the virtue of a good man and the virtue of a good citizen are not unqualifiedly the same. Each train of thoughts reveals a distinct way in which the two kinds differ. The first consideration (1276b20-34) is as follows. The common task of the citizens is "the safety of their community", i.e., of the constitution, since the community is the constitution. Therefore, a citizen qua citizen is evaluated by how much he contributes to the safety of the constitution he takes part in. In other words,

(Premise 1 = P1) The virtue of a good citizen is relative (*pros*) to his constitution.

Since there are different kinds of constitutions, potentially there are as many types of virtues as there are kinds of constitutions. That is to say,

(P2) What is required to be a good citizen is not a single virtue: it varies.

In contrast, [p.99]

(P3) A good man is so through a virtue that is one and complete:¹⁵ what it is does not vary e.g. from one constitution to another.

Therefore,

(Conclusion 1 = C1) It is possible to be a good citizen without having acquired the virtue that makes one a good man.

¹⁵ 1276b32-33: κατὰ μίαν ἀρετὴν εἶναι τὴν τελείαν.

As Kraut notices, it is not immediately clear how C1 follows from its premises; even given that one quality varies from one circumstance to another while another remains constant, it does not follow that the former is ever procurable without the latter. Nevertheless, it is clearly presupposed in the rest of the chapter, and so perhaps also here, that a good man with his distinctive virtue is much rarer than a good citizen, such that there certainly are citizens who excel in their particular public roles without being men of complete goodness. Therefore, the qualification of a good man could not be a prerequisite for being good citizens in general (but perhaps for one kind of citizen in one kind of constitution).

The second consideration, which is also about why the virtue of a good man and the virtue of a good citizen are not unqualifiedly the same, depends not on the diversity of the kinds of constitution, but rather on something about just one kind – what Aristotle calls the best constitution (1276b34-1277a4). But, in the text available to us anyway, the reasoning is presented in a rather jumbled fashion:

However, by another way it is possible for us to go through the difficulties and come upon the same account (*logos*) about the best constitution. For if (a) it is impossible for a *polis* to consist of those who are all excellent, but (b) it is needful (*dei*) that each do well according to his own task, and this from (*ap'*) virtue, since (c) it is impossible for all citizens to be similar, (d) the virtue of a citizen and a good man would not be one. (1276b36-77a1)

The second sentence can be seen as expressing a reasoning that connects four ideas, as I have labeled them. (d) is the Difference Thesis in outline. How does (c) contribute to the reasoning in this sentence? One might deduce from (b) and (c) that the virtues of good citizens as such in the best *polis* must differ (since their tasks must differ), but then it is unclear how this, in turn, supports (d). Alternatively, since (a) describes a specific case of what (c) describes in general, one could see (c) as potentially supporting (a).¹⁶ The current reading may be represented thus:

If (b) it is needful, in the best *polis*, that each citizen do well according to his own task, and this from virtue, and

if – since (c) it is impossible for all citizens to be similar – (a) it is impossible for a *polis* to consist of all good men,

then (d) the virtue of a good citizen and a good man would not be one.

If this reconstruction of Aristotle's reasoning thus far is correct, it would be obvious to ask at this point, Why, according to him – who has just even professed to be considering the best constitution – should (a) be true? In what sense may it be [p.100] impossible for a *polis* to consist entirely of good men? Though (a) follows from (c) the impossibility for all citizens to be similar, (c) in its current, highly abstract articulation, does not yet *elucidate* (a). For (c) obviously could not be true without qualification: all citizens *are* similar in some sense – e.g. they are all members of some community.

¹⁶ As does Simpson 1998, 141.

Nor could it explain (a) if it were true *in no sense other than* that it is impossible that all citizens would be good men, which is just restating (a). So, if (c) is true in such a way as to explain (a), its truth must be qualified with respect to similarity of some specific sense other the one already stated in (a). So, as we try to understand the possible truth of (a), we should also be on the lookout for an explanation of (c).

Having stated what I quoted above (1276b36-77a1), Aristotle immediately explains it thus:

For (e) it is needful that the virtue of the excellent citizen be had by everyone (for it is necessary that the *polis* be best in this way), but (f/a)¹⁷ it is impossible for that of the good man to be had by everyone, if (g) it is necessary that not all the citizens in an excellent *polis* be good.¹⁸ (1277a1-5)

Then Aristotle goes on to present what in effect appears to be yet another course of reasoning toward the Difference Thesis.

At the end of this quote, the virtue of the citizen and that of the good man are now brought to a more explicit contrast. And although we do not yet see any substantial explanation for (a/f) the impossibility for the virtue of the good man to be had by everyone or (c) the impossibility for all citizens to be similar, this passage confirms the general shape of the current reconstruction of Aristotle's reasoning. It also comprises two noteworthy developments. First, Aristotle now unambiguously affirms that (e) it is needful that the virtue of the excellent citizen be had by everyone, which is just a small step from the thought that (b) all citizens in the best *polis* must perform their task well from virtue. Therefore, although (b) was itself only posited in the protasis of a conditional, it is safe now to assume that Aristotle also affirms (b). [p.101] Second, (f) – which is (a) in paraphrase – is now subordinated as apodosis to (g). To reflect these developments, our reconstruction may be augmented this way:

(b) It is needful, in the best *polis*, that each citizen do well according to his own task, and this from virtue, so that

(e) it is needful that the virtue of the good citizen be had by every citizen in the best *polis*.

¹⁷ I mark (f/a) thus because it is virtually the same thought as (a) but paraphrased. I will henceforth state this idea in either articulation freely, so not to make an unnecessary distinction.

¹⁸ This last clause in the Greek goes, εἰ μὴ πάντας ἀναγκαῖον ἀγαθοὺς εἶναι τοὺς ἐν τῇ σπουδαίᾳ πόλει πολίτας. Grammatically, this clause admits of at least two syntactical readings that are logically distinct, with respect to the level at which its negation operates. On one reading, the negation, μὴ, negates the necessity expressed by ἀναγκαῖον. Accordingly, the clause would mean, *if it is not necessary that...* or *unless it is necessary that citizens of a good polis are all good*. This syntactical reading is adopted e.g. in Reeve 1998, 71, Simpson 1998, 141, and Newman 1887-1902, vol. 3, 158. On an alternative reading, the negation directly modifies the infinitive, εἶναι, *to be*, such that μὴ ...εἶναι together belongs to the content of what is said to be necessary, ἀναγκαῖον. This way, the logical structure would be, *if it is necessary that not...*, as the translation here reflects. This syntactical reading of the negation is also reflected e.g. in Schütrumpf 1991, 55, where μὴ...ἀναγκαῖον...is rendered as “sofern es ausgeschlossen ist...” The latter reading is to be preferred, because the conditional it yields, (f/a) *if (g)* – as rendered in the translation here – would make much better logical sense. In contrast, the former reading would commit Aristotle to an apparent *non sequitur*: “it is impossible for that of the good man to be had by everyone, if it is not necessary that all the citizens in an excellent *polis* be good”.

So, given the above,

if it is also true that – since (c) it is impossible for all citizens (in the best *polis* anyway) to be similar –

(g) it is necessary that not all the citizens in a good *polis* be good men, so that

(a/f) it is impossible for the virtue of the good man to be had by every citizen (in the best *polis* anyway),

then (d) the virtue of a good citizen and a good man would not be one.

If this reconstruction, too, is not mistaken, then yet another curiosity arises. At the beginning of the quoted passage that presents ideas (a)-(g), Aristotle says that we can arrive at the same *logos* in a second way. This leads us to expect a second argument that concludes with the Difference Thesis. But the reasoning so far concludes not *simply* with (d) – the Difference Thesis in outline – but with it only as the apodosis of a conditional, with (a/f) the impossibility for all citizens to be similar as its protasis. This is a sign that, while Aristotle sees the truth of the Difference Thesis as partly grounded in (a/f), he thinks that more need be adduced for (a/f) itself, before one can reasonably assert it. This leads us back to the puzzle, still to be solved: what is the more concrete consideration that Aristotle may have behind the idea that it is impossible – under the best constitution anyway – (a/f) for all citizens to have the virtue of the good man or (c) for all citizens to be similar ?

3.2 First Puzzle: Why, According to Aristotle, Can the Citizens in the Best Constitution Not All Be Good Men?

Why and in what sense does Aristotle think that (a/f) it is impossible that everyone – everyone who is a citizen proper in the best constitution, at any rate – would have the virtue of a good man? This claim is especially perplexing when contrasted with Book 7 and Book 8, where Aristotle speaks of the ideal *polis* consisting of only good men as its citizens. Kraut interprets the arguments here within the larger context of Book 3, the goal of which, he says, is not to construct from scratch how an ideal state ought to be (as in Books 7 and 8), but to consider the pre-existing, or ‘traditional’, political and educational institutions. Therefore, when Aristotle speaks of the best constitution here, he is referring to the best we can get as we “make do with the limited materials at hand”, such that it is indeed unrealistic to expect all men [p.102] to attain complete goodness.¹⁹ And few individuals in actual societies have attained the full virtue of a good man by Aristotle’s standard.²⁰

¹⁹ Cf. 3.7, where Aristotle says, “For while it is possible for one or a few to be outstandingly virtuous, it is difficult for a larger number to be accomplished in every virtue, but it can be so in military virtue in particular” (1279a37-39, tr. Reeve). Here Aristotle appears to be explaining why it is reasonable that when a multitude, as opposed to only one or a few, governs for the common benefit, it gets the name “polity” πολιτεία, which is also the name common to all constitutions.

²⁰ Kraut 2002, 365–66.

But this reading would render the passage a rather faulty process of reasoning toward the Difference Thesis. When Aristotle says that (f/a) it is impossible for every citizen (in the best constitution, at any rate) to have the virtue of the good man, inasmuch as he should mean that it is impossible, *in any polis that we can realistically hope for*, that every citizen would be a good man, his consideration behind (f/a) would be, we may say, a consideration of what is probable to happen. But idea (e), that everyone in the best constitution must have civic virtue, is unambiguously about what is needful for a *polis* to be of the best kind, rather than about what is probable to happen.²¹ So, insofar as (f/a) were about what is probable rather than what is needful, the things that (e) and (f/a) say, about civic virtue and about human virtue respectively, would be tangential to each other – there would be no genuine comparison. But the contrast between (e) and (f/a) is in fact precisely what Aristotle counts, in this passage, in favor of the Difference Thesis. So, given the general shape of his reasoning here, (f/a) would be irrelevant insofar as it were about some probabilistic constraint on how good a *polis* can be.

And it seems, then, insofar as (f/a) is relevant to Aristotle's reasoning here, it must in fact be about what a *polis* of the best form *requires*. But then this is indeed curious: why on earth would it be required of the *best* constitution that the virtue of the good man *not* be shared by all the citizens?²²

[p.103] A clue may be found as we read on. As noted above, Aristotle has suggested that he is giving another argument that concludes with the Difference Thesis. But what I have quoted so far concludes with this thesis as (d), only *on the condition* of (a/f). This is a sign that what I have quoted so far does not contain all Aristotle thinks need be said for the argument and, in particular, for (a/f). Although he then goes on to give a third argument, it is relevant to the second one what he says here:

²¹ It does not *per se* entail that virtue of this sort is any *more* probable to be possessed universally than the virtue of a good man. For all that has been said, (e) may as well imply that the best polis is impossible, realistically speaking.

²² My reading of (a/f) also appears to be in conflict with *Pol* 7.13, which is concerned with, *inter alia*, “from what and what sorts [of people] a *polis* is to be constituted which is to be blessed and governed well”: “However, a *polis* is excellent, at any rate, because the citizens partaking in the constitution are excellent; but all the citizens partake in the constitution we are considering. We must investigate, then, how a man becomes excellent. For even if it is possible for the citizens to be “altogether” (πάντας) excellent while they are not “each” (καθ’ ἑκαστον) excellent, the latter way is more choice-worthy: for it follows, from this obtaining in the case of each, that this obtains in the case of all.” (1332a32-38) But what is here stated as choice-worthy may be for each and every citizen to be an excellent *citizen*, and so to have the virtue of a *citizen*. This goal can already explain the call to investigate how a man becomes excellent (as man in general), at least for three considerations, some of which can indeed be ascribed to Aristotle. First, in an excellent *polis*, each of the citizens who are in the position of supreme rulers must be an excellent man and have the corresponding virtue; the virtue that makes *them* good citizens *is* the virtue of a good man (Identity Thesis). Second, if my interpretation below is right, then insofar as the constitution consists in a political rule – free men ruling free men – all citizens receive the same education that befit a free man. That is, even those who will one day become excellent men and supreme rulers would receive at least some of the training that every free youth receives. Lastly (a more speculative point), even just to train a free man to become an ‘average’ excellent citizen in a political rule – who will partake in the constitution, but perhaps only in positions of limited authority – the education should approximate, or be modeled after, that which fosters a good man's virtue.

Again, since (h) the *polis* consists of what are dissimilar, just as an animal directly of soul and body, and soul of reason and desire, and a household of man and woman, and possession of master and slave,²³ (i) in the same way, too, a *polis* consists both of all these and, in addition to these, of other dissimilar kinds; (j) it is necessary that the virtue of all citizens not be one, just as, of choral dancers, the virtue of the chorus leader and one-who-stands-by-the-chorus-leader is not one. Clearly from these, therefore, (k) the virtues [of citizen and of man] are not the same without qualification. (1277a5-13)

Aristotle's examples under (h) are examples of ruler-subject relationships, which he has discussed in *Pol* 1.2 and 1.13. It is out of these basic associations that a city-state eventually arises. The comparison with these different hierarchical associations strongly suggests that the 'additional' dissimilarity in a polis is also a ruler-subject relationship. And the most important dissimilarity among citizens qua citizens, in the best constitution, is the one between free citizens who are ruling and free citizens who are being ruled, i.e., the ruler-subject pair in a "political rule" (*politikê archê*), a relationship that is going to be discussed soon (1277b7-30).²⁴ And although (h) figures as in a premise in the new argument here, it may also be the more concrete consideration behind the thought that (c) it is impossible for all citizens (in the best *polis* anyway) to be similar. That is, by (c) he may mean that, at any time in the same polis, some citizens must be in positions to rule and some must be in the positions of being ruled. But according to the running reconstruction, (c) is supposed to support the claims that (g) it is necessary that not all the citizens in a good *polis* be good men and that (a/f) it is impossible for a *polis* to consist of all good men. How might this reading of (c) do so?

Dorothea Frede, who consciously interprets (a/f) as a consideration about what is structurally necessary for the polis to be good rather than about what is realistically best,²⁵ also finds the explanation for it in (h): "A state depends on different kinds of work. There are higher and lower functions; there are those in command [p.104] and those who obey, just as the soul rules over the body."²⁶ Indeed, any politically organized body of people – not to mention the best – seems to necessitate some hierarchy of authority and a division of labor, and there always seems to be hard labors to be done to meet the needs of a community – definitely true in 4th Century BCE Greece, and perhaps not any less true even in the most industrialized and developed parts of the world some 24 centuries later. This can explain why (c) the citizens cannot all be similar. But why does it also follow that (a/f) the citizens of a *polis* cannot all be good men? Aristotle's concern here perhaps is not just that people performing hard labors can hardly ever become decent – for which reason they might not even be citizens in Aristotle's best constitution in the first place (*Pol* 3.5) – but, more importantly, that

²³ On *why* there has to be diversity, cf. also 2.2 1261a29 and 1261b10-15.

²⁴ Given how the relationship between men who are similar in birth and freedom ought to be different from the one between masters and slaves, the mere fact that a hierarchy of power exists among citizens does not commit Aristotle to accept a permanent subjugation of one group under another, contrary to Kraut's interpretation.

²⁵ I say "consciously", because Frede chooses this interpretation despite her awareness of Aristotle's distinction between the best constitution that can be realistically achieved and the best without qualification, which receive distinct treatments in different parts of the *Politics*. See Frede 2005, 168.

²⁶ Frede 2005, 173.

men with practical wisdom naturally want to exercise their highest capabilities as a ruler, such that they would be grossly deprived should they live as ordinary subjects for the most part of their lives. A political body consisting solely of good men would thus be a state with the majority of its citizens dissatisfied at any given time, which can hardly be called best according to Aristotle's teleology of a *polis*.

Aristotle's consideration behind (a/f) is indeed a consideration of what is necessary for the *polis* to be of the best form, as suggested above. With a viable interpretation of Aristotle's reason for (a/f), it is now safe to think that he not only considers (d) hypothetically, but is presenting us with an argument that concludes with (d). The crux of this second argument for the Difference Thesis can be represented thus:

- (P4) (interpretation of (h)) A *polis* must consist of dissimilar components – those who are ruling and those who are being ruled.
- (P5) (interpretation of (a/f)) It is impossible, in the best constitution, that all of its citizens would have the virtue of a good man – for otherwise, at any given time, a majority of them would not get to fully exercise their virtue. (from P4)
- (P6) But (e) it is necessary that, in the best constitution, all citizens have the virtue of a good citizen to perform their civil role well.

Therefore,

- (C2) (d) The virtue of a good citizen and that of a good man are not one. (from P5, P6)

We are ready to reconstruct the third argument (from passage 1277a5-13, quoted above) as well. It arrives at the Difference Thesis, in fact, from one premise from each of the preceding arguments:

- (P4) A *polis* consists of dissimilar components – those who are ruling and those who are being ruled.
- (P7) (j) There must not be one and the same virtue that makes all citizens in a *polis* good citizens. (from P4)

But (as mentioned in the first argument, understood to be implicitly assumed here) [p.105]

- (P3) A person is a good man through a virtue that is one and complete: it does not vary.

Therefore,

- (C3) (k) The virtue of a citizen and the virtue of a man are not the same without qualification. (from P7, P3)

The running reconstructions show more exactly how (P3) the uniformity and completeness of the good man's virtue and (P4) the constitutive dissimilarity within a *polis* each play a crucial role in Aristotle's account of the Difference Thesis. P3 figures in the first argument, P4 figures in the second, and they both figure in the third.

4 The Identity Thesis: *Civic Virtue* (in the Best Constitution, in the Case of Ruler) = Complete Virtue

4.1 Aristotle's Account of the Identity Thesis

Having shown that the virtue of a good man and that of a good citizen are not identical without qualification, Aristotle then tries to determine what that qualification should be, and under what conditions the two kinds of virtue would coincide (1277a12-14). He considers two popular views on this issue. One view is that

(P8) The rulers and the ruled should receive different sorts of education and learn different things (1277a16-17).

The other is that

(P9) The virtue of a citizen is to have the capacity²⁷ for both ruling and being ruled well (1277a25-26).

Although these two views, as Aristotle demonstrates, could lead to nominally similar – and, by now, familiar – conclusions, that in some way the virtue of a citizen and that of a good man must be different, there appears to be a tension between them, for it seems paradoxical to think, on the one hand, that the ruling and the ruled are two separate classes of people who should have different sorts of education, and, on the other, that every proper member of a hierarchical society should know both how to rule and be ruled. Aristotle is well aware of this apparent conflict. He acknowledges that both views are widely accepted, and does not reject either of them, but instead shows that they should be understood in different contexts.

[p.106] One fundamental difference between the two views lies in their background conceptions of the ruler and the ruled. P8 takes them to be two mutually exclusive types of actual people, the former absolutely superior to the latter, such that the two groups should undergo two kinds of training and be subject to two kinds of expectations. In P9, however, the ruler and the ruled represent two kinds of functions rather than actual people, so that it is possible for the same person to be good at both. There is no genuine disagreement between the two assertions, because they are not about the same kind of ruler-subject relationship. Aristotle says that the first view concerns “the rule by a master”; it is the rule of free people over those who are able to produce the necessities of life. He thinks that these necessary tasks are servile, while the role of the free man – who is supposedly capable of rational foresight – is not to labor but to make use of the laborers: “the works of those who are ruled this way ought not be learnt by a good [man, nor by a] statesman, nor by a good citizen,” except perhaps for some personal needs (1277b2-6). In other words, the educational differentiation

²⁷ “To have the capacity...” is my translation for τὸ δύνασθαι. Generally, I use “capacity” to translate Aristotle’s δύναμις and English expressions built from “capacity” to translate Greek expressions related to δύναμις (the noun for which ‘δύνασθαι’ is the verb that means the possession of a δύναμις [for some actuality]).

mentioned is between free men and slaves, not between rulers and citizens. Since Aristotle believes in the existence of natural masters and natural slaves, for him the ruler and the ruled in a masterly (despotic) rule are different types of people, and the distinction is permanent: no one in either party in this relationship should try to play the role of the other, nor should either acquire the skill to do the tasks of the other. In this kind of ruler-subject relationship, even the virtue of an ordinary citizen in the best constitution sides with that of the ruler and not with that of the subject, because a citizen – in the best constitution at any rate – is a man free from labor-intensive works.

But there is another kind of ruler-subject relationship, in which both sides consist of free men and could be of similar births or even similar capabilities. This is “political rule” (*politikê archê*), where the tasks of the ruled are fitting for a free man, and the ruler learns to rule in fact by first being ruled. Aristotle identifies this to be the kind of rule appropriate among citizens – or at least among citizens proper²⁸ in the best constitution – for he says, “it is necessary for the good citizen to know how to be ruled and to rule, and this is the virtue of a citizen: being versed in the rule of free men in both respects” (1277b13-16). In this context, Aristotle argues, the good man too should have the capabilities for both, and not for ruling only, because a good man may also live as a subject in a political rule, namely, a free citizen who is being governed by other free citizens. Now the apparent conflict between P8 and P9 has been resolved, because it turns out that they hold only in their respective contexts. In a despotic rule – given that manual laborers do not count as real citizens – neither a good man nor a good citizen should learn the works of the ruled; as regards the political rule, in which a good citizen is expected to know how to perform both the higher and lower functions, a good man too should have both abilities. [p.107]

4.2 Second Puzzle: Blurring of Distinction

However, the virtue of a good man and the virtue of a citizen now appear so alike, that one might begin to lose sight of their difference. For if both good men and good citizens should know only the ruler’s side of the masterly rule,²⁹ and both should know both sides of the political rule,³⁰ what room is left for a distinction between their virtues, so that (P5) “it is impossible for a polis to consist of those who are all excellent”, but (P6) “it is needful that the virtue of the excellent citizen be had by everyone”? Richard Kraut’s solution is to treat all citizens as ordinary subjects and posit as their distinctive virtue “true opinion” (*doxa alêthês*) only, which suffices for holding minor offices, and is to be distinguished from a good man’s “practical wisdom” (*phronêsis*), which is required for ruling

²⁸ Manual laborers and vulgar craftsmen were also considered citizens in Aristotle’s time, since ‘extreme democracy’ arose. But Aristotle does not think a ruler should learn the skills of these men. In fact, he is reluctant to include them as citizens proper in the best constitution. See §4.2.

²⁹ Aristotle actually does not think very highly of this ‘science’ of using those who know how to produce the necessities. Those who can afford it, he says, get a steward to perform this office, while they themselves engage in political or philosophical pursuits. See *Pol* 1.7 1255b33-37.

³⁰ Cf. *Pol* 3.18 1288a39-b2.

with supreme authority. On this interpretation, Kraut takes the first view, or P8, to imply a universal dichotomy between all rulers and all citizens – “two kinds of member of the best city” that do not receive the same kind of education and never share the same roles in the “hierarchies of merit and authority.”³¹ Such mutual exclusiveness, he argues, is proleptic of the arrangement depicted in 3.17-18, namely, that the good men occupy all positions of greatest authority permanently, but the citizens only “rotate into and out of the lower positions.”³² Following Kraut’s dichotomy between citizens and statesmen, the second view, that (P9) being able to both rule and be ruled well is the virtue of a citizen, necessarily becomes a claim that excludes all statesmen. But to make sense of the idea that the ability to govern free men is also part of the virtue of a class of people none of which qualifies to exercise supreme authority, Kraut’s solution is to limit their ability to minor offices, a task for the purpose of which true opinion suffices.

Kraut’s distinction between positions of supreme authority (requiring practical wisdom) and positions of limited authority (requiring only true opinion) can plausibly explain why the virtue of a good citizen, even to the extent that it consists of some ability to rule, as defined in P9, still does not always coincide with the virtue of a good man. His reading is also justified, that only good men deserve to occupy the highest positions, and the rest of the community at best deserve the lower ones. But he is mistaken in classifying all citizens as inferior men, and in restricting the task of a good man to that of a ruler only and never to that of the ruled. The complete separation of the good man from the good citizen, and so the virtue of one from that of the other, is problematic not only as an interpretation of Aristotle, but also as a view on its own.

[p.108] First, as has been shown, Aristotle intends the difference in education stated in P8 to apply to free men and hard laborers. It does not follow that the education of a good man must be different from the one received by ordinary citizens of any sort, especially those who are free from physical labors, but Kraut seems to have overlooked this passage (1277a33-b7) when he considers P8. Since Aristotle has qualified the claim of educational disparity within the context of a despotic rule, it is at least arguable whether he thinks that the education for free and equal men who are worthy of political rule must also differ from that for a statesman. Unfortunately, Kraut does not address this issue. Second, should Kraut’s reading be true that rulers and citizens are as two mutually exclusive groups in the best constitution, it would follow that men who are best qualified (i.e., the few good men) should hold the high offices permanently and never be ruled and good citizens should at most serve in minor offices. Thus, good men and good citizens are also set apart on Kraut’s reading. He is, in effect, assuming that none of the good citizens has practical wisdom, none of them is a good man, and none of them is worthy of supreme authority. But Aristotle recognizes that some good citizens would be good rulers (1277a22-23) and some good men would sometimes be subjects (1277b16-18),

³¹ Kraut 2002, 366–68.

³² Kraut 2002, 366.

so that not only the same person is both good man and good citizen (3.5 1278a41-b6) but, specifically, the virtue of the good man also is “of necessity” the same as that of the good citizen in the best *polis* (3.18 1288a37-39). Moreover, if by some divine luck a *polis* happens to be blessed with so many equally good and worthy men as exceeding the number of high offices needed in the government,³³ it is impossible to let all of them rule permanently and simultaneously. The greater the proportion of good men in a population, the more questionable Kraut’s model becomes, for positions of supreme authority are necessarily few in any constitution. A state governed by too many rulers is not a viable state. Even in a meritocracy, if there are more equally qualified persons than needed, some or all of these good men should take turns in the high offices and let themselves be ruled by other good men periodically. Aristotle’s theory of the excellence of the good man, as he sets forth in 3.4, is even suggestive of such mobility, and should be represented as such.

However, the issue is complicated by the following argument, provided by Aristotle himself (1277a14-25):

(P8) The rulers and the ruled should receive different sorts of education and learn different things.

(P10) While the good ruler is good and “has practical wisdom” (*phronimos*), the citizen need not be so.

But since

(P11) The virtue of a good ruler and that of a good man are the same, and

(P12) The ruled is also a citizen,

(C4) The virtue of a good man is not unqualifiedly the same as that of a citizen: they would be identical in citizen of some sort but not in others.

[p.109] P11 and P12 show how the good man’s virtue and the citizen’s virtue line up differently in the ruler-subject scheme outlined in P8. But if P8, Kraut could counterargue, is really about the rule of free men over slaves and not about rulers governing citizens, why does Aristotle apply this scheme to the citizen as the ruled at all? This concern may have caused Kraut to take P8 as evidence for the mutual exclusiveness of rulers and citizens in Aristotle’s best *polis*. He may have therefore interpreted P10 to mean that no citizen ever possesses practical wisdom, and understood P11 as that a good man should always be in supreme power and never be ruled. If this reading were correct, Aristotle would maintain that the virtue of a good man and that of a citizen never coincide in any individual. His actual conclusion, however, is the opposite: (C4) “The virtue of a citizen and a man would not simply be the same, but that of a citizen of some sort would.”³⁴ He also concludes in the next chapter that this citizen must also be “a statesman, who is authoritative or has the capacity for being authoritative,

³³ Hopefully not too many, though. See §3.2.

³⁴ 1277a22-23: οὐχ ἡ αὐτὴ ἀπλῶς ἂν εἴη πολίτου καὶ ἀνδρός, τινὸς μέντοι πολίτου.

either by himself or with others, over the concern of communal affairs” (1278a40-1278b5). This shows that a citizen, in Aristotle’s mind, can also be a ruler.

So, the text itself is prompting us to avoid separating the good man and the good citizen completely when we read P10 and P11, but at the same time to keep the rule of free men over slaves in view to explain the relevance of P12 to P8. The key to this puzzle is to be mindful that manual laborers are also citizens in existing constitutions.³⁵ Aristotle acknowledges this fact, and given his view that the people who perform necessary tasks for others work like slaves and should not be admitted as proper citizens in his best polis (3.4 1277a36-1277b3, 3.5 1278a5-12), he would but admit that not everybody who is called a citizen in reality is worthy of political rule. As far as vulgar craftsmen and hired laborers are concerned, even in a *polis* where they are considered citizens, the relationship between the political rulers and them is in fact – Aristotle would not be hesitant to say – between unequals and should be permanent, like the one between masters and slaves. The education and training received by this kind of citizen is thus unfitting for a statesman or a good man, and a cobbler or carpenter does not really need the distinct capability of a ruler to excel. But there is another kind of citizen, who does not have to perform ‘servile’ tasks to earn a living. These free men, who alone may have the leisure and aptitude to take part in the public realm, are citizens in the fullest sense, and among them are the good men. Therefore, P10 is true not in the sense that no citizen ever needs practical wisdom, but in the sense that citizens, most broadly construed, do not all need practical wisdom.³⁶ Furthermore, P11, that the virtue of a good ruler and that of a good man are the same, should not be understood as a confinement of the good man’s task to holding high offices, for Aristotle himself clearly acknowledges the possibility of [p.110] a good man being a free subject, for which reason he claims that it is also the virtue of a good man to know both sides of the political rule (1277b16-19). Kraut argues that Aristotle says so only because the mature good man must have been under others’ rule when he was a child or adolescent.³⁷ But Aristotle infers from the circumstance when the good man is “*being ruled* but free”³⁸ that his virtue, *in this circumstance*, must “contain kinds in accordance with which he *rules* and is ruled” (1277b18-20, emphases mine). Since Aristotle here does speak of a kind of virtue by which its possessor rules, the possessor he speaks of as being ruled but free must be an *adult* good man. Further, when Aristotle summarizes the conclusions of chapter 4 in the next chapter, he says that the statesman in the best constitution alone, who “is

³⁵ In what sense were manual laborers citizens in e.g. classical Athens? This subject is thoroughly treated in Blok 2017.

³⁶ Kraut 2002, 367 uses the distinction between φρόνησις and δόξα ἀληθῆς in 1277b28-29 to justify a ruler-citizen dichotomy. But Aristotle has clearly formulated it only as a distinction between a good ruler and a good subject, not between a good ruler and a good citizen.

³⁷ Kraut 2002, 367.

³⁸ 1277b18: ἀρχομένου μὲν ἐλευθέρου δὲ. The participle ἀρχομένου, “being ruled”, is with the present stem, not the perfect. The imperfect aspect of this participle indicates *being ruled* not as something completed but as something that continues to happen, and the present participle is typically used in cases where the continual occurrence it indicates is concurrent to the leading claim.

authoritative or has the capacity for being authoritative”,³⁹ is the person in whom the virtue of a good man and that of an excellent citizen coincide (1278a40-1278b5). Aristotle would not describe – otherwise very misleadingly – the good man as one who is actually ruling *or has the capacity for ruling*, if he did not think that a good man as a mature adult should ever be ruled in the best constitution. In fact, as early as in book 1, Aristotle has already been explicit that “ruling and being ruled alternate in most cases of a political rule”; he even compares and contrasts this with the permanence of a man’s authority over a woman (*Pol* 1.12 1259b4-10). Therefore, the virtue of a mature good man is identical to that of a ruler *not* because he will never be a subject. Rather, it is because an excellent ruler must have practical wisdom, which constitutes moral completeness (*NE*⁴⁰ 6.13 1144b30-1145a2), and a good man is no one other than a man of such complete virtue (*Pol* 3.4 1276b33-34). This person, well qualified to be a statesman as he is, by no means lacks the ability to be a virtuous free subject, since all the other virtues are common to both the ruler and the subject in a political rule, though he will need to adjust his capabilities accordingly (1277b16-27).

It is therefore not an alien assumption for Aristotle that, in the best constitution, at least some good citizens are good men, who generally rule in high offices but might occasionally be free, private subjects. It is in these individuals that the virtue of a good man and the virtue of a good citizen coincide. However, whether because good men are rare or because a city-state cannot accommodate too many of them, or both, (P5) it is not possible for citizens to be all good men even in the best constitution. There will be citizens who are significantly inferior to the good men – and hence they never deserve to rule in high offices – but could nonetheless perform [p.111] their own tasks well. These too are good citizens, though their goodness must be different from that of a good man.

As for these other decent members of the *polis*, since Aristotle suggests that it is also part of their virtue to have the capacity for ruling, he probably thinks that they also share in ruling – although not without qualification. The ruling task for this sort of good citizens – not of all good citizens – is probably of a position of authority that is limited in one way or other, so that it does not require practical wisdom beyond true opinion. With some critical changes made to Kraut’s model, here is a hopefully more plausible picture of the best constitution to which 3.4 applies. In this best *polis*, only men free from the necessary chores are citizens, and they are all good citizens, because every one of them has the virtue sufficient for his own civil duty. Since all of them have gone through a phase of training and have performed duties under the supervision of their seniors, they have all acquired the virtue of the ruled. The distinctive element in this virtue is true opinion, which enables them not only to fare well as ordinary subjects, but also to participate in posts of limited authority. It may be an “office” (*archē*), which has authority to issue orders single-handedly (*Pol* 1299a25-28), but only one

³⁹ 1278b3-4: καὶ κύριος ἢ δυνάμενος εἶναι κύριος.

⁴⁰ For the three books common to the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics* – *EE* 4, 5, and 6, which are *NE* 5, 6, and 7, respectively – I will refer to them by their enumeration in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

that supervises activities of either limited significance, e.g. ordering how some stock of food is to be distributed (*Pol* 1299a23), or limited scope, e.g. supervising to ensure good order at *some one agora* (*Pol* 1299b16-18). The position may also be one that deals with grave matters concerning the whole *polis*, but it would be part of a *collective* body, as is an assemblyman or a juror. For example, it belongs to the assembly to deliberate whether to make war or peace and whether to form or dissolve alliances (*Pol* 1298a4-5), and it belongs to a court to decide whether someone has wronged the entire community.⁴¹ Therefore, all citizens have a share in at least some virtue for ruling as well as for being ruled. However, true opinion is inadequate for the positions of supreme authority, because such high-level ruling requires practical wisdom, the distinctive element in the virtue of a good ruler. But one who possesses practical wisdom must be a person of complete virtue, i.e., a good man, for one who is practically wise necessarily has all of ethical virtue as well (*NE* 6.13 1144b30-1145a2). Therefore, the good men alone deserve to hold high offices. If the state is short of, or has barely enough good citizens who are also good men, these rare few should always be in power. If there are more good men than there are high offices, and these elites are equal in every way relevant to being a ruler, then they should take turns holding those offices and be ordinary citizens or hold minor offices during their time off. But in either case, in the best constitution where only he who has attained practical wisdom is allowed high authority, the virtue of a good man and that of a good citizen clearly coincide in this capable statesman, whether he is actually exercising power or temporarily out of office, for it is precisely the defining element of his virtue as a good man, i.e. practical wisdom, that enables him to make his distinctive contribution of supreme governance to his community. [p.112]

5 Third Puzzle: Is the Good Man's Virtue One or Many?

Recall Aristotle's account of the Identity Thesis: The virtue of a good man and that of a good citizen are identical in the case of the good men in the best constitution, in which all citizens are good citizens, each possessing the abilities necessary for both ruling and being ruled. This account seems to imply that the virtue of a good man in the best constitution has to exhibit not only the ability to rule but also the ability for being ruled. Our Third Puzzle is, again, how Aristotle can consistently maintain that the virtue of a good man differs from that of a citizen in being uniform with respect to civil role.

The fact that a good man can sometimes be a free citizen who is not in power explains why Aristotle says that the good man should have both the ability to rule and the ability to be ruled, and that "his virtue will clearly not be of one kind" (1277b16-19). No doubt, the good man not only will do well as a supreme ruler, but also, since in his youth he has received the same training as every citizen has, it is part of his complete virtue to excel as a free subject, so that he is necessarily a good citizen ready to perform any political function in the best constitution. It does not, however, mean that

⁴¹ One of the eight courts Aristotle acknowledges in *Pol* 4.16. Another one deals with "such things as bear on the constitution" (1300b20-21).

the virtue of a good man qua good man thus varies from role to role. The good man is expected to be capable of both ruling and being ruled because, and only insofar as, he is a citizen who participates in the political rule of the best constitution. What might vary and be of more than one kind is not that which makes him a good man, but that which makes him a good citizen. It is always by having practical wisdom, and by having practical wisdom alone (the mature intellectual virtue that makes perfect all the ethical virtues), that an individual is a good man. Even though the good man does have true opinion and, for that matter, many other virtues, these constitute only the lesser virtues required by his having practical wisdom. Since the virtue of a good man or statesman is marked solely by practical wisdom, not by a plurality or a disjunction of things, it is one and complete.

However, before we get comfortable with the idea that the good man's virtue is always practical wisdom and what varies is his virtue qua citizen-virtue only, we must be able to explain Aristotle's final remarks toward the end of the chapter:

Practical wisdom is the only virtue peculiar to one who rules; for it seems that the rest are necessarily common to both the ones being ruled and the ones who rule, and practical wisdom is not the virtue of the ruled anyway, but true opinion is (1277b25-29).

If the roles of ruler and subject call for the same virtues except practical wisdom, and true opinion rather than practical wisdom is the virtue of the ruled, and if the good man, when he switches from one role to another, somehow also has to make adjustment to his capability, does it mean that he has to 'switch off' his practical wisdom when he lives as an ordinary citizen? If it does, great difficulties would follow. First, it does not seem realistic that one can choose to be temporarily less wise. Second, it is obscure why it is ever more appropriate or beneficial to be active without practical wisdom than to be active with it. In what way might practical wisdom – a state indispensable for both personal moral completeness and the steering of the best organized *polis* – ever be excessive or even unfit for non-ruler tasks, so [p.113] much so that the good man should somehow suppress or obscure it when he lives the life of an ordinary citizen? The answers to these questions are elusive. Therefore, perhaps the idea, that a good man should switch from practical wisdom to true opinion when he leaves office, cannot be defended other than sophistically. A better reading should be sought.

If practical wisdom really is the sole virtue peculiar to an excellent ruler, what and how should the good man change when he rotates into or out of power, if not switching between practical wisdom and true opinion? Although Aristotle thinks that the one who rules and the one who is ruled share all the other virtues in common, he also maintains, at 1277b17, for example, that the justice and moderation of the ruler is of a different kind. He explains this by returning to a familiar and unfortunate comparison: "a man would seem to be cowardly, if he should be brave like a brave woman is, and a woman might seem to be loquacious, if she should be as modest (*kosmios*) as a good man is" (1277b21-23). By analogy, then, a person exercising supreme authority in comparison to a common citizen needs to be bolder to bear certain possible outcomes with graver consequences when he is making a decision that will affect the entire *polis* and, when he is to lead, he must be more

assertive in voicing his opinion. It is in this sense that the ruler and the ruled should have “different kinds” of the same virtues of character. They both should have virtues such as courage and moderation. But since only the right level of boldness and assertiveness for a given circumstance are, respectively, courage and moderation,⁴² and since ruling and being ruled are circumstances that call for different levels of the same qualities, what is courageous or moderate is different for these two positions. As for the justice mentioned here at 1277b16-25, Aristotle probably means the virtue that is specifically opposed to greediness (for more than one’s due share) (*NE* 5.2 1130a14-b5).⁴³ In this case, a level of concern for private benefit (relative to the concern for common or others’ benefit) that passes as just for a subject-citizen may count as greedy insofar as one is serving in public office. Conversely, what is a just level of concern for common benefit (relative to the concern for private benefit) for a ruler may be undue for a subject-citizen, conflicting with some of the other virtues. In sum, the good man who is switching from a position of supreme power to that of a subject-citizen should exhibit different levels of quality or temperaments that are appropriate to the new context, only by which he can (continue to) be said to have virtue of character. Further, it seems to be the same one practical wisdom, possession of same one correct *logos* – “ratio”, “reason”, or “account” –, with which [p.114] the good man’s “states” (*hexeis*)⁴⁴ each amount to virtue (*NE* 6.13 1144b26-29). As such, practical wisdom enables him on every occasion to hit the mean (*NE* 2.6 1106a27-b29) and exhibits the right temperament, and one such occasion is being a subject-citizen.

But how do we reconcile this with Aristotle’s claim that practical wisdom is peculiar to one who rules, whereas true opinion is instead the virtue of the ruled? Dorothea Frede has a detailed view on the difference of virtue between the ruler and the ruled.⁴⁵ While she, too, thinks that the statesman should continue to exercise practical wisdom even in conducting his own life while being ruled by others, she argues that, as in the case of the ethical virtues, practical wisdom also has two versions, and the one appropriate for a private citizen is not the same as the one that should be exercised by a ruler. Frede takes Aristotle’s distinction between the communal good and the individual’s good in *NE* 1.2 (1094b7-10) as a hint that there are two versions of practical wisdom: one focuses on the well-being of a community as a whole; the other mainly on taking care of the individual’s own situations.

⁴² See *NE* 2.2 1104a25-30. And if what Aristotle means by “moderation” is a virtue that always concerns pleasure, then perhaps what I call assertiveness here is to be construed as e.g. pleasure-taking with respect to speaking.

⁴³ As opposed to justice in the sense of one’s *complete* virtue insofar it is in relation to another (*NE* 5.1 1129b25-27, 1130a11-13), of which anti-greed justice is a part or aspect. At 1277b16-25 Aristotle is unlikely to mean justice the complete virtue, because here he cites justice *as an example* (οἷον δικαιοσύνη) of the good man’s virtue and he mentions justice *alongside* moderation, but justice the complete virtue would *include* moderation, courage, etc. (insofar as these relate to another person as well). For more on how this and other distinctions of justice in the two *Ethics* are at work in the *Politics*, see Chap. 4 of the present volume.

⁴⁴ “State” is how I translate the difficult word *hexis* (ἕξις, for which *hexeis* is the plural) in Aristotle. For him, to have the *hexis* e.g. for speech is to have the *dunamis* (capacity) for speech in a robust sense. Every sound human being has the *dunamis* to speak in some sense, but they do not have the *hexis* for speech unless (they have learned to speak and so) can readily speak.

⁴⁵ Frede 2005, 178–80.

She also interprets Aristotle's distinction between the genders in *Pol* 1.13, at 1260a12-13, as to imply that the wisdom that could be had by a woman, unlike a man, is "without authority" (*akuros*), and she assumes this distinction to also exist between the ruler and the ruled in a polis. In other words, according to Frede's interpretation, Aristotle thinks that the good man who is taking a break from ruling should switch from sovereign wisdom to a kind of wisdom that concerns mainly the good of the individual. Even more interestingly, Frede actually offers an explanation as to why it might be beneficial to limit one's practical wisdom. She argues for the higher and lower versions of practical wisdom and of other virtues not only from the different functional requirements of the ruler and of the ruled, but also from the well-being of the statesman himself. Given the Aristotelian theme that a happy life consists in performing activities that utilize one's talents, and that the city-state exists for this end, Frede points out that, for Aristotle, the office of a supreme ruler is not only a duty, but also an opportunity that only a sizable community can offer to the most gifted individuals to actualize their highest potential. Not being able to rule, on the other hand, would be a curtailment of their happiness. In this light, the good men not just qualify, but are *entitled* to rule. It is therefore only consistent, Frede argues, for Aristotle to hold that in order not to feel entirely dissatisfied while taking his turn as a subject, a statesman should have an alternative set of lower virtues, by the activation of which he can "remain active without too much suffering from deprivation".

Frede's suggestion to keep the Aristotelian end (*telos*) of the *polis* in view and thus to not forget that ruling is as much a beneficial activity as an obligation for the capable is illuminating. For it shows how the chapter connects to the central thesis and where it lies in the overall framework of the *Politics*. But we must be careful [p.115] when attributing to Aristotle the idea of "activation of an alternative form of practical wisdom", for he thinks that, though political expertise and practical wisdom differ in being, they are the same state (*NE* 6.8 1141b23-24). Perhaps the idea is that, when it is his turn, the statesman should give it all he has got to run his state well; when it is not, he should use his wisdom to mind his own business, and let the ones in office worry about the common good. This way the good man as a subject-citizen is still able to exercise his distinguishing ability, although only to a lesser extent. He may even use his wisdom to think about public issues and discuss them with his fellowmen – as any responsible citizen should –, but the ability required to deliberate as a spectator is still far less demanding than what it takes to be actually on the spot, wrestling with factions of competing interests, making the right decisions under pressures from all sides, and taking the ultimate responsibility. The kind of understanding, prudence, fortitude, and commitment to justice required for this job is obviously not in the same league as the capability needed to merely take care of one's household and deal with other private individuals. For Aristotle – perhaps because the society of his time was considerably simpler than ours, to the effect that there were fewer choices in occupation and career than there are now – unless one is a political leader, practical wisdom at its best has little application: if a good man not in office attempts to utilize his stately virtue, he will only be reminded of its lack of application and be disappointed further. It is perhaps in this sense, then, that a

good man needs two ‘forms’ of practical wisdom or, better, to exercise his practical wisdom in two ways. But the difference, which lies in the relative level of subtlety and sophistication needed for the complexity of the situation at hand, is one of degree rather than quality. Whether this interpretation holds or not, however, the general picture is clear: the good man does not have to deactivate his practical wisdom altogether when he returns to his private life. So, when Aristotle says that true opinion is the virtue of the ruled, he says so not because the ruled should not use practical wisdom even if they have it, but because not every citizen is expected to have it, while true opinion is already sufficient for the tasks of a private subject or a minor office.

6 Can the Good Man Be a Good Citizen in a Constitution That Is not the Best?

In the best constitution, where all citizens must qualify and excel in their specific public roles, a good man and only a good man, who alone embodies the quality necessary and sufficient to govern well, qualifies to manage public affairs with supreme authority. Since practical wisdom constitutes both the complete virtue of him as an individual and the excellence with which he serves the state as a statesman, the virtue of a good man and that of a citizen coincide in him. Even if he is on a break from statesmanship, what he exercises to fare well as a subject-citizen or in [p.116] a lesser office is still his practical wisdom – though not at full capacity and though the true opinion that all the other citizens share with him would suffice.

But what about the good man who finds himself not in the best constitution but one where, say, the governing part governs to benefit itself rather than the whole community? This is not just not the best constitution – this is not even a correct one, by Aristotle’s lights (*Pol* 3.7 1279a25-32). What makes one a good citizen relative to it? What Aristotle thinks about this seems different from what he says about the subject-citizen in the best constitution. There, his point is that practical wisdom is overkill, so that some aspect or element of it would suffice. Here, however, it seems to call for something in tension with practical wisdom. Suppose the ruling part that rules for private benefit is, in addition, a multitude that is free and poor. Aristotle would call such a constitution a democracy (Cf. *Pol* 3.7 1279b4-9, 3.8 1279a15-1280a2, 4.4 1290a30-b20). Suppose this poor majority would not hesitate to profit themselves at the expense of any minority that is relatively well-off (perhaps especially those who look different from themselves). Suppose this is implicitly licensed by a conception of justice, as equality in the sense of letting the opinion of the multitude prevail, or by a love of the freedom to do whatever one likes (*Pol* 5.9 1310a25-35). So, to subscribe to such values would presumably harmonize with the rule of this governing class, and this seems to contribute to the preservation of the democracy. So, this – it seems to follow from Aristotle’s own account of Difference – would be part of what makes one a good citizen for this democracy, but it is incompatible with practical wisdom or what makes one a good man. Apparently, then, no one can simultaneously be a good man and a good citizen in a constitution that is similarly deviant. If we set

aside the sort of constitution that Aristotle would consider correct but not strictly the best,⁴⁶ Newman's remark seems validated.

However, even if it does make a citizen good (for preserving their democracy) to value the democratic 'equality' or limitless liberty mentioned above, Aristotle seems to allow *another* way to be a democracy-preserving good citizen. He thinks that educating people according to their constitution is the most important way to make the constitution last (*Pol* 5.9 1310a12-14), but he is aware that what enables those who want a democracy to have a democracy is not just whatever that pleases them (1310a19-22). He goes on to criticize limitless freedom, championed in the most democratic of democracies, as an incorrect conception of freedom (1310a27-36). It is bad for the majority to rule for private benefit *and* however they please presumably because, among other things, it would lead to instability. This implies that the education that best suits a democracy, as Emma Cohen de Lara points out in Chap. 2, Sec. 5 of the present volume, would keep that love for limitless freedom in check. It is reasonable, then, to project that a good man, with his sane sense of justice, equality, freedom, etc. can *also* help a democracy last by counteracting its unsound [p.117] extremisms. So, on this reading, the good man's virtue is *one* of the things each of which would make someone a citizen good for preserving his deviant constitution. If this is right, then, *contra* Newman, the account in *Pol* 3.4 for the Difference Thesis allows one to be a good citizen without ceasing to be a good man even in a constitution that is not the best. And yet, having the good man's virtue is not the only way that helps preserve this constitution: having merely true opinion regarding equality or freedom presumably would also help, and perhaps loving limitless freedom would help in another way, etc. It is not that every citizen in a democracy, not even every citizen e.g. in the prevailing, authoritative majority, has to be a good man to be a good citizen. Thus, the Difference remains: the virtue of a good citizen is not the same as the virtue of a good man without qualification.

As should be obvious by now, for Aristotle, while the term *virtue of a good man* always refers to practical wisdom along with the ethical virtues perfected under its guidance, *virtue of a good citizen* has no determinate designation on its own. Without sufficient context, it does not pick out one psychic state or one degree of a quality. And perhaps, as we just observed, it admits of alternatives even for a given civil role inside a given constitution that is suboptimal – one that requires counterbalancing elements to be sustainable.

7 Conclusion

Aristotle's conceptions of the virtues of character and practical wisdom, as we find them in *NE* 2 and the books common to the two *Ethics*, seem indispensable for understanding how it is as *Pol* 3.4 states,

⁴⁶ E.g. where a multitude governs for common benefit and where military virtue, but not every virtue, is widely shared by those who make up this multitude. Aristotle accepts the convention of calling it a polity (*politeia*, which is also the word for "constitution" in general). See *Pol* 3.7 1279a37-b4.

that the good man's virtue is "one and complete" but also "contain kinds in accordance with which he rules and is ruled". Therefore, it is likely that the views Aristotle espouses in his ethical writings significantly inform his conception of the good citizen and his virtue – in the paradigm case, at any rate.

Further, as we build upon existing takes on the three puzzles, we have before us a coherent and rather detailed picture of Aristotle's best constitution, drawing from various places in the *Politics*: why this *polis* cannot consist of too many good men, what training its citizens do and do not receive, what lower offices there are for which true opinion suffices, how the abundance of good men affects whether they have to rotate out of power, etc. And even in a deviant constitution, as we observed in the last section, the good man's sensible values can help make the political structure last. Thus, the *Politics* is rich with resources for fleshing out the situated life of the ideal man we find in the *Ethics* – his life in the best city but also in a deficient reality.

And to what extent do Aristotle's conceptions of good citizenship and the best constitution accommodate deviations of reality from his human ideal? His introduction of the preservation of the community as the measure of good citizenship, apparently regardless of its constitution, is no doubt remarkable. This is not a starting point we find in Aristotle's ethical writings, nor can it be easily projected from them. There may be the 'inconvenience', too, as I have indeed argued, that a good man can be [p.118] required to temporarily hand over power even in Aristotle's best constitution, because there may be more good men in a community than are required to govern it. But this is hardly the direction in which *reality* tends to deviate from the ideal. And apart from these, there seems little trace in the conceptions of good citizenship and the best constitution in *Pol* 3.4 of accommodating deviations. If I am right with Frede about the first puzzle, Aristotle denies that every citizen in the best constitution can have the good man's virtue *because* an *ideal* society would have ample opportunities for all qualified individuals to fully exercise their virtues. As for good citizenship, given that the standard for a citizen's virtue is the preservation of his community even if its constitution is incorrect, the good man – we have seen – can still be its good citizen in his virtuous way. Aristotle actually says, when he begins to go over kinds of constitutions in *Politics* book 4, that the statesman need be able to help existing constitutions as well (4.1 1289a5-7). In this way, his acknowledgement of the possibility of defect is at peace with the centrality he assigns to the healthy, so to speak. So long as a deficient specimen approximates the paradigm in such a way as to be worth preserving, as to subsist as a *constitution*, practical wisdom can promote its health. For the paradigm is paradigm, and what approximates its soundness approximates its soundness, too, *by reference to* the end (*telos*) of political expertise, which is the human good (*NE* 1.2 1094a18-b7). And to have political expertise is to have practical wisdom (*NE* 6.8 1141b23-24). Therefore, it is no surprise that Aristotle would say, "it belongs to this same practical wisdom to see both laws that are the best and laws that fit each of the constitutions" (*Pol* 4.1 1289a11-13).

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