

Interpretation

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The Question of Self-Reference in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 6*

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The overarching theme of this article is the relation between philosophy and politics in the classical tradition of Plato and Aristotle. Emblematic of that tradition is Socrates's claim in the *Republic* that "unless...political power and philosophy coincide...there is no rest from ills for the cities, my dear Glaucon, nor I think for human kind" (473d).¹ Of special relevance, as well, is Socrates's assertion, also in the *Republic*, about the relation between the political regime and human character type: "Do you suppose that the regimes arise 'from an oak or rocks' and not from the dispositions [*ek tōn ēthōn*] of the men in the cities, which, tipping the scale as it were, draw the rest along with them?" (544d–e). In what way does Aristotle comport with this understanding of philosophy, politics, and character? Let me say at the outset that there is a straightforward answer to this question, which, although partial, covers a case of great importance. Tyranny is probably the greatest malady of human kind.² Tyrants everywhere and always seek to destroy moral virtue, especially courage, intellectual virtue, and trust among subjects. Aristotle's *Ethics* seeks

* This paper was originally given as a lecture at Catholic University, November 2003. With gratitude I acknowledge the work of Ronna Burger and seminal discussion with Robert Sokolowski. I have benefited from conversations with Charles Fairbanks, the late Steven Schlesinger, Abram Shulsky, Richard Velkley, and Kevin White. The defects in my account are, of course, due to me.

¹ Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1968). All *Republic* citations are to this edition.

² "Just as it is a most excellent thing for someone to use power well in ruling others, so also it is evil in the highest degree to use it badly." Thomas Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q. 2, art. 4, ad 2, in *Saint Thomas Aquinas Treatise on Happiness*, trans. John A. Oesterle (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 20.

to cultivate moral virtue, intellectual virtue, and true friendship, bonded by unbreakable trust. Where these dispositions tip the scale, as Socrates puts it, that society will be resistant to tyranny. Aristotle's *Ethics* can thus be seen as an antityrannic device. I return to this point in my conclusion.

The following analysis of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 6, is divided into five parts:

1. Happiness, Good, Soul, Virtues
2. The Problem of Self-Reference
3. Aristotle's Political Intention
4. Perfect Virtues
5. Two Concluding Questions

1. HAPPINESS, GOOD, SOUL, VIRTUES

Book 6 of Aristotle's *Ethics* is about the intellectual virtues. It is prepared by Aristotle's opening inquiry, in *NE* 1.7, into happiness and the human good or human work, famously defined as the activity, being-at-work, *energeia*, of soul in accordance with virtue (1098a7–20). But soul is divided—as is commonly accepted—into a reasoning part and an appetitive part (1098a4, 1102a26–1103a4); thus “virtue as well is divided in accordance with the same distinction [between thinking and appetite], for we speak of virtues as pertaining either to thinking or to character” (1103a4).³ Character refers to the way we have come to have our emotions and appetites, thus the way we have come to be disposed toward, and act in the face of, the pleasures and pains to which we are subject as animate, rational individuals in political community. Our dispositions give rise to our characteristic patterns of choices. We make choices for the attainment of ends or goods whose appearance to us is a function of our disposition (1113a31, 1114b23–25, 1115b21, 1144a33–36, 1176b27).⁴ To choose well, we must be rightly disposed toward pleasures and

³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Newburyport, MA: Focus, 2002), hereafter *NE*. All quotations, with minor modifications, are from this edition.

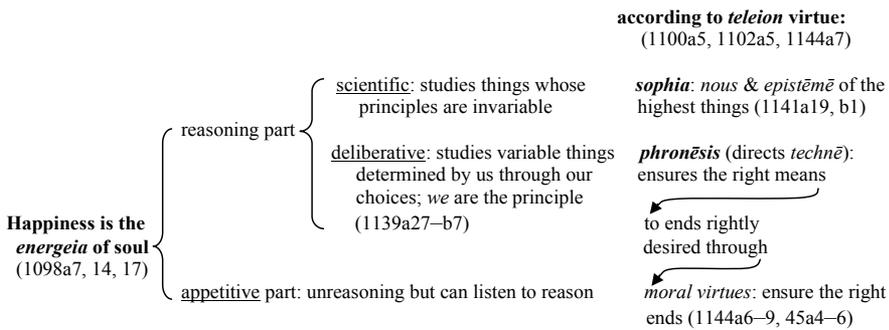
⁴ My appreciation of this owes much to Robert Sokolowski. Aristotle's phenomenology of ethical disposition is among the most valuable parts of the *NE*. It is especially important in a modern egalitarian democracy. Relevant texts are: 1104b16, 1105a8, 1105b27, 1106b17–25, 1107a5, 2.8, 1108b19, 1109a24 (the virtuous mean is in both actions and passions); 1105b19 (three in the soul: passions [*pathē*], predispositions [*dunameis*], dispositions [*hexeis*]); 1106a1 (being angry *simply* vs. being angry *in a certain way*); 1106a1–2 (we are not praised or blamed for our passions and predispositions, but for our virtues and vices); 1107a11 (malice, shamelessness, envy are base in themselves, thus blameworthy

pains, in order to be free of extremes of passion that distort perception and judgment. We must be disposed in the mean between excess and deficiency of passion such that action is correspondingly appropriate to the particular situation. The mean in action is delimited, determined, or bounded, not by instinct—as it is in the lower animals—but through practical wisdom, prudence (*phronēsis*): “There is some boundary [*horos*] delimiting the mean conditions that we say are between excess and deficiency, [a boundary] in accord with right reason” (1138b23–25). Thus, “moral virtue is a disposition concerning choice, consisting in a mean [in passion and action]...as would be determined [bounded, delimited; *hōrismenon*] by the person with *phronēsis*” (1106b36–07a1). *Phronēsis*—an intellectual virtue—is, thus, contained within the definition of moral virtue, which is contained in turn within the definition of the human good. Indeed, “what is determinate [*hōrismenon*] belongs to the nature of the good” (1170a22). Therefore, without *phronēsis* the human being would be indeterminate, boundless, unlimited, in its passions and actions, unlike any other being in nature. Accordingly, *phronēsis* is the central intellectual virtue of Book 6. It is right reason, attaining truth in action (1139a27, 1144b26–28).

But to define *phronēsis* adequately we must distinguish it from, and relate it to, the other truth-attaining capacities. And this requires a further division of soul, given in *NE* 6.1. There, the reasoning part of the soul is divided by Aristotle into, first, the scientific or speculative part, which can know invariable principles and what follows from them (in mathematics, physics, metaphysics), and, second, the deliberative part, which deals with things that are variable because they are determined by us through our choices. The excellence of the scientific part of the soul is the virtue of wisdom (*sophia*), consisting of intellectual intuition of first principles (*nous*) and step-by-step demonstration (*epistēmē*) of truths about the necessary, eternal, highest,

[1109a20–30] always, thus always voluntary); 1110a17 (in voluntary conduct, the source of motion is internal to the agent); 1111a23–25, 1111b2–3 (thus acting from anger or desire is voluntary); 1111b14 (the morally weak person acts voluntarily but not by choice); 1108b19–24 (ethical disposition and moral perception, the apparent good but truly bad: the coward sees the courageous as rash); 1113a20–b2 (to a specific disposition specific things seem beautiful, or noble, and pleasant); 1115b21 (end [*telos*], activity [*energeia*], disposition [*hexis*] line up: to the courageous, courage is a noble thing); 1114b23 (we are partly responsible for our own characters and apparent goods); 1114b30–15a5 (our actions and characters are voluntary, but not in the same way). Our actions (discrete, at a given time) and dispositions (continuous, abide over time) are voluntary, but in different ways: our dispositions come into being from childhood by a process of incremental “addition” that is not known in particular but which involves the laws and customs (good or bad) of the political community. Whereas prudence is related directly to the mean in action (it is the prudence of the agent handling the situation rightly), the mean in passion is formed or “shaped” indirectly by the prudence of many, including the agent but also (importantly for Aristotle) lawmakers (*NE* 10.9 1181b13–16).

divine, and thus suprahuman, things. The excellences of the deliberative part of the soul are, by contrast, productive craft (*technē*) and *phronēsis*. The elaboration of the five intellectual virtues, *epistēmē*, *technē*, *phronēsis*, *nous*, *sophia* (*NE* 6.3 1139b16)—but especially *phronēsis*—is the substance of Book 6 of Aristotle’s *Ethics*. Near the conclusion of Book 6, in the penultimate chapter (12), we finally have the complete scheme of Aristotle’s definition of happiness and the human good in their relation to the soul and the corresponding virtues. This virtuous work of Aristotle’s own intellect can be easily diagrammed, based on *NE* 6.12 1144a5–8:



2. THE PROBLEM OF SELF-REFERENCE

Certain features of this scheme are distinctive, even provocative. Reason exerts no force over against unruly passions. Because of the perfect disposition of the appetites, there are no unruly passions here. Wisdom plays no discernible role in disposing the appetites to the right ends in action. Indeed, according to Aristotle, “wisdom does not contemplate the means by which a human being will be happy, since it is in no way directed to coming into being; *phronēsis* does this” (1143b19–21).⁵ Speculative reason, it seems, has no appetite or desire of its own simply to understand. Consistent with this, the *sophos*, the wise man, has the enjoyment of wisdom possessed, complete wisdom, rather than the desire for wisdom not yet possessed, which animates the *philosophos*, the philosopher.

⁵ “Wisdom produces happiness, since by being part of complete virtue, it makes someone happy by being possessed and being at work [*tōi energein*]” (1144a5–6). Since *phronēsis* is concerned with the coming into being of happiness, it must—in spite of the account in *NE* 6.12—have some relation to wisdom. This is discussed in the following three notes.

The virtues in this scheme are called by Aristotle “complete” or “perfect,” *teleion*. As we will see (in part 4), following a comment by Aquinas on the meaning of the term “perfect” or “complete,” the intellectual virtues here are something like Platonic ideal forms. The ideal character of wisdom, *sophia*, is easiest to see: it combines the certainty of mathematics with the dignity of the highest object of metaphysics. One could thus wonder where in this scheme Aristotle’s biological works, including *De anima*, might be placed. In general, it would be worthwhile (but require a longer inquiry) to compare the description of wisdom in *NE* 6 with that given in *Metaphysics* 1.2.⁶ A quick comparison of the two texts yields the following points of contrast. In *Meta.* 1.2 wisdom is called the science we are seeking (982a5). The wise man “knows that for the sake of which each thing must be done; and this is the good of each thing, and in general the best in the whole of nature” (982a10). Thus, according to *Meta.* 1.2 the wisdom we seek but do not yet possess would be architectonic and, as such, it would include the human practical good. But it knows all things in terms of universals (kinds, species, reasons), not in terms of particulars or individually (982a10), which presumably would be the domain of *phronēsis*. Thus *Meta.* 1.2 leaves open the possibility of a conjunction between the search for wisdom, or philosophy, and *phronēsis*. In particular, *Meta.* 1.2 does not seem to exclude the domain of coming into being from the consideration of either wisdom or philosophy (compare 1143b20). *Meta.* 6.1 defines the subject matter of metaphysics as “being qua being,” or common being, rather than exclusively the first or highest being. In *NE* 6 (also 10.7 1177b32–78a2), complete wisdom is restricted to the highest (and nonhuman) things and is not presented as architectonic. It thus excludes even universal aspects of the human practical good (“that for the sake of which each thing must be done”), and leaves *phronēsis* alone and autonomous in its own practical sphere such that in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, wisdom and prudence could have no overlapping subject matter, whereas in the *Metaphysics* they could.⁷ That Aristotle exaggerates—in accordance with his political

⁶ It would be hard to find a more beautiful introduction to the theoretical philosophy of Aristotle than *Meta.* 1.2, on wisdom, the science we are seeking. It is knowledge sought and acquired freely, for its own sake. Most relevant for present purposes (specifically part 5: what is noble?), it is about causes the knowledge of which enables one to teach (982a30).

⁷ That wisdom precisely as described in *NE* 6.7 is difficult to find in any of Aristotle’s theoretical works is noted by J. O. Urmson, *Aristotle’s Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 80, 124. See also John Goyette, “The Nature of the Theoretical Life according to Aristotle: Wisdom, Politics and Philosophy” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1998), 1–17, 46–50. Other interpreters, however, emphasize points of similarity between the accounts of wisdom in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Metaphysics*. See, for example, H. H. Joachim, *Aristotle, The “Nicomachean Ethics”: A Commentary*, ed. D. A. Rees (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), 200–215, 291–96; C. D. C. Reeve, *Practices of Reason: Aristotle’s “Nicomachean Ethics”* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 141–44; Pierre Defourny, “Contemplation in

intention—the separation between wisdom and prudence in *NE* 6 is a major theme in the following.

The separation of wisdom and prudence is also central to Ronna Burger's *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates: On the "Nicomachean Ethics"*.⁸ Essential points of the book are summarized (and I think somewhat modified) in her important lecture "Socratic Philosophy in Aristotle's *Ethics*."⁹ Burger emphasizes that, in fact, Aristotelian *phronēsis* has a *double* function: in addition to matching means to ends rightly desired by moral virtue (as shown in the *NE* 6.12 diagram) it also ministers to wisdom. This is not shown in the diagram but is clear from the six-term proportion, discussed in part 5, below, with which *NE* 6 concludes (in chapter 13): as medicine is to health ("sees how it may come about"), and political art is to the gods ("it gives orders about everything in the city"), so *phronēsis* is to *sophia* (6.13 1145a7–12). Thus, it cannot finally be that wisdom and prudence have no overlapping subject matter such that *phronēsis* is simply autonomous in its own practical sphere. Since the ultimate end (*telos*) of moral virtue is repeatedly said by Aristotle to be the noble (*to kalon*: 1115b12–13, 1119b16–17, 1120a23–25, 1122b6–7), it follows that *phronēsis* serves two ends: the noble as seen by moral virtue, and the promotion and protection of wisdom in the polis. "How [Burger asks], is the harnessing of *phronēsis* to ethical virtue compatible with its subordination to *sophia*? Can both these roles be fulfilled together?"¹⁰ It seems to me that Burger is open to two answers to this central question (central to our understanding of the *NE* as a whole): (1) *Phronēsis* cannot serve both ends, and Aristotle is in fact a radical Socratic reducing virtue to knowledge and "denying any role to character, practice, or strength of will. [This] thesis suggests a radical overturning of morality as ordinarily understood; whether it captures the true Socratic understanding of human excellence is another question."¹¹ On this account, the only candidate for the noble is the not very noble "rational calculation of one's self-interest"¹² and Aristotle pretends otherwise for

Aristotle's *Ethics*," in *Articles on Aristotle*, ed. J. Barnes, M. Schofield, and R. Sorabji, vol. 2 (New York: St. Martin's, 1978), 109. That wisdom and philosophy are concerned with the ultimate and eternal principles of the universe is common to all Aristotelian accounts.

⁸ Ronna Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates: On the "Nicomachean Ethics"* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁹ Ronna Burger, "Socratic Philosophy in Aristotle's *Ethics*," American University Political Theory Institute, November 30, 2012.

¹⁰ Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue*, 111; also "Socratic Philosophy," 7.

¹¹ Burger, "Socratic Philosophy," 5; see also 6, lines 1–2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

reasons of self-protection in the wake of the execution of Socrates. (2) “What if Socratic philosophy were unintelligible without recognizing the beautiful [noble], in some form, as its aim? If that were so, by delaying [in *NE* 2–6] the Socratic reduction of the virtues to *phronēsis*, Aristotle would not only save, at least provisionally, the phenomena of ethical virtue: he would save Socratic philosophy, one might say, from itself”¹³—that is, from its corrosive dissolution (whether seriously intended or ironic) of ordinary morality. On this (second) account, Aristotle exaggerates the separation of theory and practice in the scheme of happiness (*NE* 6.12) for reasons of both self-protection and protection of the city, as explained in part 3. Can *phronēsis* serve the two ends, the noble and wisdom? I propose that it can, based on an indeterminacy that runs through Aristotle’s account of moral virtue: he says (above) moral virtue is for the sake of the noble but never says what *he believes the noble is*. Of course, philosophy, but I would say more broadly (and based on study of the *Ethics* and *Politics*) *teaching and learning*, and all the things necessary for it, first and foremost, defense. This is discussed in part 5, below.

For my present purpose, however, most noteworthy about *NE* 6 and its scheme of happiness and the human good in chapter 12 is that Aristotle is failing the test of self-reference. That is, if we refer Aristotle’s scheme to itself, we do not get consistency. What I mean is this: the intellectual virtues presented here are said to attain truth (1139a27–30, b12–13). But doesn’t Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, this very book, attain some truth? So where is Aristotle’s own intellectual activity of writing the *Ethics* to be found in the account of intellectual (truth-attaining) virtues in Book 6?¹⁴ Elsewhere in the *Ethics* (*NE* 1.2 and 10.9), Aristotle describes his *Ethics* as *politikē tis* (1.2 1094b12; also 7.11 1152b1–4) and *philosophia peri ta anthrōpina* (10.9 1181b15): “a certain politics” or “in a certain way political,” and “philosophy of the human things.” But the terms “philosophy” and “political philosophy” do not appear in *NE* 6.

Stated most concisely, the test of self-reference consists in this question: Of which of the five intellectual virtues is this scheme (of happiness and good in terms of soul and virtues) itself a product? It cannot be a product of *sophia*—consisting of *nous* and *epistēmē* of the highest things (1141a20)—unless man,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Aristotle’s final speeches on happiness [in *NE* 10.7 but in accord with *NE* 6.12] present an exhaustive and exclusive dichotomy between theoretical and practical activity that has no place for the political philosophy that is the deed of the *Ethics*.” Rather, the deed of the *Ethics* exemplifies friends philosophizing together (1172a5). “This is the activity that marks Aristotle as a Socratic political philosopher [who passes the test of self-reference].” Burger, “Socratic Philosophy,” 15.

or some part of man, is the necessary and eternal, highest being. But Aristotle explicitly rejects this, both here in the *NE* (1141a22, 1141b1) and in his theoretical works, which contain famous arguments for the First Unmoved Mover, the First Intellect.¹⁵

Is the scheme a product of a more general *epistēmē* or science, one that is demonstrative, like mathematics, and not merely probable, but not restricted in its application to the highest beings? It seems not, because the derivation of the scheme involves an instance of supposition or conception (*hupolēpsis*), specifically, the *hupolēpsis* that *epistēmē* in the precise sense is of the necessary and eternal (1139b19–25). Since *hupolēpsis* is subject to error (1139b17) it is not demonstrative, but merely probable.

As noted above, the five intellectual virtues are perfect (*teleion*) and thus, as we shall see, error free. The fact that they are embedded in a scheme that results in part from a cognitive capacity, *hupolēpsis*, that is imperfect and subject to error is peculiar and calls for explanation, which is attempted in part 5. For now, let us complete our examination of the question whether the scheme of happiness and good in terms of soul and virtues is itself a product of one or more of the five intellectual virtues. So far, we have reviewed and rejected *sophia* (*nous* and *epistēmē* of the highest things) and a possible generalized sense of *epistēmē*.

Is the scheme then a product of Aristotle's *technē*? Not in the normal sense of *technē* and as Aristotle defines it in *NE* 6.4. In order for it to be a product of *technē*, we would have to say either that definitions (and specifically this definition of happiness and good) are artifacts, or that there is a moral *technē*—a productive craft that can reliably produce humans who make good choices and are happy, and that Aristotle's definitional scheme is the blueprint for the reliable production of virtuous human beings. Such a moral *technē* is something greatly to be wished for by every parent, but is, obviously, not available. So the scheme of happiness and human good seems not to be a product of *technē*.

¹⁵ "For it is absurd for anyone to believe that *politikē* or *phronēsis* is the most serious kind of knowledge if man is not the highest thing in the cosmos... For there are also other things that are much more divine in their nature than man, such as, most visibly, the things of which the cosmos is composed" (*NE* 6.7 1141a21–22, 1142b1–2). See also *Phys.* 2.4 196a34, *Meta.* 6.1 1026a18–24, 12.8 1074a31, on the divinity of the celestial bodies, and *Phys.* 8 and *Meta.* 12 on Unmoved Mover and First Intellect. But can the existence of God be proved with the apodictic (mathematical) certainty of *nous* and *epistēmē* as presented in *NE* 6? See *Parts of Animals* 1.5 644b22–45a26, in which Aristotle says that knowledge of the astronomical lacks the certainty of biological knowledge; also *De caelo* 1.2 269b13–17, which seems to say that the divinity of the celestial bodies is a matter of trust (*pistis*) not *epistēmē*.

Is it, finally, a work of Aristotle's *phronēsis*? This might offer the best avenue of approach to the problem of self-reference in *NE* 6, namely, that Aristotle's own activity in writing the *Ethics* is a sort of *phronēsis*, although not simply as defined in *Ethics* 6.5 and subsequent chapters, wherein it is restricted in its application to action or doing (*praxis*: 1140b5–8) in the particular circumstances of life, and would thus not apply to Aristotle's thinking in developing this definition of happiness and human good. We return to the notion of a generalized *phronēsis* in part 5, below.

Where do we now stand on the problem of self-reference in *NE* 6, and where are we going? Aristotle appears to be failing the test of self-reference, and yet that is impossible. Aristotle cannot fail the test of self-reference, for he is one of its major founders (*Meta.* 4.3–4). There must be a resolution. Aristotle's characterization of his own approach in the *Ethics* as *politikē tis* (1094b12), "politics of a sort," or "in a certain way political," provides a key. Another key is the complete, perfect, ideal character of the virtues in *NE* 6. But the relation between these two keys—Aristotle's political intention, on one hand, and the ideal form of the virtues, on the other—is an open question. Let us begin with the first of these two keys to the solution of the problem of self-reference in *NE* 6: What does Aristotle mean by *politikē tis*?

3. ARISTOTLE'S POLITICAL INTENTION

Consider the following texts from *NE* 1.9, 1.13, and 2.1:

The highest good is the end of *politikē*. . . . It takes the greatest pains to produce [*poieitai*] citizens of a certain sort, namely, ones that are good and inclined to perform noble actions. (1.9 1099b31–33)

We assert that happiness is activity of soul. Now if this is so, it is clear that the statesman [or political practitioner: *politikos*] needs to know in some way [*eidenai pōs*] the things that concern the soul. . . . [He] must study it for the sake of the political and to the extent sufficient for what is sought, for to be more precise than that is perhaps more laborious than needed for the things proposed. (1.13 1102a17–27)

We acquire the virtues by first being at work in them, just as. . . people become, say, housebuilders by building houses or harpists by playing the harp. So, too, we become just by doing things that are just, moderate by doing things that are moderate, and courageous by doing things that are courageous. What happens in cities gives evidence of this, for lawmakers make the citizens good by habituating them [*tous politas ethizontes poiouein agathous*], and since this is the intention of every lawmaker, those that do not do it well are failures, and one regime

differs from another in this respect as a good one from a worthless one. (2.1 1103a31–b7)

We see that Aristotle's account is "in a certain way political" in that it aims to support the training or habituation of citizens to the performance of noble (just, moderate, courageous) actions as directed by the laws. This sheds light on a fact that might otherwise seem odd, namely, that of the eleven or so Aristotelian moral virtues, four are without commonly accepted names, so that Aristotle has to make up names for them.¹⁶ Robert Licht points out that, lacking names, these virtues could not be objects of legislation or stable customs, and, thus, by giving them names Aristotle enables their cultivation by law and custom.¹⁷ It is striking that among these previously nameless virtues is gentleness or moderation with respect to anger (*NE* 4.5).

In sum: Aristotle's political intention means that, at least in part, the *NE* is aimed (1094a1) at *disposing* its audience, that is, at "shaping" emotion and moral perception, in favor of decent politics and, ultimately, philosophy (1180a35). This intention is consistent with a crucial assertion on ethical disposition, apparent good, and the voluntary in *NE* 3.5: "we ourselves are in a certain way jointly responsible for our dispositions" (*tōn hexeōn sunaitioi pōs autoi esmen*) (1114b23). Joint responsibility means responsibility shared between the individual agent and other sources, which could include family and friends, community and traditions, founders and laws, and political philosophy—involving perhaps "the highest sort of cause" (1099b24)—including Aristotle's own *Nicomachean Ethics*.

But how does this requirement (to dispose human beings to decent politics and to philosophy) determine or delimit what the statesman is to know about the soul? The doctrine to be given by Aristotle to the statesman will be less than fully precise (1102a26), perhaps like an operating rule of thumb: reliable in practice, like rules of carpentry, but not as adequate or precise as the theoretical truths of geometry (1098a26–35).

To get a sense of what Aristotle might have in mind, consider these lines from *On the Motion of Animals*:

Whatever we do without calculating [*mē logisamenoī*], we do quickly. For whenever [one is] actually using sense perception or imagination or thought towards the end, he does at once what he desires. For the

¹⁶ Gentleness, friendliness, truthfulness, wittiness (*NE* 4.5–8).

¹⁷ Robert M. Licht, "The Teachings of Nature and Soul in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1975), 179.

activity of desire [*energeia tēs orexeōs*] takes the place of questioning or thinking [*ant' erōtēseōs ē noēseōs*]. . . . We should consider the organization of an animal to resemble that of a city well-governed by laws. For once order is established in a city, there is no need of a separate monarch to preside over each thing to be done; each does his own task as assigned, and one thing follows another because of habit [*dia to ethos*]. In animals this same thing happens because of nature. . . . each part of them, since they are so ordered, is naturally disposed to do its own work [*ergon*]. There is then no need of soul in each part. (701a28–32, 703a29–36)¹⁸

Ideally, there would be no need of soul in the individual citizens, because the whole community would act like one whole animal, each part of which performs its proper function automatically. But this is utopian. A community of human beings cannot possess the organic unity of a single animal—because a human being is itself a single animal.¹⁹ The next best thing is a kind of optimal training. In the optimally trained citizen, there would unavoidably be a soul, but a soul as possessing only motivational power. The reflective, questioning power of human soul would get in the way of prompt execution—by questioning or thinking over the rightness or necessity of the action that has been ordered, especially in the face of danger. Of course, the motivational part of the soul must be able to listen to orders given by the laws, or by leaders (1102b30–33, 1103a3, 1119b13) who do the practical thinking that issues in commands, which are then carried out straightaway.

A. WAR

Can we find a modern example of the high demand on action that Aristotle subserves according to his premodern political intention—an example from large liberal societies with individual freedom? Yes: combat military units undergo rigorous training to enable soldiers to perform their proper functions without thinking, because in combat, facing violent death, very few people can think.

Since war was a pervasive condition of the ancient world, we can understand Aristotle's political intention and its stringent demand for prompt and unquestioning action by free citizens. Of course, we must keep in mind the question, for what should the polis go to war—for conquest and domination or for defense, and in defense of what? We consider this in part 5, below. In

¹⁸ Aristotle, *De Motu Animalium*, trans. Martha C. Nussbaum (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 40–43, 52–53.

¹⁹ *Meta.* 7.13 1039a4–7.

any case, war makes it hard to reconcile the happiness of the individual with the common good—as Aristotle wishes to do (1.2 1094b8; 9.8 1169a19–28)—because it just is not pleasant to die in battle.

B. SOCRATES

There is another background factor, besides war, relevant to the meaning of Aristotle's political intention in the *Ethics*, namely, Socrates and the fate of Socrates. He was a great thinker and questioner. In the *Symposium*, Socrates famously says he knows nothing but *ta erōtika*, the erotic things, matters of love (177e1). But the main thing he does, throughout the dialogues of Plato, is ask questions. Terence Marshall points out that, if we change the first Greek letter, epsilon, of the word *erōtika* to eta, we have *ta ērōtika*, which sounds like, *the questions (ta ērōtēka, the things asked)*.²⁰ And Marshall suggests that Plato is punning, as he often does, so that Socrates's famous, risqué remark in the *Symposium* is a double entendre: Socrates longs like a lover for the possession of the beloved, namely, wisdom, but has not yet possessed it. His lack or incompleteness consists in knowing nothing but the questions; that is, he lacks final or fully complete and fully certain answers to the most fundamental questions. This would certainly fit Socrates's lifetime performance and his frequent claims to knowledge of ignorance.

A further element of historical background, also presented in the *Symposium*, is Socrates's failure to moderate Alcibiades—a dangerous demagogue—by turning him to philosophy and away from his addiction to the adulation of the many (215d–216c). Alcibiades instigated the Athenians to undertake the disastrous Sicilian expedition of 415 BC, which was opposed by Socrates, and which contributed to the eventual defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC). Socrates's long yet ultimately ineffective relationship with Alcibiades likely contributed to the bad reputation that Socrates got in the eyes of many Athenians, culminating in his execution.²¹

Socrates's experience with Alcibiades was perhaps paralleled by Aristotle's brief contact with the young Alexander the Great. According to Carnes Lord, “unsatisfactory as the evidence is, it seems relatively clear that...neither [Aristotle nor Philip] succeeded in educating or taming the strong-willed

²⁰ Terence Marshall, private communication.

²¹ See Benardete's discussion of this in *Plato's "Symposium,"* trans. Seth Benardete with commentaries by Allan Bloom and Seth Benardete (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 179–99. See also Benardete's remarkable conclusion to his *On Plato's "Symposium"* (Munich: Siemens Foundation, 1993), 95: “Socrates came that close to saving Athens.”

and altogether extraordinary Alexander.”²² Did Aristotle learn something from these episodes about the impediments to cooperation between political power and philosophy?²³

It is plausible that, in light of experience, Aristotle turned away from the Socratic attempt to educate or “seduce” (in the case of Socrates with Alcibiades) the extraordinary but potentially tyrannic individual to philosophy, and turned instead toward the cultivation of a political class that could be *spoudaios*—morally serious.²⁴ This would be the class of “gentlemen,” in the common English parlance.²⁵ For now, the two most relevant points, are, first, the morally serious are not attracted to demagoguery, debauchery, or self-deification, and, second, in the *NE*, the term *spoudaios* is the hallmark of nonphilosophic virtue.²⁶ In view of the latter, therefore, in his rhetorical address, Aristotle will not show the “messy details” of philosophy, the uncertain, questioning or aporetic aspect of what he does,²⁷ because this aspect (and it is an aspect, not the whole of philosophy) is inappropriate to his audience—future political practitioners, who as such must often make life-and-death decisions with little time for sustained, disinterested, profoundly

²² Carnes Lord, *Aristotle: The Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 8.

²³ Plato, *Republic* 473d, cited on the opening page of this essay. And what about Plato? For an important essay (with references to the literature) on Plato’s accounts of philosophy and politics, and his own unsuccessful experience in Sicily involving Dionysius II, see V. Bradley Lewis, “The Seventh Letter and the Unity of Plato’s Political Philosophy,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 38, no. 2 (2000): 231–50.

²⁴ The term *spoudaios* appears over fifty times in Aristotle’s *NE* and refers to persons and to activities. It is variously translated as “excellent” (Irwin, Lord), “good” (Ross, Rackham, Ostwald), “serious,” “of serious worth” (Sachs). As applied to persons it might be taken to mean simply “virtuous.” But Aristotle does not coin the term *aretikos*, perhaps owing to the ambiguity in the meaning of virtue, namely, (1) excellence in a specialized function, e.g., naval warfare versus land warfare, and (2) moral goodness that could be common to the many different specialists. *Politics* 3.4 famously considers the virtue of the good man (*anēr agathos*) and the good citizen (*politēs spoudaios*). Although ruler and ruled can each be *spoudaios*, their virtue differs according to their differing functions in the polis, *phronēsis*, for example, belonging only to the ruler (1277a5–16). Perhaps the most important text in the *NE* on the *spoudaios* is 3.4 1113a30–34: “For the *spoudaios* judges each [class of things] rightly, and in each, the true [instance] appears to him. For in accordance with each [type of] disposition, specific things are noble and pleasant, and the *spoudaios* is distinguished most of all, perhaps, by seeing what is truly so in each class of things, being like a standard and measure of the noble and pleasant.” It is safe to say that Alcibiades and Dionysius II were not *spoudaioi*.

²⁵ See Leo Strauss, “On Aristotle’s Politics,” in *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 25–28.

²⁶ See *NE* 9.8 1169a19–25; compare 1.7 1098a20 and 10.7 1177b25–27.

²⁷ A canonical example: “And in fact the thing that has been sought both in ancient times and now, and always, and is always perplexing [*kai aei aporoumenon*], ‘what is being?’ is just this: what is substance?” *Meta*. 7.1 1028b2–4. *Topics* 1.11 describes dialectical problems, i.e., problems that are not decidable by demonstrative reason, including the eternity of the universe, “for into questions of that kind too it is possible to inquire” (104b17).

detailed analysis. Accordingly, the morally serious statesmen need a certain limited awareness of soul; as Aristotle says, they “must study [the soul] for the sake of the political and [only] to the extent sufficient for what is sought” (1102a24–26).

What is sought (for the most part) in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is ethical character-formation in citizens and rulers, and resulting capacity for public-spirited, virtuous action. What is not sought, and will not be taught concerning the soul, is a philosophical, thus arresting, awareness that, as Aristotle says in his theoretical work *On Soul* (*De anima*), “altogether in every way the soul is one of the most difficult things to get any assurance about” (402a11). Indeed, could we remove from the *Ethics* Aristotle’s simplified, practical-rule-of-thumb account of the two-part soul, and replace it with the more theoretical, complex and difficult account of soul given in *De anima*? Could we still derive the neat division of the virtues into intellectual and moral, which follows immediately from the two-part soul, and culminates in the distinctive scheme of happiness and human good, as shown above?²⁸ We must leave this as another question, along with the question of war, and now the question of Aristotle’s distinctive, post-Socratic approach to the classical problem of philosophy in relation to politics (*Rep.* 473b).

Unfortunately, we have gotten ahead of ourselves. We have not yet addressed the important question whether Aristotle’s political intention and resulting limited presentation of subject matter extend all the way through Book 6 to the culminating scheme of happiness, good, and virtues in *NE* 6.12. Aristotle’s restriction to the political clearly enough applies to the accounts of the moral virtues in *NE* 2 through *NE* 5. But perhaps the intellectual virtues of *NE* 6 fall outside of this restriction, so that *NE* 6 is a genuinely theoretical account for the sake of, and sufficient for, the truth simply. Of course, the problem of self-reference would then be acute. To decide this question, consider what Aristotle says in *NE* 2.2:

²⁸ Some texts relevant to this question are: *De anima* 1.5 411a27–b12, on the difficulty of understanding the soul—itsself a principle of unity—as divided into parts; 3.9 432a22–b8, on different ways of dividing the soul, on the status of sense perception and, especially, of imagination in relation to those divisions, and on the omnipresence of desire (*orexis*) throughout the soul. At *NE* 1102a29–32, Aristotle asks whether the soul has parts outside of parts, like a body, or whether the parts of the soul might be as inseparable as the convex and concave sides of a curve (is the relation of desire and thinking at 1139b5–6 not like this?). He says it is not important for present purposes to answer this question. See Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s “Nicomachean Ethics,”* trans. C. I. Litzinger (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1993), nn. 229–30, and Joe Sachs, *Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics* (Newburyport, MA: Focus, 2002), 101–2, nn. 140–41. Whereas imagination is extensively discussed in *De anima*, it rarely appears in the *NE*.

Our present business is not for the sake of theory...for we are investigating not in order that we might know what virtue is, but in order that we might become good, since otherwise there would be no benefit from it.... Now the phrase “acting in accordance with right reason” is commonly accepted, and let it be set down—there will be a discussion of it later [in *NE* 6] both what right reason is [*phronēsis* is right reason: 1144b28] and how it is related to the other virtues. (2.2 1103b26–36)

This text makes clear that Aristotle’s restriction to the requirements of political practice does extend through *NE* 6, at least through *NE* 6.12. The final, 13th chapter of Book 6, with its discussion of cunning (*deinotēs*) and intellect (*nous*), may contain a wider account, and, as is often noted, Aristotle announces a new beginning in *NE* 7. At this point, however, we do have a firm conclusion: *NE* 6 is not simply a theoretical account for the sake of, and sufficient for, the whole truth about our truth-attaining capacities.²⁹ And so the test of self-reference cannot be applied to Aristotle’s own writing of *NE* 6, because Book 6 does not claim to be comprehensive, that is, it does not fall under the range of its own claim. This result is sufficient to exonerate Aristotle of the grave charge of failing the test of self-reference. Now, however, we have the question of what exactly to make of *NE* 6. Its presentation of the intellectual virtues is tailored to the requirements of excellent performance in and by the polis. This has to do with the way statesmen (legislators, rulers, commanders) are to understand their own high and indispensable activity, their *politikē*, the highest form of *phronēsis*. And it has to do with how these statesmen are to see that unusual and (historically speaking) often suspect minority involved in philosophical life.³⁰ For, clearly, the relation of *phronēsis* to *sophia* is a central theme of *NE* 6. Let us turn to the presentation of the intellectual virtues, specifically, to what I called the second key to the problem of self-reference, namely, the perfect, complete, ideal form of the virtues. After that, I will review and attempt to answer two outstanding questions.

²⁹ This result is foreshadowed by Aristotle’s use of the specifying adjective *praktikē* at 1098a4. What about *theōrētikē* life? Again, *NE* 1.7 1098a26–33 seems relevant.

³⁰ Socrates was accused of, and executed for, impiety and corrupting the youth. In *NE* 6.7, the examples used by Aristotle to introduce wisdom (*sophia*) are Anaxagoras and Thales (1141b4ff). According to Aquinas, “men see these philosophers [as] ignorant of things useful to themselves, but admit that they know...truths that are wonderful [but useless]...Thales and Anaxagoras are especially censured on this point.... And Anaxagoras...taking no interest in civic affairs...was consequently blamed for his negligence” (*In NE*, nn. 1191–92). Aristotle’s use of Anaxagoras and Thales as examples accords with the separation of wisdom and prudence (note 7, above); the example of Socrates would not.

4. PERFECT VIRTUES

Four times in *NE* 1, Aristotle links happiness or the human good, not simply to virtue, but to perfect or complete, *teleion*, virtue:

The human good comes to be disclosed [*ginetai*] as the activity of soul according to virtue, and if the virtues are many, according to the best and most perfect [*aristēn kai teleiōtatēn*]. (1.7 1098a17)

[Happiness], as we said, requires both complete virtue [*dei...aretēs teleias*] and a complete lifetime. (1.9 1100a5)

What then prevents our calling happy the person who is at work in accordance with complete virtue [*kat' aretēn teleian energounta*], and is adequately furnished with external goods? (1.10 1101a15)

Happiness is a certain activity of soul according to perfect (or complete) virtue (*hē eudaimonia psychēs energeia tis kat' aretēn teleian*). (1.13 1102a5)

How are we to understand this term, *teleion*, complete or perfect? Specifically, how does it bear on the intellectual virtues? Here I follow Aquinas. In his commentary on *NE* 6 (n. 1143), Aquinas remarks that “falsehood...is the evil of the intellect just as truth is the good of the intellect. But it is contrary to the nature of virtue to be the principle of an evil act.” According to Aquinas, then, intellectual capacities or habits that sometimes yield truth but other times happen to express falsehood cannot be included among the intellectual virtues, properly and strictly so called. I take this to be the sense of the term *teleion* as it applies to the five intellectual virtues presented in *NE* 6. This interpretation accords well with Aristotle’s own language. He introduces the five—*technē*, *epistēmē*, *phronēsis*, *sophia*, *nous*—in *NE* 6.3 by bounding them off from supposition or conception (*hupolēpsis*) and opinion (*doxa*), in which he says it is possible to err, to go wrong, to falsify something (1139b17). This implies that the five intellectual virtues are error free, they never go wrong. Aristotle says this explicitly in *NE* 6.6 on *nous*: “if those capacities by which we disclose truth and are never in error...are *epistēmē*, *phronēsis*, *sophia*, and *nous*” (1141a4), then, he concludes, *nous* is of the first principles. So *epistēmē*, *phronēsis*, *sophia*, and *nous* are never in error; they are perfect or ideal forms. Note that *technē* is absent from this list of error-free virtues. This is because experimentation, or trial and error, is necessarily part of *technē*, such that, in the words of Heidegger, “it is precisely on the basis of [the possibility of failure] that *technē* is *teleiōtera* [completed or perfected].”³¹

³¹ Martin Heidegger, *Plato’s “Sophist,”* trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington:

Finally, among the meanings of the word *teleion* listed by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* 5.16, we find the following:

Complete, perfect [*teleion*]...means that which has nothing of its kind exceeding it in excellence [virtue: *aretē*]...as someone is called the complete (perfect) doctor or the complete (perfect) flutist when they lack nothing of the excellence (virtue) proper to their kinds. (1021b13–18)³²

Thus, the perfect doctor never fails to diagnose correctly and cure the disease. This is the sense of “perfect” or “complete” picked out by Aquinas.

We conclude that the five intellectual virtues are something like Platonic ideal forms. They are not exactly the same thing, since in Plato there is, for example, no ideal form of *technē*, nor of *epistēmē*. In their perfection, however, Aristotle’s intellectual virtues are paradigms or governing models, each in its own domain of truth, to which we can look, although they are never fully instantiated in human life. It follows that, since philosophy, or imperfect, incomplete wisdom, sometimes falls short, sometimes goes wrong (as Aristotle notoriously did concerning inanimate local motion) or has to settle for knowledge of ignorance (unsolved problems), philosophy will not appear among these perfect intellectual virtues. And this is the clearest reason why Aristotle does not fail the test of self-reference in *NE* 6.

5. TWO CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

Let us finally attempt to answer two principal questions raised by the preceding account.

First, what is the relation between the two keys to the resolution of the self-reference problem in *NE* 6, namely, (1) Aristotle’s political intention, and (2) the ideal forms of the intellectual virtues? Specifically, why should optimal training for good performance by statesman and citizens—say, for actions that are courageous yet moderate with respect to anger—require idealized forms of the *intellectual* virtues, like *nous*, *epistēmē*, *technē*?

Second, given that military capability is a requirement of political life, for what should the polis go to war—for domination or for defense, and in defense of what?

Indiana University Press, 1997), 38.

³² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Santa Fe, NM: Green Lion, 1999), 98.

First question: Why should Aristotle's political intention to affect "the dispositions of the men in the cities" (*Rep.* 544e) for the sake of decent political practice require idealized forms of the *intellectual* virtues? Note that there are only two intellectual virtues that really matter: *sophia* and *phronēsis*. The other three are included within, or subsumed under, these two. *Nous* and *epistēmē* are constitutive parts of *sophia*, providing it with logico-deductive perfection, thus the certainty of mathematics. But, unlike mathematics, the objects of *sophia* are the highest, eternal, and most honorable; thus, as noted, the perfection or ideal character of *sophia* is easy to see. *Technē* is the perfection of production, but as such it is always morally neutral to the use of the product. *Technē* must, therefore, always be subject to *phronēsis*. Thus, we are left with *sophia* and *phronēsis* as the central, ideal virtues of *NE* 6. On the ideal character or perfection of *phronēsis*, a few brief remarks must suffice.

Phronēsis is complex. It has four parts: (1) deliberative excellence, (2) understanding, (3) a type of nondiscursive moral perception also called *nous* by Aristotle, and (4) a sense of the truly just in particular cases in contrast to the universality of the legal (6.8–11 1142a24–1143b6). Furthermore, as is evident from 6.13 1144b31–33, not to mention the definition of moral virtue itself (2.6 1106b36–1107a2), in its perfection *phronēsis* is inseparable from the moral virtues; neither can be without the other. And so the perfection of *phronēsis* takes up the bulk of Book 6. But we may not need to get into the perfection of *phronēsis* in order to answer our question (on the relation between political intention and ideal forms). It may suffice just to look at the relation between *phronēsis* and *sophia*, as succinctly presented by Aristotle at the conclusion of *NE* 6. There, at the end of chapter 13, he sets out a six-term proportion (1145a7–12):

Phronēsis is to *sophia* as medical art is to health, as *politikē* is to the gods.

Clearly medical art issues orders for the sake of health, and, in the ancient city, rulers order religious practices in view of the gods to engender habits of piety. Similarly, according to this analogy, rulers will also order the city with a view to wisdom—to engender or protect those who possess or seek it. Statesmen are thus to understand their own practical activity as (among many other things) for the sake of a theoretical activity that, although not their own, they will respect and care about from without, because Aristotle's idealized presentation makes it appear admirable to them. As Strauss puts

it, “The gentleman is by nature able to be affected by philosophy; Aristotle’s political science is an attempt to actualize this potentiality.”³³

But men of action—think of high-spirited military commanders or political men and women of great ambition for whom honor is a supreme value³⁴—are not likely to understand philosophy “from within,” that is, as its few practitioners (e.g., Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, their followers) understand it. To begin with, they do not take pleasure in it, and thus do not adequately discern its contents.³⁵ As Aristotle says, “those who are at work with pleasure discern each sort of thing better and are more precise about it,” while “pleasures from different sources are impediments to activities” (1175a32, b32). Above all, leading men of action do not have the leisure (1177b7–13) for sustained, detailed inquiry, especially concerning problems of physics, metaphysics, and their possible moral-political implications.

On this account, Aristotle’s political intention idealizes philosophy and *phronēsis* (or *politikē*) for the mutual benefit of both philosophy and the polis. The polis is to be made safe for philosophy, but thereby it is also to be moderated, made less warlike, made safe from the ambition of extraordinary but dangerous men like Alcibiades and Alexander.³⁶

³³ Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 25–29, here 28.

³⁴ “Nothing seems to be more desirable to men than honor, for men suffer the loss of all other things rather than suffer any loss of honor.” Thomas, *ST I–II*, q. 2, art. 3, in *Treatise on Happiness*, 17. “And, for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.” The Declaration of Independence. “In the years between 1798 and the Civil War, two-thirds as many American naval officers were to die in duels as in all of the country’s sea fights.” James Tertius De Kay, *A Rage for Glory: The Life of Commodore Stephen Decatur*, *USN* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 31.

³⁵ What about me? Since I have made the test of self-reference central to my argument, it behooves me to submit to it myself. Am I a man of action, or a philosopher, and what are my corresponding pleasures, pains, discernments, and limitations? I am obviously not a man of action. But I admire the skill and courage of those who truly are. Nor am I a philosopher (it requires extraordinary intelligence; there just are not that many in human history). I am a lover of philosophy—a philophilosopher. I study with pleasure the philosophers’ accounts of many things, for example, Aristotle on disposition, pleasure, and perception. But my pleasure is not unlimited; the practical side of me (such as it is) gets impatient and a little irritated with endless perplexity. So, do I understand philosophy from within? In view of my own reaction, I must say only partially, not fully. But this is useful because it helps me understand that it would make sense for Aristotle to employ different modes of discourse for the different dispositions of his readers.

³⁶ As the dialogues of Plato show, Socrates directly confronted dangerous men (Alcibiades, Callicles, Meno), in hopes of attracting them to something even better than political power, namely, *ta ērōt[ē]ka*, the erotic pursuit and enjoyment of the greatest questions, questions about the human good and the ultimate principles of the universe. But these men did not, and could not, get it. Theirs was not the *eros* of metaphysics, but *libido dominandi*. Accordingly, Aristotle abandoned the attempt to educate men of this type. (And so it is no accident that *eros* as metaphor for philosophy, or as animating the incomplete pursuit of wisdom, is conspicuously absent from Aristotle’s *Ethics*. It does occur in Aristotle,

In the *Posterior Analytics*, discussing two species within the genus of magnanimity, Aristotle says that Alcibiades, Achilles, and Ajax were magnanimous in the sense that they would not submit to being dishonored, and so, when insulted, Alcibiades chose war (97b18–20). And this brings us to our second question, on war, the fate of Socrates, and Aristotle’s post-Socratic approach.

Second question: For what should the polis go to war? For its own preservation against external attack, of course. But for the sake of what should it *ultimately* preserve itself? For what is most admirable, of most serious worth, most noble. What is that? It is not what leading men and many poleis in Aristotle’s time believed, namely, domination. To see this, consider *Politics* 7.2. There, Aristotle lists nine well-known cities or tribes whose laws “look to one thing...domination” (1324b3–22). In fundamental contrast, Aristotle teaches that what is of most serious worth is *sophia* and, by implication, the human life devoted to its pursuit. More broadly stated, I believe that, for Aristotle, the noble is teaching and learning, and all the things necessary for that, which accordingly have a share in the noble.³⁷ Again, consider *Politics* 7.2: the life of mastery and domination, even tyranny, which is praised by many, is contraposed to theoretical life. Although Aristotle does not say so explicitly, the implication is that, without a protected place for philosophy, or teaching and learning in the polis, the political community will turn to mastery, domination, even tyranny (1324a32, b4). In *NE* 10.7, Aristotle says that “the activity [*energeia*] of the intellect appears to excel in seriousness [*spoudēi*]” (1177b19), and is more choiceworthy even than the active life, which attains to nobility and greatness in politics and war. Accompanying this high affirmation is the following stark warning: “no one chooses to make war for the sake of making war...anyone would seem to be completely bloodthirsty if he were to make friends into enemies so that battles and killings might come about” (1177b9–11). It is striking that both *NE* 10.7 and

twice: *Parts of Animals* 644b22ff., and *Metaphysics* 1072b4.) Thus we have the following contrast: in Plato’s Socratic dialogues, philosophy is erotic, incomplete (like a lover), and intrusively concerned with the moral-political sphere. In Aristotle’s *NE*, philosophy appears as nonerotic, complete, and separated from *phronēsis*.

³⁷ “We must remember that Plato was not such a fool [as] to ignore the fact that the existence of philosophy on earth depends absolutely on the polis and thus on what kind of polis it is. Plato certainly knew that the philosopher owes a duty of loyalty to the polis. Philosophy depends on the polis. Everyone can see this today if he compares the Western world with Soviet Russia. But there is a certain deeper problem which must not be blurred by this almost matter of course moral obligation. There is something in philosophy which can never be understood in terms of that moral obligation” (Leo Strauss, *Republic Seminar* 1957, 134). The nobility of moral virtue is conditional on the regime. This is as it should be and is no surprise.

Politics 7.2 contain roughly the same juxtaposition of these alternative ways of life: learning and domination.

To conclude: The twofold purpose of Aristotle's approach in the *NE* is to help make the city safe for philosophy and, reciprocally, to benefit the city by moderating the most dangerous tendencies of political life.³⁸ Accordingly, his own intellectual activity in preparing this program of study for political practitioners would then be a higher-order form of *phronēsis* or political philosophy. It would be the source of that definition of happiness and human good that we diagrammed, but it would not appear in the diagram.³⁹ This completes my attempt to resolve the question of self-reference in *NE* 6.

³⁸ The two most dangerous tendencies are tyranny and faction. What is problematic and disturbing for us today, of which Aristotle could not know, is that the rise of the colossal tyrannies of the twentieth century had something to do with philosophy, with the thought of Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger, in relation to ideologies that proclaimed the absolute and murderous primacy of human will and the radical transformation of the world through violent action. Thus, in light of the history of philosophy and politics, we must say today that the regime that is safe from tyranny is the one that is safe for the Socratic type and resulting tradition of philosophy. This has something to do with the classical conception that man is not the highest being, and thus that there are limits on the actions, passions, and will of a dangerously unlimited being. The large literature on twentieth-century totalitarianism explicates this theme.

³⁹ That Aristotle's writing of the *Ethics* is a type of prudence, although not the same as the one described in *NE* 6, is noted by Godfrey of Fontaines, Quodlibet XIV, in *Les philosophes belges*, vol. 5, pt. 2, ed. Jean Hoffmans (Louvain: L'Institut supérieur de philosophie, 1935), 332–33.

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Contributors should follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* (16th edition). *The Chicago Manual of Style* offers publications the choice between sentence-style capitalization in titles of books or articles and headline-style. *Interpretation* uses the headline style. Parenthetical references no longer use "p." or "pp." *Interpretation* has reverted to the traditional form of citation and no longer uses the author/date form. Please double space the entire text. Footnotes, rather than endnotes, are preferred.

Words from languages not rooted in Latin should be transliterated to English. Foreign expressions that have not become part of English should be accompanied by translation into English.

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