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Aristotle's Ambivalence on Slavery

by Donald L. Ross

I

Aristotle's treatment of slavery in Book I of the *Politics* is too familiar to need detailed summary. Aristotle couches his opinion as an attempt to split the difference between what in his day counted as the political extremes on the question. On the one side were those who held that 'whatever is taken in war is supposed to belong to the victors,'¹ that 'slavery in accordance with the custom of war is just.'² On the other were those who argued 'that the rule of master over slaves is contrary to nature, and that the distinction between slave and freeman exists by convention only, and not by nature; and being an interference with nature is therefore unjust.'³ Against both of these extreme positions, Aristotle argues for the existence of natural slaves:

¹ *Pol.* I 6 1255a6-7. All Greek references are from the OCT series. All English translations are based on Revised Oxford Translation, edited by J. Barnes, but with frequent revisions by myself.

² *Pol.* I 6 1255a23.

³ *Pol.* I 3 1253b20-23. I am aware that scholars frequently detect more than two opinions in Aristotle's telegraphic summaries of current positions on slavery. For details, see W. L. Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1887), pp. 150-52; Franz Sussehl and Robert Drew Hicks, *The Politics of Aristotle* (London: Macmillan, 1894), pp. 163, 207; Charles J. O'Neil, 'Aristotle's Natural Slave Reexamined', *The New Scholasticism* 27 (1953): 267; Robert Schlaifer, 'Greek Theories of Slavery from Homer to Aristotle', *Slavery in Classical Antiquity: Views and Controversies*, ed. M. I. Finley (Cambridge: Heffer, 1968), pp. 131-32; Victor Goldschmidt, 'La theorie aristotelicienne de l'esclavage et sa methode', *Zetesis: Album amicorum* (Antwerp: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1973), pp. 153-58; Carnes Lord, *Aristotle, The Politics* (Chicago: Chicago, 1984), p. 248, n. 19; Peter L. Phillips Simpson, *A Philosophical Commentary on the Politics of Aristotle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998), pp. 39, 41; Malcom Schofield, 'Ideology and Philosophy in Aristotle's Theory of Slavery', *Saving the City: Philosopher-Kings and Other Classical Paradigms* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 135. I am not concerned here with delving into the question of precisely how many points of view are alluded to in *Politics* I 3 and 6. What is clear, and what I do wish to claim, is that Aristotle is searching for some middle ground between opposite sides of the issue. See Trevor J. Saunders, 'The Controversy about Slavery Reported by Aristotle, *Politics* I vi, 1255a4ff.', *Maistor: Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for R. Browning*, ed. A. Moffat (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1984), pp. 25-36; and *Aristotle Politics Books I and II* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), pp. 79-81.

Where then there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between men and animals (as in the case of those whose business is to use their body, and who can do nothing better), the lower sort are by nature slaves (φύσει δοῦλοι), and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master. For he who can be, and therefore is, another's, and he who participates in reason enough to apprehend, but not to have, is a slave by nature (φύσει δοῦλος).⁴

Later Aristotle presumably explains what it means 'to apprehend, but not to have, [reason]', 'for the slave,' he says, 'has no deliberative faculty at all'.⁵ The anti-slavery position is wrong because slavery is based on nature, not mere convention; and the traditional pro-slavery position is wrong because the enslavement of war captives *is* based on convention and not nature. So Aristotle's theory of the natural slave seems to take a centrist position, embodying the legitimate insights from both other views, while avoiding the extremes to which their proponents took them.

Scholars have so taken for granted the normativity of Aristotle's classical defense of slavery in *Politics* I that they have generally been blind to a real problem in the Aristotelian corpus concerning slavery, which, if taken seriously, makes Aristotle

⁴ *Pol.* I 5 1254b16-23.

⁵ *Pol.* I 13 1260a12. See W. W. Fortenbaugh, 'Aristotle on Slaves and Women', *Articles on Aristotle: 2 Ethics and Politics*, ed. J. Barnes, M. Schofield, and R. Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1972): 136-37; R. G. Mulgan, *Aristotle's Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), pp. 41-42; Stephen R. L. Clark, 'Slaves and Citizens', *Philosophy* 60 (1985): 33-34; Yvon Garlan, *Slavery in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1988), p. 122; Richard Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good* (Princeton: Princeton, 1989), p. 106; Nicholas D. Smith, 'Aristotle's Theory of Natural Slavery', *A Companion to Aristotle's 'Politics'*, ed. D. Keyt and F. D. Miller, Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991): 147; P. A. Brunt, 'Aristotle and Slavery', *Studies in Greek History and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993): 359-66; Eugene Schütrumpf, 'Aristotle's Theory of Slavery – A Platonic Dilemma', *Ancient Philosophy* 13 (1993): 119; Eugene Garver, 'Aristotle's Natural Slaves: Incomplete *Praxeis* and Incomplete Human Beings', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 32 (1994): 176-80; Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1996), pp. 38, 109; C. F. Goodey, 'Politics, Nature, and Necessity: Were Aristotle's Slaves Feeble-Minded?', *Political Theory* 27 (1999): 214-16; Martin Harvey, 'Deliberation and Natural Slavery', *Social Theory and Practice* 27 (2001): 41-64; Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others* (Oxford: Oxford, 2002), pp. 54-55, 142; Richard Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford, 2002), pp. 283-90. See also Susemihl-Hicks: 161, 211-12; O'Neil: 252, 270, 277; Schlaifer: 121; Saunders, *Aristotle Politics*: 78; Simpson: 36-37, 43-44, 66; and Schofield: 126.

appear far more ambivalent on the subject.⁶ I am referring to a passage in *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII 10-11, where Aristotle applies his sixfold analysis of constitutions to the various forms of familial relations. First Aristotle briefly summarizes his sixfold classification:

There are three kinds of constitution, and an equal number of deviation-forms – perversions, as it were, of them. The constitutions are monarchy, aristocracy, and thirdly that which ... it seems appropriate to call timocratic, though most people usually call it polity. The best of these is monarchy, the worst timocracy ... But it is the contrary of the best that is worst. Monarchy passes over into tyranny ... Aristocracy passes over into oligarchy ... Timocracy passes over into democracy.⁷

Most significant, however, is the basis of the distinction between the true and deviation forms; 'for the tyrant looks to his own advantage, the king to that of his subjects' (ὁ μὲν γὰρ τύραννος τὸ αὐτῷ συμφέρον σκοπεῖ, ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς τὸ τῶν ἀρχομένων).⁸ Aristotle goes on to argue that the relation of father to sons is monarchic, that of husband to wife aristocratic, and that of brothers to one another timocratic.⁹ But then he makes the following (and, to readers of *Politics* I, surprising) claim:

τυραννικὴ δὲ καὶ ἡ δεσπότης πρὸς δούλους· τὸ γὰρ τοῦ δεσπότης συμφέρον ἐν αὐτῇ πράττεται.

Tyrannical too is the rule of a master over slaves; for it is the advantage of the master that is brought about in it.¹⁰

⁶ This is not to say that there are not apparent inconsistencies on slavery within the *Politics* itself. See the discussions, for example, in Schlaifer: 192-99; Mulgan: 42-44; Smith: 142-46; Brunt: 372-73; Garnsey: 97-98; and Schofield: 118, 124-28. For detailed analyses, see Wayne Ambler, 'Aristotle on Nature and Politics: The Case of Slavery', *Political Theory* 15 (1987): 390-410; and also Schüttrumpf: 111-23. But such inconsistencies, I think, present problems only for the interpretation of Aristotle's views on slavery; they do not point to a fundamental ambivalence on the morality of slavery itself.

⁷ *NE* VIII 10 1160a31-b17.

⁸ *NE* VIII 10 1160b2-3. Cf. *NE* V = *EE* IV 1 1129b14-17, VIII 9 1160a9-14; *Pol.* III 6 1278b17-24, 1279a17-21, 7 1279a25-31.

⁹ *NE* VIII 10 1160b22-1161a9.

¹⁰ *NE* VIII 10 1160b29-30. See also *Pol.* III 6 1278b32-37.

In the next chapter he explains more fully:

ἐν δὲ ταῖς παρεκβάσεσιν, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ δίκαιον ἐπὶ μικρὸν ἔστιν, οὕτω καὶ ἡ φιλία, καὶ ἥκιστα ἐν τῇ χειρίσῃ· ἐν τυραννίδι γὰρ οὐδὲν ἢ μικρὸν φιλίας. ἐν οἷς γὰρ μηδὲν κοινόν ἐστι τῷ ἄρχοντι καὶ ἀρχομένῳ, οὐδὲ φιλία· οὐδὲ γὰρ δίκαιον ...

But in the deviation forms, as justice is at a minimum, so too is friendship. It is least in the worst form; for in tyranny there is little or no friendship. For where there is nothing common to ruler and ruled, there is not friendship either, since there is not justice ... ¹¹

In these passages slavery is identified as a tyrannical relation between individuals. Why? Because 'it is the advantage (συμφέρον) of the master that is brought about in it'. Moreover, Aristotle is clear that in tyrannical forms of rule 'justice (τὸ δίκαιον) is at a minimum'. This is a far cry from the confident conclusion of *Politics* I 5: 'it is clear ... that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both advantageous and just' (ὅτι ... τοίνυν εἰσὶ φύσει τινὲς οἱ μὲν ἐλεύθεροι οἱ δὲ δοῦλοι, φανερόν, οἷς καὶ συμφέρει τὸ δουλεύειν καὶ δίκαιόν ἐστιν)!¹²

Although Aristotle concedes in the *Nicomachean Ethics* passage that the slave 'is benefited' (ὠφελεῖται) by the master,¹³ the overwhelming emphasis in these two chapters is that it is the master, not the slave, who is the primary beneficiary.¹⁴ The difference between the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* passages centers around the word συμφέρον. Now at first it may seem that the object of συμφέρει at the end of *Politics* I 5 is ambiguous, because it is not clear whether οἷς at 1255a3 refers to οἱ ... ἐλεύθεροι or οἱ ... δοῦλοι at 1255a2. But all ambiguity is removed when we consider that the concluding sentence answers the question posed at the beginning of the chapter, 'whether slavery is both better and just for him [i.e. the slave] or not' (καὶ πότερον βέλτιον καὶ

¹¹ *NE* VIII 11 1161a30-34.

¹² *Pol.* I 5 1255a1-3; cf. 6 1255b6-7.

¹³ *NE* VIII 11 1161a35-b1.

¹⁴ See also *Pol.* III 6 1278b32-37.

δίκαιόν τιμι δουλεύειν ἢ οὐ),¹⁵ and also that one of the points made in *Politics* I 5 is that slavery is βέλτιον for the slave.¹⁶ Yet in the *Nicomachean Ethics* it is overwhelmingly the *master* whose advantage is furthered by slavery. And, as we have seen, it is the difference in the συμφέρον that accounts for the difference in the δίκαιον.

Very little scholarly attention has been devoted to this *prima facie* inconsistency. Kraut¹⁷ and Schofield¹⁸ notice the problem, but deny any incompatibility between the point of view of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and that of the *Politics*. I will deal with Kraut's argument below. Brunt does concede that 'Aristotle is not consistent with himself',¹⁹ and he puzzles, 'it must be a matter of conjecture why Aristotle put forward these incompatible views'.²⁰ Yet in the end he falls back into the traditional view that 'we may find his considered judgment in the *Politics*'.²¹ The only scholar I am aware of who really appreciates the inconsistency – and for generally the same reasons as I have cited above – is Peter Garnsey,²² who argues that 'Aristotle's discussion of slavery in these two works should no longer be regarded as a unity'.²³ In what follows I will defend the position that there really is a problem here by replying to various potential objections.

II

Let us first begin with the position of Richard Kraut, who refuses to see any inconsistency between *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII 10 1160b29-30 and *Politics* I. He explains the passage as follows: 'Tyranny is unjust because free men do not deserve to be treated as instruments. Slavery is just because natural slaves do.'²⁴ In other words, we must distinguish between natural slaves and natural free-persons, and, according to Kraut, the

¹⁵ *Pol.* I 5 1254a17-18.

¹⁶ *Pol.* I 5 1254b19-20.

¹⁷ Kraut, *Human Good*: 108.

¹⁸ Schofield: 139.

¹⁹ Brunt: 367.

²⁰ Brunt: 367-68.

²¹ Brunt: 369.

²² Garnsey: 107-108, 115-119, 124-127.

²³ Garnsey: 125.

²⁴ Kraut, *Human Good*: 108.

passage under consideration, where slavery is treated negatively, is really about the enslavement of natural free-persons, which is unjust. Now the most immediate rejoinder to such an interpretation is that it is not supported by the plain sense of the text. If Aristotle was thinking in terms of the natural slave/natural free-person distinction when he wrote the *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII 10 passage, why did he not qualify his statement by saying something like, 'Tyrannical too is the rule of a master over those who are not slaves by nature'? In the *Politics*, the natural slave theory is obviously very important to him. Why, therefore, didn't he qualify his assertion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* if it really means what Kraut supposes it to mean?

But, leaving that aside, let us go on to explore the implications of Kraut's interpretation. It follows that, as the enslavement of natural slaves is just while the enslavement of natural free-persons is unjust, there must be two corresponding forms of tyranny – tyranny over natural free-persons, which would be unjust, and tyranny over natural slaves, which would be just. One might even argue that there is some support for this in the *Politics*, where Aristotle seems to suggest that non-Greeks are naturally slavish, and so deserving of the tyrannies by which they are typically governed.²⁵ In the end, however, Aristotle classifies this form of government as a type of monarchy, though it 'nearly resembles tyranny'.²⁶ Such governments 'are ... royal, in so far as the monarch rules according to law over willing subjects; but they are tyrannical in so far as he is despotic and rules according to his own fancy'.²⁷ They are contrasted with tyranny proper,²⁸ which 'is just that arbitrary power of an individual which is responsible to no one, and governs all alike ... with a view to its own advantage, not to

²⁵ *Pol.* III 14 1285a16-29, b2-3; IV 10 1295a7-17; cf. I 2 1252b5-9, 6 1255a28-38. See Susemihl-Hicks: 25, 142, 143, 167, 207, 423, 501; Schlaifer: 168, 198; Mulgan: 41; Clark: 34-35; Garland: 121; Brunt: 379-80; Garver: 176-79; Simpson: 19, 216; Schofield: 132-33; Harvey: 58-61; Cartledge: 137, 140. See also Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (Princeton: Marcus Wiener, 1998), p. 187.

²⁶ *Pol.* III 14 1285a18-19.

²⁷ *Pol.* IV 10 1295a15-17.

²⁸ *Pol.* IV 10 1295a17-24.

that of its subjects, and therefore against their will'.²⁹ As the barbarian governments are 'over willing subjects', they cannot function to the sole advantage of the ruler, which is the defining characteristic of tyranny. Thus there is no evidence that for Aristotle there is any such thing as a just tyranny. If not, and if slavery is simply tyranny on a small scale, then in the passage under discussion, Aristotle does not envision a just form of slavery either.

At this point, our opponent might claim that the above argument really just boils down to semantics. Perhaps Aristotle was so committed to his sixfold classification of constitutions that he was reluctant to call despotic governments over nevertheless willing subjects tyrannies because in the end they fall within the pale. So at bottom they are classified as monarchies. Thus there are still two forms of despotic government – one just, the other unjust; the former called monarchy, the latter tyranny. Perhaps, therefore, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* passage, Aristotle means to confine his negative association of slavery with a tyrannical form of government to natural free-persons, thus implying that the enslavement of natural slaves would be monarchical and therefore just. Perhaps a slaveholder such as Aristotle himself³⁰ could convince himself that truly natural slaves are never enslaved 'against their will'.

The problem with that interpretation is that in the passage under consideration, Aristotle links tyranny and slavery with the way in which Persian fathers treat their sons, which is said to be 'wrong' (ἡμαρτημένη).³¹ Yet for Aristotle the Persians are the paradigm case of barbarians who are so typically content to acquiesce in despotical relationships. For example, in *Politics* V 11, where Aristotle is recommending measures to inoculate tyrannies against revolutions, he sums up his recommendations by issuing the rule of thumb to just 'practice these and the like Persian and barbaric acts'.³² Such measures are effective 'because

²⁹ *Pol.* IV 10 1295a19-22.

³⁰ I take it that, given the example of many of the American Founding Fathers, no one will assume that it is impossible for a slaveholder to express moral qualms over the institution.

³¹ *NE* VIII 10 1160b27-29. I will comment in more detail on this passage in Section IV.

³² *Pol.* V 11 1313b9-10.

Asiatics [are more slavish by nature (δουλικώτεροι... φύσει)] than Europeans',³³ so, not surprisingly, the form of government embraced by them is precisely that despotic monarchy that is supposedly given a pass in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.³⁴ Even Persian royalty are, Aristotle claims, not natural rulers;³⁵ their nobility is only relative to their own, not absolute.³⁶ Given such a view of the Persian character, one would expect Aristotle to claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that Persian sons get the sort of treatment they deserve. But instead, surprisingly, he condemns the way Persian fathers treat their sons. Therefore, as Persian father-son relationships would be, from the point of view of the *Politics*, based on natural slavishness, and as those relationships are explicitly paralleled to master-slave relations and condemned in the *Nicomachean Ethics* passage, it follows that the kind of slavery criticized in the latter would include persons who, from the former perspective, are natural slaves.

III

Another line of argument aimed at minimizing the discrepancy between the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* passages might be to say that Aristotle is not saying that slavery is *unjust*, but rather that the question of justice and injustice simply doesn't apply to the master-slave relation. Aristotle's language does not consistently support such an interpretation, however. For example, he notes that in the master-slave relation justice is 'at a minimum (ἐπὶ μικρόν)'. To say that justice is minimal in such cases is not to say that it does not apply. And then there are those passages in *Politics* I, cited above, in which Aristotle insists that slavery is 'advantageous and just'.³⁷ Yet another problem with the interpretation under consideration is Aristotle's explicit linking of slavery with tyranny. The defender of this interpretation must be prepared to admit that a tyrannical constitution is also neither just nor unjust – a conclusion which is difficult to square with Aristotle's assertion in *Politics* III 6 that the natural forms of government 'are constituted in

³³ *Pol.* III 14 1285a19-22.

³⁴ *Pol.* III 14 1285a16-24, cf. IV 10 1295a11-12.

³⁵ *Pol.* I 2 1252b6-7.

³⁶ *Pol.* I 6 1255a33-36.

³⁷ *Pol.* I 5 1255a1-3, 6 1255b6-7.

accordance with strict principles of justice' (κατὰ τὸ ἀπλῶς δίκαιον) whereas the deviation forms 'are wrong' (ἡμαρτημέναι).³⁸

Now the objector might reply that Aristotle does follow with several examples – craftsman and tool, soul and body, owner and animal – of relations in which questions of justice and friendship are clearly inappropriate,³⁹ as between such pairs 'there is nothing common'.⁴⁰ It might be urged that these examples indicate that Aristotle views it as a mistake, strictly speaking, to predicate 'justly treated' or 'unjustly treated' of slaves, just as one cannot say that a tool is either justly or unjustly treated; for 'the slave is a living tool'.⁴¹ Perhaps in those instances where Aristotle characterizes slavery as just or unjust he is simply speaking loosely. This is important because of the logical relationships between the two very different concepts in play here – 'slave' as an individual and 'slavery' as an institution. The institution of slavery's being neither just nor unjust, or being just, is compatible with all the logical possibilities – the slave's being treated justly, the slave's being treated unjustly, or neither of the above. But if the institution itself is unjust, then one would have to say that *ipso facto* the slave is unjustly treated – simply by virtue of being a slave. So if it is a mistake to predicate either 'justly treated' or 'unjustly treated' of a slave, then it cannot be the case that slavery itself is unjust.

Now for the reasons cited above, I am skeptical of such a one-sided interpretation of Aristotle's language. But I am willing to grant the point for the sake of the argument. Even so, the situation is not at all straightforward; for Aristotle also is careful to mention that, although in the master-slave relation both justice and friendship are lacking, and so '*qua* slave ... one cannot be friends with him', '*qua* man one can; for there seems to be some justice between any man and any other who can share in a system of law or be a party to an agreement; therefore

³⁸ *Pol.* III 6 1279a17-21.

³⁹ *NE* VIII 11 1161a 34-b5.

⁴⁰ *NE* VIII 11 1161a32-33. But Aristotle is probably thinking of differences in degree here, not differences in kind. Compare his discussion of inequality in *NE* VIII 7, where he notes that friendship presumes a certain degree of equality, and that where there are vast differences in status – such as between humans and gods – there can be little friendship.

⁴¹ *NE* VIII 11 1161b4.

there can also be friendship with him in so far as he is a man'.⁴² Even the *Politics* allows for friendship (and its opposite) between master and slave.⁴³ As friendship and justice are treated as having the same scope by Aristotle,⁴⁴ this entails that even if we cannot say, strictly speaking, that the slave is justly or unjustly treated, we can say that the man, who is a slave, is justly or unjustly treated. And if the man, who is a slave, can be unjustly treated, then it is possible to say that the man, who is a slave, is unjustly treated precisely because he is a slave. And if the man, who is a slave, can be unjustly treated because he is a slave, then it is also possible to say that slavery itself is unjust.

IV

I now wish to deal with a different sort of problem. The context of Aristotle's initial comment on slavery in *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII 10 may be urged as an objection to the above interpretation. However, as I hope to show, any such claim is based on imperspicuous translation. The entire context reads:

ἡ μὲν γὰρ πατρὸς πρὸς υἱεῖς κοινωνία βασιλείας ἔχει σχῆμα· τῶν τέκνων γὰρ τῷ πατρὶ μέλει· ἐντεῦθεν δὲ καὶ Ὅμηρος τὸν Δία πατέρα προσαγορεύει· πατρικὴ γὰρ ἀρχὴ βούλεται ἢ βασιλεία εἶναι. ἐν Πέρσiais δ' ἡ τοῦ πατρὸς τυραννικὴ· χρῶνται γὰρ ὡς δούλοις τοῖς υἱέσιν. τυραννικὴ δὲ καὶ ἡ δεσπότητος πρὸς δούλους· τὸ γὰρ τοῦ δεσπότητος συμφέρον ἐν αὐτῇ πράττεται. αὕτη μὲν οὖν ὀρθὴ φαίνεται, ἡ Περσικὴ δ' ἡμαρτημένη· τῶν διαφερόντων γὰρ αἱ ἀρχαὶ διάφοροι.

The Oxford translation reads:

For the association of a father with his sons bears the form of monarchy, since the father cares for his children; and this is why Homer calls Zeus 'father'; it is the ideal of monarchy to be paternal rule. But among the Persians the rule of the father is tyrannical; they use their sons as slaves. Tyrannical too is the rule of a master over slaves; for it is the advantage of the master that is brought about in it. Now this seems to be a correct form of government, but the

⁴² *NE* VIII 11 1161b5-8.

⁴³ *Pol.* I 6 1255b12-15.

⁴⁴ Cf. *NE* VIII 1 1155a22-28, 9 1159b25-1160a8, 11 1161a10-b10.

Persian type is perverted; for the modes of rule appropriate to different relations are diverse.⁴⁵

The issue revolves around the last sentence, specifically the antecedent of αὕτη at 1160b30. All translators refer it to the implied either κοινωνία or ἀρχή at 1160b29 in the clause τυραννικὴ δὲ καὶ ἡ [κοινωνία/ἀρχή] δεσπότου πρὸς δούλους. Some explicitly link αὕτη with ἀρχή, as does the above translation by Ross-Urmson: 'Now this seems to be a correct form of government ...'⁴⁶ Thompson-Tredennick, however, explicitly link αὕτη with κοινωνία, thus: 'Now *this* relationship is right ...'⁴⁷ Other, more literal, translations leave the specific antecedent of αὕτη ambiguous; for example, Pakaluk renders the clause, 'Now *that* seems to be correct ...'⁴⁸ All of the above renderings, however, are punctuated in such a way as to imply a linkage of αὕτη with the clause, τυραννικὴ δὲ καὶ ἡ δεσπότου πρὸς δούλους. The most tendentious translations even make this reference explicit; for example, κοινωνία-partisans Gauthier-Jolif and Oswald render the clause, 'Mais dans ce dernier cas une telle communauté est évidemment normale ...',⁴⁹ and, 'Now while the relationship of slavery appears correct ...',⁵⁰ respectively, whereas ἀρχή-partisan

⁴⁵ NE VIII 10 1160b24-32.

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2 vols, ed. Jonathan Barnes, trans. W. D. Ross and J. O. Urmson (Princeton: Princeton, 1984), vol. 2, p. 1834. The following translations are similar: 'Now this rule appears to be right ...', Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell: Peripatetic, 1984), p. 154; 'This, then, appears a correct form of rule ...', Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), p. 227; 'This kind of rule, then, seems correct ...', Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2000), p. 156; '... this type of rule, then, is clearly correct ...', Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford, 2002), pp. 220-21.

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *Ethics*, trans. J. A. K. Thompson and Hugh Tredennick (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 276.

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics Books VIII and IX*, Clarendon Aristotle Series, trans. Michael Pakaluk (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), p. 15. The following translations are similar: '... this now strikes me to be as it ought ...', Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle*, Everyman Library, trans. D. P. Chase (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1950), p. 213; '... und dies scheint richtig ...', Aristoteles, *Die Nikomachische Ethik*, Der Werke des Aristoteles, vol. 3, trans. Olof Gigon (Zurich: Artemis-Verlag, 1951), pp. 244-45.

⁴⁹ Aristote, *L'Éthique à Nicomaque*, 3 vols., trans. René Antoine Gauthier and Jean Yves Jolif (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1958), vol. 1, p. 236.

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Oswald (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1962), p. 234.

Rackham translates, 'The autocracy of a master appears to be right...'⁵¹

Now I submit that every one of these translations is guilty of looking at *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII 10-11 through *Politics* I spectacles.⁵² Αὕτη does not refer to the implied subject of the clause τυραννικὴ δὲ καὶ ἡ δεσπότου πρὸς δούλους, and the only reason it was ever taken that way was to bring the passage into line with Aristotle's position on slavery in the *Politics*. Instead, αὕτη refers to the explicitly written κοινωνία at line 24. I base this claim on two arguments.

(1) At the beginning of *Politics* III 7 Aristotle promises to consider τὰς πολιτείας... ὀρθὰς versus αἱ παρεκβάσεις – the 'right' constitutions versus the 'deviations'. This is the same language he employs in *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII 10-11, where he uses παρέκβασις or some cognate to refer to the deviation-forms of government.⁵³ More significant, however, is his designation of the three natural forms of government as ὀρθαί. As the ὀρθός-παρέκβασις antithesis seems to be his standard way of distinguishing between the just and the unjust forms of government, to point out that slavery is tyrannical and then to turn around and call that form of association ὀρθή is paradoxical, to say the least. Far more natural is to refer αὕτη, and hence ὀρθή, to the κοινωνία of father and sons at line 24, which, Aristotle asserts, is monarchic and by implication also ὀρθή.

(2) An even stronger argument for this reading can be made by examining the particles in this difficult passage, for they are the scaffolding on which Aristotle's train of thought is constructed. Of interest here are four: the adversative μέν ... δέ, the copulative δέ (without the μέν), the causal/explanatory

⁵¹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 19, trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard, 1982), p. 493. The following translations are similar: 'Ora, questo secondo tipo d'autorità appare retto ...', Aristotele, *Etica Nicomachea*, 2 vols., trans. Marcello Zanatta (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1986), vol. 2, p. 745; 'Now the rule of a slave-master seems to be a right form of tyranny ...', Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Great Books in Philosophy, trans. J. E. C. Weldon (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1987), p. 276.

⁵² Thus Zanatta cites *Pol.* I 5 (Zanatta: II 1025, n. 17), cf. J. A. Stewart, *Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics* 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1892, vol. 2, p. 310); Gauthier-Jolif allude to *Pol.* I 6 (Gauthier-Jolif: III 702-3); Apostle cites *Pol.* I 3-6 (Apostle: 327, n. 7); and Oswald references *Pol.* I 13 (Oswald: 234, n. 31).

⁵³ *NE* VIII 10 1160a30-31, 36, b20; 11 1161a30.

γάρ, and the inferential/resumptive οὖν.⁵⁴ Particularly important is the use of δέ without the μέν, as it is not always adequately translated by just 'and', connoting as it often does a degree of subordination.⁵⁵ we might say, 'and also' – a nuance reinforced in this passage by its occurrence in the expression δὲ καί. Now the structure of the passage in question is as follows:

μέν⁵⁶... γάρ...
 δὲ καί... γάρ...
 δέ... γάρ...
 δὲ καί... γάρ...⁵⁷
 οὖν...⁵⁸
 μέν...
 δέ...
 γάρ...

Now let us fill in the structure with the following somewhat stilted paraphrase:

On the one hand [μέν] the association of a father with his sons is kingly, for [γάρ] the father cares for his children (and also [δὲ καί] Homer calls Zeus 'father', for [γάρ] kingship aims at paternal rule); on the other hand [δέ] the association of Persian fathers with their sons is tyrannical, for [γάρ] they use them like slaves (and also [δὲ καί] the association of a master with his slaves is tyrannical, for [γάρ] it is the advantage of the master that is sought). So [οὖν] on the one hand [μέν] the one association seems right; on the other hand [δέ] the Persian seems wrong: for [γάρ] the types of rule among different people are different.

Clearly the main contrast is between right paternal rule and its Persian deviation. It would therefore be illogical for the

⁵⁴ I am indebted in the following discussion to Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1920), pp. 631-71; and J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996).

⁵⁵ Smyth: 644-45 (#2836); cf. Denniston: 305-6.

⁵⁶ I have omitted the initial γὰρ at 1160b24, which links the entire rest of the chapter with the previous clause, because it is outside our purview.

⁵⁷ Given the parallelism with the previous sentence, I would repunctuate the original Greek text: I would replace the period at the beginning of this clause with a high point. Indeed, the OCT punctuation is itself probably the result of the same tendency to read this passage in the light of *Pol.* 1.

⁵⁸ For μέν οὖν in contexts where the οὖν supplies the needed transition between independent thoughts and the μέν is linked with a following δέ, see Smyth: 655-6 (#2901c) and Denniston: 470-73.

antithesis in the sentence in question to be between the latter and the afterthought that follows it. If that were the meaning, one would expect something like, ἀλλ' αὕτη μὲν ὀρθὴ φαίνεται, κτλ., or perhaps, φαίνεται δ' αὕτη μὲν ὀρθή, κτλ., to counter the expectation set up by the previous two clauses.

One final point about the translation of the last clause: it should be noted that it is entirely dependent on the translation of the μὲν ... δέ clauses in the first part of the passage. If one takes the first part to be contrasting the relation of master to slave with that of Persian fathers to sons, the last clause must be stating what ought to be, not what is, because there is no factual difference between the two relations – they are both cases of slavery. Thus most of the translators cited above render the final clause something like, 'where people differ the rule *should* differ'. But if one takes the contrast as between the correct and the perverted forms of paternal rule, the last clause must be stating what is, not what ought to be, because the Persian type of paternal rule patently ought *not* to be. Nevertheless, given the context, the point seems to be both descriptive and normative. Thus I would gloss, 'among different sorts of people, the types of rule both are different in kind and require different evaluations' – still a factual statement.

V

I now wish to summarize my arguments. (1) Scholars have in general been so focused on the *locus classicus* of Aristotle's discussion of slavery in *Politics* I that most have failed to notice the ambivalence in Aristotle's treatments of the subject. But to the skeptic I simply ask that you advert to the plain meaning of the text: *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII 10-11 clearly states slavery to be lacking in the δίκαιον because it primarily promotes the συμφέρον of the master, and as such is a form of personal tyranny. This cannot be easily reconciled with the much more famous account of slavery in *Politics* I. (2) One cannot say that in the *Nicomachean Ethics* passage Aristotle is condemning only the enslavement of those who are not natural slaves, leaving the enslavement of natural slaves as some benign form of tyranny, because there is a parallel ambivalence in the two works in Aristotle's attitude toward non-Greeks: in the *Politics* they are

regarded as naturally slave-worthy, yet in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle complains of the despotic way in which Persian fathers treat their sons. (3) One cannot say that in *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII 10-11 slavery is viewed as neither just nor unjust, because Aristotle is clear on the essential humanity of slaves, so even granted the dubious premise that relations of justice and injustice do not pertain to slaves *qua* slaves, they do pertain to slaves *qua* human beings. (4) The passage in which Aristotle points out that slavery is tyrannical has been consistently mistranslated (and even misspelled) by scholars in an attempt to bring it into line with the treatment of slavery in the *Politics*. That cannot be done, and it is better to be resigned to a fundamental inconsistency between the two works on the subject of slavery.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to try to resolve this inconsistency; I have simply tried to point out that a problem exists. However two lines of attack seem promising for further research. First, it may be possible to examine whether we can understand Aristotle's two points of view on slavery in terms of his distinction between *ποίησις* and *πρᾶξις* – the former representing a consequentialist approach to moral questions more appropriate to politics, and the latter representing a non-consequentialist approach. According to this line of thinking, in the *Politics* slavery would be seen as justified by its benefit to the polis as a whole, whereas in the *Nicomachean Ethics* it would be seen as unjust in itself. Second, one might consider the possibility that the two points of view represent a development of Aristotle's thought. These two approaches are not necessarily alternatives. Aristotle could, for example, have evolved from a position focusing on slavery as *πρᾶξις* to one focusing on slavery as *ποίησις*.⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ Many readers have contributed to both the argument and the style of this paper. I cannot possibly thank them all by name. I will simply mention two of them – personal friends both – Michael Boylan and James Lesher, whose advice on earlier versions of this paper have gone beyond matters of argument and style.