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ARISTOTLE'S POLITICS

A SYMPOSIUM*



ARISTOTLE ON HUMAN NATURE AND POLITICAL VIRTUE

JULIA ANNAS

ARISTOTLE GIVES US an account of φύσις or nature in the *Physics* which is adequate for his immediate purposes there, but gives little indication of his broad deployment in the ethical and political works of the concept of the natural. He never systematically investigates nature as an ethical or political concept. Had he done so, he could not have failed to see that there are some tensions within the roles he assigns to the natural. He might thereby have avoided several problems, including one of his most unfortunate legacies, that of reactionary political attitudes which have appealed to nature, often in Aristotle's name, to uphold existing inequalities in society, such as slavery and the subordination of women. Some of this legacy has got attached to Aristotle unfairly; appeals to his works to defend race-based forms of slavery, for example, are patently specious. However, Aristotle's own lack of precision about the role of nature in his ethical and political arguments must bear some of the responsibility.

Nature in the *Politics* has been most extensively studied in the context of the book 1 argument that the polis is "by nature." Fred Miller's *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's Politics* is a landmark

*With the exception of John Cooper's essay and Fred Miller's response, these papers were presented at a conference focused on Miller's *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's Politics*, codirected by Charles L. Griswold, Jr. and Jeffery Paul with the support of the Liberty Fund, Inc.

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in this respect as in many others, and his discussion of the naturalness of the polis is, I think, definitive, and should put an end to the notion that according to Aristotle people find their natural end functioning as mere parts in some large organic social whole. However, nature in Aristotle's ethical and political works contains complications outside book 1, and I hope that there remain some points to be made and issues to be elucidated.

One source of confusion is Aristotle's tendency, in the ethical and political works, sometimes to stress a particular strand in the *Physics* account and sometimes to ignore it, and even to say things which conflict with it. This is notably so with the idea that the natural is that which occurs always or for the most part. The main *Physics* discussion, which revolves around the idea of an internal source of changing or being changed, does not discuss this, but it emerges slightly later.¹ Something is natural or by nature if, starting from some internal principle, it develops continuously "always something going towards the same thing, if nothing interferes."² Thus the natural is the usual. We can see why this emerges as an assumption, expressed but never defended, in the physical works, where it is reasonable to assume that the kinds of changes that a thing can engage in which are due to its internal principle of change, rather than external interference, will be revealed by its usual behavior, rather than by any imposed or freakish occurrences.

Sometimes Aristotle carries over to the ethical and political works this assumption that "nature is the cause of what is the same way always or for the most part, and chance of the opposite."³ It is difficult to believe that this assumption plays no role in Aristotle's argument for the naturalness of the polis and of slavery. In Aristotle's world every known society contained slavery, a fact that clearly prevented Aristotle from being able to think of it as an institution based on force rather than nature. Furthermore, societies other than the Greek polis could well have seemed to Aristotle to be, like the Persian Empire, based on force. Thus the Greek polis might well seem like

¹See Aristotle, *Physics* 199b15–18, 25–6; cf. Aristotle, *Parts of Animals* 641b24–6.

²*Physics* 199b15–18. All translations are the author's, unless otherwise specified.

³Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1247a31–b1; cf. Aristotle, *Magna Moralia* 1194b37–9.

the usual form to develop when no interfering conditions were present.⁴ Sometimes, on the other hand, he develops an argument based on nature that conflicts with this, as with his third major argument in book 1 (chapters 8–10), the one that establishes that only certain forms of money-making are natural. For the conclusion of this argument is that the only form of natural money-making is one which is extremely rare; indeed, for it to be usual the whole of the ancient economy would have to be revolutionized. Clearly the uppermost idea in Aristotle's mind here is that of the natural not as the usual but as the ideal, something not actually found in the world as it is.

One reason for the existence of an unedifying tradition of reactionary appeals to nature in the name of Aristotle is surely his failure clearly to analyze, in his discussion, the role of nature as the usual and its distinctness from nature as providing an ideal. If we look at the notorious arguments in *Politics* 1 with this point in view, it leaps to mind that while the first two rely on the idea that the natural can be found by looking to the usual, the third argues that the natural is something which is not to be found. However, this difference between the arguments has not been given the prominence it deserves. Of course, if nature provides an ideal, this will have normative force; and if nature can be found by looking to the usual, then no effort is required to draw a number of familiar reactionary conclusions: the subordination of women is natural, and hence is to be endorsed as a norm, because women are nearly always subordinated to men, and so on. This is the simplistic form of "appeal to nature" vigorously criticized by thinkers like Mill and Sidgwick.⁵ Aristotle himself does not make this kind of "appeal," but it is easy to see why those who do so have looked to the first two arguments of *Politics* 1 as support. Moreover, it is fair to regard Aristotle as open to criticism for not having thought more carefully

⁴Aristotle is thinking of the conditions of Greek civilization, though he is not clear about this restriction: in book 2 of the *Politics* he considers Carthage at length as an example of a type of constitution, while in book 7 (1327b20–36) he appears to write off non-Greeks, for differing reasons, as incapable of political development. (However, he then adds that the same distinctions that he has drawn between Greeks and non-Greeks apply among the Greeks themselves.)

⁵John Stuart Mill, *Nature* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1958); and chapter 1 of *The Subjection of Women* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1988); Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 80–2.

about the relationship between his uses of nature in the physical works and his uses of it in the ethical and political works.

However, this conflation is not the source of all the complexities in Aristotle's use of nature in the *Politics*. In what follows I shall be concentrating on another distinction, one which points us towards an uncertainty that arises within Aristotle's concept of human nature, without reference to works outside the *Politics*.

In book 7 Aristotle says that for people to become virtuous three things are required: nature (φύσις), habit (ἔθος), and reason (λόγος); and he develops the idea as a preliminary to his discussion of the proper education for citizens. He spends far longer on habit and reason, but what he says about nature here is significant.⁶ The subjects he is concerned with, he says first, must be human beings and not some other animal. This same human nature requires being of a certain kind of body and soul. He does not further specify this here, beyond saying that he has already said what people should be like by nature to be "amenable to the law-giver." (We shall take up this reference below.) Some natural endowments, he says, are not an advantage, for habits alter them; some qualities are, as far as nature goes, ambivalent, and develop for better or worse through habit. Other animals live mostly by nature, though habit plays a small role; but humans have reason. Then follows a striking sentence: "So these must harmonize with one another; for people do many things because of reason against their habits and nature, if they are persuaded that to do otherwise is better."⁷ Here "harmony" of nature, habit, and reason is compatible with reason going against the other two (a remarkable conception of harmonization).

Nature here is what I call "mere nature."⁸ It is simply the basic material of human beings, which, so far from having its own reliable built-in goals, can be developed in quite opposite directions by habit and reason. Human beings start out with some tendencies and not others; but they develop morally not through nature, but through habit and reason and the ways that these get to work on the raw material provided by nature. This idea of mere nature is more familiar from

⁶See *Politics* 1332a38–b10.

⁷*Politics* 1332b6–8.

⁸Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* where “natural virtue” is distinguished from full virtue.⁹ The concept of nature that has had most prominence in discussions of the *Politics* is the one that gets a starring role in book 1, and is clearly quite different from the raw material of mere nature, which could never be enough to support the arguments about the naturalness of the polis, slavery, and certain forms of money-making. Nature as that which figures in book 1 is itself a goal or end: “what we say the nature of each thing is, is what it is when its coming-into-being is completed.”¹⁰ Nature here is the end of the process, not the beginning. Further, nature in this sense is clearly normative, a point that scarcely needs argument for book 1. Mere nature is explicitly no guide to what is better and what worse, while there is no doubt that nature proper or nature in the full sense does establish a norm, by virtue of being the appropriate end-point of a thing’s development. This is not restricted to book 1, however; within books 7 and 8 themselves there are frequent uses of nature in the more familiar sense of a thing’s goal or end, with normative implications.¹¹

Aristotle himself does not explicitly distinguish these two uses of nature, although they differ sufficiently for it to be as appropriate for him to draw the distinction as to draw the distinctions that he does for concepts like place, oneness, or one thing’s being “from” another. (His listing of different uses of “nature” in his philosophical lexicon, *Metaphysics* 4, is unhelpful for our purposes, since it is not concerned with problems arising from the ethical and political use of the term and discusses only physical applications of nature.)¹²

⁹*Nicomachean Ethics* 1103a18–26, 1144b1–12.

¹⁰*Politics* 1252b32–33. Here completion results in production of a thing’s nature, while in the “mere nature” passages habit and reason need to complete nature in order to develop it from raw material towards a goal.

¹¹See *Politics* 1324b36–7 (and 1325a27–30), 1325b7–10, 1332a21–4 and 27–30, 1334b12–17 and 24–5, 1337b28–33, 1342b22–8. Passages which seem to stress mere nature can be found at 1326a5–7, 1327b18–20 and 33–6, 1328a9–10 and 17–18, 1329a14–16, 1330a28–30, 1332a34–b11, 1332b35–41, 1334b6–8, 1336b40–1337a3.

¹²However, the chapter does add to the account in *Physics* 2 (nature as the internal source of change) the point that a thing’s nature is both the matter from which the change begins and also the substance or form which is the τέλος of the completed change. This is analogous to the distinction between mere nature and nature in the ethical and political works, though Aristotle never connects them.

Noting the difference between nature and mere nature can help us to solve some problems with the use Aristotle makes overall of nature in the *Politics*. As Fred Miller points out,¹³ the apparent conflict between the thesis that the polis exists by nature and that ethical (and hence political) virtue does not exist by nature dissolves once we note that virtue does not come about in us because of mere nature (to become virtuous we need habit directed by reason) while the state exists by nature in the full sense: the polis establishes a norm for human development and behavior, since it is natural for humans to activate and exercise the potentiality for social and political virtue.

Here, however, I shall be concerned not with the problems of book 1 but with problems that arise for Aristotle's treatment of human nature in books 7 and 8. Here we find, as noted, an explicit discussion of mere nature, together with clear awareness of the role of nature in the full sense. However, we also find the closest Aristotle comes to providing a bridge between these two ideas of human nature. In his discussion of the relation of reason and habit,¹⁴ he says that the *telos* (τέλος) of human nature is reason and mind (λόγος καὶ νοῦς), so that this is what should form the goal of the ways that habits should be set up. That is, mere human nature is developed into full human nature by habit and reason, but reason is also the way in which it is natural for humans to develop.¹⁵ Aristotle's position would be clearer if he had provided a developmental account of the progress of reason from mere nature to nature, but in *Politics* 7 and 8, where he is talking at length about education of various kinds, an overall developmental position can be constructed.¹⁶ Humans are equipped by mere nature to

¹³Fred D. Miller, Jr., *Nature, Justice and Rights in Aristotle's Politics* (hereafter, *NJR*) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 44–5.

¹⁴See *Politics* 1334b6–28.

¹⁵“Natural” in which sense: that of mere or full nature? If reason is just part of mere nature, it will need something else to develop it into full nature, while if reason is part of our nature in the full sense, it will be, in the requisite way, distinct from the mere nature it needs to get to work on. Of course nobody starts with a fully developed reason; that is why we need to proceed through habit, and to follow established patterns until we are capable of our own fully autonomous uses of reason.

¹⁶In *The Morality of Happiness* (pp. 146–9) I criticize Aristotle for not providing an overall developmental account of reason as the path from mere nature to nature, contrasting the later positions of Arius Didymus' account of Peripatetic ethics, which does recast Aristotle's theory in terms of a Stoicized story of οἰκειώσις, and Alexander of Aphrodisias, who returns to a more strictly Aristotelian account which leaves the two uses not clearly connected.

develop virtue, but do not do so unless habit is directed by reason to produce a rational direction of one's life and employment of external goods. In the context of the *Politics* we also need to remember the thesis that humans are by nature *politika* (πολιτικά)—social and political beings. For it is only when habit is directed by reason to produce dispositions to engage socially, culturally, and politically with others in a form of society (one which Aristotle identifies with the polis) that humans achieve the goal of natural development.

This is an attractive thesis, and has some equally attractive corollaries. The natural development for humans is one in which they achieve virtue, which is not a matter of mindless habituation but a developed reflective disposition to choose and act rightly—a disposition which precisely frees the agent from dependence on the results of habituation if these have been too narrow and conventional to capture what matters for virtue. Thus the citizens of Aristotle's ideal state will be individuals who choose and act as a result of autonomous reflection. Moreover, a state whose citizens have developed virtuously will be just, aiming at the common good rather than the good of one particular faction; so individual and political aims will mesh. The political culture of the ideal state will be one in which the factors that habituate the young as they are educated will encourage them to develop virtuously, hence reflectively and rationally, and their virtuous choices will in turn tend to propagate a culture which encourages the development of rational reflection in the citizens. Thus the ideal state will exhibit what Miller calls moderate individualism: the aim of the state is the virtue, and hence happiness, of each individual, not a collective goal that some might partake of less than others.¹⁷ This characterizes a state which meets the further demand that citizen virtue require active exercise of political rule, not mere conformity to law; for political rule is rule over equals, and hence has to be exercised according to the principle of ruling and being ruled in turns, a principle generating an attractively democratic form of political government in which political institutions are constrained by the demands of equality among citizens.

There is also, however, a well-known and unattractive aspect to Aristotle's view of the natural development of political virtue. His discussion of an ideal form of polis in books 7 and 8 makes it patent

¹⁷See Miller, *NJR*, 213–24.

that the development of political virtue not only is difficult but requires considerable σχολή or “leisure,”¹⁸ and that this in turn requires a very considerable infrastructure—in fact, a whole layer of economic activity which is carried out by people who are not themselves citizens and hence not “parts” of the polis. The leisure, and hence virtue, of one group depends on the work of others, who do not themselves have leisure, and hence do not develop the ethical and political virtue of the citizens. In the ideal state there are first- and second-class citizens, although Aristotle does not put it this way, for he insists that the only real citizens are the minority of the virtuous, thereby defining the majority of inhabitants of the city as noncitizens and not a part of it.

Not only is this unattractive, it appears quite plainly unjust. As Christopher Taylor has roundly put the matter: “As it stands, the so-called ideal *polis* is not a political community at all, since it is not self-sufficient for life, much less for the good life (1252b27–30). Rather, it is 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. Even leaving aside the question of slavery, the ‘ideal’ *polis* is thus characterized by systematic injustice.”¹⁹

It is immediate and straightforward for us to consider this unjust. We have a distribution of the city’s benefits and burdens which is inequitable, in that some labor for the benefit of others. Further, this is the ideal state, so Aristotle is abstracting from what he considers to be nonideal features of the real world. Why does he not consider this arrangement unjust? What is his considered view of the distinction between citizens and others in his state?

¹⁸Cf. *Politics* 1269b34–6: the well-run state will provide leisure from necessary activities. Aristotle presents this as an agreed point, though one providing difficulty as to its achievement. “Leisure” is apparently unavoidable as a translation of σχολή, despite the unsuitable modern connotations of triviality and relaxation. (It is perhaps significant that modern English lacks a handy word for the idea of having time that is spent in ways determined by your own priorities, not by the need to work for others, and which is devoted to serious, rather than trivial, pursuits.) There is another aspect to σχολή less obvious in the English “leisure,” namely, freedom from pressures generated by money worries. Cf. 1273a31–7, 1273b6–7. (In some ways the English “independence” best combines the idea of financial freedom from want and subordination, and the idea of shaping one’s life according to one’s own plan, but would not be recognized as a translation of σχολή.)

¹⁹C. C. W. Taylor, “Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 250.

Aristotle assumes that some of the noncitizens will be metics or resident aliens, who will not even expect to form part of the political community. He does not regard this as problematic and is simply assuming a normal fact of everyday life in the ancient world, where there were large disfranchised metic communities in cities such as Athens. Aristotle himself lived most of his life as a metic,²⁰ and, although he sometimes stresses the disadvantages of metic status,²¹ seems to have found it obvious that many people would find it to their advantage overall to live in cities of which they were not citizens, mostly to engage in trade, so that the dependence of his ideal state on a metic section of the economy would not be appealing to any novel arrangement. However, there are problematic hidden assumptions in Aristotle's transfer of a fact of ordinary Greek life to the ideal state. His state can hardly be a paradigm of self-sufficiency in the most minimal sense of being able to meet its own economic needs, if it is economically dependent on the commercial activities of people whose primary political loyalties lie elsewhere.²²

The farmers are envisaged as slaves (sometimes as *περίουκοι*, which presumably implies some degree of unfreedom).²³ We would expect Aristotle to insist that he has in mind natural slaves, given the notorious discussion in book 1. For when he argues that slavery has a natural basis, the only set-up that his analysis begins to fit is the one where heavy manual labor is performed by natural slaves under the guidance of a natural master, who benefits himself and his slaves by directing them in ways that they are incapable of unaided. This structure can be seen as fitting ancient small-scale farming, though patently failing to fit many of the skilled and supervisory roles which ancient

²⁰On Aristotle's own status and self-conception as a metic, see David Whitehead, "Aristotle the Metic," *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 201 (1975): 94–9.

²¹See *Politics* 1278a34–8. However, Aristotle's attitude to metic status seems to be objective and uninvolved; his occasional comments (collected in Whitehead's article) show that he is aware that some metics resented their lack of political rights, but is apparently free from personal resentment as well as from any judgment that, in his own political theory, the lot of metics should be improved.

²²It is not wholly fanciful to compare modern worries about loss of national autonomy in countries whose economy is dependent on the activities of multinational companies based elsewhere.

²³See *Politics* 1329a25–6, 1330a25–30.

slaves often filled. If natural slavery fits anywhere, it should fit here; and in the context of sketching an ideal state, Aristotle could be expected to ignore the awkward fact that the actual world presents us with few if any examples of those people whom the theory categorizes as natural slaves.²⁴ Further, Aristotle here contrasts the relation of being a part of the state with that of being a necessary condition for its existence, without there being a common good, as in the case of a product and the tool needed to make it. He adds that this kind of possession belonging to the city will include many living things, surely meaning to recall the statement of book 1 that the slave is a living tool.²⁵

However, Aristotle assumes that the slaves in question 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.²⁶ Aristotle's discussion assumes throughout that these are people who are capable of functioning as free people,²⁷ but have been deprived of their freedom through *τύχη*, bad luck. Notoriously, he never gives theoretical attention to the injustice of enslaving those who are not natural slaves; his ideal city here rests on an injustice which is never explicitly dealt with.

The most striking type of injustice in Aristotle's ideal state, however, does not involve metics or slaves, people whose exploited status we can understand Aristotle taking for granted. A majority of the free residents of the ideal polis are not to be citizens. They are *βάνανσοι* —

²⁴On the argument for natural slavery, see Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*, 152–6, and Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

²⁵See *Politics* 1328b22–37; cf. 1253b32–3.

²⁶See *Politics* 1330a25–33.

²⁷Aristotle's attitude towards the farmers in this ideal state is unexpected, given that in book 6 of the *Politics* he regards the best type of democracy as one based on a farming population, with workers and traders worse in character and leading to a worse form of democracy if they get into power. He adds that the life of workers and traders precludes virtue, but conspicuously fails to say this about the farmers. However, he praises the farmers' democracy rather back-handedly, saying that what makes it good is that farmers lack the leisure to go to the Assembly often or to take much interest in politics. Possibly, when sketching his ideal state Aristotle was unwilling to have half-leisured citizens, and found it preferable, despite the obvious problems, to rely on a large body of slave or serf farmers.

a word that has no ready modern equivalent. They are the productive class, but Aristotle's way of referring to them has an ineliminably negative aspect; the work they do is regarded as mechanical and menial. Social prejudice against certain kinds of work, however, cannot on its own generate any justification for depriving them of political rights. How might Aristotle think that this could be justified?

The obvious way would seem to be to claim that there is a difference of nature between the workers and the citizens—a difference, presumably, of mere nature—explaining why the citizens can, while the workers cannot, develop into people achieving their full nature by exercising ethical and political virtue. After all, in book 1 Aristotle claims that there is a natural basis to the distinction between male and female, and free and slave. Females and slaves have a different nature, so that their political subordination does not offend against the demands of justice: unequal rights are assigned to unequals. Among free males, by contrast, Aristotle stresses equality: political rule is exercised over those who are equal and similar to you, which is why care has to be taken that it does not become regarded as a mere exercise of power which might lead the ruled to resentment and the rulers to become unacceptably dominant.²⁸ In book 7 itself, when discussing how the roles of soldier and of political ruler (deliberating policy and judging legal cases) should be assigned, he is careful to point out that the natural fact of aging provides a difference that all can respect as relevant: the young should fight while the older men deliberate. The assumption is clearly that any principle of exclusion from the exercise of political rights is *prima facie* objectionable and resented. Age-limits can be tolerated only because they do not permanently exclude those disadvantaged, merely making them wait for a time. Moreover, this difference is a natural one; hence people will accept it, since it does not exclude people from what they are entitled to.²⁹ Surely,

²⁸Cf. *Politics* 1325a24–30, where Aristotle reiterates that rule over free people is as different from rule over slaves as is the naturally free from the naturally slave, and 1325a41–b10, where he derides those who think that supreme power gives one the chance to do the most fine actions; fine actions can only be performed by treating those who are in fact equal to you as equals: treating them as unequal to you is contrary to nature, and hence not fine. In this context Aristotle repeats the lack of equality between male and female, and free and slave (and adds that of father and child): political rule respects natural equality and natural inequality.

²⁹See *Politics* 1329a2–b17, esp. b13–17.

therefore, Aristotle ought to provide a natural basis for his principle of excluding the workers from political rights. They are ruled by the citizens in a way that is wholly one-sided; they do not get treated as equals, or get to rule in turn, any more than the slaves and women do, and so the citizens' control over them would seem to be not "political" but "despotic": it is an exercise of power which, while it has some constraints, is not constrained by the political rights of those who are ruled. In Aristotle's own terms, "it is odd if there is no natural distinction (φύσει) between what is suited to despotic rule (δεσποστόν) and what is not."³⁰

However, if we trace Aristotle's concern with this issue through books 7 and 8, we find him uncharacteristically evasive and vague. When he talks about the basis of nature (here clearly mere nature) that is required for people who are to develop into citizens, he first draws an ethnic distinction. The inhabitants of the cold north of Europe have plenty of spirit (θυμός) but are lacking in skill and intelligence, so that they are politically disorganized; the inhabitants of Asia are intelligent but lacking in spirit, so that they put up with political subordination; the fortunate Greeks, being in the middle, have the right amount of both spirit and political intelligence to develop political organizations that encourage both individual independence and political cooperation.³¹

Thus it looks as though it is being Greek which is what is required as the basis of mere nature that can be developed politically.³² However, Aristotle immediately adds that the same difference is found among Greeks themselves: some have characters that go to one of two disabling extremes, while others have the desirable mixture.³³ Some Greeks, it appears, are incapable of full political development for the same reason that non-Greeks are, and only a few can develop political virtue. Aristotle's wording here, however, does not suggest the set-up that we would need for his ideal state, whereby each state would have a minority with a nature fit for virtue, and a majority of workers who would be by nature either too recalcitrant or too spineless for developed political activity. Rather, Aristotle indicates that he is distin-

³⁰*Politics* 1324b36–7.

³¹See *Politics* 1327b18–33. Aristotle here connects this ability to combine factors that individually go to disabling extremes with the ability to rule others, but I shall prescind from this here.

³²Where in this classification would Aristotle fit the Carthaginians, whose constitution he discusses at length in book 2?

³³See *Politics* 1327b33–8.

guishing among different tribes or ethnicities of Greeks, not drawing a horizontal distinction among the people of a given Greek state.³⁴

Some Greeks, then, have the mere nature requisite for habituation and reason to work on to produce virtuous citizens. So far we have no natural basis for the distinction between citizens and the workers. Aristotle, after making the point that not every necessary condition for the functioning of a natural whole will be a part of that whole, distinguishes different functioning parts of the state, and raises the question whether all shall share in all these functions, as in democracies, or not. His answer, familiarly, is that they shall not, at least in the ideal state: for the aim of the ideal state is happiness, and this requires virtue; developing and exercising virtue require a leisure (σχολή) incompatible with farming, trading, or exercising a manufacturing skill, but not incompatible with developing military skill early in life. Citizens, therefore, will not be farmers, traders, or βάνανσοι. The wisdom of dividing the state into distinct γένη of farmers and soldiers is supported by the antiquity of the arrangement in Crete and especially in Egypt, the country with the oldest continuous political history.

Aristotle's appeal to the antiquity of tradition to support a theoretical point is unfortunate for his argument here in two ways. First, he appeals to a non-Greek society to support a point about the kind of political organization that he has just said develops only among Greeks; what relevance does the antiquity of Egyptian institutions have to politically capable Greeks, if the Egyptians are themselves politically incapable, because lacking in spirit?³⁵ Moreover, Egypt does not provide the right model here. Aristotle stresses here that the Egyptians divide the farming class from the fighting class; this corresponds neither to his own demand that the farmers be slaves or foreign περίοικοι since farmers in Egypt are neither slave nor foreign, nor to his own concern to give a privileged place to citizens for their development of political virtue and political activity, something which is displayed in all kinds of actions and not limited to fighting. Egyptian free farmers and nonpolitical soldiers could hardly correspond

³⁴See *Politics* 1327b34: τα τῶν ἐλλήνων ἔθνη; ἔθνη is the word used shortly before for non-Greeks (1327b23).

³⁵The oddity of appealing to non-Greeks to certify Greek institutions, given what has just been said about the political incapability of non-Greeks, applies also to the attempt to trace the institutions of common meals back to the native inhabitants of Italy.

less to the slave farmers and politically active citizens in Aristotle's state. In any case, what Aristotle needs is a precedent for separating privileged citizens not from farmers but from his working class, the βάνανσοι. What he really wants out of the comparison, presumably, is an established rigid political division, among a free and otherwise similar population, by social function. However, the actual comparison is inept. Moreover, it indicates that Aristotle is less than clear in his own mind here as to what does ground the distinction between the citizens and the workers. All he has committed himself to, as a basis for the development of citizen virtue, is a nature—a mere nature, that is—which is Greek (though possibly some types of Greek are more apt than others). Yet within this group a distinction is drawn which confers or withholds political rights, justified by the antiquity of the practice among a people who apparently have a different (mere) nature, and so should not be comparable.

The discussion in books 7 and 8 make much of two points about the citizens' life: it requires σχολή, time spent in ways that one has freely chosen for oneself, and it should not have the quality of being βάνανσος or ἀγοραῖος.³⁶ Citizens need "leisure," both in the sense of literally having the time to consider difficult matters of public policy at appropriate length, and in the sense of having time to spend which is at their own disposal. We can readily agree in principle that a citizen should not have to make up her mind on complex public issues without having the time to become properly informed about them, and also that someone who spends most of her time working to achieve ends set by others may not adequately develop the habits of intellectual independence that are desirable in a citizen. However, even apart from the question of whether Aristotle sets the level of leisure too high, perhaps because he is unconsciously relying on traditional ideas of the leisured "gentlemanly" life,³⁷ it is clear that he is presupposing an economic basis to it which implies that a minority have leisure at the expense of a majority who do not. However, while in the case of slaves he at least argues that there is a natural basis to this asymmetry, no such argument appears in the case of free workers.

³⁶See *Politics* 1328b39–1329a2.

³⁷See J. Stocks, "ΣΧΟΛΗ," *Classical Quarterly* 30 (1936): 177–87. Stocks notes the parallel in the "digression" in Plato's *Theaetetus*, and also its debt to conventional views: "The man of leisure was in short for the Greeks . . . a man of means. . . . It is repugnant to a Greek gentleman to have to struggle for his life, or to take thought for the morrow" (p. 182).

Aristotle in fact underlines the difference himself in a passage in book 1,³⁸ where he says that a slave needs virtue only insofar as is required for him to perform his tasks unhindered by intemperance or cowardice. Is the same true of workmen, he asks, who can also be intemperate? His answer is that there is a big difference; a slave belongs to a natural kind, while this is clearly not true of cobblers or other workmen. A “common workman” (βάνανσος τεχνίτης) only needs this slave’s virtue insofar as he is subject to “a limited kind of slavery.” Here we see openly the idea that working for a living is like being a slave, since one’s time is not one’s own and one has little free time anyway; but we also see Aristotle admitting that there is nothing natural in any workman being in this position.

The discussion in books 7 and 8 of the education of citizens takes two lines, which do not quite mesh, on the difference between citizens and βάνανσοι. Much of the time Aristotle proceeds as though it were obvious that certain structures of activity, like that of a working man, together with the pleasures that are typically associated with these, simply preclude the living of a virtuous life. The citizens must not live a life which is βάνανσος or ἀγοραῖος, for such a life is ignoble and is inimical to virtue (πρὸς ἀρετὴν ὑπεναντίος).³⁹ But how can merely engaging in certain types of activity prevent or obstruct the exercise of political virtue? Aristotle is here laying weight on the development of virtue, and the fact that the aspirant to virtue must begin by copying certain models in his society. If the models of action that he starts by emulating embody wrong ideals, then he lacks the starting-point from which to develop the right ideals.

Aristotle elsewhere shows a similar emphasis on the content of habituation which is absorbed from our social environment as we learn to be virtuous. In his long discussion of virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he stresses that we become just, for example, by performing just actions, and to do the latter we must accept some people in our society as examples of justice. So it is important “to have been brought up right”: if our society is one in which there is a systematically

³⁸See *Politics* 1260a36–b2; cf. 1277a33–b7.

³⁹See *Politics* 1328b39–41; cf. 1329a19–21 and 35–8, 1337b3–15, 1341a5–9, 1342b18–22. Outside books 7 and 8, cf. 1319a24–40, and book 3, chapter 5, where Aristotle’s only ground for excluding βάνανσοι from being citizens is that their way of life precludes virtue (1278a8–11 and 15–21).

perverted conception of justice, then we will acquire habits of acting and thinking which will make it difficult, perhaps impossible, to acquire a good understanding of justice and its requirements. Aristotle is merely extending this idea to political virtue. We can readily see what he means. If you are brought up to respect profit-making, you will think of public projects from the perspective of individual interest; if you have been brought up always to bargain, you will lack a public-spirited notion of cooperation, and so on. This is a notably conventional conception of virtue, one which defines it by the content of the habits in which dispositions are developed. Just as, in the ethical works, Aristotle does not question that there is a virtue of public spending (“magnificence”) and virtues of tact and sociability, because these are regarded as virtues in his society, so here in the *Politics* he does not question the idea that political virtue can only be developed and exercised in certain specific contexts of action, the ones which control habituation in one way rather than another. Unsurprisingly, a view that defines virtue by its social contexts of habituation tends to take over conventional prejudices, since these are embodied in these social contexts. Hence there is something to the charge that here Aristotle is over-influenced by contemporary snobbish prejudice against craftsmen and tradesmen. This influence is not a matter of personal attitude, but rather of over-conservative method.

Sometimes, however, in books 7 and 8 Aristotle takes the line that being βάνανσοϛ is a matter not of the actions performed but of the attitude with which they are performed. In particular, the crudity and small-mindedness which he associates with working ways of life are seen as a matter of having the wrong aim in what is done.⁴⁰ This flows from a less conventional way of regarding virtue, one which ties it less tightly to the content of the initial habits of action which are formed, and which puts more stress on the role of the agent’s reason. When Aristotle focuses on the way in which an agent comes to reflect on the content of a given disposition which has been acquired by habituation, he allows more room for flexibility of attitude towards acquired patterns, and recognizes that similar behavior may involve differing priorities.

When he looks at virtue this way, Aristotle can regard βανανσοία not as an alternative to which those are condemned who do not have

⁴⁰See *Politics* 1337b17–21, 1341b8–18.

education in citizenly virtue, but sometimes as the result of a failure in that education. Most notably, he says that Spartan education, conventionally regarded as being, whatever its failings, a training in high ideals, in fact produces people who are “βάνανσοι in truth.”⁴¹ This is, in conventional terms, a revolutionary thing to say: βανανσία is conventionally associated with trading, bargaining, and working for a living, and the allegedly petty and vulgar habits of mind that this produces, and to apply it to the results of a Spartan military education would normally outrage those who define virtue by its contexts of habituation. Yet here Aristotle does not hesitate to say that what matters for being βάνανσοις is an attitude, which can be found even among those who practice a conventionally admired activity, if they lack insight into the value and point of that activity.

One passage in book 7 has a wider significance than Aristotle realizes for his view of political virtue. In giving reasons why citizens may reasonably be made to wait in their youth before exercising political rule, and expected to put up with being ruled without resentment, Aristotle says that the aim, rather than the action, may make a difference in being ordered to do something. “That is why it is fine (καλόν) for the young, among free people to perform many of what seem service tasks; for as regards being fine or not fine actions do not differ so much in themselves as in their end and their aim.”⁴² The fine is the aim of the virtuous person; here, Aristotle is refusing to find it incompatible with virtue to serve others in menial kinds of ways, as long as one does not have a menial or servile attitude. Aristotle unfortunately does not realize that this point undermines much of his assumption about the importance of the conventional content of political virtue. Laying more stress on the agent’s attitude, which he must develop for himself, and less on society’s views which he has absorbed, allows for a far more egalitarian conception of virtue, one undermining the assumption that certain activities in themselves can prevent an agent’s acquiring virtue.

⁴¹*Politics* 1338b24–38; cf. 1333b5–25, especially 9–10, where Aristotle stresses the idea of vulgarity.

⁴²*Politics* 1333a4–11. There is an apparent conflict with 1277a338–37, where Aristotle calls it slavish to be able to perform the same thing, namely “service” (διακονικός) actions. The conflict disappears if we assume Aristotle in the earlier passage to be thinking of an ability that is so developed that it “comes naturally” to serve others, thereby damaging the agent’s independence of mind.

Aristotle does not seem clear about the difference between his two lines of thought about the education of citizens; hence, perhaps, some of his wavering about whether certain forms of training are harmful in themselves or only when done beyond a certain point. The two approaches put different stress on the roles of habit and of reason in the development and exercise of virtue. Neither, though, appeals to any initial difference of nature.

And so, when we find that in one passage Aristotle says that the souls of βάνανσοι are distorted from the natural state (παρεστραμμένα τῆς κατὰ φύσιν ἕξεως) because they take pleasure in music which is similarly “unnatural,”⁴³ we must take the reference to be to nature as norm and goal, not the initial endowment of mere nature. Citizens are divided from the βάνανσοι because (mostly) their contexts of habituation and (sometimes) their rational use of these differ, and Aristotle takes this to show that they differ in virtue and hence in development towards the “natural” norm of citizen virtue. However, he never explicitly takes them to differ in mere nature, in initial raw material and aptitude for virtue. I therefore disagree with Miller’s view that Aristotle is relying on a natural difference here. Workers may, because of their way of life, fail to attain nature as a norm of political life, but this does not show that they are naturally disqualified from the start, like women and natural slaves; for that Aristotle would have to show that there is an initial difference of mere nature.

Miller discusses the inequalities in Aristotle’s best constitution.⁴⁴ He suggests that we should be less surprised by the inegalitarianism if we remember that Aristotle’s “theory of natural justice as such neither entails nor excludes the doctrine that individuals have equal rights according to nature. From the standpoint of natural justice, individuals possess equal rights according to nature if, and only if, they are in fact equal according to nature.”⁴⁵ “Aristotle’s inegalitarianism is based on the alleged natural inferiority of whole classes of persons as defined by nationality, gender and profession.”⁴⁶

Miller’s general point, that natural justice is consistent with discriminating on the basis of natural inequalities, if there are any such,

⁴³*Politics* 1342a22–8. It is interesting how often Aristotle refers to nature in the concluding discussion of types of music.

⁴⁴Miller, *NJR*, 240–5.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 241.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 242.

is evidently correct. So are his discussions of the ways in which Aristotle claims to find natural inequalities between free and slave, male and female. However, he fails to find ways in which Aristotle clearly claims that the distinction between citizen and worker is based on nature. Aristotle only says once that the souls of those who have to work are in an unnatural state, and, as we have seen, this does not imply that there is a difference of initial natural endowment; it means only that the workers do not achieve a life which is natural in the sense of normative, one which achieves the goal of a best human life. This is due to habit and reason; those brought up in certain ways of life cannot develop the reflective and informed disposition of choice and action which is exercised as political virtue. This, however, is not a natural fact; it is due to convention, and ultimately to the way cities need the particular economic infrastructure that they have.

Aristotle slides into allowing this fact to play the role of a natural fact in his construction of the ideal polis, because he fails to consider that it could have been otherwise: economic roles could have been different, or differently distributed. Of course, it is by failing to consider that things could have been otherwise that he falls into considering slavery and the subordination of women natural. However, distinguishing citizens from workers is more glaring, in that Aristotle had available examples of cities that were governed in more egalitarian ways than his ideal state and explicit justifications of ancient democracy, whereas slavery and the subordination of women were universal in the ancient world and so could more readily be taken for granted. Indeed, Aristotle pays some attention to forms of democracy where farmers, workers, and traders have the political rights of citizens. When he is studying this type of democracy, especially in books 5 and 6, as one form of constitution among others, he studies it and other forms of constitution that change to it and from it dispassionately, giving no indication that change from "polity" to democracy is a change from a natural to an unnatural form of government in a way not true of, for example, change from polity to oligarchy. Democracy of the kind excluded by his ideal state is criticized because it forms a tyranny of the majority, not because there is something unnatural about it. Thus Aristotle has no basis for treating the distinction between citizen and worker as though it were a natural fact; there is every indication that it is due to conventional factors. His own insistence, in these books, on the development from nature through habit and reason to virtue presses the problem on him: for the political organization is in fact unjust, unless

there is a natural difference between those who have political rights and receive an education for political virtue, and those who do not.⁴⁷

I do not agree with Miller, then, that all the forms of Aristotle's egalitarianism in the ideal state are to be put at the door of his qualifying natural justice by claiming that there are natural inequalities between groups of people. From Hobbes onwards, there has been a tendency to think that all inequalities in Aristotle's ideal state are supposed to depend on nature and to use the argument about natural slavery to support this. Hobbes claims that Aristotle "putteth so much difference between the powers of men by nature that he doubteth not to set down as the ground of all his politics that some men are by nature worthy to govern and others by nature ought to serve."⁴⁸ However, one of his most striking egalitarian claims is made without any such argument, in a context where it is hard to see how such an argument could be made.

That Aristotle fails to see this is partly due to his generally adopting an unnecessarily rigid and context-bound conception of virtue, one which ties it to conventionally defined areas of action. This, however, cannot be the whole story, as we have seen that sometimes in these books Aristotle's conception of education and political virtue is more flexible than this.

A large part is played, I believe, by simple unwillingness to think through the point that in Aristotle's own terms injustice is produced by political discrimination which is not based upon natural inequalities. I do not think that we should rush to berate Aristotle for this; it is something which in our own case we can easily find ourselves doing. Let us take a modern example which reproduces some of the features of Aristotle's state, which is aimed at producing happiness and the best life for its citizens and does so by inculcating political virtue in them.

⁴⁷Outside these books we can at times see Aristotle's unclarity as to which inequalities are natural ones. In *Politics* 3.1277a5–12, he uses, in talking of dissimilar parts of the city, analogies which in book 1 imply natural subordination (soul/body, reason/appetite, man/wife, master/slave) but in book 3 merely show that there is no one single virtue of the good citizen. Cf. 1277b13–32.

⁴⁸From Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 4:103. I take the reference from the excellent article by J. Laird, "Hobbes on Aristotle's *Politics*," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 43 (1942–3): 1–20.

A university is an example of a community where, while many people work every day side by side, some of them can be considered “parts” or members of the community while others provide the necessary conditions for the functioning of the community. For a university is defined by its activities of teaching, studying, and research; and those who engage in these share in the community’s life as members. The administrators, fund-raisers, and those who provide secretarial and janitorial support do not in the same way partake in the community’s life, although it would come to a halt if their own activities were withdrawn. The fact that there is this distinction of role is not in itself an indication of injustice. An individual may have as fulfilling a life as an administrator, supporting the life of the university, as he does as an academic, partaking in it. In Aristotle’s case, he clearly shares some common prejudices of his class against the life of workers and traders just as such, but this is not necessarily a part of his position. The question of injustice arises when the division between parts and necessary conditions affects individuals in ways which do not correspond to their individual desert, so that someone who could flourish as a member of the community is compelled to live the life of someone who provides the necessary conditions for others to be members merely because of the bad luck of circumstances. If this is the case, then the value achieved by the life of the members of the community will not nullify the injustice. The university as a community is often given a perfectionist justification: it is the institution in which the goods of intellectual research and community are best achieved. However, if it depends for its existence on the work of those who are unjustifiably excluded from participating in it, the perfectionist justification does not meet the objection that the community’s functioning rests upon injustice. Aristotle stresses his perfectionist justification of his ideal state: in the best state “anyone whatsoever”⁴⁹ can live the best life. He fails to take the measure of the problem that this favors a minority at the expense of a majority who are excluded in a way that he cannot defend. Since Aristotle does not provide a clear argument that the workers in his ideal state are naturally unfitted for the political

⁴⁹ ὅστις οὖν; 1324a23–5. I agree with Miller that “anyone whatsoever” refers to individual members of the polis, not any individual, citizen or not, with whom the lawgiver is concerned; hence Aristotle would see no problem in excluding workers here; see Miller, *NJR*, 214 n. 65.

rights that are denied them, we have to conclude that his ideal state is in his own terms (and not merely ours) unjust, and that he does not face this point because he does not focus on the workers and their status clearly enough.

It is obvious, Aristotle says in book 7,⁵⁰ that everyone wants to live well and to be happy. However, some have the ability to do this and others not,⁵¹ because of some chance or nature (διὰ τινα τύχην ἢ φύσιν). For living finely (that is, virtuously) requires some supplies (χορηγία), less for those who are of better disposition, more for those who are of worse. This is a strikingly candid passage about the insufficiency of virtue for happiness. Virtue needs external goods, both because it requires material for its exercise and because the achievement of virtue in the first place may require a certain amount of health, wealth, and so on. In accepting the insufficiency of virtue for happiness, Aristotle consciously accepts what was to become a scandal for his school in the Hellenistic period, the position that happiness can be lost, or never achieved, through chance and not through any fault in the agent. What is striking about the passage for present purposes, however, is its coupling of chance and nature, two factors normally kept at opposite ends of the Aristotelian spectrum. Moreover, it is unclear here what their scope is. Is Aristotle conjoining the exclusion of the workers through chance (their being landed in an unpromising way of life) with the exclusion of natural slaves and women through nature? This is the most obvious thought, and there is a parallel.⁵² However, the “for” clause concerns only external goods, not natural endowments, and this would suggest that it is lack of the infrastructure for the virtuous life which is being ascribed to “some” chance or nature. If so, the awkwardness of the sentence would perhaps re-

⁵⁰See *Politics* 1331b39–1332a2.

⁵¹The word is ἐξουσία. In *NJR*, Miller discusses this term (pp. 102–4) as an indication that Aristotle has the locution to talk of liberty rights, but I do not think that this is in question in this passage. Miller says: “The term *exousia* is closely connected with freedom, and denotes the unobstructed ability to perform a particular action” (p. 102). Here the obstruction lies in outward circumstances, not in any behavior of others that might create a duty not to do the action in question.

⁵²See *Politics* 1295a25–8. Note that in *The Politics of Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1887–1902), W. L. Newman comments that the “for” clause is added to explicate “through chance,” since defect of χορηγία “is due to a defect of fortune”; thus he notices the awkwardness of φύσις and its place in the sentence.

flect Aristotle's ambivalence and unhappiness at excluding a majority of his state's free male inhabitants from the life of civic virtue and happiness merely on the basis of chance (even though he has no good argument to ascribe it to nature).

It is worth stressing that even if Aristotle were perfectly clear in his own mind, and prepared to accept that it is mere chance which disfranchises the majority in his ideal state, this is still an embarrassment for him. For in contexts other than this issue, books 7 and 8 stress, even more than do the ethical works, the dominance of virtue for happiness. External goods have a limit set to their contribution to happiness, a limit formed by virtuous use of them, while there is no such limit to the contribution made by virtue; to ascribe happiness to external goods rather than to their virtuous use is like ascribing the excellence of a performance to the instrument rather than the performer.⁵³ In these books of the *Politics* we find, more markedly than in the ethical works, the language of virtue as the use of external goods, with external goods playing the role of tools and material for virtue to use, a way of speaking which was to become dominant in later ethical theories. Thus Aristotle's exclusion of the βάνανσοι from political rights in his ideal state finds no justification in his ideas about human nature, but also sits ill with his ideas, especially in these two books, about the scope and power of chance with regard to happiness. This supports, I think, the suggestion that there is a problem of injustice here which Aristotle never squarely faces. His perfectionist justification of the best state does not achieve as much as he thinks it does; that many fail to achieve the happiness that all seek, because of a lack of external goods and opportunities, is ascribed to "some chance or nature" by a theorist who sees that it must be one or the other, but for whom neither offers a satisfactory answer that will save the best state from depending on a fundamental injustice.⁵⁴

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⁵³ See *Politics* 1323a38–b29, 1332a7–27.

⁵⁴ I am grateful for comments made by participants at the Liberty Fund conference on Fred Miller's book. I am also grateful to Fred Miller for letting me see his forthcoming chapter on Aristotle's naturalism for *The Cambridge History of Ancient Political Thought*, edited by Malcolm Schofield and Christopher Rowe.