Aristotle’s Egalitarian Utopia: The *Polis Kat’ Euchen*

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The terms “egalitarian” and “utopia” are not readily associated with Aristotle. But Aristotle’s ideal *polis* is a *polis* “according to our prayers” (κατ’ εὐχήν: *Pol.*[1] 1288b22; καθάπερ εὐχομένους: 1325b39), involving a collocation of circumstances nearly impossible to achieve under the conditions of ordinary life; in that respect it is a kind of utopia. It is also a *polis* in which all citizens enjoy an equal share in political governance, and so merits the description “egalitarian.”[2]

Despite Aristotle’s deserved reputation for hard-headed realism in politics, the utopian character of the ideal *polis* should not surprise us. For Aristotle the healthy and complete form of any kind is the standard by which all members of that kind should be evaluated (1254a36–9); whatever cannot achieve this healthy and complete form should approximate it as closely as its condition and circumstances will allow (*Cael.* 292b6–20), so that even an *unachievable* end can be a practical guide to action. Hence, even if Aristotle did not envision the founding of his πόλις κατ’ εὐχήν as a realistic possibility, he saw it as defining the ideals that should guide political pursuits in everyday life. Thus Aristotle could doubtless say with Plato: ἐν οὐρανῷ ἴσως παράδειγμα ἀνάκειται τῷ βουλομένῳ ὁρᾶν καὶ ὁρῶντι ἑαυτὸν κατοικίζειν (*Resp.* 592b).

When I say that Aristotle may not have envisaged his ideal *polis* as a realistic possibility, I do not mean to suggest that he thought of it as absolutely impossible in principle. After all, he notes explicitly that although in describing this *polis* we must postulate many conditions “according to our prayers,” still “none of them should be impossible” (1325b39). Moreover, the prospect of founding a community according to a philosopher’s blueprint was not utterly fantastic; “think tanks” like Plato’s Academy and Aristotle’s Lyceum were often consulted in drawing up laws for new colonies or reforming the laws of established communities (Klosko (1986) 188; Lynch (1972) 151). So the philosophical project of constitutional design did have potential practical application. On the other hand, a project can be possible in principle without being terribly *likely*; my point is simply that Aristotle arguably saw the practical value of his ideal *polis* as exceeding its literal implementation.[3]

1. Slavery, *Thymos* and the *Kalon*

Just as the standard of human excellence is the human function (*Eth. Nic.* 1097b22–8a17), so the standard of *polis* excellence is the function of the *polis*. A *polis* is first of all a state, wielding coercive authority over its citizens, and exercising legislative, executive and judicial functions (1297b36–8a6). But it is also the *supreme* association, taking precedence over smaller associations such as the household or larger associations such as military alliances. It is supreme in two ways: in so far as it aims at the *ultimate* end (happiness) rather than at some intermediate means to that end, and in so far as it seeks to achieve this end for an entire community rather than for an individual only (1252a1–7, 1280a33–b35, 1337a27–30; *Eth. Nic.* 1094a26–b11).[4] It is also a *free* and *rational* community (hence slaves are tools rather than parts of the *polis*, and non-human communities do not count as *poleis*, at least in the strictest sense of the term: 1253a7–18, 1280a32–4). The *polis* "comes into existence for the sake of living, but exists for the sake of living well" (1252b30–1); an association aimed merely at survival would be no better than an aggregation of slaves or beasts (1280a30–4). Hence the liberal idea that a state exists primarily to ensure the security of its citizens is foreign to Aristotle; a *polis* differs from a military alliance (or from the pseudo-*polis* of Lykophron, a mere *ἐγγυητὴς ἀλλήλοις τῶν δικαίων*) in having as its proper end not mutual protection alone but the good life (1280a34–b13).

Different *poleis*, however, are based on different conceptions of the good life. Those that conceive the good life in terms of wealth, pleasure or reputation are mistaken, but nevertheless count as *poleis* because they are still organised around *a* conception of the good life, even if it is the wrong one. (And Aristotle certainly allows that these goods have a *place* in the good life, albeit a subordinate one; hence deviant *poleis* pursue ideals that are merely one-sided rather than entirely wrong-headed.) But the healthiest and most complete *polis* will be organised around the inculcation of virtue (1280a34–b13), since it is in the exercise of virtue that the good life in chief part consists (*Eth. Nic.* 1098a6–18).

These features of the *polis* – its freedom, its rationality and its orientation to the good life – are closely connected. The three chief ends of human action (*Eth. Nic.* 1104b30–3) are the advantageous, the pleasant and the *kalon* (noble, fine, beautiful, admirable). Of these only the pleasant and the *kalon* are choiceworthy for their own sakes (the advantageous being valuable only as a means, not an end). Hence the supreme association, aiming as it does at the *ultimate* good, does not exist *primarily* for the sake of advantage in the way that a military alliance does; it is not a mere administrative convenience in the liberal mode.[5] Pleasure is an end common to all animal life, but concern with the *kalon* is unique to rational beings, and is the aim of the virtues; hence the *kalon* is the proper end of a distinctively rational community.[6]

The connection between freedom and an orientation toward the *kalon* is closer than is sometimes recognised, and is perhaps best viewed through the lens of what Aristotle says about *un*freedom. Aristotle's theory of natural slavery has as its corollary a theory of natural freedom; understanding why natural slaves are unsuited to free political life will help us understand the nature of that life.

Natural slaves, in Aristotle's view, are human beings who are incapable of rational self-direction – a type of person providentially found mainly in non-Greek populations (1252a31–b9).[7] One might wonder why such creatures count as human beings at all, if rationality is part of the human essence, but Aristotle explains that unlike both naturally free humans (whose rational capacity is complete) and non-human animals (which lack reason entirely), the natural slave "shares in reason to the point of perceiving it but not to the point of having it" (1254b23), and so is (minimally) human. Aristotle's description leads us to expect that natural slaves suffer from an *intellectual* defect; it comes as a surprise, then, to learn that natural slaves are divided into a European type, possessing *thymos* but lacking in *dianoia*, and an Asiatic type, possessing *dianoia* and lacking in *thymos* – with the Asiatic type being described as the *more* slavish of the two (1285a19–20, 1327b20–33).[8] For Aristotle's stereotypical Asiatic, intelligent but servile, does not appear to be lacking in *rationality*.

The solution to this puzzle is that for Aristotle full rationality requires not only *dianoia* but *thymos* as well. Aristotle divides the rational part of the soul into theoretical and practical reason; the practically rational part in turn is subdivided into an intellectual part possessing reason and an emotional part responsive to reason (*Eth. Nic.* 1098a3–5; *Eth. Eud.* 1219b30–20a3), and it is to this last part that *thymos* belongs.[9] Hence those who lack *thymos* are as deficient in practical rationality as those who lack *dianoia*. *Dianoia* by itself is incapable of issuing in any decision without the co-operation of moral character (*Eth. Eud./Eth. Nic.* 1139a32–b1). Moral virtue, a function of the emotional part, sets the end, while practical wisdom, a function of the intellectual part, selects the means to the end (*Eth. Eud./Eth. Nic.* 1144a7–9); hence courage, e.g., is *thymos* supplemented by decision and purpose (*Eth. Nic.* 1117a4–6). Without moral virtue, the contribution of the intellectual part would be not practical wisdom but mere cleverness; without practical wisdom, the contribution of the emotional part would be not moral virtue but merely natural virtue (*Eth. Eud./Eth. Nic.* 1144a23–5a3).[10] Moral virtue is thus a disposition not merely "in accordance with" (*kata*) but "involving" (*meta*) right reason (*Eth. Eud./Eth. Nic.* 1144b26–7). As I have written elsewhere:

> Both [the intellectual and the emotional] parts are rational; and both parts are needed to give us a proper sensitivity to the moral nuances of the situations that confront us. Hence the wise person will be both intellectually rational and emotionally rational. Emotional people whose intellectual side is weak tend to be reluctant to accept reasonable constraints on their behavior; they are too aggressive and self-assertive for civilized society . . . But intellectual people whose emotional side is weak are often too willing to accept unreasonable constraints on their behavior; they lack the *thumos*, the spirited self-assertiveness, to stand up for themselves, and so are likely to sacrifice nobility for expediency . . . According to Aristotle, feeling *less* anger than the situation calls for is as much a failure of moral perception as feeling *more*. Only a full development of both the intellectual and the emotional aspects of our reason can yield an integrated personality fit for freedom and social cooperation. (Long 2002)

Underlying the racist nonsense of Aristotle's theory of natural slavery, then, is an intriguing thesis in moral psychology. A deficiency in *thymos* renders one unable to aim at the end of virtue, which is the *kalon*. A *thymos*-deficient person may be very skilful at *instrumental* reasoning, at pursuing advantage, but will not be able to recognise any *ultimate* end apart from the common animal end of pleasure. Lacking the *thymos* necessary for risk-taking and self-respect, such people succumb too easily to tyrannical rule; Aristotle is probably thinking of the Persians, whose unmanly abasement before the *basileus* was a recurring theme in Greek literature. By contrast, Europeans (Aristotle means northern Europeans, e.g., the foolishly bold Celts who "fear neither earthquake nor flood":[11] *Eth. Nic.* 1115b25–8) have plenty of *thymos*, and so have a conception of the *kalon*; that is why they are less slavish than the Asiatics. But their deficiency in *dianoia* renders them unable to deliberate well about the means to achieve the *kalon*; one suspects that constitutive as well as instrumental means are meant,[12] so that, despite their enthusiasm for the *kalon*, they regularly fail to identify what is the genuinely *kalon* thing to do in the actual circumstances.[13] Paraphrasing Kant, one might say that *dianoia* without *thymos* is empty, while *thymos* without *dianoia* is blind.

It is thus a mistake to think of natural slaves on the model of shambling, brain-damaged brutes. This will obviously not be true of the Asiatic type, who may be very intelligent indeed. And even in the case of the European type, the essential defect may be not so much an *absolute* deficiency of *dianoia* as a *relative* one, an *imbalance* between the two – i.e., such an excess of *thymos* that the judgement of *dianoia* gets swamped. Aristotle says of *thymos* that it "hears reason in a sense, but mishears it, just as hasty servants rush off before hearing all that they are being told" (*Eth. Eud./Eth. Nic.* 1149a26; cf. 1150b19–28).

The sense in which natural slaves are incapable of rational self-direction thus shows Aristotle not to be open to the commonly brought charge of overlooking "the skilled and supervisory roles which ancient slaves often filled" (Annas (1996) 739–40; cf. Smith (1991) 145), since it is certainly false of Asiatic natural slaves, and possibly false of European natural slaves, that they "have intelligence adequate only to do heavy manual work" (Annas (1993) 154). The rational deficiency of natural slaves is less severe – or, to put the point another way, Aristotle's criteria for full rational capacity are more exacting – than commentators often suppose.

What disqualifies a person for *polis* life, then, is not, or not only, an intellectual deficit, but an inability to recognise non-instrumental values other than pleasure. The citizens of the healthiest and most complete *polis* are accordingly dedicated to the pursuit of intrinsically valuable activities – *theoria* and *praxis* – leaving *poiesis* to metics and slaves.[14] Even the education of the young is focused on music and culture, in order to prepare them for virtuous activity by habituating them to appreciate non-instrumental value. Drawing is taught, not for utilitarian purposes, but to inculcate appreciation of aesthetic form (1338a40–b3). Music helps habituate students to feel appropriate emotions (1340a11–37), and provides a catharsis of undesirable ones (1341b37–2a15; cf. *Poet.* 1449b26–8).[15] "Nothing is less appropriate to great-souled and free persons than to inquire in every case what the use is" (1338b3–4; cf. *Metaph.* 982a14–19). The common people, by contrast, confuse leisure with amusement, because both are chosen for their own sake (1339b31–9); the implication is that amusement is the only sort of non-instrumental good they have been taught to respond to. In truth, while it admittedly possesses some intrinsic value, amusement's *primary* value is instrumental: it is a means to leisure, as rest is a means to work (*Eth. Nic.* 1176b28–7a7). For Aristotle leisure is not an *alternative* to work, it is the *occasion* for work – for *serious* work, i.e., the leisured, intrinsically valuable activities for which a healthy human being is destined.

Plato in the *Republic* had offered (qualified) praise to the martial spirit, seeing the warrior as akin to the philosopher in his willingness to respond to noble goals rather than pursuing mere bodily comfort; hence Plato's (again qualified) admiration for war-like Sparta. While Aristotle's theory of the role of *thymos* in practical reasoning and its responsiveness to the *kalon* is borrowed directly from Plato's thoughts on these matters, Aristotle is far more sceptical than Plato about the affinity between war and the *kalon*. He is particularly concerned, in *Pol.* VII, to sever the popularly conceived tie between civic virtue and military pursuits; defensive military preparedness is a necessity, but an overemphasis on war and conquest is both unjust in itself and an impediment to the development of a well-rounded character. Even the Spartans, Aristotle tells us, take an unduly utilitarian attitude, treating intrinsic values as though they were instrumental only, and so do not truly recognise the *kalon* (1334a39–b5, *Eth. Eud.* 1248b38). In the *πόλις κατ' εὐχήν*, glory is to be sought in intellectual and cultural pursuits, not martial ones.

2. Virtue in Theory and Practice

Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of virtue: theoretical wisdom, practical wisdom, and moral or ethical virtue. To which kind(s) of virtue is the *πόλις κατ' εὐχήν* dedicated? Theoretical and practical wisdom may be grouped together as virtues of the intellectual part, as against the moral virtues, which belong to the emotional or responsive part. Alternatively, practical wisdom and moral virtue may be grouped together as practical virtues by contrast with theoretical virtue. Since practical wisdom and moral virtue are (as we've seen) reciprocally entailing, the second division is more useful for present purposes. The question, then is: what are the respective roles of theoretical and practical virtue in the ideal *polis*?

The dispute between intellectualist and inclusivist interpreters of *Pol.* VII (and likewise of *Eth. Nic.* X) is an old and continuing one.[16] Yet nearly all commentators, whether intellectualist or inclusivist, agree (though see below) that in *Pol.* VII and *Eth. Nic.* X Aristotle commits himself to the following four positions:

(a) Theoretical virtue is superior to practical virtue.

(b) Because of (a), both the best life and the best *polis* will have the exercise of theoretical virtue as their central focus.

(c) Practical virtue is also valuable, either in its own right or as a means to the exercise of theoretical virtue.

(d) Because of (c), both the best life and the best *polis* will also include the exercise of practical virtue.

If intellectualist and inclusivist interpreters agree on all that, what is the dispute about? Primarily it is about the relationship of practical virtue to *happiness*. Here there are three main views (many variations on which are possible):

> *Inclusivism*: the exercise of practical virtue is a component of (i.e., a constitutive means to) happiness.
>
> *Intellectualism-1*: the exercise of practical virtue is not a component of or constitutive means to happiness; its only value is as an instrumental means to happiness.
>
> *Intellectualism-2*: the exercise of practical virtue is not a component of or constitutive means to happiness, but it does possess intrinsic (i.e., non-instrumental) value; this value is non-eudaimonic, however.

A full investigation of this dispute lies beyond my present purpose, but a couple of points may be made on behalf of the inclusivist interpretation. Intellectualism-1 runs afoul of *Eth. Nic.* 1097b1–6's insistence that every virtue (πᾶσαν ἀρετήν) is choiceworthy for its own sake. Intellectualism-2 will have a hard time explaining Aristotle's claim that anyone who is "zealous always to act justly or temperately or in accordance with any of the other virtues," even to the point of sacrificing his life, is a "lover of self" in the truest sense, since he awards himself what is "noblest and best" (1168b15–9b2). The value assigned to virtue here is clearly not instrumental. (Least of all could one give up one's life as an instrumental means to the exercise of theoretical virtue!) But if virtue has intrinsic value, and if that value is non-eudaimonic, then those who sacrifice their lives for a virtuous cause would be sacrificing their happiness; yet Aristotle insists that their lives are happier for the sacrifice, since those who choose nobility of life over length of life have profited thereby. It seems impossible to construe this passage except as affirming that the exercise of practical virtue is a component of the individual's happiness.

The πόλις κατ' εὐχήν will thus be dedicated to the pursuit of both theoretical and practical virtue; but theoretical virtue's place will be primary. (Politicians have sought only to change the world in various ways; but the point is to interpret it!) Perhaps the closest analogy to Aristotle's ideal *polis* is a university dedicated to the life of the mind, run by the faculty, in which all the students will eventually be hired as faculty (and where students not qualified to become faculty in due course are not admitted in the first place), and in which all university personnel other than students and faculty – janitors, deans and the like – are either slaves or contract hirelings (metics) under the authority of the faculty (cf. Annas (1996) 751). I suspect that more than a few professors harbour fantasies along precisely these lines.[17] The similarity to the Academy and the Lyceum, institutions of learning in which Aristotle spent over half his life, is surely not coincidental; one is reminded of Robert Nozick's suggestion (1997) that academics long to remake society into "school writ large."

It might be objected that by Aristotle's own testimony the responsibilities of political administration are incompatible with the untroubled leisure required for philosophy; hence the true philosopher must live a solitary and god-like life, a *non-political* life.[18] On this interpretation the *philosophia* cultivated in Aristotle's ideal *polis* (1334a23, 32) will be something less demanding than philosophy in the strict sense. Support for such an interpretation might be found in Aristotle's admission that the philosophical life is leisured while political activity is unleisured (*Eth. Nic.* 1177b12–18). Since the citizens of the ideal *polis* do engage in politics, one might infer that they have no time to lead the philosophical life. Further support for this reading might be drawn from Aristotle's claim that theoretical activity is "self-sufficient" (*Eth. Nic.* 1177a27), can be practised "by oneself" (*Eth. Nic.* 1177a33), and is "superior to the human level" (*Eth. Nic.* 1177b26) – descriptions that might seem to mirror Aristotle's pronouncement that "whoever is without a *polis* – by nature and not by chance – is either a base creature or superior to the human level" (1253a2–4), since "he who is unable to enter into association, or who owing to his self-sufficiency has no need to do so, is no part of a *polis*" but is "either a beast or a god" (1253a27–9).

Against this, however, is Aristotle's clear assertion that civic life in the πόλις κατ’ εὐχήν will be focused on *leisure*, which tells against the claim that political participation necessarily conflicts with the leisured life. Also against it is Aristotle's insistence that "the life that is best for an individual human being is necessarily the same as the one that is best for *poleis* and human beings collectively" (1325b30–2). Since Aristotle uncontroversially holds that the philosophical life is the best life for an individual human being, he is committed to regarding it as the best life for a *polis* as well.

The solution to this puzzle lies in distinguishing the (correct) claim that political participation is incompatible with philosophical *activity* (in the sense that one cannot be engaging in both at the same moment) from the (incorrect) claim that political participation is incompatible with the philosophical *life*. After all, the philosophical life cannot be a life of *uninterrupted* philosophical activity, since such a life is the unique prerogative of the Prime Mover: "Its way of life is such as the best that we enjoy for a short time; for it has this always, which for us is impossible" (*Metaph.* 1072b14–16). Indeed, such a divine life would not even be desirable for a human being, since no human being could survive the change into a divine contemplator (*Eth. Nic.* 1159a4–14, 1166a15–23).

Hence nothing prevents a philosophical life from including periods of political activity, so long as these do not take *too* much time away from philosophy. Aristotle explicitly allows that one may engage in unleisured activities in order to secure the means to engage in leisured activities: "Some of the virtues that are useful for leisure (σχολήν) and leisurely activity (διαγωγήν) have their function in times of leisure, others in times without leisure; for many necessities must be present in order for leisure to be possible" (1334a16–19). Since unleisured activity is for the sake of leisured activity (*Eth. Nic.* 1177b5–6), it would be puzzling if the rulers of the ideal state were to spend all or most of their time at toilsome administrative tasks. Aristotle advises us to pursue divine philosophy "as far as is possible" (ἐφ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται: *Eth. Nic.* 1177b33); taking breaks from philosophy in order to maintain the framework that makes such philosophising possible is hardly disobedience to this advice.

In *Politics* VII 2–3, Aristotle raises two questions: first, "which life is more choiceworthy, the life of participating in politics with others and associating in a *polis*, or rather that of an alien removed from politics?" and second, regardless of what is best for an individual, "which condition of the *polis* is best?" (1324a14–19). After replying that the second question, not the first, is his present concern, Aristotle goes on to add that the second question nevertheless cannot be answered without answering the first: "the best constitution is that system under which anyone whatsoever might perform the best actions and enjoy a blessed life," but the *identification* of this blessed life is precisely what is in dispute: "whether the political and active (πρακτικός) life is choiceworthy, or rather the life removed from external matters, such as a theoretical life, which some say is the only one for a philosopher" (1324a23–9).

Some prefer the theoretical life on the grounds that political rule is an "impediment to one's own flourishing" (1324a38); such thinkers "reject political office, holding that the life of a free person is different from that of a statesman and is most choiceworthy of all" (1325a18–20). Others insist that "the active and political life is the only one for a man," because "private persons" have less scope for virtuous actions (1324a39–b1); on this view, the politically active life is best because "one who is inactive cannot act well, but acting well and being happy are the same" (1325a21–3).

Aristotle's solution to this dispute is that "both sides speak correctly but also incorrectly" (1325a23–4) – not because the philosophical life is appropriate for some and the active life for others, but because the dichotomy between the two lives is a false one. The anti-political side is right in thinking that "the life of a free person is better than the life of a despot," but wrong in supposing that "all ruling is despotic" (1325a24–8). The pro-political side is right in holding that "the best life is the active one," but wrong in supposing that the active life must be led "in relation to other people" and that "only those thoughts count as active that come about for the sake of the consequences of acting"; on the contrary, "theorising and thinking that are complete in themselves and done for their own sake have far more claim" to be considered *active* (1325b16–21).

This "solution" doesn't actually settle the question of whether one's life should contain political or philosophical activity or both; all it shows is that the political life is not open to the charge of being unworthy of a free man, and that the philosophical life is not open to the charge of being inactive. While this does not show that the two lives are compatible, neither of course does it show that they are not.

In *Eth. Nic.* X Aristotle does say that the philosophical life is "superior to the human level; for it is not in so far as he is a human being (ᾗ ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν) that he will live it, but rather in so far as he possesses something divine within him," since "if intellect is something divine in comparison to a human being, the life in accordance with this will also be divine in comparison with the human life" (*Eth. Nic.* 1177b26–31). But it is important to distinguish the passages in which Aristotle is developing an *aporia* from the passages in which he is resolving it (*Eth. Nic.* 1095a30–b3, 1145b3–7). After the passage in which he describes the philosophical life as superhuman, Aristotle immediately goes on to explain that, properly understood, the philosophical life is *not* something alien to our humanity but is that humanity's highest fulfilment:

> Each person would seem to *be* this [divine element], if he is his commanding and superior part; it would be strange, then, if he were not to choose his own life but that of something else. . . . For what is proper to each thing's nature is what takes precedence and is most pleasant for

> it; and the life in accordance with intellect is so for a human being, if he is *most of all* this; such a life will then be the happiest. (*Eth. Nic.* 1178a3–8)

The claim that a human being is "most of all" (*malista*) his intellect is repeated elsewhere:

> Just as a *polis* and every other composite system seems to be *most of all* its commanding part, so too with a human being. . . . And a person is said to possess or lack self-control according as he is or is not controlled by his intellect, on the assumption that each person is this; and actions in accordance with reason are thought to be *most of all* one's own and voluntary. Thus it is clear that each person is this, or is this *most of all.* (*Eth. Nic.*1168b31–9a2)

If a human being is not *solely* his intellect but *most of all* his intellect, then one would expect the life that most fully actualises his human nature to be one of *predominantly* but not *exclusively* theoretical activity – one in which the exercise of other human faculties is subordinate but not non-existent.[19] And this seems to be exactly what Aristotle says:

> The person engaged in theoretical activity needs none of these goods, *for that activity at least* (πρός γε τὴν ἐνέργειαν); one might even call them hindrances, *for theoretical activity at least* (πρός γε τὴν θεωρίαν). *But in so far as he is a human being* (ᾗ δ' ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν) and lives among the multitude, he chooses to act in accordance with virtue; hence he will need such goods for living humanly. (*Eth. Nic.* 1178b3)

In short, those who lead a philosophical life are expected to live a human life *as well.*[20] The philosopher is not literally superhuman (though, like all human beings, his soul contains a superhuman element), and hence does not live a literally superhuman life (though he does live a life that gives pride of place to the exercise of his superhuman element). Hence he is not one of those self-sufficient demigods who lives in isolation (1253a2–4, 27–9); on the contrary, although theoretical wisdom differs from practical wisdom in that it can be practised alone, nevertheless even theoretical activity "is presumably done better with colleagues" (*Eth. Nic.* 1177a34). Nor would it be appropriate for the philosopher to live in the *polis* without having a share in its rule: "the wise person should command rather than be commanded; nor should he obey another, but a less wise person should obey him" (*Metaph.* 982a17–19). Someone who was *literally* superhuman would not belong in a *polis*; but those that are described, metaphorically, as superhuman (*Eth. Nic.* 1125a26) are said to belong, not outside the *polis*, but in charge of it (1284a3–12).

In Aristotle's ideal *polis*, then, philosopher-kings will rule – not over passive subjects as in Plato's *Republic*, but over philosopher-kings-in-training. Just as Plato's philosopher-kings give up uninterrupted contemplation (but not contemplation *tout court*) in order to return to the cave, so Aristotelian rulers will live lives that are simultaneously philosophical and human; these lives will be organised around theoretical activity, but their administrative duties will ensure that this activity is not uninterrupted.

But are the administrative duties of the *polis* so pressing that time for philosophy will be squeezed out entirely? This might be so in an ordinary *polis*, but it is not clear that they need be so in Aristotle's utopia. A city full of virtuous people will presumably be easier to administer than most cities. Wars will be infrequent, since the *πόλις κατ' εὐχήν* will not engage in wars of aggression (1324b23–41), while its strategic location (1325a1–3, 1326b39–7a6) and modest wealth (1327a29–31) will presumably decrease – though perhaps not eliminate – the need for wars of defence (1325a3–5). (Also, much of the purely bureaucratic work of governing could be assigned to (Asiatic-type) natural slaves or contracted out to metics.) Balancing administrative and scholarly activities may be difficult, as abbots of monasteries or chairs of academic departments (or Aristotle himself in his capacity as head of the Lyceum) could testify; but there is no reason to suppose it impossible. Indeed, much of the "ruling" in Aristotle's ideal *polis* will presumably take the form of *teaching*, an activity which (as Aristotle, a teacher himself, surely knew) at its best reinforces and enriches the teacher's theoretical activity at least as much as it distracts from it.

3. Aristocracy and Political Merit

The best *polis* is one dedicated to virtue. But there are three forms of constitution dedicated to virtue – kingship, aristocracy and polity – of which kingship and aristocracy are said to be best. Indeed, Aristotle at one point declares kingship preferable to aristocracy (*Eth. Nic.* 1160a36). And yet Aristotle's *πόλις κατ' εὐχήν* is labelled an aristocracy (1293b1–7, 1330b20; cf. 1332a32–8). What does Aristotle mean in calling it an aristocracy, and why does the ideal *polis* take this form rather than kingship or polity?

In the *Politics* Aristotle offers at least three different ways of classifying constitutions.[21] One, call it the Traditional Classification,[22] goes by number of rulers (one, few, many) and whether they rule solely in their own interest or in the interest of their subjects as well;[23] see figure 1. A (less explicit) second, call it the Proportional-Merit Classification, goes by the criterion of

		one	few	many
kind of rule	benevolent	kingship	aristocracy	polity
	despotic	tyranny	oligarchy	democracy

Fig. 1. Traditional classification of constitutions

		both individually and collectively	individually but not collectively	neither individually nor collectively
	virtue/ wisdom	kingship	polity	aristocracy
kind of merit	wealth	oligarchy? tyranny?	oligarchy	oligarchy?
	freedom			democracy

Fig. 2. Classification of constitutions by proportional merit

political merit (virtue, wealth or freedom) and the proportion of the rulers' merit to that of the ruled;[24] see figure 2.

A third system, call it the Mixture Classification, goes by relative proportions of democracy and oligarchy. This last leaves out kingship and (pure) aristocracy entirely; since Aristotle's ideal *polis* is not included in the Mixture Classification, I shall ignore it in what follows.[25]

The Proportional-Merit Classification requires some explanation. Aristotle tells us that differences among constitutions result from different conceptions of happiness (1328a41–b2). A *polis*'s dominant conception of happiness is reflected in its criterion of political merit, i.e., its standard for determining who has a just claim to participate in governance. A community dedicated to the pursuit of wealth as the chief good will tend to honour the wealthy; a community that regards freedom (in the sense of "doing as one pleases") as the central point of human existence will, by contrast, tend to assign political rights to those who are free. Finally, of course, a community whose fundamental orientation is toward wisdom and virtue will prefer to be ruled by those who possess these qualities to the highest degree.

The idea that the wisest and most just deserve to rule is one that Aristotle inherits from Plato; but he gives it a twist of his own. Plato had assumed that the wise rulers would be in the minority and the unwise subjects in the majority; but Aristotle is struck by the fact that the many may sometimes be *collectively* wiser than the few, even when the few are *individually* wiser than the many (1281a38–2a19, 1286a23–35, 1287b8–33). When this is so, the requirement that the wise should rule the unwise becomes complicated: the many, being collectively wiser, deserve *in their collective capacity* to rule the few, while the few, being individually wiser, deserve *in their individual capacity* to rule the many. The solution, according to Aristotle, is to allow the many to exercise authority collectively (e.g. by voting and serving on juries) but not individually; hence governmental offices allowing for individual discretion will be reserved to the wise elite (1281b21–38). The resulting two-tiered constitutional system will be an instance of what Aristotle calls *polity*.[26]

It might be thought that *Pol.* 1281a40–b5 treats the fact that the many may be collectively wiser than the few as an argument in favour of *democracy*, not of polity.[27] But all that Aristotle says there on behalf of democracy is that the case for it is "somewhat problematic but perhaps still true" (καὶ τιν' ἔχειν ἀπορίαν τάχα δὲ κἂν ἀλήθειαν). The moral that he actually goes on (1281b21–38) to draw from the argument is that the many should participate in ruling collectively but not individually, and such a system will be precisely the sort of mixed system that Aristotle identifies as polity (1294b5–12), not democracy. (But he grants that democracies come in more and less radical forms (1291b30–2a38), and that polities, depending on exactly how they go about balancing the influence of the many against that of the few, may be called aristocracies, oligarchies or democracies (1293b31–6, 1294b13–16) – thus allowing himself a certain latitude in terminology.)

There may be cases, however, where the many do not exceed the few in wisdom even collectively – either because the few are superhuman in their wisdom (1283b20–6; 1284a3–11, b25–34; 1288a15–30; 1332b16–24) or because the many are subhuman in their unwisdom (1281b15–21). In the first case, the appropriate constitution is kingship; the superhumanly wise will exercise benevolent rule over the averagely wise. (Since the subhumanly unwise are presumably natural slaves, the second case does not specify any one constitution in particular.) On the other hand, when the entire free citizen population is virtuous enough that the few do not exceed the many in wisdom even individually, then the citizens deserve to share political power equally, and the result is aristocracy – more specifically, *pure* aristocracy, as opposed to real-life "so-called" aristocracy.[28]

Although Aristotle's account of the Proportional-Merit Classification focuses on the three constitutions that adopt virtue as their criterion of political merit (kingship, aristocracy and polity), Aristotle makes clear that the same considerations apply to oligarchical constitutions that assign political rights on the basis of wealth. Although the few may be wealthier individually, the wealth of the many will often outweigh that of the few *collectively*, in which case, by the oligarchs' own criteria, the many deserve a greater share in governance (1283a40–2, 1283b23–34).[29] Or again, if wealth is consistently adopted as the criterion of political merit, then whenever one member of the oligarchical ruling class is wealthier than all the others *both* individually and collectively, he deserves to exercise supreme political authority over them (1283b16–18); this would be an "oligarchical" analogue of kingship. Hence considerations of proportional merit apply with equal force to constitutions based on wisdom and constitutions based on wealth.

Aristotle does not apply considerations of proportional merit, however, to constitutions based on freedom as the criterion of political merit. That is why in figure 2 the first two boxes have been left blank; presumably nothing fits there because freedom differs from virtue and wealth in not being additive or not coming in degrees: "for few are wealthy but all share in freedom" (1280a5–6). It's particularly difficult to see how the freedom of one group could outweigh the freedom of another individually but not collectively.[30] Taking freedom as a criterion of political merit thus leads to democracy, and to democracy only.

As should now be apparent, the Traditional and Proportional-Merit Classifications are mutually inconsistent. Benevolent rule by a few counts as aristocracy under the Traditional Classification, but as kingship or polity under the Proportional-Merit Classification; the πόλις κατ' εὐχήν would seem to be either a polity (in its relation to citizens) or an oligarchy (in its relation to non-citizens) under the Traditional Classification, but an aristocracy under the Proportional-Merit Classification. Tyranny, the despotic correlate of kingship according to the Traditional Classification (and, mysteriously, a mixture of extreme oligarchy and extreme democracy according to the Mixture Classification:[31] 1310b1–11a19) has no clear place in the Proportional-Merit Classification at all. (And as is often the case with Aristotle's preferred classificatory systems (cf., e.g., *Eth. Nic.* 1107b1–3), several of the categories in the Proportional-Merit Classification have no recognised name.)

Likewise, although kingship is described as a species of monarchy, which under the Traditional Classification it must be, when feeling the pull of the Proportional-Merit Classification Aristotle seems happy to call a *polis* run by more than one person a kingship under certain circumstances,[32] referring to such rulers as "those who participate in the kingship" (*μετεχόντων τῆς βασιλείας*: 1313a2). This is not a complete departure from ordinary Greek usage, however, since Sparta was generally described as having a dual kingship. (Strange to say, the Spartan system is one of the "two kinds of monarchy" [*sic*] discussed at 1285a30, while 1313b38 imagines the entire *demos* as a "monarch.")

The most obvious difference between the Traditional and Proportional-Merit Classifications is that (Spartan kingship aside) the former tracks ordinary usage while the latter departs from it. Why does Aristotle employ mutually inconsistent classificatory systems? And why, in particular, does he make use of the Proportional-Merit Classification when it yields such counter-intuitive categories as egalitarian aristocracy and monarchical oligarchy?

The answer is that to classify something, to state *what* it is, is to state its *essence*, and a thing's essential qualities are not necessarily the same as the features by which we customarily pick it out; instead they are the fundamental properties that *explain* the more familiar ones. Essences are discovered, not stipulated.[33] We know *what* a lunar eclipse is, Aristotle tells us, only when we know what *causes* the moon to darken; an eclipse cannot be defined as a darkening of the moon, because this characterisation is *accidental*, whereas the correct definition must make reference to what *causes* and *explains* this darkening, i.e., the interposition of the earth between sun and moon. (*An. Post.* 90a15–18, 93a16–b14). Likewise, although having internal angles equal to 180° is a necessary property of the triangle, it nevertheless counts as an *accidental* rather than an essential property because it flows from, is explained by, the deeper essence of triangularity. (*Metaph.* 1025a30–3; cf. *Eth. Eud.* 1222b30–41).

For Aristotle, the most fundamental explanation for constitutional diversity is the diversity of conceptions of happiness (1328a41–b2) and thus of criteria of political merit. The reason that the *poleis* we call "democratic" adopt majority rule is not that they are enthusiasts for majority rule but that they are enthusiasts for *freedom*; this leads them to select freedom as the criterion of political merit, extending governance to all who are free. Hence freedom, not majoritarianism, is democracy's explanatory essence.

Likewise, the reason that the *poleis* we call "oligarchic" adopt minority rule is not that they are enthusiasts for minority rule but that they are enthusiasts for *wealth*; since the wealthy tend to be in the minority, selecting wealth as a criterion of political merit tends to *result* in minority rule, but minority rule is not the essence of oligarchy, since it flows from a deeper explanatory property, i.e., a wealth-centred conception of happiness.

As for real-life "aristocracies," the reason these involve unequal citizen rights is that they are *imperfectly* aristocratic; these are constitutions that mix aristocratic with oligarchic or democratic criteria of merit (1293b1–20, 1294a17–24), and so are called aristocratic only because they approach more closely to aristocracy than other constitutions do.[34] (No doubt because the inegalitarian aristocracies are the most common, Aristotle sometimes slides back into ordinary usage and describes aristocracy *per se* as hierarchical – e.g. at 1288a9–12, 32–b2.)

Classification by number of rulers is logically a by-product of classification by proportional merit together with the likelihood of different criteria of merit being met by groups of different sizes. (Likewise, it is presumably because despotic rule is unjust (at least when exercised over those who are naturally free:[35] 1324b36–41) that constitutions taking virtue as a criterion of political merit will be benevolent rather than despotic.) Thus the Traditional Classification gives us not the *essences* (which are instead identified by the Proportional-Merit Classification) but merely the reliable (though not exceptionless) *symptoms* of those essences.

Compare our own practice of scientific classification. Dolphins were originally classified as fish rather than mammals because in their *surface characteristics* they resembled fish more than mammals; but we reclassified them once we discovered that in their *deep explanatory structure* they resembled mammals more than fish. In the same way, a *polis* ruled by a wealthy majority might look more like a democracy than an oligarchy, but perhaps it should be reclassified as an oligarchy if it turns out to share more of its deep explanatory structure with typical oligarchies than with typical democracies. And if it is objected that a majoritarian oligarchy is a contradiction in terms (since *oligarchia* means "rule by the few"), a fair response is that by that standard our own talk of "splitting the atom" is contradictory as well (since "atom" means "indivisible"). But nomenclature is not destiny. We gave the name "atom" to certain particles because we *thought* those particles were indivisible; but it turned out that we were wrong. Likewise, Aristotle is suggesting, the Greeks assigned the name *oligarchia* to a certain form of political community which they encountered in their social experience, because they *thought* that minority rule was the essence of that form; but they too were wrong. Once again: essences are discovered, not stipulated.

I have previously suggested (Long (1996a) 796 n. 80) that *aristokratia*, when it occurs in Aristotle's *Politics*, should be translated "meritocracy" rather than "aristocracy," in order to avoid the hierarchical connotations of the latter term (given that Aristotle's *aristokratia* is egalitarian rather than hierarchical). I am now inclined to retract that suggestion, for two reasons. First, kingship and oligarchy are just as "meritocratic" as *aristokratia* (as are democracy and oligarchy, for that matter, relative to their own conceptions of merit), so the term "meritocracy" is too broad to apply to *aristokratia* alone. Second, Aristotle knew perfectly well that the term *aristokratia* had hierarchical connotations in ordinary Greek, and he deliberately used the term in a way that he must have recognised would sound paradoxical; I see no reason to mask that paradoxicality in translation.

In two passages (1279b20–80a6, 1290a30–b20) Aristotle explicitly raises the question whether rule by a wealthy majority, or by a minority lacking wealth, should be classified as democracy or as oligarchy. In both passages he treats wealth as a more fundamental criterion than numbers: an oligarchy's being ruled by the few comes about as an accidental by-product (*συμβεβηκός*, *συμβαίνει*) of its being ruled by the wealthy (1279b36, 1280a6, 1290b2). Nevertheless, the two passages seem to give opposite answers to the question. At 1279b38–80a5 Aristotle defines oligarchy as rule by the wealthy and democracy as rule by the poor (incidentally, vacillating within the space of a few lines as to whether freedom or poverty is the criterion for democracy); it apparently follows that rule by a wealthy majority would be oligarchy. But at 1290a30–b20, apparently unwilling to stray *so* far from ordinary usage, Aristotle redefines oligarchy as rule by the wealthy *few* and democracy as rule by the free (or poor?) *many*, thus building *both* criteria into the definition. But once the numerical criterion has been incorporated into the *definition*, Aristotle can no longer consistently say, as he still wants to (1290b2), that the numerical criterion is an accidental by-product of the essence, rather than *part* of the essence. (If Aristotle were to make a similar concession to ordinary usage in the case of *aristokratia*, it would be hard to see how his πόλις κατ' εὐχήν could still count as an aristocracy.)

Compare: if *darkening of the moon* is a bad definition of an eclipse (because it omits the explanation), should an eclipse then be defined simply as *interposition of the earth between sun and moon*, or as *darkening of the moon caused by interposition of the earth between sun and moon*?[36] The latter definition seems preferable on grounds of ordinary usage; for if the earth were to be interposed between sun and moon and a darkening of the moon were *per impossibile* not to result, we would hardly say that an eclipse had occurred. On the other hand, building *darkening of the moon* into the definition makes it harder to say what Aristotle has plausible grounds for wanting to say: namely, that defining an eclipse as *darkening of the moon* is an *accidental* characterisation. (Can X+Y be the essence of Z if X by itself is accidental to Z?)

Aristotle is torn between a classificatory system that respects ordinary language and a classificatory system that reveals explanatory structure, because his philosophical method involves trying to accord due deference to the views of both the wise and the many (cf. Long 2000) – a kind of methodological polity. But the two systems need not conflict. Aristotle is often happy to answer questions with "in one sense yes, in another sense no"; hence the two systems might be seen as appropriate for different purposes. If you want to track ordinary usage, use the Traditional Classification; if you want to study the constitutional forms you're most likely to encounter in everyday experience, use the Mixture Classification; if you want a more philosophical grasp of the underlying explanatory essence, use the Proportional-Merit Classification.

There are further puzzles about the Proportional-Merit Classification, however. Aristocracy and democracy are alike in involving equal citizenship; polity and oligarchy are alike in involving unequal citizenship. Hence one might expect democracy to be the deviant form of aristocracy, and oligarchy to be the deviant form of polity. Instead, Aristotle continues to treat democracy as more akin to polity, and oligarchy as more akin to aristocracy, under the Proportional-Merit Classification no less than under the Traditional Classification. Hence a polity becomes more aristocratic by becoming more oligarchic! (1293b19–20, 33–6). The reason is not clear, but perhaps Aristotle's thought is that just as ordinary people have more power in a democracy than in an oligarchy, so ordinary people have more power in a polity than in an aristocracy (cf. 1290a15–18) – though not because, as in an oligarchy, they are second-class citizens, but because in an aristocracy there *are* no "ordinary people"; everybody exceeds the human average in virtue.[37] At the same time, aristocracy and oligarchy are similar in having a small number of rulers[38] (1306b22–6), quite apart from the question of the status of the ruled. Aristotle also suggests (1293b34–7) that because wealthier people tend to be better educated, and better educated people tend to be more virtuous, oligarchy has an inherent tendency toward aristocracy;[39] polity, by contrast, achieves its broad base by emphasising the kind of virtue most accessible to the less wealthy: namely, military virtue.

Why does Aristotle identify the best constitution sometimes as aristocracy and sometimes as kingship? Perhaps because each has an advantage the other lacks: aristocracy is superior to kingship in granting full political participation to all its citizens, while kingship is superior to aristocracy in embodying superhuman virtue in its government; polity enjoys neither advantage (cf. Long (1996a) 796–8).

Why cannot aristocracy embody superhuman virtue in its government? Presumably because Aristotle regards the prospect of finding people of superhuman virtue in sufficient numbers to make up not just a government but an entire *polis* (1284a3–5) as too hopelessly utopian to consider. (It would be left to the generation after Aristotle (e.g. Zeno the Stoic) to explore this possibility.[40]) Suppose, however, that within an existing *polis* there should indeed arise enough people of superhuman virtue to constitute a separate *polis*. What, by Aristotelian standards, would be the appropriate constitutional solution? There would seem to be three possibilities:

(a) The superhumanly virtuous people should act as kings and rule the other citizens benevolently, just as in the case where their numbers are fewer.
(b) The superhumanly virtuous people should establish an aristocracy on the spot, ruling in their own collective interest and treating the other inhabitants as non-citizens.
(c) The superhumanly virtuous people should leave the *polis* and form their own aristocracy somewhere else.

Given Aristotle's insistence that it is unjust to rule the naturally free as though they were slaves, it is hard to see how he could countenance (b). His claim that kingship is appropriate when those of superhuman virtue number "more than one, though not enough to make up a complete *polis*" (1284a3–5) tells against (a); for why would the qualification "though not enough to make up a complete *polis*" be needed if the claim would still be true without the qualification? The suggestion is that in kingship the rulers remain in political association with their subjects only because they are not self-sufficient without them. It seems a reasonable inference, then, that Aristotle would prefer (c). Plato had held that rulers of superhuman virtue have a moral obligation to serve as rulers over their inferiors even when they do not need to do so and would be happier on their own (*Resp*. 519c–20e; cf. 420b–1c); but Aristotle does not find Plato's position compelling (1264b16–23). (And even Plato grants (520b) that the rulers have such an obligation only if their virtue arose from civic education and not by chance.)

Against (c), and in favour of (a), might be cited 1271a11–13's declaration that "he who has the merit for ruling ought to rule whether he is willing or unwilling." Aristotle distinguishes, however, between consent *to* a political framework (which he associates with freedom in the sense of *eleutheria*) and consent *within* a political framework (which he associates with freedom in the sense of ἐξουσία); once the former is granted, the latter is largely unnecessary.[41] At 1271a11–13 Aristotle is discussing people who are already citizens and whose consent to the constitution may be presumed; such people, so long as they continue as citizens, are not at liberty to reject the requirements of the laws. In the present case, by contrast, the issue is whether those of superhuman virtue should consent to a certain constitution in the first place.

Why is the πόλις κατ' εὐχήν an aristocracy rather than a kingship? Aristotle does not tell us. But kingship notoriously presents special problems. Aristotle tells us plainly (1275a23–b20) that political participation is a criterion of citizenship in the unqualified sense, that this criterion is especially applicable to democracy, and that while the criterion may fail to apply in the case of deviant constitutions, it will certainly apply to properly constituted ones. Yet it is difficult to see how the criterion could apply to kingship. And it's no solution to say that the king is the only citizen, since by Aristotle's standards if the king is to differ from a tyrant, he must rule in the interest of the citizens rather than solely in his own interest – and so there must *be* citizens other than himself.[42] This may be the reason why aristocracy ends up edging out kingship.

4. Justice in the Ideal *Polis*

Aristotle's fundamental principle of political justice is the Merit Principle: *People have a right not to be ruled by their equals in merit except in rotation, and not to be ruled by their inferiors in merit under any circumstances.*[43]

The πόλις κατ' εὐχήν apparently satisfies this principle: it adopts the correct principle of merit (virtue), and political power is shared equally among the equally virtuous. (More precisely, the older men rule, and the younger men are ruled; but this accords with the Merit Principle, since, first, the older men are wiser than the young ones, and second, the young men (or most of them) will eventually be older, so everyone receives equal political rights in due course (1329a2–17, 1332a31–41). As Aristotle puts it, the positions of ruler and subject are occupied not by different people but by the same people at different times.)

Yet Aristotle's ideal *polis* is frequently condemned as unjust. C.C.W. Taylor, for example, describes the πόλις κατ' εὐχήν as "an exploiting elite, a community of free-riders whose ability to pursue the good life is made possible by the willingness of others to forgo that pursuit"; far from being an egalitarian utopia, "the 'ideal' *polis* is thus characterized by systematic injustice" (Taylor (1995) 250).

To evaluate the charge of injustice, we must make some distinctions. First we must distinguish between the accusation that Aristotle's ideal *polis* violates his *own* standards of justice and the accusation that it violates the *correct* standards of justice. Second, we must distinguish between complaints of injustice against citizens and complaints of injustice against non-citizens.

Aristotle's surviving incomplete sketch of the institutions of the πόλις κατ' εὐχήν (*Pol.* VII–VIII) depicts a society in which much of the citizens' life is subjected to political micro-management – perhaps not to the extent of Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, but pretty thoroughly, none the less. Since habituation is required not only for acquiring virtue but also for keeping it, laws must impose training and discipline in virtue not only in childhood but well into adulthood (*Eth. Nic.* 1179b30–80a6). Speech, art, trade, property, marriage, reproduction and pastimes are all tightly regulated (*Pol.* VII–VIII). Miller (1995) 248–9 offers a list of Aristotelian infringements of individual liberty that would seem intolerable to many modern liberals.

By Aristotelian standards, however, the liberty of these citizens has not been impaired, since the liberty that matters is not *exousia*, the freedom to "live as one pleases," but *eleutheria*, the freedom to give or withhold one's consent to the constitution.[44] To force any naturally free person (or man, anyway) to participate in the πόλις κατ' εὐχήν would be an injustice; Aristotle disagrees sharply (1324b22–36) with Plato's assumption (*Pol.* 291e–3e) that so long as political rule is wise and benevolent, its justice does not depend on the consent of the governed. But those who do consent to a constitution oriented toward the exercise of virtue have no grounds for complaint if their activities are supervised and directed with a view to that end. For modern liberals, by contrast, the exercise of free consent *within* a political framework is at least as important as consent *to* that framework. (cf. Long 1995).

The only group of citizens lacking equal political rights is, of course, women.[45] As the nature of their political disability is never clearly explained (what does it mean to say that "the slave lacks the deliberative capacity entirely, while the woman has it [and so presumably possesses both *thymos* and *dianoia*] but it is lacking in authority" (*akuron*: 1260a13–14)?), it is difficult to assess the justice of their treatment. Aristotle promises us a discussion of the proper education of women (1260b13–21), which might have told us more, but if he wrote such a section (presumably following the extant *Pol.* VIII), it is lost. Women aside, however, the citizens of the *πόλις κατ’ εὐχήν* appear to have no *Aristotelian* grounds for complaint.

A more common charge is that Aristotle's ideal *polis* violates his own standards of justice in its treatment of non-citizens: slaves, farmers, tradesmen and all those generally labelled *banausoi*. None of these groups are part of the *polis*; they are ruled "despotically," i.e., in the interests of the rulers rather than the ruled, and in the most cases irrespective of their consent. (The exception is those non-citizen residents who are metics, since these may be taken to have consented; their relation to the *polis* is more like a contractual one on the model of a military alliance.[46]) Yet only natural slaves may be ruled without their consent. Hence Aristotle's *polis* will be just only if all resident non-citizens are either metics or natural slaves. But are they?

Julia Annas argues that they are not:

> Aristotle assumes that the slaves [in the ideal *polis*] will not be natural slaves; far from lacking enough reasoning power to function on their own, they are envisaged as better motivated if given the chance of achieving freedom, and as having enough intelligence to combine forces and revolt, if precautionary measures are not taken. (Annas (1996) 740)

As we have seen, however, Aristotle does not envision natural slaves as dim-witted troglodytes; there is no reason why they should not be able to understand, and be motivated by, offers of emancipation. In any case, one of the "precautionary measures" Aristotle recommends (1330a25–9; cf. 1329a24–6) is selecting slaves who are deficient in *thymos* (cf. Miller (1996) 897); this suggests that these slaves will be natural slaves, presumably of the Asiatic type.

Nicholas Smith argues that rewarding slaves with emancipation (a practice recommended at 1330a33) is itself an injustice: "if they are natural slaves, and nature provides sufficient grounds for enslaving them, then to free them would be wrong" (Smith (1991) 144). But this is a mistake. Although the fact that natural slaves benefit from being enslaved is what makes enslaving them *permissible*, it does not make it mandatory; the slave-master legitimately rules with an eye to his own interest, not the slave's, and the slave benefits only accidentally (1278b31–6). Hence a natural slave's owners need not take his interests into account in deciding whether to free him; perhaps he would be better off enslaved, but if he foolishly desires freedom, and if offering him freedom is advantageous to the owners, such a policy is a perfectly legitimate one.[47]

A criticism of C.D.C. Reeve's is more telling. ((1998) p. lxxiii). The justice of Aristotle's arrangements concerning slaves depends on an assumption whose falsity Aristotle himself admits (1255a35–b1; cf. 1254b27–34): that naturally slavish families can be relied upon to breed true. It is difficult to see how the naturally free children of slave parents would be identified under Aristotle's system, and thus difficult to see how the citizens could avoid ruling these children despotically and so unjustly.

In addition to the slaves, Annas thinks that there is a separate class of free resident *banausoi* who are not natural slaves, but who are none the less ruled despotically, and so unjustly (Annas (1996) 740–2). Annas points to 1260a41–b3's claim that cobblers and other banausic craftsmen, unlike slaves, do not form a natural class, and have only "a kind of limited slavery" (*ἀφωρισμένην τινα δουλείαν*). Annas interprets the first claim to mean that cobblers and banausic craftsmen are not (ever?) natural slaves; but it seems more plausible to interpret Aristotle as meaning that while some people are slaves by nature, no one is a cobbler by nature. This would be consistent with some cobblers' being slaves by nature. As for the second claim, the respect in which the slavery of the *βάναυσος τεχνίτης* is *ἀφωρισμένην* seems to have nothing to do with whether he is a natural slave or not; rather, ordinary slaves share a household with their master (*koinonos zoes*), whereas craftsmen live apart (*πορρωτέρων*) and require less supervision. Aristotle stresses the inferior character of the *banausos*, tells us that *banausoi* in most *poleis* are either slaves or metics (1278a5–6), and divides the audience in the ideal *polis* into two classes, one free and the other banausic (1342a18–21). I am thus inclined to agree with Fred Miller that in the *πόλις κατ' εὐχήν* the *banausoi* too (when they are not metics) are natural slaves rather than free residents (Miller (1996) 898–9).

John Cooper argues that Aristotle "can hardly have seriously intended that somehow or other *all* the native-born free persons . . . should attain . . . the extremely high levels of moral and intellectual accomplishment that he requires for the exercise of the rights of citizenship" (Cooper (1996) 867 n. 18). Against this, however, is Aristotle's explicit statement (1324a23–5) that "the best constitution is that system under which *anyone whatsoever* might perform the best actions and enjoy a blessed life" (*εἶναι πολιτείαν ἀρίστην ταύτην ⟨τὴν⟩ τάξιν καθ' ἣν κἂν ὁστισοῦν ἄριστα πράττοι καὶ ζῴη μακαρίως*).

I conclude that Aristotle does a good job, though not a perfect one, of defending the justice of his ideal *polis*, given *his* conception of justice and *his* assumptions about human nature. But once those are opened to criticism, the case for the πόλις κατ' εὐχήν quickly becomes shaky. That there is no good reason to believe in the existence of natural slaves is of course old news, and without natural slaves it is unclear how the ruling elite are to be supported in their leisured activities. Perhaps all the functions of the slaves could be taken over by metics, but metics will have to be paid, and with what? The citizens of the ideal *polis* produce nothing directly, and deprived of slaves they produce nothing indirectly either. (Well, perhaps not quite nothing. The one marketable commodity produced by the citizens is *wisdom*; hence the *polis*'s only chance for economic survival might be to become what I've already compared it to: a university, making a living from the fees of paying students. But if "outsiders" can become students, the line between citizen and metic is blurred; moreover, such outsiders, not having been raised from infancy in Polis U., may be seeking pleasure or advantage, rather than the *kalon*, from their instruction, thus forcing a transformation of the curriculum.)

As for the justice of the paternalistic legislation governing citizens themselves, Aristotle takes for granted that those who conceptualise the good life in terms of virtue will take virtue as their criterion of political merit (and likewise for wealth and freedom). He fails to consider the possibility that someone might regard virtuous activity as the proper aim of life but not the proper aim of the *polis*. This in turn is chiefly because he, like many of the Greek philosophers, is blind to the distinction between *society* and *state*[48] (though the distinction was by no means inaccessible to the Greeks generally: see Hansen (1989), (1998)). When sophists like Lykophron argued that the state was merely an egoistic alliance for mutual security, Aristotle interpreted them, with some justice, as holding that *society* was so as well.

The lesson of modern liberalism, by contrast, is that liberty (in the sense of *exousia*, the ability to shape one's life through ongoing choices among competing options) is both an intrinsic component of the good life and an instrumental means to discovering the good life. Merely consenting to a constitutional set-up that radically constrains one's choices henceforth is an impoverished conception of liberty (cf. Long 1995), and in any case there are limits on the extent to which one can alienate one's own liberty. Hence an institution of legal compulsion and control is an inappropriate venue for the inculcation of moral virtue. If, as liberalism holds, restrictions on *exousia* are as despotic as limits on *eleutheria*, then the basis for political authority must be freedom rather than virtue. But this does not mean that virtue is not the appropriate focus of *social* rather than *political* life.

Many of the features of Aristotle's ideal *polis* become less objectionable when transferred from the political to the social arena. For example, anyone who has served on a committee can testify that the ideal committee would be one in which all the members have good sense (a committee κατ' εὐχήν); but when that is not so, those without good sense (be they in the majority or the minority) ought to defer to those who have it. And this is just the Proportional-Merit approach. We may be uncomfortable saying that those with good sense have a *right* to the submission of those without, because talk of rights suggests a political context, the context of legal *compulsion*. But if the claim is put in a social rather than a political context – if what is being said is not that the less sensible members of the committee should be *compelled* to defer to the more sensible members, but merely that they *ought* to do so – our discomfort wanes.

Aristotle's theory of the πόλις κατ' εὐχήν is an attempt to combine two ideals: equality in authority and the supremacy of virtue. The attempt itself is a laudable one; Aristotle's mistake is to assume that the kind of supremacy that virtue deserves must be translated straightforwardly into political authority. If supremacy of virtue is interpreted as requiring that the wise and virtuous should govern, and if at the same time equality in authority requires the assignment of equal political status to all citizens, the only way to satisfy both demands is to restrict the citizen body to the wise and virtuous, with all the difficulties this entails. The liberal solution, by contrast, is to assign the two ideals to different spheres: equality in authority applies in the political sphere (i.e. the sphere of legal compulsion, state-based or otherwise), while supremacy of virtue applies in the social sphere. Aristotle's πόλις κατ' εὐχήν fails to resolve the tension between the two ideals because for him the political sphere engulfs the social. I said at the beginning that for Aristotle the *polis* was simultaneously a coercive legal authority and the supreme form of human association; in fact nothing does, could or should fill both those roles. The supreme association is society itself, the Stoic *kosmopolis*; coercive legal authority, by contrast, is merely an administrative convenience.[49]

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Notes

1 All references to Aristotelian texts will be to the *Politics* except when otherwise noted. All translations are my own.

2 While modern egalitarianism tends to focus on *socioeconomic* equality, for the ancients (as arguably for the Lockean strand within modern liberalism; cf. Long (2001)) the most important form of equality is *equality in authority*. Contrast contemporary discussions of "distributive justice," which are chiefly about access to material resources, with ancient discussions of the same topic, which are chiefly about access to political power. While Aristotle does exhibit concern to avoid extremes of wealth and poverty in his ideal *polis*, equality in authority clearly looms larger in his interests than socioeconomic equality.

3 Mogens Herman Hansen suggests to me that Aristotle's ideal kingship is meant to be an *impracticable* utopia corresponding to the impracticable utopia in Plato's *Republic*, while Aristotle's *polis kat' euchen* is meant by contrast to be a *practicable* utopia corresponding to the practicable utopia in Plato's *Laws*. (For more about kingship, see below.) Whatever Plato's intentions may have been, I'm not convinced that Aristotle regarded either of his own utopias as impracticable *in principle* – and I also think he regarded both as none the less pretty unlikely. It's not clear to me which is the unlikelier. (What is more utopian – finding a small number of people who meet the highest standard of virtue, or finding a larger number of people who meet the second highest standard?)

4 This second criterion distinguishes the *polis* from an individual, but arguably not from a household or a military alliance, each of which seeks the good of all its members. Hence the first criterion is crucial.

5 Of course whatever aims at an end must aim at the means to that end, so in a sense the *polis* will be very much concerned to aim at advantage. But a military alliance is aimed at advantage in a more fundamental way: it is a means to an end (security) which in turn serves an ultimate end (happiness), but the function of the alliance reaches only as far as producing the first end, and does not play any part in subsequently using that first end to promote the further end. In economic terms, a military alliance concerns itself only with relatively high-order stages of production.

6 Irwin (1988) treats altruistic concern as the central feature of the *kalon*, and thus of the virtues (439–42). But this tends to blur Aristotle's distinction (1129b25) between general justice (virtue-in-relation-to-another) and virtue as such. The *kalon* is above all graceful, appropriate, and morally beautiful; Rogers's (1993) emphasis on the *aesthetic* character of the *kalon* is salutary.

7 Not all non-Greek populations appear to be naturally slavish; the Carthaginians are described as *politeuesthai kalos* (1272b24–5), while the Egyptians enjoy *taxeos politikes* (1329b32–4), conditions presumably open only to the naturally free. Perhaps these peoples' location on the Mediterranean puts them in the geographic "middle," allowing them to avoid the extremes of climate that supposedly generate a slavish mentality (1327b20–33). (Ah, the temperate climes of northern Africa . . .)

8 A similar distinction is found within the Greek population itself (1327b28–37), which raises the question of whether a substantial portion of Greeks, too, are natural slaves. This would be surprising, since Greeks appear to be capable of *polis* life, while natural slaves are not. But Aristotle may be thinking of such Greeks as having these deficiencies in *dianoia* and *thymos* in a less extreme form, thus fitting them for deviant *poleis* (which outstrip the political capacities of natural slaves), and perhaps even for polity, but not for the *polis kat' euchen*. If even most *Greeks* are not capable of the highest form of political life, this would seem to heighten the utopian character of Aristotle's ideal constitution.

9 This subdivision of the rational part appears to be identical to what Aristotle elsewhere describes as a division of the *non*-rational part (1102b13–3a3). A human soul's non-rational part is like the soul of an animal, in that it is divided into a nutritive part and a desiderative part; but a human's desiderative part differs from an animal's in being responsive to reason (one's own reason in the case of the naturally free, the reason of another in the case of a natural slave). Hence the emotional part is rational in a way and non-rational in a way. An obvious Platonic influence here is the *Republic*'s treatment of *thymos* as a non-rational part responsive to the rational part. A less obvious Platonic influence is the *Republic*'s Divided Line, where images are treated twice over as denizens of the sensible and of the intelligible world.

10 On the cognitive function of emotions in Aristotle's theory, see Achtenberg (2002); Long (2000), (2003).

11 The fearlessness of the Celts was a byword; Arrian (*Anabasis* I.4.6) reports how Celtic envoys told Alexander of Macedon that they couldn't think of anything that would frighten them except the sky's falling (cf. Strabo VII.3.8).

12 For the distinction between constitutive and instrumental means see *Eth. Eud.* 1214b11–27; cf. Irwin (1995) 65–6.

13 Even if Aristotle's stereotypes of these populations were to be accepted, his confidence that the differences in question are due to nature rather than nurture sits oddly with his emphasis on the importance of education.

14 Aristotle's assumption that productive labour lacks intrinsic value is puzzling. It is true that productive labour always aims at some product beyond itself; but there is no reason why this feature of *poiesis* should not itself be intrinsically choiceworthy. As Adam Smith notes: "[T]he exact adjustment of the means for attaining any conveniency or pleasure [is] frequently . . . more regarded, than that very conveniency or pleasure, in the attainment of which their whole merit would seem to consist . . . When a person comes into his chamber, and finds the chairs all standing in the middle of the room, he is angry with his servant, and rather than see them continue in that disorder, perhaps takes the trouble himself to set them all in their places with their backs to the wall. The whole propriety of this new situation arises from its superior conveniency in leaving the floor free and disengaged. To attain this conveniency he voluntarily puts himself to more trouble than all he could have suffered from the want of it; since nothing was more easy, than to have set himself down upon one of them, which is probably what he does when his labour is over. What he wanted therefore, it seems, was not so much this conveniency, as that arrangement of things which promotes it" (*Theory of Moral Sentiments* IV.1).

15 Interpretations of Aristotelian *katharsis* abound. As I read both the *Politics* and the *Poetics*, suppressed emotions are unhealthy, and causing them to be felt enables them to dissipate (cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1126a17). If this interpretation is felt to be anachronistic, savouring as it does of the modern notion of the subconscious, I would point to *Mem.* 451b23–9, 453a14–31, as evidence that Aristotle does indeed have a notion sufficiently like that of the subconscious to ground this account of catharsis. If this is right, then Barnes's objection that "after a performance of *Oedipus*" we do not in fact "cease . . . to feel any pity or any fear" ((1995b) 279) is a misunderstanding; the point of *katharsis* will be to move pity and fear from the subconscious to the conscious level, a process which will ordinarily involve an *increase* in the *felt* strength of such emotions.

16 For an inclusivist reading of *Pol.* VII, see Depew (1991).

17 The janitorial staff could be metics, but the deans have *got* to be slaves.

18 This objection was suggested to me by Prof. Hansen.

19 "To be most of all man is to be less than, and so nonidentical with, man" (Keyt (1987) 150).

20 Aristotle remarks elsewhere (*HA* 487b33–8a10) that some animals lead a solitary life, others a gregarious one, and still others "dualise" (*epamphoterizei*) between the two; human beings are assigned to this last, "dualising" category; cf. Cicero, *De fin.* II.13.40: "A human being, as Aristotle affirms, is born for two things, understanding and action, as though he were a mortal god."

21 The same irresolution is found in the ethical works: contrast, e.g., *Eth. Nic.* 1160a30–b10 with *Eth. Eud.*/*Eth. Nic.* 1131a24–8.

22 I call it "traditional" because this classification, or one close to it, occurs in Xenophon, *Mem.* IV.6.12, and in Plato, *Pol.* 291c–2a, 302c–e.

23 For the requirement that the rulers rule in the *interest* of the ruled (or more precisely of the entire *polis*, including both rulers and ruled) Aristotle sometimes substitutes the requirement that the rulers rule with the *consent* of the ruled, or again that the rulers rule *lawfully*. (See, e.g., 1285a26–8). But lawful rule for Aristotle implies consensual rule (1324b23–9), and rule in the interest of the ruled arguably does so as well (see Long (1996a) 787–98).

24 Identifying who the "rulers" are can be tricky, however. Presumably constitutional classification should be based on *de facto* rather than *de jure* status, since these often diverge (the early Roman emperors, e.g., had far more power *de facto* than *de jure*; with today's English monarchs the reverse holds). Yet if we consider *de facto* power rather than legal authority, then, e.g., Athens was far more oligarchic than Aristotle admits: Long (1996b).

25 For a fuller discussion of the Mixture Classification, see Hansen (1993) and Miller (1995) ch. 5.

26 Aristotle says that a father's rule over his children is like kingship, while a husband's rule over his wife is like polity (1259a38–b18). He notes that this does not mean that husband and wife take turns ruling; but what *does* he mean? He cannot mean, nonsensically, that the husband's virtue outweighs the wife's individually but not collectively. Perhaps the analogy is that while the husband is generally wiser, the wife is wiser within the specific sphere of her domestic duties and should be deferred to there (cf. ps.-Aristotle, *Ec.* III. 1) – whereas children are never wiser than their father in any respect.

27 I owe this suggestion to Prof. Hansen.

28 It might seem that *Pol.* 1286b11–14 identifies a *polis* of equally virtuous citizens as a polity (rather than, as one might expect, an aristocracy *kat' euchen*). (I owe this suggestion to Prof. Hansen.) But this text, which describes a hypothetical transition from kingship to polity, does not say that there comes into being a large group of citizens equal in virtue to the king *individually*; it can equally well be read, and in light of Aristotle's overall theory should charitably be read, as saying that this large number of equally virtuous citizens comes to rival the king's virtue *collectively*. In that case, polity would indeed be the appropriate constitution.

29 One might argue that a market economy functions as precisely this sort of "oligarchy." An individual rich person has more "votes" than the average person, but because the average people have more wealth collectively, the market caters primarily to their preferences rather than to those of the rich.

30 But see Cohen (1983).

31 Perhaps tyranny will count as a mixture of oligarchy and democracy not only under the Mixture Classification but likewise under the Proportional-Merit Classification: the tyrant will be the wealthiest citizen and the *only* free citizen, so tyranny will meet both the oligarchic and (in a perverse way) the democratic criteria.

32 If in a given *polis* "there is any one man" of superhuman virtue, "or more than one, though not enough to make up a complete *polis*" (1284a3–5), then such men, "whether there be several or one only" (1284a7–8), cannot legitimately be subject to the authority of others (1284a9–17), and should instead be treated "as permanent kings in their *poleis*" (1284b33–5). Again, whenever there is "an entire family *or even* a single individual" of superhuman virtue, justice demands that "this family be the kingly one and be in charge of everything, and that this individual be king" (1288a15–19). The implication is that such a constitution will be a kingship, whether its rulers are single or plural in number. (Presumably if these men of superhuman virtue *had* existed in numbers sufficient "to make up a complete *polis*," they would have formed an aristocracy rather than a kingship; but see below.)

33 For a defence of this thesis, see Putnam (1979); Kripke (1980).

34 Perhaps another reason for calling the *polis kat' euchen* an "aristocracy" is that all the other labels are taken! Though all citizens have equal rights, the ideal *polis* is not a democracy, because democracy is a deviant constitution, and the ideal *polis* is of course not deviant. Nor can it be the non-deviant correlate to democracy, because that is supposed to be polity, which does not involve equal rights. Nor is it kingship, since although a kingship's rulers can be plural in number, they cannot constitute an entire *polis* by themselves (1284a3–5), whereas in the *polis kat' euchen* they do. The etymological significance of *aristokratia* probably exerts some pull as well.

35 C.D.C. Reeve takes 1255a1–3: "So it is evident that there are by nature certain persons, some free and some slave, for whom slavery is both advantageous and just" (*hoti men toinun eisi phusei tines hoi men eleutheroi hoi de douloi phaneron hois kai sumpherei to douleuein kai dikaion estin*), to imply that some naturally free persons may be justly enslaved (Reeve (1996) 9 n. 36). This reading appears to require *both* (a) that *hoi men eleutheroi hoi de douloi* be read as within the scope of *phusei*, rather than as a parenthetical phrase interrupting *eisi phusei tines hois*, and *also* (b) that *douleuein* be read as "being a slave" rather than as "participating in slavery," whether as a slave or as a master. ("So it is evident that there are certain persons, some by nature free and others slave, for whom being enslaved is both advantageous and just."). And Reeve's further inference that some natural slaves may not be justly enslaved depends on (c) taking *tines* as implying "fewer than all." Neither (c) nor the conjunction of (a) and (b) seems irresistible (particularly given that the *toinun* implies that the sentence is an inference from what has come before).

36 For an analogous dispute see *Soul* 403a29–b12, where the respective merits of (a) *desire for retaliation*, (b) *boiling of the blood around the heart*, and (c) *desire for retaliation realised in boiling of the blood around the heart* as definitions of anger are debated.

37 Why is this so? Presumably because a community consisting entirely of averagely virtuous people wouldn't contain anyone virtuous enough to adopt virtue as a criterion of political merit.

38 It's not clear whether the citizens of an aristocracy are few because it's hard to find people of superior virtue in large numbers, or instead because a system of rewards based on virtue requires the citizens to be well known to one another, which in turn requires a small citizen body (1326b10–20). If "few" and "many" are understood in terms of *percentages*, aristocracy is more democratic than polity; if they are understood in terms of *absolute quantities*, polity is more democratic than aristocracy. Aristotle seems to vacillate between these two understandings of "few" and "many."

39 On the other hand, oligarchies are said to be more prone to faction and so less stable: 1302a7–13.

40 For Zeno's imaginary *polis* see Erskine (1990); Schofield (1991); Obbink (1999); Vander Waerdt (1994); Long (2005).

41 For defence of this claim see Long (1996a) 787–98.

42 In any case Aristotle seems (1284a7) more inclined to say that it is the king who is not a citizen, assuming that a citizen is a *meros poleos*. But perhaps he means that the king is not *merely* a *meros poleos* but is the *polis* himself, in the sense that the *polis* may be identified (as at 1278b8–13; cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1168b31–3) with its ruling part.

43 Cf. Long (1996a) 795.

44 For the distinction between *exousia* and *eleutheria* and the role of consent to the constitution, see Long (1996a) 787–98.

45 It's debatable whether women even count as citizens. If citizens are those who have a share in ruling, then they are not. If citizens are those whose interests are to be taken into account in political decisions, then they are. Aristotle of course employs both criteria freely, and ordinary Greek usage is inconsistent on this point as well. Aristotle never takes the status of women into account in classifying constitutions.

46 By Aristotle's standards, the modern liberal state would in effect be, paradoxically, a *polis* composed entirely of metics, or the moral equivalent of metics.

47 Aristotle never fulfils his promise (1330a33) to explain "later on" *why* offering emancipation as a reward is advantageous; the *Politics* as we have it breaks off in the middle of a discussion of musical education in the ideal *polis*, and the promised explanation may belong to a section now lost. The ps.-Aristotelian *Economics*, in a section (1344b15–18) that is probably the work of Aristotle's student Theophrastos (Philodemos ascribes the first book of the *Economics* to Theophrastos: *PHerc.* 1424.7–8; cf. Natali (1995) 102), suggests that the promise of emancipation gives slaves a greater incentive to work. Another possibility is that it gives slaves less incentive to rebel.

48 The *locus classicus* is Thomas Paine: "Some writers have so confounded government with society, as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness *positively* by uniting our affections, the latter *negatively* by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher. Society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one" (Paine [1776] (1976) 65). "Great part of that order which reigns among mankind is not the effect of government. It has its origins in the principles of society and the natural constitution of man. It existed prior to government, and would exist if the formality of government was abolished. The mutual dependence and reciprocal interest which man has upon man, and all the parts of a civilized community upon each other, create that great chain of connection which holds it together. . . . In fine, society performs for itself almost everything which is ascribed to government" (Paine [1791–2] (1971) 185).

49 This paper has benefited from comments by the other participants in the Copenhagen Polis Centre's Symposium on the Imaginary Polis in Copenhagen, January 8–10 2004, and especially from our symposiarch, Mogens Herman Hansen.

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