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Scale, Anonymity, and Political *Akrasia*
in Aristotle's *Politics* 7.4



I. Introduction

Many philosophers and social scientists have held that the intensity of interpersonal interaction within a society varies inversely with the scale of a society, that is, that living in large communities increases the superficiality of our relationships. So obvious is this connection between scale and community that some thinkers have distinguished between kinds of communities in ways that are ultimately reducible to scale: Tönnies's distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Durkheim's distinction between organic and mechanical solidarity, Maine's distinction between societies defined by status and contract, and Redfield's distinction between folk and urban cultures all fit this paradigm.¹

However, as Gerald Berreman has noted, "scale" is an ambiguous term, as is "social interaction."² Does the relation between scale and social interaction simply inhere in the sheer population of a community, or is it also dependent on the density of settlement, on the heterogeneity of the population, on the extensiveness of communication networks, or on the complexity of a community's political, economic, and social organization? How reliable are the generalizations of social scientists about the relationship

1. See Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, edited by Jose Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, translated by W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1997); Henry Maine, *The Ancient Law, Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas* (1861), chapter 5; Robert Redfield, "The Folk Society," *American Journal of Sociology* 52 (1947): 293–308.

2. Gerald Berreman, *Current Anthropology* 19 (1978): 225–45.

between scale and the variable social characteristics of societies? Clearly, no mere quantity of people directly correlates with intensity of social interaction. A community of Carthusian monks is small and dense, but short on interpersonal interaction, for instance. The interesting questions lie in the other direction: at what point does scale (however we analyze that term) inhibit social interactivity (whatever that is), and how?

This essay suggests that Aristotle provides a coherent and insightful theoretical and normative framework for thinking about the relation between scale and properly *political* activity. First, Aristotle provides a defensible justification for the concept of “proper size.” Second, he develops useful criteria for evaluating the relationship between scale and social interactivity by analyzing the relation between interpersonal familiarity and successful political deliberation. The key thesis in Aristotle’s thinking about this relation is that interpersonal anonymity is destructive of the virtue of prudence, which is a requisite for political justice and the well-functioning of the *polis* as such. After developing and defending Aristotle’s principal argument for this thesis, we will outline several important implications of the argument should it prove to be sound.

II. The “Proper Size” Argument of *Politics* 7.4

The proper size of the state (or city, or *polis*) is a qualitative rather than a quantitative question for Aristotle.³ If “the city, like the individual, has a work to do, and the city which is best adapted to the fulfillment of its work is to be deemed greatest,” he argues, we should judge a city not by the number of its inhabitants, but by its ability (*dunamis*) to do that work.⁴ “A great city is not the same as a populous one.”⁵

In these brief lines, Aristotle articulates several theses. The first is that the city has a *telos*, an end or purpose following from its nature as a city. That purpose is to facilitate human *eudaimonia*, as he has previously ar-

3. I will be using the terms “city,” “state,” and “polis” interchangeably, though following Aristotle in *Politics* (hereafter *Pol.*) 5.3 and 7.4, as distinct from “nation.” Aristotle indicates these are normative terms. Cities possess a principle of unity, whereas nations lack such a principle due to their excessive size. All citations taken from Aristotle’s text refer to translations in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984).

4. *Pol.* 7.4, 1362a10–14.

5. *Pol.* 7.4, 1326a24–25.

gued.⁶ Second, he asserts that a human population is the material in which the statesman works his craft, and third, that size is an accidental rather than essential feature of the *polis* as such.⁷ One cannot create a state simply by drawing random lines on a map or by “surrounding all Peloponnesus with a wall.”⁸

It is nevertheless obvious that every city has some size, and arguably the case that size plays a determinative role in a city’s ability to accomplish its *telos* and thus to be a city at all.⁹ As Aristotle puts it, “a very populous city can rarely, if ever, be well governed.”¹⁰ This is the fourth thesis in this section, the one to be proved. While Aristotle suggests that it is substantiated by experience, he is aware that the one-time reputation of a few (now defunct) city-states is a thin basis on which to build a philosophical argument. We should keep in mind, then, that while Aristotle thinks experience will confirm the relevance of size to the well-functioning of the state, the thesis itself is established by an argument premised on the nature of the *polis* rather than by an inductive generalization.

Suitably reconstructed, the first half of Aristotle’s *Limit Argument* runs thus:

1. Organized bodies are directed towards an end (*telos*).
2. Size affects the ability of organized bodies to achieve their ends, since:
 - a. Size can cause an organized body to lose its ability to achieve its end, and
 - b. Size can cause an organized body to lose its original end by becoming a different kind of being altogether.¹¹

6. *Pol.*, 7.1, 1324a22–23: “That form of government is best in which every man, whoever he is, can act best and live happily.”

7. *Pol.*, 7.4, 1325b37–1326a4: “As the weaver or shipbuilder or any other artisan must have the material proper for his work ... so the statesman or legislator must also have materials suited to him,” including “a certain number of citizens, a country in which to place them, and the like.”

8. *Pol.*, 3.3, 1276a26–29.

9. Bodies bear the same relation to the flourishing of the state as external goods bear to the flourishing of the individual: they are limited “like any other instrument, [for] all things useful are useful for a purpose, and where there is too much they must either do harm, or at any rate be of no use, to their possessors”—unlike goods of the soul. *Pol.*, 7.1, 1323b7–10.

10. *Pol.*, 7.4, 1326a25–26: “Experience shows that a very populous city can rarely, if ever, be well governed; since all cities which have a reputation for good government have a limit for population.”

11. The passage on which premise (2) is based reads: “To the size of states there is a limit, as there is to other things, plants, animals, implements; for none of these retain their natural power when they are too large or too small, but they either wholly lose their nature, or are spoiled.” *Pol.*, 7.4, 1326a35–38.

3. Therefore, there is a rational limit to the size of organized bodies, a “proper size” for them to be.

Let us consider each premise individually.

Premise (1). Putting aside homogenous materials, we immediately see that the first premise articulates a foundational principle of Aristotelian natural philosophy.¹² Aristotle’s hylomorphic metaphysics holds that every substance is a composite of matter and form. Matter is a *substratum* that persists through change and is organized by form, whereas form is the *rational principle* which explains the structure and powers of a substance and thus accounts for the intelligibility of something as a member of a kind.¹³

Aristotle further argues that this formal organizing principle can be *internal* or *external* to the being it organizes. Being “the material of a tree” is what makes wood woody, for instance, whereas being “the material of a bed” does not conceptually specify any specific material of which beds are made (beds can be made of metal, plastic, wood, or marshmallows).¹⁴ Internally organized substances behave “always or for the most part” through change, that is, *regularly*: water freezes at 0° C, living things grow and reproduce, men act for reasons. Since chance is not a sufficient explanation for causal regularity, some other explanatory principle is required, which Aristotle calls the *final cause* or *telos* of a substance.¹⁵ The *telos* of internally organized or “natural” substances is identical with the *form* of a thing: that something has the chemical structure of water explains both why it is water and why it freezes at 0° C.¹⁶ In every case, the final cause explains the regularity of something’s behavior or powers, allowing us to classify substances (e.g., in the Periodic table) and thus to engage in practical and productive reasoning.

12. While Aristotle argues that every substance is organized in *some* way by form, Aristotle uses the term “organized body” more specifically in his biological and political writings to indicate a substance possessing parts whose operations are coordinated towards a corporate end; see *De anima* 2.1 and *Pol.* 7.3, 1326a25. Premise (1) clearly refers to non-homogenous (“corporate”) organisms as opposed to homogenous substances, such as copper.

13. Aristotle, *Physics* (hereafter *Phys.*) 2.3, 194b23–35.

14. Thus, Aristotle quips in *Phys.* 2, “man is born from man, but not bed from bed. That is why people say that the figure is not the nature of a bed, but the wood is—if the bed sprouted not a bed but wood would come up.” See the discussion at 193a9–193b21.

15. See *Phys.* 2.8, 198b32–199a8.

16. See *Phys.* 2.1, 192b13–15 for the definition of natural substance, and 2.7, 198a25–26 for the assertion that the formal, efficient, and final causes are often identical in natural substances.

The fruits of productive reasoning are artifacts, things created by human beings for a purpose. Artifacts are externally organized: wood does not spontaneously become a bed, but can be made into a bed by a carpenter who understands how to make use of it for that purpose.¹⁷ The formal and final causes of artifacts are not identical, for they originate in the mind and will of an artificer rather than in the material on which she works her art. Nevertheless, just as final causality was necessary to explain the causal regularity of natural substances, so too is final causality necessary to ground the intelligibility and value of artifacts.¹⁸ If a pen is an instrument for writing with ink, for example, what cannot write with ink is not a pen, and what cannot write well with ink is not a good pen. One cannot coherently evaluate a pen *qua* pen by asking whether it is useful for hunting or war.

Premise (2). The second premise of Aristotle’s argument asserts that size affects the ability of both naturally and artificially organized beings to achieve their ends. Consider writing instruments again. A pen can be too small or too large to be used for writing. An ungraspable, microscopic pen and an unliftable, three-ton pen would be pens in name only, as good for writing as a drawing of an eye would be good for seeing. On the other hand, a worn-down nub of a pencil is *hardly* a pencil, and a pen the size of a baseball bat is *hardly* a pen, because both are bad for writing.¹⁹

That is true at least for an average sized person, anyway. As Aristotle argues in *Nicomachean Ethics*, “virtue” or “excellence” is a term whose instantiation is relative to acts, subjects, and circumstances. What counts as a better-making property of *F* depends on what *F* is, the condition of *F* at the time, and the circumstances in which *F* finds itself. Whether the size of a pen is a better or worse-making property of that pen depends on whom the pen is used by, just as what constitutes a “healthy” amount of food de-

17. *Phys.* 192b30–31. Note that Aristotle’s distinction between natural and artificial substances is not a distinction between real and nominal essences. Artificial substances possess real forms necessary for explaining their structure, function, powers, and purpose. No such explanations can be given for nominal substances.

18. See Aristotle’s distinction between use and exchange value at *Pol.* 1.9, 1257a6–15, which is indebted to Plato’s arguments (for instance) at *Republic* 352e–354a, *Euthydemus* 279a–281d, and *Meno* 87e–88d.

19. Aristotle himself illustrates premise (2) using the example of a ship, arguing that “a ship that is only a span long will not be a ship at all, nor a ship a quarter of a mile long; yet there may be a ship of a certain size, either too large or too small which will still be a ship, but bad for sailing.” *Pol.* 7.4, 1326a39–1326b2.

pends on whether one is Milo the wrestler or Fifi the ballerina.²⁰ The pens useful for Tom Thumb and Jack's Giant are not the same size. Likewise, what counts as a well-sized pen depends on whether one is young or old, skilled or unskilled at writing, as well as where one finds oneself: underwater, among rich business associates, etc. As these reflections show, Aristotle is not asserting that there is *one* best size for every kind of artifact. Rather, he is asserting that an instrument that cannot be used for its purpose is not an *F*, while the degree to which an instrument accomplishes its purpose—the more useful and qualitatively better it is—the more it both satisfies its definition as an *F* and maximizes its value. “Being,” “end,” and “good” are in this sense coextensive, though not synonymous. That which accomplishes the *telos* of *F* best has the best claim to be *F*, since if *kinesis* is the reduction of potentiality to actuality, then “the form of a thing emerges in its activity of striving toward its actuality from its potentiality to do so.”²¹

Nevertheless, it remains the case that in order to be a pen at all, the instrument must be sized in such a way that it is capable of being easily used for writing. The *telos* of a thing functions as a limit on the size of an organized being relative to both its nature and its use. The concept of “proper size” is therefore coherent insofar as there is some purpose *F* can succeed or fail at and the size of *F* contributes to its success or failure at that purpose.

Does the same follow for natural things? The point is obvious in the case of living things. There are many goods whose acquisition or achievement is made more difficult, or even impossible, by the size of Tom Thumb and Jack's Giant.²² Using pencils and having sex come to mind, of course, but so do goods of the soul, like friendship and wisdom. As Aristotle argues throughout the *Politics*, human beings require social structures such as families, friends, teachers, and neighbors both to *acquire* moral and intellectual excellences and to *exercise* them: one cannot learn to speak or

20. See *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter *EN*) 2.6, 1106b3.

21. For an excellent technical discussion of this point, see Adriel Trott, *Aristotle on the Nature of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 25–28. Aristotle defines change as the “fulfillment of what is potentially, qua potential” at *Phys.* 201b5 ff. He asserts that “actuality” and “good” are coextensive in many places, including *Metaphysics* 5.16 and the opening arguments of the *Pol.* at 1252b32–1253a2.

22. We might also offer a vegetable example. Evolutionary theory would posit that insofar as size affects an organism's ability to survive and reproduce, non-optimally sized organisms will fail at both tasks. Thus the size of a plant's leaves and the depth of its root structure respond to climate, etc.

philosophize well alone.²³ If Tom's voice is too quiet for us to hear and the Giant's voice too loud for us to endure, neither will be capable of participating in the life of the *polis* or achieving *eudaimonia*. Insofar as natural things have a *telos* at which they aim, gigantism and dwarfism will be defects of those things and their parts insofar as each constitutes a disability, a frustration of an organism's capacity to exercise the activities characteristic of its kind.

In sum, Aristotle makes a plausible case that the rational limit of organized bodies is a *relative limit* in the case of artifacts and an *intrinsic limit* in the case of natural beings.

III. The Organized State Claim

Having established (3), that there is a rational limit to the size of organized bodies, Aristotle makes a key assertion: “In like manner a state when composed of too few is not, as a state ought to be, self-sufficient; when of too many, though self-sufficient in all mere necessities, as a nation may be, it is not a state, being almost incapable of constitutional government.”²⁴ Formally stated, Aristotle is asserting that

1. The *polis* is a relevantly organized body.

From this he can infer,

5. Therefore, there is a rational limit to the size of the *polis*.

We should note here that Aristotle is not inferring (5) by way of an *analogy* between the *polis* and other organized beings (e.g., “plants, animals, implements”). Rather, he is asserting in (4) that the *polis* is an *instance* of something being so organized that its size affects both its nature and its ability to achieve its *telos*. This is clear in his explanation: a state that is too small will lack the necessary conditions of being a *polis*, such as the ability to satisfy the basic needs of its citizens, while a *polis* that is too large is incapable of rational order, that is, rule by law—and therefore will not be a *polis*, but something else.²⁵

23. See V. Bradley Lewis's analysis in “Wealth, Happiness, and Politics: Aristotelian Questions,” in *Wealth, Poverty, and Human Destiny*, edited by Doug Badow and David Schindler (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2003).

24. *Pol.* 7.4, 1326b2–5.

25. Aristotle suggests that it has become a nation, both here and at *Pol.* 3.3.

Several objections can be raised against this fourth premise. First, one might argue with Hobbes that a *polis* is only a nominal substance in the way a pile of stones is. That a pile of stones has a location in space makes it *one thing* for some practical and conceptual purposes, but it does not make it *one substance* in the same way that you and I are individual persons rather than collections of organs. We possess, and piles lack, a principle of organization coordinating the powers of our parts so as to act as a unified whole. However, as we noted in our analysis of premise (3) above, only things which have a *telos* can have a proper size. If the nominalists are correct, then, there is no proper size for the *polis* because the *polis* lacks a *telos*.

Second, one might argue that even if some polities are organized according to a rational principle, there is no one principle that organizes all polities. As evidence one might point out that polities can be organized by many political principles and for many ends, even the mere production and consumption of material goods. Thus, one might conclude that size is relevant to the success of some polities but not others: it might be the case that for polities aimed at market growth, bigger is always better.

In favor of (4), however, stands Aristotle's political naturalism.²⁶ Aristotle explicitly argues in a number of places that the *polis* is an organism whose form is its constitution. For instance, he argues that the constitution of a *polis* is its principle of identity. The *polis* remains one city despite the cyclic birth and death of its members, but does not remain the same city if it acquires a new form of government even if the members of the city remain identical.²⁷ For example, the American Revolutionary War caused the American colonies to cease to exist as colonies and to begin to exist as the United States, even though the members of each polity were roughly the same. Second, as Aristotle argues in *Motion of Animals*, the state is an organism like an animal insofar as the proper work of each of its parts is coordinated towards the work of the whole.²⁸ Finally, Aristotle famously

26. This section, and the discussion of the *akratic* state below, was greatly assisted by Carlos Cortisoz's unpublished paper, "The Soul-State Analogy in Aristotle's Politics," presented at the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Annual Meeting, October 2009, New York, New York.

27. *Pol.* 3.3, 1276b2–10

28. "The animal organism must be conceived after the similitude of a well-governed commonwealth. When order is once established in it there is no more need of a separate monarch to preside over each several task. The individuals each play their assigned part as it is ordered, and one thing follows another in its accustomed order. So in animals there is the same orderliness—nature taking the place of custom—and each part naturally doing his own work as nature has composed them" *De. Mot. An.* 10, 703a30–35.

argues in *Politics* 1.2 that as a political organism, the state is prior to its parts in the way that a body is prior to a hand: a stateless human being is a nominal person in the way a hand unattached to a body is a nominal rather than a real hand, since what it is to be a person or hand includes being a part of a *polis* or body, respectively. Thus, Aristotle concludes, the state is an organic, natural compound whose constitution stands to its members as form or soul to its matter.²⁹ For such reasons, Aristotle would find both nominalist objections mistaken in principle.

A further argument in defense of (4) can be developed from Aristotle's account of the origin of states. Aristotle posits two individually necessary and jointly sufficient causes of human association: sex and speech. As he famously puts it,

In the first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other, namely, of male and female, that the race may continue . . . and of a natural ruler and subject, that both may be preserved. For that which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature lord and master, and that which can with its body give effect to such foresight is a subject, and by nature a slave.³⁰

Lest we mistake Aristotle's "natural ruler" to designate some persons rather than other persons, Aristotle adds that "man is the only animal who has the gift of speech," the purpose of which is to determine what is expedient and what is just. Therefore only man "has any sense of good and evil . . . and the association of living beings who have this sense makes a family and a state."³¹ In other words, Aristotle's natural ruler—and the second necessary condition of both the family and the state—is *logos*, which is expressed in speech. It is for this reason that Aristotle says man is not simply a gregarious animal, but a political one: human beings spring from our loins but require the sharing of *logoi* to fully actualize their end as virtuous persons engaged in leisurely *philosophia*, and "what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature."³² *Logos*, in other words, is the internal cause of the *polis*, for it is natural to human beings and associations that our character-

29. *Pol.* 1.2, 1253a18–29.

30. *Pol.* 1.2, 1252a25–32.

31. *Pol.* 1253a10–18.

32. *Pol.* 1.2, 1252b34. Cf. Eric Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, vol. 3 of *Order and History* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 251: "The growth of the polis is not an inevitable biological process; men are not forced into the polis by an urge or instinct. Man is not a gregarious animal [*agelaion zoon*]; he is a *politikon zoon* and that means that the end, the *telos*, of the community lies in the realm of conscious, deliberate recognition of good and evil, of right and wrong."

istic excellences are exercised through deliberation, social intercourse, and choice. As Aristotle puts it, “justice is the bond of men in states; for the administration of justice, which is the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society.”³³

Two things follow from this analysis. The first is that the only suitable material for states is man, for it is only such a being that the state can bring to conscious, deliberate perception and the choice of good and evil. One cannot make cities of rocks, animals, children, or madmen. The second is that a good *polis* is one which makes good reasons available to individuals and promotes them as choiceworthy.³⁴ Since reasons are causes for rational animals, a community of rational persons must provide sufficient material as well as formal causes—reasons—for the reproduction and flourishing of human culture. As V. Bradley Lewis puts it,

One’s development into a person fitted to pursue happiness, a life of rational action in accord with the virtues, is made possible by a complex of relationships to other persons often structured as associations or communities for the pursuit of goods common to many persons.³⁵

Because material goods are sought for the sake of the soul, Aristotle argues, the primary *telos* of the city is to habituate its citizens in virtue—to promote “living well” over and above “mere living”—by means of law³⁶; the highest work of the *polis* is moral education.³⁷ This raises an important question: If “the happy state may be shown to be that which is best and acts rightly; and it cannot act rightly without doing right actions, and neither individual nor state can do right actions without excellence and wisdom,” where precisely do these reasons come from?

Aristotle believes the answer is clear: from the public, political, and philosophical discourse of citizens with one another—that is, from the contemplative action proper to human society. The burden of proof for premise (4) thus lies in proving that the size of a state affects its ability to develop, utilize and display virtuous reasons for action.

33. *Pol.* 1.2, 1253a37–39.

34. See *EN* 1099b29–32; 1102a7–13; 1103b3–6; 1129b14–25; 1179b20–1180a24.

35. V. Bradley Lewis, “The Common Good in Classical Political Philosophy,” *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* 25, no. 1 (2006): 25–41.

36. *Pol.* 1280a21–1281a4. Aristotle makes claims about the best *polis* on this basis at 1283a23–26, 1284a1–3, and 1323b29–1324a13.

37. *EN* 1129b24–25.

IV. Friendship, Anonymity, and the Akkratic State

If the state is an organism, as Aristotle holds, then its parts have a proper work as much as the state as a whole does. Speaking roughly, Aristotle suggests that the basic governing function within the state is to adjudicate disputes among citizens through the creation of law and the judgment of lawsuits, while the basic function of the citizen is to decide who is most capable of exercising the duties of governance.³⁸ The marked inability of a community to agree either about how to judge cases or about how to distribute public offices is therefore a symptom of political *akrasia*, which Aristotle discusses in *Politics* 5.1 and *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.10. These political failures promote the development of factional associations within the state, leading to instability, political violence, revolt, or revolution.³⁹ The presence of factions in a *polis* is thus a symptom of a deep loss of a necessary condition of human society, namely, constructive political discourse. Although such a city may continue to reproduce itself without public philosophy, it will lack the necessary unity of a real *polis*, possessing only the nominal and unstable unity of a (growing) pile of stones.

However, Aristotle argues, “if the citizens of a state are to judge and to distribute offices according to merit, *then they must know each other’s characters*; where they do not possess this knowledge, both the election to offices and the decision of lawsuits will go wrong.”⁴⁰ In other words, on Aristotle’s diagnosis, a *lack of familiarity* with one’s fellow citizens brings about the failure of political discourse, factionalism, and the ultimate dissolution of the city. Let us call this the *Anonymity Thesis*:

7. Aristotle’s Anonymity Thesis: It is difficult or impossible to judge and distribute goods according to justice without knowledge of someone’s character.

Importantly, the *Anonymity Thesis* assumes that character is the basis of desert. This is unsurprising, since if virtue makes a person better as a human being, and Aristotelian justice requires distributing goods in proportion to worth or excellence, then the virtuous person is the one most deserving of

38. “For both governors and governed have duties to perform; the special functions of a governor are to command and to judge . . . [and] the citizens of a state are to judge and to distribute offices according to merit.” *Pol.* 7.4, 1326b11–14.

39. *Pol.* 5.1, 1301a37–1301b10

40. *Pol.* 7.4, 1326b15–19; my emphasis.

real goods. It follows, then, that goods cannot be justly distributed in the face of ignorance of someone's character, since such ignorance deprives us of the necessary conditions for making true judgments about the distribution of goods. This principle will hold at both the interpersonal and the political level. If a constitution is "an ordering of offices in a *polis* in respect of the way they are distributed," for instance, then a constitution is a kind of distributive justice, as Richard Kraut has argued.⁴¹ Anonymity will thus entail that the state either cannot deliberate, or will be unable to put its conclusions (i.e., laws) into effect, the political equivalence of moral *akrasia*.

One justification of Aristotle's Anonymity Thesis is found in his account of friendship in *Nicomachean Ethics* 8 and 9. Just as "pleasure coming through sight originates erotic passion," Aristotle argues, friendly affection is spurred by the recognition of some excellence in another person called *εὐνοία*.⁴² Reciprocal and recognized *eunoia* is friendship.⁴³ One important difference between erotic passion and *eunoia*, however, is that *eunoia* constitutes a judgment that can be false; it is difficult to be "falsely attracted" to someone, but not difficult to wrongly esteem someone. Thus, Aristotle adds, to truly call people friends, the friendship must have developed over a sufficient period of time and the friends must have become familiar, that is, have been found loveable and trustworthy to each other.⁴⁴ As he puts it, those who quickly show the marks of friendship to each other wish to be friends, but are not friends unless they are both loveable and know the fact; for a wish for friendship may arise quickly, but friendship does not.⁴⁵

Friendship requires developed familiarity because personal knowledge, *justified eunoia*, requires an understanding of the causes of someone's character, and such knowledge—like character—develops of necessity over

41. *Pol.* 4.1, 1289a15–18; cf. 3.1, 1274b38; 3.6, 1278b8–11. Richard Kraut, "Aristotle's Theory of Distributive Justice," in *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, edited by David Keyt and Fred Miller (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 238.

42. *EN* 9.5, 1167a4–5. See Peter Hadreas, "Εὐνοία: Aristotle on the Beginning of Friendship," *Ancient Philosophy* 15 (1995): 393–401. Hadreas defines *eunoia* as an allogenic "recognition of another's worthiness," an intellectual response to some feature of a person we find valuable. Note that *eunoia* does not require that the excellence we recognize in another is virtue: Aristotle's own example is of a spectator recognizing the skill, *techne*, of an athlete. See *EN* 9.5, 1166b35 and 1167a19–20. In fact, Aristotle will distinguish the kinds of friendship precisely according to the various ways we perceive the goodness of others.

43. *EN* 8.2, 1155b33–1156a3.

44. *EN* 8.3, 1156b26–30.

45. *EN* 8.3, 1156b30–32.

time.⁴⁶ It is precisely knowledge that so-and-so is lovable because he is virtuous that justifies the extreme level of trust and loyalty accorded to friends.

It follows from this analysis that those who lack familiarity with one another—and *a fortiori* persons who are anonymous to each other—will lack the epistemic basis for making prudent judgments about one another's character, and therefore about what each deserves in truth. Since the political function of the governor is to exercise political prudence, then, citizens who are unfamiliar with the character of political candidates will lack the epistemic basis for making their own prudent judgments about the relative worth of those candidates. This conclusion will hold for all political associations. Just as no stranger will be able to judge whether a particular thirteen-year old teenager is capable of babysitting her five year old sister without knowledge of the teenager's character, so too no *polis* will be capable of judging which candidate is qualified for executive office when their only interaction with the candidate occurs through rumors, office memo, or the television set.

Since the size of a *polis*—the number of its inhabitants and their proximity to one another—is arguably the most basic circumstance of familiarity, it follows that giantism in a *polis* will create political anonymity which undermines the conditions for political discourse required for a well-functioning city. As Aristotle concludes: "Clearly then the best limit of the population of a state is the largest number which suffices for the purposes of life, and can be taken in at a single view."⁴⁷ Put otherwise, the exercise of political prudence is coextensive with familiarity between persons.

V. Conclusion

If this argument is sound, then several surprising and important consequences follow. The first is that, if Aristotle's argument truly applies to

46. Cf. *Metaphysics* 1.1, 981a27–29: "For men of experience know that the thing is so, but do not know why, while the others [wise persons of knowledge and understanding] know the 'why' and the cause." Though this passage discusses the nature of theoretical knowledge, it also provides a suitable description of the knowledge of others required for friendship. The practical knowledge of how to make such judgments (including what facts about people are relevant to the judgment that a person is lovable, and which are not) is a function of our intellectual maturity and moral character.

47. *Pol.* 7.4, 1326b24–25.

all human associations, it follows as a general principle that for each kind of social relation, some level of familiarity is necessary for the exercise of prudence and the achievement of justice. Likewise, for each kind of social relation, some degree of anonymity will frustrate the exercise of prudence and justice.

Second, it follows that those views of social relations which presuppose methodological anonymity will necessarily frustrate the exercise of prudence and justice. For instance, Aristotle's Anonymity Thesis presents an *a priori* challenge to the coherence of using many anonymous citizens methodologically hidden behind a Rawlsian "Veil of Ignorance" to determine the just distribution of political goods. Likewise, Aristotle's argument is relevant for current debates about the political value of "Big Data," namely, whether large-set analytics entails the "end of theory," as Chris Anderson, Jonathan Rauch, and others have argued, or whether political decisions will always require human prudence.⁴⁸ Likewise, Aristotle's argument will undermine the normative value of economic approaches to analyses of citizen behavior in democracies as found in "Public Choice Theory," since Aristotle would attribute the irrational outcomes of democratic processes not to discrepancies between the costs of informed political participation and the negligible impact of individual votes, but to failures of political prudence due to the anonymity of candidates (not *policies*) to voters.⁴⁹

48. Philosophically, both "Big Data" methodologies and "Public Choice" theories of politics have their roots in Hayek's arguments against Socialism, namely, that the knowledge required for a successful state cannot be located in one person unless—as Aristotle himself suggests—that person is a god (the only being who can introduce order into the unlimited; see *Pol.* 7.4). Rather, they hold, knowledge is widely distributed among individual agents. Like Adam Smith, Hayek argued that the free, self-interested exchange of goods between rational agents naturally tends towards optimal consequences without intentional direction. The question then arises as to how that knowledge can be harnessed by processes whose consequences are identical to those which would be exercised by an Aristotelian god, were there such a being, and whether such processes can be intentionally or unintentionally directed. According to modern theories of political "Datafication," widely distributed knowledge can be "mined" for intentional use by algorithms. Critics argue that even if algorithms can make data patterns available to theorists, context and human judgment are still necessary for interpreting those patterns, and such judgments remain beyond the scope of human prudence. See the debate between, e.g., C. Anderson, "The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete," *Wired Magazine*, June 2008; Shvetank Shah, Andrew Horne, and Jaime Capellá, "Good Data Won't Guarantee Good Decisions," *Harvard Business Review*, April 2012; M. Graham, "Big data and the end of theory?" *The Guardian*, March 9, 2012; and Jonathan Rauch, "Seeing Around Corners," *The Atlantic*, April 2002.

49. See for instance James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock, *The Calculus of Consent: Logical Foundations of Constitutional Democracy* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 2003).

Third, Aristotle's argument may prove to be relevant for issues in moral psychology. For instance, his argument suggests that moral character itself is a kind of *reason* over and above abstract "rights" claims in deliberations about justice—something Aristotle emphasizes in his *Rhetoric*, but not in his *Politics*. There he argues that "[a speaker's] character may be the most effective means of persuasion he possesses."⁵⁰ The argument we have been examining suggests this might be grounded in the nature of prudence as a *moral necessity* rather than in the art of *rhetoric* as a condition of psychological persuasiveness.

Finally, Aristotle's argument has implications for thinking about democratic theory. Nothing in Aristotle's argument precludes us from *scaling* familiarity at the political level. That is, it might well be the case that good political judgment can be scaled if, at each level of election and judgment, those responsible for choosing leaders are familiar with the character of the leaders they elect. Thus, while Aristotle would give a negative prognosis to the American democratic system in which every citizen has an equal vote in the election of unfamiliar candidates to legislative and executive office,⁵¹ he would probably argue that the hierarchical governance of an institution like the Catholic Church constitutes a more virtuous structure of political authority, since each leader is—in theory—selected by a small group of familiars.

50. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1356a2–13.

51. I here put aside the Electoral College as an unnecessary complication.

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Jacques and Raïssa Maritain

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