

interpretation

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interpretation

Volume 11 number 2

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The Good Life, Slavery, and Acquisition: Aristotle's Introduction to Politics

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Modern readers of Aristotle's *Politics* are often embarrassed by Aristotle's argument for natural slavery, and perplexed by his seemingly unqualified condemnation of commerce. They often attribute these features of Aristotle's politics to the prejudices of his time.¹ I shall argue, in contrast, that Aristotle intentionally fails to demonstrate the existence of natural slavery, and that this failure points to the deeper issue of Book I of the *Politics*—mankind's dependence on or slavery to nature. Masters enslave other men not because they deserve to rule those who benefit from being ruled, but because masters are naturally needy. By satisfying some of man's basic needs, commerce removes the necessity of slavery, and therewith its justification. Commerce thus makes possible political life, which is characterized by political rule, the rule of free men over free men. Commerce, however, also inhibits political life to the extent that politics is characterized by freedom from rule by the bodily pleasures which commerce and wealth provide. Aristotle condemns commerce, for while it helps to free man from his initial dependence on nature, it also inhibits his actualizing his distinctive natural capacity—his capacity for politics, or for sharing in speech about the advantageous and the just. The freedom from nature that commerce effects thus has both a good and a bad aspect due to the complexity of nature itself. This complexity in nature makes possible Aristotle's choice of a politics that subordinates living to living well. Aristotle discovered the openness of nature, which allows him to construct a politics wherein man's dependence on nature is not slavish and commerce serves political life.

1. Sir David Ross, for example, writes, "It is, though regrettable, not surprising that Aristotle should regard as belonging to the nature of things an arrangement that was so familiar a part of everyday Greek life as slavery was." *Aristotle* (London: Methuen, 1953), p. 241. Ross finds Aristotle's condemnation of the commercial class "too much a reflexion of the ordinary Greek prejudice against trade as an illiberal occupation." p. 243. See also Ernest Barker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (New York: Dover, 1959), pp. 368, 375–76, and 389. More recently, R. G. Mulgan explains Aristotle's argument for natural slavery in the following way: "We must not forget that he is writing within a society which took the existence of slavery for granted and where slaves, though they did not make up the entire labour force, were largely responsible for the marginal surplus of wealth and leisure which made Greek culture and civilization possible." Mulgan finds that "no one, in the ancient world, as far as we know, advocated the abolition of slavery." Consequently, "[a]gainst the background of a general acceptance of slavery, the debate about whether slavery was natural was not, as it seems to us, about whether there should be slaves but about why there should be slaves." Hence there were only two alternatives: slavery is natural, or might makes right. Since the latter justification of slavery is "unthinkable" to Aristotle, Aristotle is left with the former. *Aristotle's Political Theory, An Introduction for Students of Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 43–44.

I

Near the beginning of the *Politics*, Aristotle says that “the city comes into being for the sake of life, but exists for the sake of the good life” (1252b30–31).² Commentators have not given sufficient attention to the problematic character of this statement.³ What is the relationship between the end of a thing’s genesis and the end of its existence? According to Aristotle, something comes into being for the sake of its natural end, the realization of its perfection. The acorn, for example, comes into being for the sake of the oak tree. It is difficult to understand how something can have both an end of its genesis and an end of its existence, given the common understanding of Aristotle’s teleology.⁴ Moreover, Aristotle speaks even of artificial things as having ends peculiar to themselves. The shoe has two uses, one “peculiar to itself,” the other as an article of exchange, although the shoe “did not come into being for the sake of exchange” (1257a13). While man produces an artifact for an end peculiar to itself, he can make it serve a variety of ends. And that variety of ends includes ends that are higher than the end peculiar to the artifact. The shoe’s end as an article of exchange is in fact higher than the end peculiar to the shoe. Man exchanges shoes for other items, and that exchange frees him from having to provide those items by his own labor. Similarly, the first associations, which take place naturally rather than by choice (1252a26–27), come to have purposes higher than those contained in their origins. The association of man and woman is for the sake of generation (1252a26–27), and the household satisfies man’s “merely daily needs” (1252b14–17). By the end of Book I, however, Aristotle says that the highest concern of the head of a household is the education of its members in virtue (1259b18–22). So too do the master and slave come together for the sake of “security” (1252a31), but Aristotle ends his discussion of slavery by observing that slavery allows the master to turn to politics and philosophy (1255b3). Ends other than those implied in the origins can control development, since development can be modified by human choice. The end of the city also can be modified in the course of its development. Nature may not be so benevolent as to incline men to come together for the sake of living well, but nature is flexible enough to allow men to do so.⁵

2. All references in parentheses, unless otherwise noted, are to Aristotle’s *Politics*. The translations are mine.

3. Ross, p. 328; Barker, p. 268; Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Politics*, trans. Ernest L. Fortin and Peter D. O’Neill, in *Medieval Political Philosophy*, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 308.

4. But see Aristotle’s account of two “actualities” in *De Anima*, 412a–b.

5. Aristotle accounts for moral virtue in a similar way in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “the virtues come into being neither by nature nor contrary to nature” 1103a24–25. The virtues are not the actualization of a potential, as seeing is the actualization of sight: because we have sight, we see, whereas because we practice the moral virtues, we become morally virtuous. On the other hand, since we can acquire the moral virtues, they are not contrary to nature. We can train ourselves to

This conclusion might seem to run counter to Aristotle's argument that man is a political animal. Nature does nothing in vain, and man possesses speech, Aristotle argues. Speech is unlike mere voice, which indicates pleasure and pain. Other animals make one another aware of these sensations through voice. Only speech, however, can indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore the just and the unjust.⁶ The city is the association in which men use their unique faculty of speech to indicate these things to one another (1253a10–18). Later in Book I, Aristotle maintains that what attracts animals as pleasant benefits them (1256a26–27). Animals do not need speech because their pleasure is their good. For man, in contrast, speech about the advantageous is necessary because the pleasant can be harmful. Man thus cannot be guided simply by the naturally pleasant, but needs instead speech for his perfection. The teaching that man is a rational (and hence political) animal implies that nature has failed to provide man with his good, although it has allowed him reason in order to discover it. Nature's limited providence becomes man's opportunity.

The question of the providence of nature underlies Aristotle's discussion of slavery. Before arguing that natural slaves exist, Aristotle reveals that slaves are advantageous, even necessary, to man. If there are no natural slaves, nature has not been provident. The beneficence of nature therefore turns on the existence of natural slaves.

Early in the *Politics*, Aristotle describes the natural ruler as the one who "can foresee with his mind" and the natural slave as the one who "can do with his body" what the ruler foresees with his mind (1252a32–33). It is a mistake, Aristotle argues, to identify the slave with the female, as the barbarians do. Nature does not act "in a niggardly way"; it makes "one thing for one [purpose]." Each being has one work rather than many, so that each may be perfected (1252a2–4). The barbarians are not fully aware of nature's abundance. However, in the beginning of his discussion of natural slavery, Aristotle observed that the head of a family needs tools to accomplish his work:

Every assistant is as it were a tool that serves for several tools; for if every tool could perform its own work when ordered, or by seeing what to do in advance, like they say of the statues of Daedalus and the tripods of Hephaestus, if shuttles wove and

become courageous, but we cannot train a stone to move upwards *NE*, 1103a14–1103b7. Thomas Aquinas also notes the similarity between the moral virtues "acquired through human exercise" and cities "founded by human industry," p. 311.

6. Aristotle's distinction between speech and voice does not depend on a complete disjunction between the pleasant and the advantageous. By the advantageous Aristotle might mean pleasure obtained through restraint and reflection rather than in an immediate sense.

Moreover, how does the just and the unjust follow from the advantageous and the harmful? Thomas comments: "Human speech signifies what is useful and what is harmful. It follows from this that it signifies the just and the unjust. For justice and injustice consist in this, that some people are treated equally or unequally as regards useful and harmful things," p. 310. See also Laurence Berns, "Rational Animal—Political Animal: Nature and Convention in Human Speech and Politics," *The Review of Politics* 38 (April 1976), pp. 177–78.

quills played harps of themselves, master craftsmen would have no need of assistants, and masters no need of slaves [1253b33–1254a1].

Aristotle states here that a slave must perform a variety of functions. The slave, if he is to be a good one, has a certain complexity; even if he has been made by nature for one job alone, he is not restricted to one job. Nature is acting “in a niggardly way,” and certain tasks would be performed more perfectly if they were man’s sole occupation. Nevertheless man has become flexible; he is able to accomplish more than one task. Moreover, foresight is a condition of flexibility. Because tools cannot foresee what to do in advance, masters need slaves. By implication, a good slave foresees what should be done in the situation, and acts accordingly. He performs different tasks when he exercises foresight.

Aristotle lets us see that a useful slave foresees what should be done without depending on his master, or that he possesses some of the competence that defines the master. To the extent that a slave is truly useful, he is less a natural slave. Although Aristotle implies that slaves are useful in production, for example, weaving, he proceeds to assert that a slave is a tool for action rather than for production (1254a8). Tools for action are articles of property, and articles of property belong to another (1254a9–11). In spite of Aristotle’s suggestions concerning the independence of the slave—his foresight as well as his productive capacity—Aristotle refers us to his complete dependence on his master.

Aristotle next says that although the master is the master of the slave, he does not belong to the slave in the way that the slave belongs to the master (1254a9–13). But would anyone suppose that the master belongs to the slave? In asserting the contrary, Aristotle brings up the issue of the master’s dependence. From time to time in Book I, Aristotle identifies the natural master with the free man (for example, 1254b28–29). Slave is the opposite of both. But since the master needs the slave, as Aristotle indicates in the course of defining the nature of the slave, could the master be simply independent or free?

Having defined “the nature of the slave,” Aristotle asks “whether there is anyone who is by nature a slave and whether it is advantageous and just for anyone to be a slave” (1254a18–19). The answer to the former question would seem to imply the answer to the latter: if there is a natural slave, by definition it is advantageous and just for him to be a slave, since he naturally belongs to another. Aristotle pursues his question “by looking to argument” and “by learning from what happens” (1254a21–22).

Aristotle observes that there is ruling and being ruled throughout “all nature.” “In every composite thing, where many things combine to make a common one,” there is something ruling and something ruled. Aristotle gives examples: the soul rules the body, the mind the passions, the male the female, and man

the lower animals. The observation about composites, however, cannot decide the issue, which is whether any two men form such a composite. Aristotle states that “all men, who differ as greatly as the body from the soul, and the beasts from man, . . . are by nature slaves, for whom it is best to be ruled” (1254b16–20). Aristotle still does not demonstrate the existence of natural slaves, but he is further elaborating the definition. But the definition is making the concept of a natural slave all the more problematic. If the master has a body as well as a soul and the slave has a soul as well as a body, how could the master differ from the slave as much as the soul from the body? Strictly speaking, for the master and the slave to reproduce the difference between the soul and the body, the master would have to be completely soul and the slave completely body. If we had reason to suspect that the natural slave would not be useful to his master, our suspicion is now confirmed: what could be more useless than a dead slave for a master who, having no body, has no needs a slave could satisfy? Aristotle immediately underlines the difficulty by telling us that the slave does “share in reason,” but only so as to perceive it rather than possess it (1254b23–25).⁷

At last turning to “what happens,” Aristotle asserts that nature intends to make the bodies of free men different from those of slaves, the latter “strong for necessary service,” the former “erect and unserviceable for such things, but useful for political life.” Unfortunately, nature does not “often” (literally, “many times”) fulfill its intention. Slaves often have the bodies of free men, while free men often have souls but not bodies of free men (1254b33–34). In other words, if we consider only the type of body required, natural slaves do not often make good slaves, while free men often do.⁸

In light of the development of the argument, Aristotle’s conclusion is overstated: “*It is clear* therefore that some are by nature free men, and others by nature slave” (1255a1–2; emphasis mine). It is not surprising that Aristotle now

7. Barker finds that Aristotle cannot maintain consistently both that “the slave is a mere body” and that he possesses “the *semi-rational* part of the soul” and is able to listen to the voice of reason, p. 365. Barker argues that many of Aristotle’s statements about natural slavery vitiate his theory of natural slavery. His theory, according to Barker, is like all false theories: “a false theory must always fall into inconsistency, if it deals with all the facts and data of its subject; and some of these facts must contradict the assumptions on which it goes,” p. 368. Ross comes to a similar conclusion: “Aristotle’s treatment of the question contains implicitly the refutation of his theory,” p. 242. Mulgan also notes the inconsistency between Aristotle’s “seeing the slave as wholly physical and animal-like” and his granting that “the slave has even the emotional and desiring part of the human soul,” p. 43. See also p. 41. Mulgan observes “If [Aristotle] has given one of the classic defences of genetic or racial supremacy, he has done it in a way that makes refutation easy; not all such doctrines are so readily refuted,” p. 43.

8. What exactly is the difference between the bodies of free men and those of slaves? When Aristotle says that the bodies of free men are “useful for political life,” he divides the occupations of political life into service in war and in peace. 1254b29–34. Is the body of the warrior not useful for ploughing the fields? If the master (free man) subdues the slave in war, must he not be strong enough to perform the tasks of a slave?

concedes to the conventionalists that some slaves are so by convention only and not by nature (1255a3ff.).⁹

We have reached the same result when considering both the intellectual capacity and the body needed by the slave. The most useful slave is the man excellent in mind and body, who also happens to be perfectly loyal. The statues of Daedalus, which Aristotle mentioned earlier, are useless because they run away. Nature “often” makes men with the souls of slaves, but with bodies unserviceable for necessary work, Aristotle said. While such a man might benefit from being ruled, a master would not benefit from ruling him. On the level of the master–slave relationship, there is no common good.

Aristotle speaks of the friendship that can exist between a master and a slave when the slavery is natural. When slavery is only “by convention and by force,” there can be no friendship (1255b15–16). When discussing acquisition, Aristotle maintains that war can be justly employed “against men who are by nature fit to be ruled but who are not willing” (1256b25). The friendship between master and slave therefore seems tenuous. It might appear to be promoted by the master’s education of the slave in useful skills and in virtue, as Aristotle recommends (1255b25ff.; 1260b2–3), except that as the slave becomes more competent and virtuous he is more obviously not a natural slave. Aristotle not only fails to give a conclusive argument for the existence of natural slavery, he also advises masters to treat their slaves in a way that prepares them for freedom.

If indeed there are no natural slaves, who both benefit their masters and benefit from being ruled, nature has failed to provide for man. Nature is a harsh master: man is needy by nature, and he cannot satisfy his needs without violence and injustice to others. The advantageous is not necessarily the just. Man is not simply free to pursue the good life: not only must he provide the necessities that nature does not provide for him, but he must do so by enslaving others who do not deserve to be enslaved. He cannot pursue the advantageous and the just, naturally good ends, without violating the one or the other. His nature therefore cannot lead him simply toward his good. His dependence on nature recalls Aristotle’s description of unnatural slavery. The natural is not simply the good. Slavery, however, goes some distance toward freeing man from merely necessary existence. At the end of his discussion of slavery, Aristotle mentions how greatly advantageous slavery is: the possession of slaves frees a man so that he can engage in politics and philosophy (1255b37). Since slavery makes politics and philosophy possible, the question implicitly arises whether politics and philosophy can relieve man of his unnatural slavery to nature.

9. Barker notes that Aristotle’s distinction between natural and conventional slaves would diminish the number of slaves. “Aristotle’s doctrine,” Barker writes, “may seem to us to defend slavery: it is quite possible that it struck his contemporaries as also an attack,” p. 369.

II

The largest part of Book I is on acquisition. Aristotle discusses the households, the smallest associations in the city, and the relationships within the households. He discusses the master's relationship to his slave, who, as an article of property, is man's means for action or life (1254a2–8). While the job of the head of the family is to use property, is it also his job to acquire property? Aristotle thus raises the question of the source or origin of man's life or activity. Does a man provide for himself his means of living, or is he dependent on something external? Aristotle now brings up the possibility that a beneficent nature provides man with what he needs. The issue underlying the discussion of slavery, the beneficence of nature, now becomes explicit.

Book I raises the question of nature, and of man's relationship to nature. Aristotle speaks of what pertains "throughout all nature" (1254a33). In this Aristotle imitates Hippodamus, who also tried to place politics within the context of "the whole nature" (1267b69). Hippodamus apparently applied principles of mathematics to politics, and neglected the heterogeneity of nature.¹⁰ Aristotle, in contrast, sees not only that there are rulers and ruled throughout nature but also that there are "many different kinds of ruling and being ruled" (1254a25). But is there some order or unity that pervades the diversity? Thus far in the discussion of slavery there have appeared men who enslave and others who are enslaved, but no assurance, or even likelihood, that those who are enslaved are naturally inferior to their enslavers. Having suggested that there is no common good between master and slave, Aristotle turns directly to the question raised by that suggestion, the question of the goodness of nature.

In discussing the acquisition of food, Aristotle gives an argument for nature's providence. Nature provides many different kinds of food, and has differentiated the ways of life of the animals by giving them different faculties for obtaining different foods. Some eat grass, others meat; some are nomadic, others solitary. So too with men, their lives differ greatly, because they obtain food in different ways. There are nomadic herdsmen, hunters of various kinds, and farmers. This argument for nature's providence indicates man's neediness: man's manner of life itself results from the way in which he acquires the necessities. And need leads to injustice: Aristotle includes "piracy" among the natural modes of acquisition (1256a36).¹¹ He tells us that men sometimes "live pleasantly" by combining the various pursuits, "supplementing the more deficient life when it

10. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), p. 19.

11. It is difficult to see how piracy could be a just mode of acquisition. Is piracy the violent taking from others what they have acquired, whether through nature's providence, or through their own efforts? Or perhaps piracy refers to the enslaving of men. But if there are no natural slaves, as I have argued, then piracy in this sense also is unjust.

happens to fall short in being self-sufficing" (1265b3–5). Man must choose how to provide for himself, and both his independence and pleasure increase as he takes less of what nature provides and more of what he acquires through his own efforts. Aristotle observes that nature bestows food on all, just as animals bring forth with their young enough sustenance for them "until they are able to provide for themselves" (1256b11–12; emphasis mine). But he nevertheless concludes that nature provides for the mature animal as well; moreover, nature provides "all things for the sake of man" (1256b22). He appears to mean that there is no natural barrier to man's acquiring what he is able to subdue, for he immediately indicates that man's natural provision might resist being acquired.¹² Not only is hunting a natural mode of acquisition, but also war, in cases where "those of mankind designed by nature for subjection refuse to submit to it" (1256b25–27).

Aristotle has discussed the natural modes of acquisition other than trade—herding, farming, piracy, fishing, and hunting (1256b1–2). These do not necessarily bring men into association with one another. They may be undertaken alone. He concluded his discussion of these natural modes of acquisition by including war among them (1256b25–27). Exchange, however, obviously brings men into contact with one another. Exchange is natural, Aristotle says, for men must obtain from others what they happen to lack, while they exchange what they have in surplus (1257a28). But the invention of money grows out of exchange, for it is a more convenient means of exchanging goods. Along with the use of money came associations of men in which men agreed to abide by an authoritative stamping of coins which determine their value (1257a35ff.). The Greek word for money, *nomisma*, is derived from the word for convention, or law, *nomos* (1257b10; see *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1133a29–32). The invention of money therefore strengthens the bond between traders. They now have agreements or conventions that regulate their common activity. Trade, along with the invention of money, appears instrumental in forming bonds among men.¹³

12. Barker takes Aristotle's statement that nature provides all things for man out of context, and then tries to excuse it: "it was only natural that early thought should indulge itself in such *naïveté*," p. 376. Barker nevertheless notes the distinction between this "external teleology" and Aristotle's "fine and internal conception of teleology, in which man is the end of other things, not as their 'destined eater' but as the final aim towards the production of which nature moves," p. 376. See also Ross, p. 126.

13. Harry Jaffa observes that at the center of natural acquisition is hunting, a species of war, and at the center of unnatural acquisition is trade, culminating in usury. War and trade are alternative modes of acquisition. "Aristotle," *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), p. 80. See also Joseph Cropsey, *Political Philosophy and the Issues of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 39, on "the transformation of the predation of war into the salutary predation of peace, the mercenary quest for increase and gain."

Why does Aristotle nevertheless describe moneymaking as an unnatural mode of acquisition? In concluding his discussion of natural acquisition, Aristotle explained that natural acquisition is limited by its end, living and eventually living well, just as any tool is limited by its end or function (1256b28–39). But now Aristotle argues that men seek to acquire unlimited amounts of money because they seek life rather than the good life. And since the desire for life is unlimited, men desire without limit the means to life (1257b24–30). But is the desire for life not limited by its end, life, as Aristotle first indicated? Apparently, a desire for unlimited life accounts for unlimited moneymaking. Unlimited moneymaking is premised on the denial of mortality. And to deny one's mortality is to deny one's corporeality. Aristotle refers to those who think that money is "entirely a convention, and in no way by nature, because it is useless for the necessities, and a man rich in money may lack the necessities of subsistence" (1257b10–14). And there is the story of Midas, who came close to dying of hunger due to his insatiable desire for money (1257b15–17). Moneymaking is an unnatural mode of acquisition, then, because it removes man from the natural world of necessity, corporeality, and death. Moreover, with the advent of money, particular items such as shoes are no longer needed as articles of exchange. Money can take the place of all the particular goods sought through exchange; it reduces a variety of goods to a single measure. Men have invented a universal that appears to remove them from nature, inasmuch as nature is composed of a variety of entities, irreducible to one another.

Aristotle gives a second reason why men desire unlimited amounts of money. Men identify the enjoyment of bodily pleasures with living well, and consequently seek an unlimited amount of the means to these pleasures (1258a2–8). The life of moneymaking thus blinds man to his natural neediness at the same time that it binds him all the more to his body. It is therefore unnatural in this further sense as well: a slave to bodily pleasures, man does not rise to the manly independence of political rule that characterizes politics at its best.

Of the forms of moneymaking, usury is "the most contrary to nature." Money "came into being for the sake of exchange," but interest increases the amount of money itself (1258b5–6). We should not suppose, however, that usury is unnatural because it uses money for an end other than the end for the sake of which money came into being. The shoe, we remember, came into being for an end peculiar to itself, but before the advent of money it was used for the sake of exchange as well as for its original end (1257a13). And the city too comes into being for one end, but exists for a higher one. Aristotle does not take his bearings entirely from the origins. Usury is a paradigm for the unnatural evidently because through usury the artificial comes from the artificial, and therefore has no origin in nature. Usury even more radically than money removes man from the limits imposed by nature's heterogeneity, since everything that naturally comes into being does so from some particular

thing. But usury makes something come from nothing.¹⁴ While for Aristotle the origins do not necessarily completely control development, usury denies the origins altogether.¹⁵

Having “sufficiently distinguished [the forms of acquisition] in order to understand them,” Aristotle will discuss them “in regard to their use” (1258b9–11). He divides the natural mode into its branches. Then, of the mode involving commerce, there is exchange, usury, and labor for hire. The latter includes the workers without arts, “who are useful by means of their bodies alone” (1258b28). The natural slaves by definition (1252a34) are now working for hire. The convention of money has made it possible for men to pay other men for necessary services. In order to pay other men, the head of the family of course must possess more money than is necessary for the purchase of needed goods. His extra money permits him to employ others to do necessary tasks and therewith to free himself for other occupations. Aristotle now tells us there is a third mode of acquisition, with elements of both the natural and the commercial kind. He gives the examples of felling timber, an activity that does violence to nature in order to use it for human purposes, and mining, an activity that takes from nature what it does not readily provide. I believe that we should be reminded of Aristotle’s political science, which must do violence to man’s natural inclinations in order to raise him to his place at the peak of nature.

Aristotle says that he will leave a detailed account of these modes of acquisition to others. He recommends that “someone collect the scattered accounts of the successful methods used by moneymakers,” which “will benefit those honoring moneymaking” (1259a3–6). One such method is monopoly. Aristotle gives the example of a man who made one hundred talents out of his fifty. Far from condemning this making of money out of money, Aristotle emphasizes that the method can be used politically. While he shows that a private use of monopoly is harmful to a tyrant’s affairs (1259a30–32), he concludes that “to know [how to secure a monopoly] is useful for statesmen also, for many cities need such means of acquiring money” (1259a35–37). What divorces man from nature’s heterogeneity is now recommended if it can be subordinated to political ends.

The first part of Book I is about man’s natural neediness, as it is revealed in the human institution of slavery. The second part of Book I is about man’s separating himself from nature through unnatural modes of acquisition. Aristotle’s suggestion for the political use of commerce, which concludes his discussion of acquisition, provides a transition to the last part of Book I, in which Aristotle

14. Barker admits that Aristotle objects to usury on the ground that it makes something come from nothing. But Barker believes that this is a false inference from the peculiarity of the Greek word for interest. For his discussion, see pp. 385–387.

15. Jaffa suggests that Aristotle’s praise of just war and his censure of trade are due to the fact that the root of injustice is the abolition of the limits upon bodily desires. “Perhaps the extreme of trade, culminating in usury, is more akin to the abolition of those limits than is war,” p. 80.

returns to the family, a reminder of one's natural origins. He now claims that the family can be understood properly only in the context of political life. The family remains an integral part of the city, but the city exists for the sake of the good life. Political life therefore frees man from his dependence on brute nature without uprooting him from the natural world.

Before discussing the other relations within the family, Aristotle returns to the relation between the master and slave. Since the head of the family is more concerned about the virtue or excellence of its human members than of its inanimate property, the question of the virtue of the slave arises. Does the slave have only the virtue of a tool or a servant, or also such virtues as courage, justice, and moderation (1259b21–26)? Aristotle has this dilemma: if the slave can be virtuous in the latter sense, he would be a human being, but Aristotle has had to describe him as less than human in order to justify slavery. After calling our attention to the advantages of commerce and of the statesman's use of commerce, Aristotle thus returns to the question of the slave's humanity. It now appears that the slave is capable of moral virtue, although Aristotle refrains from undermining his earlier argument altogether by maintaining that the slave is capable of moral virtue only in a sense. There are different kinds of courage and moderation. There is the virtue of a slave, and that of a free man, just as there is the virtue of a man, and that of a woman (1260a2–28).¹⁶ But does not the diversity within humanity, and therewith within the concept of human excellence, call into question the unity of the good life? Book I ends with Aristotle's inability to speak of the virtue of women and children without considering the particular regime in which they live (1260b10–18). Presumably, the same applies to the virtue of a man. While virtue appears inseparable from political life, political life itself assumes a multiplicity of forms. Virtue varies from regime to regime. A consideration of politics evidently recalls to man the irreducible natural diversity that commerce tended to deny. The good life at which Aristotle said cities aimed must always be lived within the context of a particular regime. Aristotle's argument suggests by the end of Book I that there is a variety of good lives.

16. As we have seen, Aristotle distinguishes the rule of male over female from the rule of master over slave. (See p. 173 of this paper.) Nevertheless both kinds of rule are defined as the rule of the naturally superior over the naturally inferior. Aristotle says, "The male is naturally fitter to command than the female, *except where there is some departure from nature*" (1259b2, emphasis mine). Aristotle classifies the rule of male over female as political rule, although the male's rule is permanent and political rule is the rule of equals who take turns ruling. Where equals take turns ruling, Aristotle observes, rulers try to indicate some sign of their superiority, such as modes of address or titles of respect, in a way reminiscent of Amasis' footpan (1258b–1259a). According to Herodotus, Amasis made his golden footpan into a god in imitation of his own situation: a former utensil had become an object of reverence, just as Amasis, formerly a subject, had become king (Herodotus, ii.172). The male's preeminence over the female, it appears, resembles the pre-eminence of Amasis' footpan. Again nature is improvident, since it fails to provide men with inferior and obedient wives, just as it fails to provide slaves. If nature's improvidence again could be seen as man's opportunity, it is only by looking beyond the practical demands of life.

Aristotle finds support for the diversity of virtues from Sophocles' *Ajax*. The poet said, "Silence gives grace to woman," Aristotle observes.¹⁷ Yet it is the maddened Ajax who said this, when his wife Tecmessa questioned his activities. It is a madman, Aristotle might be saying, who does not listen to the good advice of a woman.

Yet Aristotle appears to endorse Ajax's statement. When would silence be appropriate? At the beginning of Book I, Aristotle tells when speech becomes appropriate: the political community is a sharing in speech, for speech reveals the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore the just and the unjust (1253a14–16). The conjunction of the advantageous and the just, as revealed by speech, is the basis of the political community. But Aristotle's discussion of slavery revealed the disjunction between the advantageous and the just. Injustices may be unavoidable in establishing civil societies. And commerce, not simply advantageous for man because it distances him from his natural world at the same time it further binds him to his body and its pleasures, makes relief from the gross injustice of slavery possible. Until the existence of cities, the advantageous and the just for man appear to conflict. And past cities have probably existed for the sake of survival, or wealth. They are not cities that deserve the name of cities (see 1280b7–8). Could Aristotle have thought that cities truly deserving the name had not yet existed? And was it his chosen task to bring such cities into existence through his political science? The greatest acquisition at issue in the *Politics*, then, is mankind's acquisition of Aristotle's political science. For it is in Aristotle's speech that the end of the city's existence, as opposed to the end of its genesis, makes its first appearance among mankind.¹⁸ A womanly silence may be appropriate, especially if un-womanly speech, like Tecmessa's, attacks a man's pride as he goes about the business of defending his honor. Aristotle's politics, after all, centers on political

17. Sophocles, *Ajax*, 293.

18. It might be objected that the end of the city's existence, the good life, first appeared in ancient cities that made piety the bond of their union. Such an objection depends on the ends served by religion. Aristotle associates veneration of the gods with the village stage of human development. When men were themselves ruled by a king they worshipped gods also ruled by a king: they likened the lives of the gods to their own (1252b). The stories of the gods thus support kingly rather than political rule: they indicate man's dependence and bondage rather than his self-sufficiency and freedom. The good life at which the Aristotelian city aims, in this sense at least, must go beyond piety.

It might be objected also that the end of the city's existence, the good life, first appeared not in Aristotle's speech but in Plato's. Although distinguishing Aristotle's political science from Plato's philosophizing about politics is beyond the scope of this paper, the following suggestion, based on a passage in Book I, is in order. Aristotle begins the politics with a criticism of those who believe that "political rule, kingly rule, household management, and despotic rule are the same." These men also believe that there is no difference between a small city and a large household (1252a8–14). It is commonly understood that Aristotle is referring to Socrates and Plato. But for Aristotle, political rule, as opposed to despotic rule, is essential to the city's aiming at the good life. From Aristotle's point of view, then, Plato did not understand the good life for which cities might exist.

rule and freedom, for political rule is that of free men over free men (1277b16). Awareness of the degree of mankind's dependence on Aristotle for these things may not promote the manly independence necessary for nondespotic political life.

Ajax commits suicide. Tecmessa tries to prevent his death.¹⁹ When she is unsuccessful, she laments his rashness and thereby affirms the goodness of life.²⁰ Suicide presupposes a distance from life, or sufficient detachment from life to discern that it is not worth living at all costs. Perhaps it is this detachment that allows men to try to overcome natural necessity, to enslave others, and to found cities. Yet if political life were simply unsatisfying, if it provided man no access back to a natural world, suicide might be a proper response to the human condition. Aristotle intends to bring into existence cities, or communities that provide some degree of good living. He is again playing the woman's part, although with considerably more insight than Tecmessa, and with a large degree of manly assertion.

19. When Tecmessa discovers the danger to his life, she asks the chorus to help her find him: "Come, let's hurry. No time to sit, if we wish to save a man who is eager to die," *Ajax*, 811–12.

20. *Ajax*, 891–903.