

interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

May 1983

Volume 11 Number 2

- | | | |
|-----|------------------------|---|
| 139 | Arlene W. Saxonhouse | An Unspoken Theme in Plato's <i>Gorgias</i> : War |
| 171 | Mary Pollingue Nichols | The Good Life, Slavery, and Acquisition: Aristotle's Introduction to Politics |
| 185 | Catherine Zuckert | Aristotle on the Limits and Satisfactions of Political Life |
| 207 | Timothy Fuller | Temporal Royalties and Virtue's Airy Voice in <i>The Tempest</i> |
| 225 | Jeffrey Barnouw | The Pursuit of Happiness in Jefferson, and its Background in Bacon and Hobbes |
| 249 | Robert Sacks | The Lion and the Ass: a Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Chapters 35–37) |

interpretation

Volume 11 number 2

Editor-in-Chief Hilail Gildin

Editors Seth G. Benardete • Hilail Gildin • Robert Horwitz
• Howard B. White (d.1974)

Consulting Editors John Hallowell • Wilhelm Hennis • Erich Hula •
Arnaldo Momigliano • Michael Oakeshott • Ellis
Sandoz • Leo Strauss (d.1973) • Kenneth W.
Thompson

Associate Editors Larry Arnhart • Patrick Coby • Christopher A. Colmo
• Maureen Feder • Joseph E. Goldberg • Pamela
Jensen • Will Morrissey • Bradford Wilson

Assistant Editors Marianne C. Grey • Laurette G. Hupman

Design & Production Martyn Hitchcock

Authors submitting manuscripts for publication in
INTERPRETATION are requested to follow the *MLA
Style Sheet* and to send clear and readable copies
of their work. All manuscripts and editorial correspon-
dence should be addressed to INTERPRETATION,
Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. 11367, U.S.A.

Copyright 1983 • Interpretation

Aristotle on the Limits and Satisfactions of Political Life

CATHERINE H. ZUCKERT

Carleton College

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt attempts to revive the ancient notion that the distinctively human lies in political action. She thus reminds her readers of Aristotle's famous dictum (*Politics* 1253a3–5)—that man is a political animal—and its essentially controversial character at the same time she explicitly dissociates herself from the ancient philosophic understanding. Unlike the Latin commentators who reveal their misunderstanding by reducing political to social, she recognizes, Plato and Aristotle retain a sense of the distinctively public life of the *polis*. Nevertheless, these ancient philosophers establish the tradition which subordinates practice to contemplation or philosophy; and it is this hierarchy that she wishes to challenge.¹ As Leo Strauss has brilliantly shown, Plato does establish both the viability and the superiority of philosophy as a way of life by showing the limits of politics.² But the subordination of politics to philosophy is not so clear in the works of Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he suggests three different peaks of human excellence—magnanimity, justice, and contemplation. And in the *Politics*, he presents the life of the statesman or *πολιτικός* more or less in its own terms, as a life worth choosing for its own sake or essentially a self-satisfying one.

The picture Aristotle gives of political life differs, moreover, in important respects from the action Arendt praises. Although it is true that the *Politics* begins by showing that the *polis* does not emerge until or unless the necessities of life are provided by the *oikos*, it is not true, as Arendt claims, that the *polis* is characterized by a sharp distinction between public and private. On the contrary, Aristotle shows that the regime (*πολιτεία*) shapes and so infuses all aspects of private life, especially the family—not through totalitarian controls, of course, but rather by praise and blame expressed either in legislation or mere opinion. Second, political life as depicted by Aristotle is not animated simply by the desire for fame, “immortality” or “distinction” as Arendt claims. Because human life is characterized by several incommensurable needs, there is an enduring problem both of providing the requirements and of compensating those who do. Politics essentially concerns the question, who should rule, which is a question not merely of recognition or honor but ultimately of justice. Since this question can be answered only through complex and continuing deliberation, politics is an inherently rational activity. The simple distinction between action and reason or theory does not fit: *φρόνησις* includes

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 10, 17–18, 155–56.

2. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963), pp. 50–138.

both. Finally, the fundamental pluralism of human life that Arendt herself stresses makes it impossible for all members of a community to participate fully in public or political decisions. Man as a species may be political—with a meaning yet to be fully explained—but individual distinctions are products of chance (birth) and place (the division of labor). Only by means of a vast abstraction and simplification can we equate voting with the negotiations of a secretary of state as political participation. We do, as Arendt urges, need a better appreciation of “the political.” As Aristotle shows, politics is both a more noble and a more limited human endeavor than we generally recognize.

Politics is not merely a “search” for power, according to Aristotle, nor does it characterize all human relations or associations. On the contrary, political activity arises only after human beings meet their more fundamental procreative and economic needs. Since the members of a polity must continue to produce new generations as well as to feed and defend themselves, the requirements of both family and economic organization (the division of labor) limit the scope of political action. Aristotle shows, however, why neither purely social nor economic relations satisfy human beings. And in showing why political activity is both necessary and desirable, Aristotle reveals the reasons why every political association constitutes or involves a “regime” (*πολιτεία*), that is, an ordering of disparate groups and activities in which some rule others. Through his discussion of regime Aristotle thus enables us to understand why political conflict endures, why all political activity and association is partial, why there is never complete consensus or agreement, and thus why force is always necessary to maintain order.

All human beings act from an attachment to their own existence, but they do not all define their existence in the same way. Man’s basic concern to preserve his own life makes economic considerations powerful in determining the way of life of individuals or communities (1256a29–1256b9), but economic considerations alone never suffice to explain any particular regime, that is, human life above the level of subsistence, because the distribution of goods can be altered by force. The decision as to who rules is a decision as to what is most important; since every human being values his own existence, even tends to overestimate his own importance, everyone in the community is not apt to agree about who should rule. Some men seek honor rather than wealth, moreover; their desires can be fulfilled only through being elevated above others, and these are the men most apt to engage in politics. Since most human beings have to devote most of their lives to acquiring the necessities of existence, very few will ever participate fully in politics. The nature of any specific regime thus very much depends on the character and wisdom of the men who make and enforce the laws. The fact that all human beings and so rulers in particular act out of self-love (1267a30–35) does not mean that all government is necessarily oppressive or unjust. It does mean that it is extremely difficult to construct and maintain a regime which recognizes and gives due

weight to all the different kinds of contributions or activities necessary to maintain a political association. It requires deliberation, and such deliberative skill emerges only in the context and on the basis of political experience.

Aristotle's very first claim that the *polis* constitutes the highest and most comprehensive form of human association surely flies in the face of the modern liberal tendency to view the state as separate and in some ways subordinate to society.³ Yet our own experience in one of the least socialistic liberal democracies ought to teach us that the law reaches into virtually all realms of private endeavor, even when the object of the law is to protect freedom, the "right to privacy," for example. Even before the emergence of the welfare state, however, Alexis de Tocqueville showed that the effects of American democracy extend far beyond the institutions of government into economic enterprise, religion, all forms of intellectual and artistic endeavor, the family, and even the individual's conception of himself. If political influence is so pervasive, it is also fairly clear that it is not primarily or directly coercive. And Aristotle's second sweeping claim is that political rule differs essentially from both despotism and patriarchal authority; the rule of a *politikos* (literally "political man" but usually translated statesman) is essentially different from that of a master and that of a father. Our tendency (stemming from Locke) to associate government primarily with legislation leads us not only to underestimate the extent of political influence but also to conceive of political action primarily in terms of command and enforcement. Since command and force are universal, we conclude, so is politics. Aristotle suggests, on the contrary, that understanding politics primarily in terms of "power" involves a fundamental misconception of the nature of political order.

Political order represents a compound of several different but equally necessary kinds of association. If there are no people, there will be no *polis*. Political order thus includes the male–female procreative relation. If there is no food, there will be no people, so the existence of political order also requires the intelligent organization of labor to provide the necessary goods. Aristotle describes the intelligent organization of labor in terms of the master–slave relation, because the production of goods at anything more than individual subsistence level requires a division of labor. The fact that there are necessary economic conditions for the emergence of political order also means that politics is not universal; men are not able to deliberate about the best way of life until their vital needs are met. Under unfavorable circumstances, it may require all their time and effort merely to survive.

Unlike Marx, Aristotle insists that the first form of human association, the family, consists in the merger of two different natural relations: the erotic, male–female or procreative relation as well as the master–slave, or economic in the narrower, modern sense, division of labor. Self-preservation operates

3. Harry V. Jaffa, "Aristotle," in Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, ed., *History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1972), pp. 65–68.

on a species as well as an individual level. “Barbarians” make the mistake of confusing the two distinct relations, Aristotle argues, when they treat women as slaves. Procreation is not simply another form of production; the family does not develop solely from the requirements of survival or need. On the contrary, Aristotle suggests, there is always a positive attraction to life itself as well as to other human beings at the root of every human society. Human beings form family groups not merely from necessity but also from desire. Once formed, however, the association affects both the constituent needs and desires. To maintain the family, and so give birth to future generations, sexuality must be restricted both with regard to partner and the number of progeny, while the need to produce and provide greatly expands. The interplay of the two roots of the most basic form of human association is thus instructive as to the nature of the higher, more complex political order. All human associations consist of several, irreducibly different parts or relations. Aristotle’s approach to politics is thus both fundamentally pluralistic and fundamentally hierarchical. The concept of “regime” is central to his political science, because he understands political order as a compound or articulation of several, irreducibly different parts. As all parts of the household are affected or shaped by the requirements of raising future generations, so all parts of the political order are affected by the particular way of life the members of the *polis* seek to preserve.

Once human beings meet their needs, Aristotle observes, their desires expand. They do not merely want life, they want a good life, the best life possible; and in seeking the good life, they form political associations. In contrast to the formation of the household order or family, the *oikos*, which arises out of the combination of instinct and need, political order is instituted intentionally, as a matter of conscious choice. Although men are naturally inclined to associate politically, political associations do not spontaneously emerge the way families do. The greatest benefactor to mankind, Aristotle observes, was the man who first invented and instituted political order (1253a31–34).

At a subsistence level, human life is ruled by necessity. Once men produce more than they need, they also choose a way of life, almost of necessity, because instinct is so much weaker in human beings than it is in other animals. Human beings have to order and direct their own lives because of the indeterminacy or openness of human nature. They are able to order their lives by virtue of their rational faculty or *logos*. But as Jean-Jacques Rousseau later argued, human beings develop their speech and reason only in association with one another. There is, strictly speaking, no completely individual capacity for choice or self-rule. Rather than emphasize the openness or indeterminacy of human life, Aristotle thus stresses the importance and difficulty of making a good choice, that is, of developing man’s practical reason, and its political foundation.

Although human beings can and clearly do exist without associating politically, Aristotle declares that the *polis* is prior to the individual, because each

develops his “individuality” or particularity as well as his distinctly human qualities only in political association. The qualities which most distinguish one man from another develop only through specialization and a division of labor. So long as one man uses all his energy to provide for himself and a family, he is not apt to develop a talent for geometry, music or painting. Since human beings cannot live at any level above subsistence except in cooperation with others, the choice of a way of life can be made only through association, and men associate with each other only on the basis of the friendship that arises from an agreement about what is right or just. Men who do not trust each other do not deliberate together about what they should do; they seek to defend themselves from possible incursions. Human beings thus develop their natural potential to order or direct their own lives, their *logos*, only in political associations, and political associations are founded on an agreement about what is right or just. Human speech and reason extend beyond the mere animal expression of pleasure and pain to calculations of what is useful or harmful. But *logos* is not merely instrumental, as Aristotle understands it. How can men calculate what is useful without a standard of measure of what “X” is useful or harmful to? *Logos* thus includes the ability to articulate, compare and rank various desires, to determine what is right, as well as the capacity to determine what is conducive to achieving these ends. Men thus exercise and express their full rational potential only in political association.

Although individuals acquire both their distinctive talents and traits along with their ability to choose a way of life only in a political association, individual differences are not merely or completely products of the division of labor. On the contrary, Aristotle argues, there are natural differences in individual potential; it is the existence of such differences that makes the division of labor rational, productive, and generally beneficial. If there were no such natural differences in potential, neither differentiation nor hierarchy of any kind would be just. Specialization would merely constitute a restriction and contortion of human potential. All social organization would rest ultimately on arbitrary preferences and coercive control. The master–slave relation represents the simplest and most extreme case.

Aristotle’s discussion of the master–slave relation reveals two fundamental characteristics of all human association: (1) the utility of a division of labor, and (2) the need to use force to maintain order. Like Marx, Aristotle suggests that the most fundamental division of labor is that between mind or soul and body.⁴ Through an analysis of the compound constitution of the individual human being, however, Aristotle argues that such a division is necessary, natural, and beneficial. If soul does not rule body, that is, if there is no intelligent direction of physical motion, no man will long survive. Rule of the soul or mind is thus necessary and beneficial for both ruler and ruled. By analogy, Aristotle

4. Karl Marx, “The German Ideology,” reprinted in Robert Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 159.

therefore argues, one man has a right to control the actions of another completely, to own him, if the two are related to each other as soul is to body. The natural slave is thus a human being with enough reason to follow orders but not to direct his own life. He lacks enough foresight and control to order his own affairs sufficiently to survive without direction. Rule by a master is good for the slave as well as the master, because the slave left alone is unable to preserve himself. All human beings are naturally attached to their own existence, so preservation may certainly be regarded as good. Although mastery is just when both parties benefit, the justice of mastery does not rest on the consent of the slave. It could not because the natural or justly enslaved man is enslaved precisely because he is not able to determine or to do what is best for himself. The masters have to determine which men ought to be slaves and force them to serve. Mastery can be just even when it rests on force rather than consent, but forceful conquest does not suffice to establish just rule. Only common benefit establishes justice.

The only reason human beings associate with each other is for their mutual benefit or pleasure, but mutual benefit does not necessarily mean equal benefit. Aristotle was certainly not quixotic or unobservant enough to believe that men enslave others in order to preserve or benefit the slaves. They take slaves because they want to use them to obtain or to do what the masters want, for the benefit of the masters, not the slaves. Aristotle does not emphasize the common benefit—which for the slaves is mere preservation—so much as the essentially instrumental character of mastery. Despite a common opinion to the contrary, Aristotle argues, careful examination of the situation shows that command and control of the actions of other human beings and the division of labor involved in that command are *not* good or desirable in themselves. A fortunate master will find a reliable steward to manage his slaves for him so that he will be free to engage in politics or philosophy (1255b30–37). Human excellence or virtue does not consist merely in the recognition of superiority by others; it consists in a way of life, a kind of activity that the participants find satisfying in itself, not as a means to some other good. Aristotle's suggestion that the work of slaves might be performed by "divine machines" may make the difference he sees between politics and mastery clearer to the modern reader. Technology, again the intelligent direction of physical force, is supposed to increase our power or ability to realize our desires; it is essentially instrumental rather than choiceworthy or valuable in and of itself. It could only replace politics, deliberation and judgment by rigidly restricting the mental development and the variety of life it is supposed to serve.⁵

Both the emergence and continued existence of a political association depend upon the intelligent use of force to maintain order and a division of labor

5. There are, indeed, some who fear that it will. Cf. Joseph Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation* (San Francisco: Freeman, 1976), and Jacques Ellul, *Technological Society* (New York: Knopf, 1964).

to produce enough to free some from the press of necessity. Both the need for coercion and a division of labor inherent in the master–slave relation belong to the household; both are necessary parts or elements of every political order, but neither constitutes its essence, that which makes it distinctly political. On the contrary, both of these necessary elements constitute limitations of politics—the extent to which it can be free, reasonable, just and beneficial to all. Aristotle indicates the extent of such limitations only briefly when he observes two respects in which nature falls short of her “intention.” First, she “intends” that masters and slaves be visibly distinguishable (1254b27–34). In fact, it is difficult if not impossible to tell who is a natural slave and who a master, because the primary difference is one of intellectual potential rather than physical strength, and intellectual potential cannot be seen. In order to be identified, intellectual potential has to be actualized, and the actualization depends upon a child’s social (family) and, later, political position. As the Coleman report has more recently reminded us, the development of a child’s intelligence depends very much on his family circumstances. A good family life does not suffice to produce excellence, moreover. As Aristotle observes (1255b1–5), outstanding men do not always have excellent sons, not only because public men often neglect their own families but also because the sons do not have the same potential. Human excellence is not simply inherited, although nature again “intends” it. Social and political order, the division of labor, does not and never will clearly and perfectly reflect the differences in individual potential and talent, because the development of potential into excellence presupposes social order. But the fact that political order can only approximate and never completely duplicate the naturally indicated order does not lead Aristotle to abandon the natural as the standard of right.

Contrary to Marx, Aristotle suggests that the division of labor arises not so much from need as from the desire to live well.⁶ One man can support himself alone with only an ox. Unfortunately, the same tendency to amass more than they need also prevents most human beings from ever realizing their desires. Although acquisition ought to be defined and limited by the requirements of a fully satisfying life, since the utility of any “means” must be determined by its “end” or purpose, it is much easier, as Aristotle observes, to see the utility of goods and money than it is to find a fully satisfying way of life. Most men thus devote themselves to acquiring as much as they can, because they are ultimately more concerned with their mere preservation than they are with living well (1257b41–1258a2).

As Hobbes later emphasizes, human beings never know exactly what they will need, so they amass as much as possible to take care of as many future contingencies as possible.⁷ But, Aristotle insists, this unlimited desire for acquisition results in a fundamental perversion. Rather than use money and goods

6. Marx, *op. cit.*, pp. 156–58.

7. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* VI, XIII.

to improve the quality of their lives by raising their level of activity, most men exercise and improve their faculties in order to acquire more goods. The first illustration Aristotle uses is indicative. Men need courage in order to live well, that is, not to live in fear, but in mercenary armies or wars for conquest, they make courage merely into a means of acquiring more wealth. They never find satisfaction in their own activity; they look only for the (external) rewards.

Although Aristotle's view of the primary driving forces in the lives of most men is thus quite similar to Hobbes', there are two important differences. First, Aristotle describes a positive attachment to life rather than the negative fear of death or the unknown. The naive or natural view is that life is good, something to be desired. Second, Aristotle maintains that there are some few who are not moved solely by the desire for acquisition or mere life. In taking account only of the majority, Hobbes does not reveal the full human truth. A few can achieve full satisfaction in philosophy or government. If that is true, human life does not necessarily and always consist merely in striving that ceases only in death. So long as some human beings have to devote their lives to providing the goods, that is, so long a division of labor is necessary, everyone will not be able to devote his or her life to politics or philosophy.

Nevertheless, if most men seek good without end, there is bound to be competition and conflict on what we call economic grounds. And where there is conflict, force must be used to establish order. The use of force is therefore necessary in instituting political order not only to provide necessities in the form of the master-slave relation but also to deal with the conflict that results from the expansion of desire that follows the productive success of a division of labor. Since scarcity does not result so much from the limits of natural goods as the unlimited range of human desire, the productivity of modern technology would not fundamentally alter the situation. As Aristotle argues in Book II, acquisitive desires give rise to conflict which cannot be solved by solely economic means.

Plato attempted to abolish self-interested conflict or "factions," especially between rich and poor, by making the citizens of his *politeia* as much like each other as possible and having them share everything. This most radical communism ever proposed is radically defective, according to Aristotle, in both means and end. If a political society necessarily comprehends several different functions, conflict cannot be reduced by destroying differentiation without destroying the possibility of politics as well. Political deliberation consists precisely in determining the difficult question of which activities to encourage among which groups of citizens and how to reward them with goods or praise. Like Plato, Aristotle asserts that education is the way to produce political unity, but Aristotle criticizes Plato for not recognizing the significance of economic function for education. If the farmers and guardians receive the same education, Aristotle asks, how will they remain able to perform their different functions?

If they don't, how does the educational scheme unify the city? Education means more than the acquisition of skills and common beliefs; human beings learn largely by doing, so their education is virtually inseparable from their way of life. Rather than unity itself or in the abstract, it is the desire to foster and protect an accepted way of life that holds together different activities which necessarily constitute a polity.

Although Plato purports to rely on education to unify his *politeia*, Aristotle observes, he actually depends more on the communistic institutions. Aristotle's critique of these institutions thus points to his understanding of the origin or core of the political conflict that Plato tried to avoid—self-love. Human beings are naturally first attached to their own existence. By having all citizens own all property in common, Aristotle argues, Plato insures that no one will take care of any of it. Each will tend to leave the management of the “commons” to others, and it will not be possible to identify the failure of any specific individual to contribute his share because no one has any particular responsibility for any specified part. The same observation applies even more strongly to the family and the raising of children. Men care for their own, both as an extension of themselves and because others hold them responsible. By making the city into one big family, Plato does not extend a close tie, therefore, so much as dissolve it. No one any longer “belongs” to any one else.

The foundation of the traditional family structure is not solely economic or primarily based on the general difference between the sexes in physical strength and reproductive function, according to Aristotle. On the contrary, the family comprises three different relations. One is the master–slave or economic function, but that is only one. Women are not properly slaves, because they can reason; the relation between husband and wife is a “political” one of equals, as opposed to the despotic rule of slaves or the monarchical guidance of children (1259b1). Since it involves choice, the conjugal relation is not merely animal, erotic, or procreative. Third and most important, however, is the educational relation of parents to children. Like adults, children can be educated only if their needs are met, but most adults will care enough to take the trouble only for their own children, as an extension of themselves or, at least, as a duty for which they are publicly and individually held responsible. The family structure is thus necessary, because men will care for their children only when these are publicly and privately identifiable as theirs. As Aristotle indicates in his discussion of the differences between political and subpolitical associations in Book I, the family is *economically* necessary to produce future generations of human beings. It is *politically* necessary to make most men act to preserve the regime by taking care to pass on their own way of life to their children. The specific character and regulation of family life will therefore also vary according to the regime (1260b12–18).

If education is, or ought to be, the first concern of any government, a public system will be provided and the laws will regulate family life as well as more

formal studies. If education remains almost entirely within the private family, the division of labor will certainly be unjust, because private wealth and family position will determine future occupations rather than individual potential. Citizens will be encouraged to care for their own, moreover, rather than what is common. Like Plato, Aristotle is aware of the Spartan system of public and equal, although segregated, education for both males and females. Like Plato, he suggests that men will not be educated unless their mothers are also (1260a). Unlike Plato, however, Aristotle argues that public efforts cannot entirely replace family ties. Personal attention is important not merely because human beings desire it, but because it is such a clear indication of what is valued. If education is truly deemed to be important, fathers will concern themselves with it not only in general, in the law, but also as it specifically concerns their own sons. Indeed, concern for the existence and future of their own families constitutes one of the strongest bonds uniting men in a polity. Political unity cannot be achieved by destroying man's attachment to his own, Aristotle suggests, because politics itself grows out of this self-same attachment.

Aristotle states his full view of the political function of the family only as a critique of Plato, because the family structure involves another fundamental limitation on political justice. Plato suggested the "community of wives and children" not only in order to overcome man's attachment to his own but also to offer both sexes an "equal opportunity" to develop their individual potential, that is, as a matter of justice rather than efficiency. In Book I, Aristotle claims that as the master rules the slave by nature, so the man leads the woman (except when the union is against nature, that is, when a woman marries her inferior) (1259b1–5). He thus implicitly recognizes the possibility explicitly discussed in the *Republic* (455c–456a) that a woman inferior to a few men will still be superior to most. Since he insists that the conjugal association is political and reflects in the immediate sequel that political relations generally occur between equals, who rule and are ruled in turn, it is difficult to see why he nevertheless concludes that the man should always rule (1259b5–10). In describing the basis of the three different kinds of rule or relations in the household, Aristotle explains that the parts are different. Where the slave does not participate in council or deliberation (*βουλευτικόν*) at all, both women and children do, but the woman's participation is *ἄκυρον*, without authority, and the child is undeveloped (*ἀτελής*). To say that the woman deliberates without authority, rule or decisiveness (the alternative meanings of *κύριος*) is as much as to say that her reason does not rule because she does not rule. Aristotle does not give the reason why she does not rule or justify the exception to the ordinary equality in political relations.

Aristotle admits that his discussion of the family and the proper excellence and functions of its varied parts in Book I is not complete (1260b8–20). The question must be reconsidered in the context of the discussion of the different regimes because it is a question of the respective excellences of ruled and

rulers. The family is, after all, but a part of the *polis*, and the excellence of the part is relative to the whole. When Aristotle returns to the question of the relative excellences of ruler and ruled in Book III (1277b14–30), he also discusses the different virtues of the two sexes. The only virtue peculiar to rulers, he concludes, is *φρόνησις* or practical reason which is and can be developed only in the process of governing, that is, in use. Otherwise the virtues of the ruler and the ruled are the same; the ruler must know how to obey (himself and others) before he can rule. The virtues of the two sexes differ, not because of differences in natural potential for deliberation, according to Aristotle, but because of their different household functions. According to the true laws of the household (*οἰκονομία*), the business of the man is to acquire where that of the woman is to secure. (Is Aristotle guilty of an ironic pun here? The verb he uses to describe the female function, *φυλάττειν*, has the same root as the noun, *φυλακή*, that Plato uses to describe the rulers in the *Republic*.) The definition of the functional difference underlying sexual differences in excellence seems to refer back to the art of war, described as a form of the art of acquisition and so *οἰκονομία* in Book I (1256b24–28). If so, the sexual division of labor in the household reflects differences in physical strength more than deliberative potential; and the woman's silence or "modesty" is a product more of place than intellectual deficiency. Aristotle's discussion of slavery makes it clear, moreover, that he does not regard physical strength as a legitimate ground for rule.⁸

Defense is usually considered to be just while taking the property and lives of others is not. Perhaps for that reason Aristotle includes the art of war or the hunting of slaves only conditionally in the true *οἰκονομία* and art of the statesman. Only if nature provides for man's needs as she does for the chick with the yolk, is the taking of slaves just. Aristotle does not argue that there will be a sufficient number of natural slaves to serve the needs of each *oikos* or *polis*; on the contrary, in Book VII (1330a26–33) he indicates that even in the best regime some who are not naturally slaves will be forced to serve others by proposing to free some of them. (A natural slave could not be freed, because he is incapable of taking care of himself.) Even the best political order does not and cannot correspond exactly to the uneven distribution of natural potential among individuals.

Just as slavery is finally justified not merely by a natural difference among individuals in talent but also as a necessary means or part of a greater whole, the political association, so is the perpetual debarment of women from politics.⁹ Some must provide the necessities so that others can be free. So Aristotle

8. See also Arlene Saxonhouse, "Aristotle's Critique of Socrates' Community of Wives," paper prepared for presentation at the Midwest Political Science Association meetings, April 19–21, 1979, Chicago, Illinois.

9. Even Susan Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 235, admits that Aristotle treats women in accord with his general teleological understanding, not as exceptions to the rule for men.

observes at the end of his critique of Plato's *Laws* (1265b22–27) that some one must manage the household. In Book I, however, Aristotle suggests that it is desirable to find a steward to oversee the employment of one's slaves in order to free oneself for politics or philosophy. Why couldn't a wife also hire a household manager? In contrast to slavery, the subordination of women does not appear to rest primarily on the need for an economic division of labor. True, the provision of necessities is a prerequisite of political life; but it is not sufficient. Men must also be educated; and as Aristotle points out in his critique of Plato's attempt to make political order correspond to natural differences, men will not attend to the education of their sons unless they are certain these children are in fact theirs. The fundamental reason women are barred from the full development of their deliberative faculties in public life appears to be the need to maximize each husband's conviction that his wife's children are his own so that he will tend to their education. As public concern for education decreases, in a democracy for example, Aristotle later observes, so does the need to regulate the activities of women and children. Sexual differentiation of function does have a natural foundation, but that foundation appears to consist more in man's love of his own than in differences between the sexes in potential intellectual ability.

Aristotle is thus very much aware of the role of self-interest in politics and its primarily economic manifestation. He simply insists that as forms of human existence differ, so do the expressions and demands of self-interest. Since all interests are not simply economic, he points out in his critique of Phaleas, all conflicts of interest cannot be solved solely by economic means. Because economic desires extend beyond need, as soon as need is met, conflict will not end by giving all equal shares. Some will try to get more, not simply because they want more things, but because they want honor, to be recognized by other men as being better. Since economic desires readily expand beyond need, economic conflict is inevitable and can be regulated only by noneconomic means, that is, government. Government will also be based on self-interest, but interest of a different kind. Relatively few people in any community have either the opportunity or the desire to participate regularly in directing its affairs. Most people will be content merely to be left alone to manage their own business.¹⁰ Prompted by starvation, people may revolt, but such popular uprisings are relatively rare and certainly not of long duration. The people who desire a place in government on an ongoing basis will not be prompted by need so much as a desire for "more," which is most often a desire for recognition.

Political conflict is thus not fundamentally or properly speaking economic in origin. Precisely for that reason, Aristotle suggests, it is possible to obtain civil peace, if the desire for recognition, office, or honors of the few makes them unwilling to engage in purely acquisitive activities and they are granted

10. Cf. Machiavelli, *Prince* IX.

the power to control the acquisitive desires of others with force (1267b4–10). The way in which a community allocates offices and honors is thus absolutely crucial, because it determines the kinds of activities or achievements ambitious men pursue and whether or not they will see an opportunity to realize their desires and so support the regime.

Aristotle makes us confront the fact that the “people” act politically only with leadership or organization. The character and education of the leaders is thus the decisive political phenomenon, even in democracies. Political leaders can be led or educated through an appeal to their desire for recognition, but Aristotle reminds us that the desire for recognition is not the only motive which brings men into politics. Some also seek to become tyrants, to have the power to do whatever they want, or as he says, to have pleasure without pain. They are mistaken in this attempt, he suggests, because there are always “costs” or “trade-offs” in politics of the kind we have discussed in the context of the division of labor. The only source of pure pleasure is philosophy, presumably as Plato argues, because the truth is the only good human being can share without losing any themselves, that is, the only good they can truly hold in common and noncompetitively.

Nevertheless, Aristotle does not support Montesquieu’s later suggestion that ancient political virtue consists fundamentally in an appeal to the desire for recognition and is basically military.¹¹ Aristotle argues that this is true of ancient practice, particularly of Sparta, but he insists that military prowess does not constitute the whole of practical or political virtue. The excellence of a ruler, as Aristotle presents it, is primarily intellectual. It consists in duplicating the complex determination Aristotle himself begins in Book III of what is just not only in general but also in the specific circumstances. Such considerations apply not only to the founding, the fundamental law, or the organization of offices and honors in the constitution, but also potentially to every piece of legislation, every particular administrative decision, because, as Aristotle observes, small changes, in the qualifications for voting, for example, can change the entire constitution (1289a4–6; 1303a21–25). It takes great prudence to foresee the long-term effects of current actions. These deliberations are thus continually necessary and so difficult that they tax and fully occupy a human being’s entire mental and physical capacity. They are inherently satisfying, although not entirely without pain, because political decisions always involve hard alternatives and always have costs, since they always benefit some more than others. In any form of government, only a few participate at this level and so realize the full benefits. Everyone cannot govern; at most the rulers will take turns. Most will always attend primarily to the means of their own self-preservation.

If very few people ever take part in full political deliberation, very few will fully understand the reasons for any set of laws. Most will obey on the basis

11. Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws* IV, V.

of a general trust or belief that the laws are beneficial. But every time the law is changed, this general belief will be brought into question. Aristotle thus criticizes Hippodamus' suggestion that innovation should be rewarded and so encouraged. Since every change has such a fundamental cost, only major reforms should even be considered. Reform per se cannot be advocated without undermining obedience to the law.

Improvement in politics is possible and reason is the major source of improvement. Political reason is essentially deliberative rather than linear or simply additive, however, for two reasons. First, there are competing and non-commensurable elements to be weighed, and second, the weight of each depends somewhat upon the particular circumstances, which are always changing. The most important political decision, as we have seen, is the constitutional one determining what the offices or honors shall be and who is eligible for them. In short, who should rule. This question is difficult, although not impossible to answer, Aristotle sees, because of the necessary differentiation of function. Several groups can claim to provide what is most essential to the political association and, therefore, the right to have the decisive voice in its affairs. No one group can provide all the community's needs, so any group(s) denied the right to participate to the extent of electing officials at least will have some just grounds for complaint. The primary attachment to his own existence of each individual will, moreover, tend to make each group overestimate the importance of its own contribution and denigrate the services of others. Conflict almost necessarily results; whether dissent is voiced or not, there will never be perfect agreement or consent underlying any regime. Man's self-love not only makes unanimous consent extremely unlikely but also invalidates consent as the sole measure of justice.

Unlike modern relativists, Aristotle insists that it is possible to answer the question, who should rule, with reason. There are two kinds of considerations to be taken into account. First, there are the broad criteria set by the ends of the association. A political association is more than a market or a mutual defense pact, Aristotle argues, because different polities can trade or ally with each other without becoming politically united (1280a). Political association involves agreement on a desirable way of life, and those who contribute to the maintenance of this distinctive way of life have a greater claim to participate in the government than those who simply contribute to its subsistence by providing food or defending its territory. All contributions or services to the polity are not necessarily performed by discrete groups, however. Farmers can also be soldiers, and soldiers can become judges. In order to determine what groups should participate in making decisions for the community, and to what extent, one must also look at the specific circumstances or people to see which group or groups, on the whole, contribute most and so deserve to rule.

Mechanics or artisans represent the limiting and so most revealing case. Clearly, mechanics and artisans are not "natural slaves" because they are able

to order their lives and preserve themselves. Their need to labor prevents them from doing more. They contribute to the maintenance of the life of the city, but they cannot participate in politics or government in any very meaningful sense, because they have not the time, experience, or occasion to follow and participate in public deliberations. The institution of political association does not, therefore, enable members of this class to reach their full human potential. Aristotle concludes, therefore, that they should not be citizens in any well-ordered regime (1278a). Have they not been treated unjustly, we might respond; they, too, contribute to the common good. Should they not at least be allowed to vote? Aristotle would respond that they enjoy the advantages of law and order; in exchange for their contribution to the preservation of the city, they, too, are preserved. Nevertheless, he concludes that it is dangerous not to let them have some share in the enjoyment of power; for a *polis* with a body of disenfranchised citizens who are numerous and poor must necessarily be a *polis* which is full of enemies (1281b28–31). Men love their own, and they will view the government as their own only if they participate in it to a certain extent. Aristotle thus makes his recommendation with regard to artisans in full view of the potential costs.

Democracies tend to be more stable than other forms of government, Aristotle observes, but they also tend to be ill-governed. If the people decide issues or vote for a party platform directly, they do so on the basis of inadequate information and disregard for the need to adapt to changing circumstances. If they merely vote for officials to make these decisions for them, they must be very fine judges of character (1281b–1282a; 1326b2). Usually they are not. Either they blame officials for problems they had no control over, or they elevate sycophantic scoundrels. (Aristotle might well recall Athens' treatment of Perikles as well as Kleon.) Most fundamental, however, a government which elevates the necessities of life and those who provide them, whether democratic or oligarchic, implicitly endorses and frees the acquisitive desires. It will necessarily be corrupt in itself and corrupt the people. The only check on the acquisitive desires is reason, but Aristotle recognizes that the people who see the reasons why acquisition should be limited are few, so few that they will not be apt to press their claims to rule. They have too much practical sense (1304b4–5). They see that they will be "outvoted" in effect by others. To the extent to which all government rests on the consent of the many, it is not based on reason.

Although reason can solve the political problem, Aristotle suggests that it is not likely to be effective very often—at least not fully effective. The best regime generally possible is not a regime which elevates the best men (an "aristocracy") but one which checks the worst abuses of power. In a "mixed regime" or polity, elections and offices are structured so that they balance the powers of the people (numbers) and their relatively moderate desires against the rapacity of the few wealthy. There are many possible structures or varia-

tions, Aristotle recognizes, but no such mixture is possible where there is not a substantial middle class. Only the middle class has an interest in keeping the balance, because they would suffer from either expropriation and redistribution of all property by the poor or oppressive taxation by the party of the rich. Even regimes which do not intentionally and explicitly seek to educate their citizens have a formative effect, but in these regimes predominantly economic factors have a much more powerful role.

Many people, Aristotle observes, believe that there are fundamentally only two types of government—democracies and oligarchies. (The distinction lives on in contemporary political science in the contrast between authoritarian and participatory.) Distinguishing them merely in terms of the number of people involved does not describe regimes accurately, however. As Aristotle reminds us, the rule of the “people” or a “majority” still represents the rule of the whole by a part, very often in its own self-interest. Politics is always partial. The government of many educated middle-class citizens is significantly different, moreover, from the rule of poor peasants. Men tend to categorize all regimes as either democracies or oligarchies, Aristotle suggests, not simply on the basis of the number of people involved but because rich and poor appear to be the only mutually exclusive characteristics of ruling classes. Since it is possible to be both poor and brave or rich and educated, democracy and oligarchy or simple economic and numerical classifications do not suffice to describe a regime. There are monarchies, aristocracies, and polities as well as democracies, oligarchies, and tyrannies. Whether the ruling class defines its self-interest in terms of the prosperity of the whole or over and against other classes makes a fundamental difference. Even when the ruling party is more evidently and narrowly self-interested and defines its interest primarily in economic terms, there are still important practical differences among oligarchies and democracies.

Political action always reflects self-interest, as Aristotle presents it, but that fact alone does not suffice to show that it is unjust or will be effective. Like all human beings, rulers act for their own good. Whether their rule is just or not depends on how they understand their own interest. The best man would see that it is not in his interest to abuse a slave or artisan; the middle class is also politically self-controlled, but for economic rather than moral reasons, in its public acts but not on an individual or private level. Although a mixed regime is not possible without a large middle class, that is, the best regime generally possible depends on the existence of a certain distribution of wealth, the distribution of wealth is not in itself politically determinative because government can change the distribution through taxation or outright expropriation. The political effects of both the distribution of wealth and the mode of production, so to speak, are more indirect. They affect the polity largely through the effect they have on the characteristic attitudes of the people.

The differences Aristotle describes among democracies and oligarchies, for

example, have two primarily economic sources: the distribution of property and population on the one hand—Aristotle always insists that the two factors be related—and the “mode of production” on the other. If a democracy is composed of many small landholders or farmers, it is apt to be law-abiding and highly stable. Small landholders or farmers necessarily have to spend most of their time attending to their own affairs. Since they are geographically dispersed, it is difficult for them to organize or participate directly in political deliberation very often. They will tend, therefore, to support the rule of law and to maintain widespread distribution of property (by opposing oppressive taxation), because both are in their rather immediate and narrow economic interest. The same is true of an oligarchy composed of many citizens who can meet a relatively low property qualification. If, on the other hand, power devolves to urban day-laborers, they will be apt to meet regularly and to change the law frequently, because it will be relatively easy for them to congregate. They will also be apt to expropriate the holdings of the rich, at least to tax property heavily, in order to pay themselves for public service. Likewise, an oligarchy composed of a few very wealthy families who recognize no claim of right or human excellence but wealth is apt to adopt very oppressive laws or even to act outside the law in an attempt to increase their own holdings even more. The distribution of wealth and types of property held are politically important not merely because they arouse conflict. As Aristotle argues in Book V, political conflict seldom revolves solely around the economic question; there is always an admixture of a concern for what is “right” or just. Distribution and the “mode of production” are politically important because they determine the way of life of a people, their general habits and opinions, especially with regard to the law.

Surely it would be best if all men could rationally decide what is the best way of life and then foster it intentionally. Laws are necessary, however, precisely because human beings are not entirely rational, and not all members of a society will ever have the leisure to engage in extended deliberations. A division of labor is necessary with the result that most men will spend most of their time pursuing a variety of essentially economic tasks. When they cannot be persuaded to restrain their acquisitive desires intentionally and willingly, it is necessary to use force. Force alone does not suffice to produce obedience to the law, however, because it is too clear that force may be used to gratify the acquisitive desires of the rulers at the expense of the ruled. If most citizens cannot be persuaded to do what is right or commonly beneficial for that reason alone, they may still obey the law because they see it as in their own economic interest. Both the distribution of goods and the kinds of property held are subject, after all, to legal control. When the laws cannot shape or improve the character of citizens directly, they may approximate the same results indirectly through economic regulation.

Although Aristotle’s name is justly associated with the thought that political

participation is the only means by which human beings can realize their full potential for self-rule, he does not advocate participation per se.¹² On the contrary, he seems as interested as James Madison in diffusing the energies and directing the self-interest of those who have not been educated to public service into private and largely economic directions. Organizing and arguing or pressuring merely to foster one's own interest at the expense of others does not develop the highest human faculties. There is a big difference between public deliberations concerning the good of the community, or political participation properly speaking, and interest group activity. Aristotle does not merely point out the way in which the private pursuit of economic self-interest, as opposed to the use of public power to attain economic benefits, leads to more stable, less oppressive government. He also points out the broader effects on the character of the populace, the inculcation of a relatively low order of moderation or self-control, which is a reflection at least of man's higher and fuller capacity for self-rule. As a student of both Machiavelli and Montesquieu, Madison simply drops that concern. The question, of course, is whether we retain an adequate understanding of either legislation or politics if we ignore the formative effects, intended or accidental, and conceive of government solely in terms of what it controls or leaves free from restraint.

Rather than advocate participation, Aristotle supports the rule of law in almost all cases. The rule of law is usually superior to *ad hoc* decisions, he argues, because it is freer from passion and hence more reasonable. Not only is the law general in application and so freer from personal interest or attachment than particular decisions made in particular cases, but the law is also the product of a prior determination of what is right without regard to particular applications. If the law is apt to be better than the legislators' direct adjudication of specific controversies, however, it cannot be better than the legislators' general understanding of what is right and appropriate. Laws thus always reflect the men who make them, that is, the ruling body. Good laws cease to be good, moreover, when they are not suited to the particular people in question; they will not be obeyed and a negative lesson in reasonableness and order or self-control will result. There is no substitute finally for political wisdom which combines knowledge of the general principles of politics with observation of the specific circumstances and the limits these place on the achievement of what is in itself desirable. In his discussion of the relative merits of the rule of law and the absolute rule of one man of superior wisdom, Aristotle thus returns at the end of Book III to the essential tension between the necessary conditions for political life and the realization of its end that he introduced by asking whether mechanics should be citizens.

12. Delba Winthrop, "Aristotle and Political Responsibility," *Political Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (November 1975), pp. 406-22; Benjamin Barber, "The Undemocratic Party System," in Robert A. Goldwin, ed., *Political Parties, U.S.A.* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 1980), pp. 34-49; Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Boston: Little Brown, 1960), pp. 58-63.

Although the rule of law is almost always to be preferred to individual discretion, Aristotle argues that if one man is wiser than all his countrymen combined, he should rule absolutely. He has more reason. It would pervert the end of the association entirely, moreover, if the better were subordinated to the worse. Nevertheless, the rule of the one best man represents another extreme and limiting case, because political relations are essentially deliberative, conducted among equals, and there is no real, interpersonal exchange of opinion or equality in the absolute rule of one man. His rule is, therefore, not truly political. If such an extraordinary man wished to benefit his countrymen, and such a man would, he would legislate for them. Political knowledge must be essentially practical, because it concerns practice; yet the man who possesses and acts upon it, should the opportunity arise, also stands somewhat outside and above politics (interestedness) itself.

Aristotle's suggestion that political knowledge properly culminates in legislation and that the construction of the constitution is the fundamental political act differs in two important respects from similar arguments later offered by Machiavelli concerning the importance of "founding" and by Rousseau on the role of the "Legislator."¹³ Aristotle certainly does not suggest that the legislator use religion to convince the people who cannot understand the reasons for his new constitution to adopt it as a matter of divine will. He does recognize the priesthood as a political office (1322b12–37), but he seems to have the existing institutions in mind. He himself does not indicate much respect for the Greek Gods or their worship when he observes that they merely represent projections of human characteristics and desires (1252b25–30). And he repeatedly urges his readers to avoid one of the commonest mistakes politicians make, to attempt to deceive or manipulate the people (1297b5–10; 1308a1–5; 1308b30–40). The second difference follows from the first. Aristotle denies the possibility of instituting any radically new political order. Institutions and laws must be suited to the particular character of the people. If these institutions serve to educate as well as to benefit the people in material ways, as they can, this education will occur over time and through practice rather than precept. Political order is not primarily a matter of rhetoric any more than it is fundamentally a product of force.

Aristotle's *Politics* thus points more to the possibility of political wisdom and knowledge than to any specific set of reforms. Here, too, his work stands in marked contrast to Plato's *Republic*, at least on the surface. If political knowledge consists largely of reflections on political practice, and practice may improve on the basis of these reflections, as Aristotle argues in Book II (1264a1–5; 1269a), it is extremely unlikely that any man will have the occasion to legislate entirely from scratch. Aristotle observes that it is as difficult to reform an existing regime as it is to design an entirely new one. The leg-

13. *Prince* VI; *Discourses* I:xi; *Social Contract* II:7.

islator needs to know both the direction in which to move and the limits of the possible, that is, to have full political knowledge, in order to achieve even a small but truly beneficial change. Small changes can have cumulatively large effects.

Aristotle concentrates on what we can know generally about political activity and organization rather than making specific recommendations not only because the “ought” depends on the particular circumstances but also because what we can know far exceeds what we can do.

Even though it is difficult to find the truth in these matters of equality and justice, it is easier than to persuade those with the power to act for their own advantage to act justly. (1318b1–5)

Aristotle addresses the *Politics* primarily to potential rulers, and his advice, most simply stated, is, obey your own laws. Political association depends on friendship, trust in the character, and faith in the good intentions of the governors (1295b24–28). Such trust can grow only on the basis of experience. The people will accept any government, Aristotle thinks, that leaves them alone. They will even serve in the army to defend it, if they are paid (1297b 1–15). The most important factor in maintaining any government, therefore, is that the rulers obey their own laws; they must want to preserve the constitution. Any infraction of the law must be immediately and seriously punished.

Aristotle differs most from both modern political philosophers and contemporary political scientists in his insistence that justice is practically and effectively crucial in politics. It is important not only to take account of what people believe is right or their “values,” but also to determine and to do what is beneficial (although not necessarily equally beneficial) for all members of a society in order to maintain a regime. The fact that all ruling groups claim to rule, as a matter of right, for the common good, is not merely a kind of “white-washing” or propaganda. It reflects the fundamental truth about politics. Human beings associate only for their common benefit or pleasure, and all these associations reflect their powers of reason. The rationality of these associations is simply not complete or uniform. Few men will understand how to structure institutions; fewer will be farsighted enough to predict the long-term effects of laws (1308a33–35). Although most men are unable to live or understand a fully satisfying life, they understand quite well when their lives or livelihoods are threatened and take measures to resist. Political associations will last, therefore, only so long as they benefit most of the inhabitants, even though the benefits will largely be rather low and concrete—personal safety and the right to own a bit of property.

Although Aristotle argues that it is in the interest of rulers to be just, he does not express much faith in the powers of most men to exercise self-control. The acquisitive desire is too strong, so strong that in his “best regime” Aristotle would unnaturally and unjustly enslave some to perform the tasks of

the mechanics rather than give the contributions of necessary goods public recognition by making artisans citizens. Short of the best regime, Aristotle observes, rulers tend to use their power to amass a fortune and so undermine the end of political association itself as well as the particular regime. In arguing the essential importance of justice, Aristotle does not preach any selfless “virtue.” On the contrary, his *Politics* differs from Plato’s *Republic* primarily because Aristotle puts self-interest first and foremost. “To feel that something is one’s own makes an inexpressible difference. Love of oneself is surely natural. Selfishness is justly blamed, but this is really not so much love of oneself as love of oneself more than one ought” (1263a41–1263b5). Beginning with man’s self-love, Aristotle shows not only why justice is in the interest of the rulers but also why most men are not just most of the time.

The same desire, the desire not only to live but to live well, that gives rise to politics and the need for justice also limits both. The limits are, in the first instance, economic. As we have seen, the propagation and nurture of future generations requires the family structure, and the maintenance of the family requires the somewhat unjust subordination of women. Families are necessary, particularly to educate the young. So long as there are differences among families—and there will be differences so long as there is a division of labor—the division or allocation of tasks among adults, including governing, will not correspond perfectly to differences in natural potential. Potential per se is not visible or identifiable, and its actualization is fostered or restricted by family circumstance. Aristotle thus shows in passing that equal opportunity in the modern, liberal form is something of a myth which can never be perfectly realized. Unlike Plato, Aristotle does not propose any “noble lies.” Aristotle admits that women need not be confined, that it is not even appropriate, in democracies and that all contributions or vocations tend to be recognized in such regimes through universal suffrage. But he suggests that no one will lead a truly satisfying life in such a regime, no one perhaps but the entirely private philosopher, because the acquisitive desire is freed, and there is no way of satisfying that desire for mere life or more goods on its own terms.

Economic desires give rise to competition and conflict, moreover, and this conflict produces a need for government. If human beings always act for their own good, all governments will be partial to the interests of the ruling group, however, and those not in office will have reason to object. No regime will benefit all those under its control equally, and no regime will rest on universal consent. Force will always be necessary to maintain order. And, as a matter of fact in contrast to right, Aristotle observes that political power tends to devolve upon those who possess arms (1297b16–20). Even the legislator who understands that it is in his own interest to be just, to benefit his fellow citizens (actually subjects) rather than to seek to enrich himself at their expense, will find that he is unable to benefit them all completely or equally. The necessity of providing the basics, food and defense, mandates a division of labor

which makes it impossible for all to participate in political deliberations and so to develop their natural potential to the fullest extent possible. Most human beings will continue to live under laws they do not make or understand.

Unlike Plato, whose philosophers must be forced to rule (*Republic* 579c), Aristotle suggests that politics may also be an inherently satisfying activity. It is so at Aristotle's own level, however, in thought or deliberation rather than in effect. In showing the limits of political action, Aristotle thus also teaches a certain kind of self-restraint. If his readers do not become utopians or radical reformers, they also surely do not become nihilists and despair of humanity.