

**ARISTOTLE ON THE COMMON GOOD**

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## ARISTOTLE ON THE COMMON GOOD

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In this paper I seek to explicate Aristotle's conception of the common good as it applies to communities or *koinōnīai* in general and the *polis* in particular. According to Aristotle, every *koinōnīa* constitutes a distinct whole insofar as it contains a number of individual parts standing in certain relations to one another. And because Aristotle claims that every *koinōnīa* is established for the sake of some good, it follows that a given *koinōnīa*'s arrangement of parts constitutes at least an instrumental good that is common to all its members, although it is possible for a specific arrangement to possess more than mere instrumental value. I then argue that the *polis* is such a non-instrumental arrangement insofar as it constitutes a part of our highest good, namely, happiness or *eudaimonia*, since Aristotle claims that we are by nature political animals, that is, beings who are meant to live in *poleis* of some kind. In particular, the good that the *polis* achieves includes the ability for its members to actively contribute to a complete and self-sufficient way of life characterized by rational deliberation and choice rather than by accident or chance. The way of life specific to the *polis* therefore centers on the exercise of political rule. I then argue that the *polis*' arrangement, insofar as it represents a non-instrumental good, can be shared in common by its members only if they stand to the arrangement in a particular way, namely, as political rulers. I conclude by demonstrating that on this account, the existence of economic classes within a *polis* is sufficient to exclude certain groups from participating in the *polis*' common good *qua* arrangement. In other words, the existence of classes entails that there is a stable separation between rulers and ruled such that those who are ruled cannot share in the highest good of the *polis*' arrangement unless they become, either individually or collectively, the ruling class.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Although Aristotle claims that the common good is that for the sake of which the *polis* exists, his conception of what the common good actually is remains decidedly unclear. Some commentators argue that the Aristotelian common good ought to be construed in terms of individual interests.<sup>1</sup> For them, the *polis* is nothing more than that form of social organization best suited to help its individual members achieve happiness or *eudaimonia*. That is because, at least according to these thinkers, what the members of a political *koinōnia* share in common (*koinon*) is primarily the *individual capacity* to live a good life through the exercise of reasoned speech or *logos*. So although the *polis* is grounded in the political aspect of human nature in virtue of which we are able to communicate and deliberate about our own and others' good, many of the activities constitutive of our final end, e.g., theoretical contemplation, fall outside the purview of the shared activities characteristic of political life. Hence different political arrangements are typically conceived as instrumental means to individual functioning and should therefore be assessed in terms of how well they facilitate that end. Seen in this way, the common good is reducible to the individual interests of a *koinōnia*'s members and can therefore be defined largely without reference to the *koinōnia*'s arrangement itself.

It seems to me, however, that this individualistic interpretation fails to capture the force of Aristotle's conception of the common good. This is not to say that Aristotle would entirely disagree with these commentators—individual well-being is, after all, essential to what makes the *polis* the most comprehensive form of *koinōnia*. But I think he would object that this interpretation is not enough, or at least that it obfuscates certain important features of his political

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Morrison, "The Common Good" in M. Deslauriers and P. Destrée (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 176-98; Nussbaum, "Nature, Function, and Capability: Aristotle on Political Distribution" in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, supplementary vol., 144-84, Oxford: Clarendon, 1988, pp. 145-84; Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*, University of California Press, 1993, esp. Ch. 5, pp. 166-74.

teleology. For Aristotle claims that human beings, insofar as we are political animals by nature, have as our function (*ergon*) some *single thing* that we all do together (HA.I.488a7). As Bernard Yack rightly observes, this definition of our political nature supports the idea that the common good of the *polis* is a single end in the strong sense and not (or as I suggest, not *merely*) a plurality of individual interests.<sup>2</sup> At any rate, it is not immediately apparent whether Aristotle conceives of the common good as something reducible to the goods of a *koinōnia*'s individual members or whether he has a more holistic conception in mind.<sup>3</sup> Now I submit that Aristotle is indeed committed to the view that the members of a political *koinōnia* share something *more* than just the individual capacity for *eudaimonia*, namely, the constitution or *politeia* itself. And while this much may be clear, the implications it has for Aristotle's conception of the common good are far more consequential than what is traditionally thought. As we will see, Aristotle's view that the *politeia* constitutes a non-instrumental good sets certain limits on the kinds of groups who can actually share this good in common. Since, however, Aristotle classifies the *polis* as a species of *koinōnia*, the concept of *koinōnia* is logically prior to any account of the common good. Therefore in this essay I will first explain Aristotle's whole-part conception of *koinōnia* before turning to the implications it has on the common good of the *polis*.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Ch. 2, pp. 51-3.

<sup>3</sup> John M. Cooper is perhaps the main advocate for a holistic interpretation of Aristotle's notion of the common good. For Cooper, the common good is normally to be understood as the sum total of each member's good taken as separate individual units. "But where," he argues, "civic life involves civic friendship, [the common good] includes more than this," i.e., more than just the sum total of each member's good separately considered, since under such conditions each member aims both at her own good *and* at the good of others so that their good "becomes, and is conceived of by herself as being, also a part of her own good"; see Cooper, "Political Animals and Civic Friendship" in Günther Patzig (ed.), *Aristoteles' 'Politik'*, 1990, pp. 220-41, esp. p. 238. So according to Cooper, if a *polis* is animated by civic friendship, the common good ought to be construed as an inseparable whole.

But I find this interpretation highly unsatisfactory, for Cooper seems perfectly content in allowing civic friendship to obtain even between socioeconomic classes so long as there is no overt class conflict (pp. 233-4, n. 16). And although one can argue (I think mistakenly) that civic friendship *can* exist between classes, Cooper simply takes it as given and thus does not address the limits of whether civic friendship can obtain in all circumstances. Aristotle, on the other hand, is quite explicit that friendship cannot obtain between a master and a slave since "there is nothing in common to the two parties" (EN.VIII.1161b1). Nevertheless, in what follows I present my own interpretation of how Aristotle conceives of the common good as an interrelated whole. In doing so I hope to show that Aristotle can avoid relying on the psychological appeal to civic friendship since for him the *polis*, along with every form of *koinōnia*, necessarily involves some non-reducible good regardless of whether it is animated by the bonds of friendship.



## II. ARISTOTLE'S WHOLE-PART CONCEPTION OF *KOINŌNIA*

For Aristotle the genus *koinōnia* applies to an especially broad range of social relationships including (but not limited to) those found between citizens, family members, friends, and even fellow-travelers and exchange partners. Indeed, Aristotle classifies as a *koinōnia* every kind of social group in which its members share something in common such as a single end, a similar identity, or some cooperative activity. What the members of a given *koinōnia* share in common therefore connects those members to one another in some particular way and further defines or limits the interactions between them (*EN.VIII.1159b25-1160a8*). Sailors on a ship, for instance, constitute a *koinōnia* to the extent that safety in navigation is “the common task of all” and the object or goal towards which they aim (*Pol.III.1276b26-7*). But whatever it is that the members of a group partake in together, Aristotle evidently thinks that every *koinōnia* seeks to bring about some good. His reasoning here is parallel to his discussion of purposive action in the *Ethics*—in Aristotle’s view, every action and choice is undertaken for the sake of something which the agent perceives as a good (*EN.I.1094a1-2*). So if the formation of every *koinōnia* involves some action, and if every action aims at some good, it follows that all *koinōniai* come into being for the sake of some good as well (*Pol.I.1252a2-3*).

Thus it would seem that each *koinōnia* centers around a single end regardless of how comprehensive that end might be. And yet Aristotle here seems to ignore the fact that there are many *koinōniai* in which different members participate for different reasons. Parties to an exchange, for instance, partake in a *koinōnia* (albeit a temporary one) insofar as they share an activity together, but each does so in order to satisfy his or her own interests rather than for the sake of some single end such as maintaining the economy. So it is difficult to see how an entire social group can aim at a single good in much the same way as an individual does. And even if the members of a *koinōnia* were to aim at a single good, there is a further problem in determining

how this good ought to be shared since the ways in which individuals participate in a *koinōnia* might differ from one another in either mode or degree.

The difficulty for Aristotle, then, is to provide a more informative definition of what a *koinōnia* actually *is* that addresses whether a single collective good is compatible with a plurality of interests. But aside from a few scattered remarks throughout his political and ethical works, Aristotle nowhere offers us a systematic account of the nature of *koinōnia*. Even so, we might still be able to derive a more formal definition if we focus on the *method* Aristotle employs to investigate the different species of *koinōnia* since he argues that the nature of a subject matter determines how it ought to be studied (*EN*.I.1094b23-5). Now in regards to political *koinōniai* Aristotle adopts a whole-part method of analysis—the *polis*, he argues, belongs to the order of compounds (*suntheta*) insofar as it forms a single whole containing a number of different parts, and he accordingly proceeds to analyze the *polis* as such (*Pol*.I.1252a19-21, III.1274b38-40, VII.1328a21). But what does Aristotle mean when he says that the *polis* is a compound? And how might he conceive of *koinōniai* generally in this way?

A possible interpretation of this claim is that a *koinōnia* is not just some accidental collection of parts but instead possesses a distinctive character or identity. For instance, consider what Aristotle has to say about the concept of a compound in the *Metaphysics*:

As regards that which is compounded out of something so that the whole is one—not like a heap, however, but like a syllable—the syllable is not its elements, *ba* is not the same as *b* and *a*, nor is flesh fire and earth; for when they are dissolved the wholes, i.e., the flesh and the syllable, no longer exist, but the elements of the syllable exist, and so do fire and earth. The syllable is something—not only its elements (the vowel and the consonant) but something else (*Met.Z*.1041b11-8)

From this it seems that the *kind* of compound formed by a number of different parts is not only contingent on the specific nature of those parts but also on how they are arranged and organized into an internal structure relative to the whole, e.g., the syllables *ab* and *ba* are two distinct wholes simply in virtue of how their individual elements stand to one another. And it is important that Aristotle here mentions that the whole compound is *not the same* as its individual elements—that is, a compound is *not merely* a collection of parts but *something else*. Thus each individual element stands in a double relationship both to the other parts and to the whole. The internal structure of relationships between a compound's parts therefore constitutes the form of that compound.

If this interpretation is correct, then Aristotle can claim that a *koinōnia*'s formal structure constitutes a single common good insofar as it coincides with the *koinōnia*'s overall function.<sup>4</sup> For Aristotle argues that every *koinōnia* is established in order to achieve some specific outcome, and so the way in which the members of a *koinōnia* are arranged and coordinated relative to the whole must facilitate the attainment of that outcome in some way.<sup>5</sup> In other words, each part of a *koinōnia* stands in a functional relation to the other parts and in doing so contributes to a greater or lesser extent to the functioning of the whole. We can therefore compare the existence of a *koinōnia* to some other functional product, e.g., a house. The function of a house is to provide shelter, and this function explains why it takes the form it does and needs material of a definite kind. But if we were to remove its roof or replace its walls with unsuitable material, the house would no longer be able to perform its function. And since all things derive their essential character “from their function and their capacity,” a house which is no longer able to perform its function can be called a house in only a homonymous sense (*Pol.I.1253a22-25*). Similarly, Aristotle argues that if the form of a *koinōnia* changes, the *koinōnia* becomes a different kind of compound (*Pol.III.1276b4-12*). It follows that the continued existence of a given *koinōnia* depends on the preservation of its specific arrangement. And this arrangement consists in the way in which its parts function proximately in relation to one another and how these parts are distributed and organized into a whole.

So a *koinōnia*'s form or arrangement—like that of the arrangements of all other compounds generally—is that in virtue of which it is able to perform its function. Moreover, a

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<sup>4</sup> According to Morrison, there are two serious problems with interpreting the common good as the “good condition of the web of shared activities that constitute social life” (as he puts it); the first is that Aristotle nowhere mentions the concept of a single-thing which is “all-of-social-life taken together,” and the second is that this common good “leaves out many activities included in the happiness of all the citizens” such as solitary activities; see Morrison, *ibid.*, p. 184. To the first point I would respond that Aristotle *does* mention something which includes the relations of a *koinōnia* since, as the syllable example above shows, a *koinōnia* forms a compound (*suntheton*) in virtue of the definite relations in which its members stand to one another and to the whole. As for the second point, I do not think it is necessary for Aristotle to establish that the common good *qua* arrangement must include *all* the activities of a *koinōnia*'s parts, for it is certainly possible for a member of a *koinōnia* to achieve both his or her own individual good while also sharing in the good of the arrangement. And as I imply in section IV, the relations which form the *politeia* help to shape and define the individual characters of a *polis*' members and, by extension, their solitary activities as well.

<sup>5</sup> For my purposes here it is irrelevant whether or not the arrangement is the most efficient at facilitating the *koinōnia*'s final end. The important point here is that a given *koinōnia*'s arrangement allows it to function in some distinctive way as a collective whole.

given *koinōnia*'s arrangement constitutes a *good* which its members share in common.<sup>6</sup> To see how this is so, consider a *koinōnia* of sailors which exists for the sake of arriving safely at some destination. In this *koinōnia* each sailor has a particular function that is related, either directly or indirectly, to the actions of the other members. The sailors therefore operate as parts within the ship's total organizational structure—as such, each individual sailor depends on the other parts to perform their respective functions in order to achieve the *koinōnia*'s final end. To the extent that this specific arrangement enables the *koinōnia* to perform its function, the arrangement itself at the very least instrumentally benefits its members such that they all have an interest in its preservation.<sup>7</sup> So although the individual sailors might have different motivational interests in participating in this *koinōnia*, they all nonetheless aim at a single common good, namely, the ship's overall arrangement of parts. If, then, Aristotle is right in classifying *koinōniai* as compounds consisting of matter (i.e., parts) and form (i.e., a specific structure of relationships), it follows that a *koinōnia* can aim at a single good in ways compatible with (and in some instances even requiring) simultaneously varied interests. That is because the common good *qua* functional arrangement of parts is in some sense *different from* the interests of those parts taken separately.

This is not to say, of course, that the common good is *entirely* distinct from these individual goods. Instead, I think Aristotle's point is that every *koinōnia*, insofar as it represents some functional arrangement or compound, aims at *something more* than just the individual well-being of its parts, and this additional aim—implicit in every form of *koinōnia*—is nothing less than the *koinōnia* itself. That is because the specific relations of a given *koinōnia* entail some concomitant mode of interaction and behavior explicable in terms of the *koinōnia*'s essential

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<sup>6</sup> For evidence that Aristotle considers an arrangement of parts to constitute as a good, see *Met.* A.1075a11-24. Here Aristotle considers how the universe contains the good, whether as something separate and by itself or as the order of parts. He concludes by saying that the good probably exists in both ways as it does for an army since the good of an army “is both in the order and the leader.”

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that even if something classifies as an instrumental good, this alone does not preclude that good from also being choiceworthy in itself. Hence there is an important difference between a good that is instrumental for some further end and a good that is *merely* instrumental. A merely instrumental good is something which is never choiceworthy in itself but rather is good only insofar as it produces or preserves other good things. Such instrumental or auxiliary goods are therefore different in kind from other goods choiceworthy in themselves such as powers (*dunameis*), noble things (*kala*), and honored things (*timia*). On the distinction between auxiliary goods and goods choiceworthy in themselves, see Thomas Tuozzo, “Aristotle's Theory of the Good and Its Causal Basis” in *Phronesis*, vol. 40, no. 3, 1995, pp. 293-314, esp. 298-304. Now although the arrangement of a ship could be more than a merely instrumental or auxiliary good, typically such an arrangement should be understood in merely instrumental terms as aiming at something other than itself.

function. To that end, a *koinōnia*'s arrangement can persist if and only if its individual parts act in accordance with those (prior established) relations. Roughly speaking, a *koinōnia* "reproduces" itself so long as those relations are maintained. If, then, a *koinōnia* continues to benefit at least some of its members, the common good must be understood in reference to two fundamental aspects related to its ultimate end or goal:<sup>8</sup>

(a) The Good of the Parts: the sum total of individual goods belonging separately to each of a given *koinōnia*'s parts

(b) The Good of the Whole: the overall arrangement of a given *koinōnia*'s parts consisting of (b1) the relations in which each part stands to the other parts and (b2) the relations in which each part stands to the whole

This whole-part conception of *koinōnia* construes the goodness of any community both in terms of individual *and* collective functioning.<sup>9</sup> That is, the common good of an Aristotelian *koinōnia* depends on *what* the individual members aim at and *how* this end is achieved through the *koinōnia*'s specific arrangement.

To make this point more salient, consider the *koinōnia* of, say, an exchange market. The function of this *koinōnia* is evidently to facilitate the transfer of goods and services—hence this *koinōnia* holds if and only if there is some buyer-seller relationship between a group of people. So on the one hand this association exhibits a common good in the sense that each member's good must be achieved through the *koinōnia*. But in addition to this there is also another common good that stands over and above the distinct advantages of the *koinōnia*'s parts, *viz.* the buyer-seller relationship which must be preserved in order for the *koinōnia* to remain. This

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<sup>8</sup> The condition that a *koinōnia* continues to benefit at least some of its members is simply meant to exclude all *koinōniai* that do not benefit any of their members in any way. For if a *koinōnia* does not benefit any of its members, the common good would include only, and in a very weak sense, the arrangement of its members apart from the members themselves. Hence under such circumstances the common good could not be considered as a *holistic* good. But given that such *koinōniai* are presumably rare (let alone whether it would actually count as a *koinōnia* at all), I will assume from here on that every *koinōnia* benefits at least some of its members and that this is sufficient to describe the common good as holistic.

<sup>9</sup> The phrase "whole-part conception" is first used by Martha Nussbaum to describe one way Aristotle defines the function of the *polis*. Nussbaum, however, formulates this conception in very different terms than what I present here, for she says that on this conception "a political arrangement is good as a whole just in case its citizens are (each and every one?) good as individuals"; see Nussbaum (1988), p. 156. Nussbaum's formulation underscores an important (but I think mistaken) assumption she makes, namely, that the *polis* is merely reducible to its individual parts. For whenever Nussbaum mentions the *polis* as a *whole*, she evidently does so in terms of a collection or "heap" of parts. But the whole-part conception Aristotle actually presents in the *Politics* construes *koinōniai* as compounds of individual parts *standing in definite relations to one another*. So unlike Nussbaum, I do not think that the goodness of a *koinōnia* as a whole can be dissociated from its formal structure of relations.

relationship—which Aristotle argues is based on proportionate requital—can be described as a common good because it serves a functional role and varies in its capacity to perform that function well.<sup>10</sup> If, for instance, a law is passed which gives an undue advantage to the sellers at the expense of the buyers, it would be insufficient to say that the common good of this *koinōnia* is affected just insofar as the buyers are harmed, for on that assumption we could potentially rectify the harm simply by giving what is owed to the buyers in accordance with proportionate requital. This, however, fails to address the fact that the overall relationship itself has changed such that buyers will *continue* to be harmed at the expense of sellers so long as the relationship holds. In this instance, the law affects the individual members of the *koinōnia* just to the extent that it affects the *relationship* as a whole.<sup>11</sup> So we can conclude that the common good is affected not only because the buyers are harmed individually but also because the *koinōnia*'s arrangement deviates from proportionate requital.

So at this point it should be clear why the common good is not simply reducible to each member's individual good since every *koinōnia* insofar as it constitutes a functional compound necessarily includes both (a) the good of its parts and (b) the good of the whole. It is important to note, however, that these two aspects of the common good are not necessarily assigned equal weights, for if a particular *koinōnia* ultimately aims at the individual well-being of its members, then we have reason to give precedence to (a) over (b) when considering the common good of this community. That is because Aristotle distinguishes between two senses in which one thing exists for the sake of another. If, for instance, x exists for the sake of y, then x is either an instrumental means to y or a component part of y. In regards to *koinōniai*, x represents some

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<sup>10</sup> For more on Aristotle's notion of exchange, see *EN.V.1132b34-1133a24*. My designation of this *koinōnia* as a buyer-seller relationship may be considered a misnomer since individuals can engage in exchange activities without any monetary transfer, but for the present purpose I think the designation is appropriate. Notice, however, that the criterion for participating in this specific *koinōnia* is absolute in the sense that if x does not have anything to exchange, then x cannot be included in the *koinōnia* at all. This, of course, does not exclude x from participating in some other *koinōnia*. If, for instance, y makes some unconditional transfer of goods to x, there would certainly be a relationship between them. But we could not call this relationship a *koinōnia* of *exchange* since it is not based on proportionate requital; such an asymmetric relationship would instead be classified as a *koinōnia* of benevolence (discussed at *EN.IX.1167b16-1168a27* and *EE.VII.1241a35-1241b10*) involving a benefactor (y) and a beneficiary (x).

<sup>11</sup> The buyers, then, are harmed directly by the relationship and only indirectly by the law. That is because the law changes the nature of the relationship such that the sellers are now *able* to exploit the buyers. By itself, however, the law does nothing, for it is only in and through the relationship that the buyers are harmed. The important point here is that the function of the relationship as a whole, i.e., the way in which the buyers and sellers stand to one another, ought to factor into our considerations of this *koinōnia*'s common good.

specific arrangement and y represents that *koinōnia*'s final end. Now if we assume that each member of a *koinōnia* receives some benefit from the *koinōnia*'s final end, we can say that y necessarily includes (a) as a component part and x includes (b). But unless we know more about the specific nature of a *koinōnia*'s final end, we cannot say for certain whether or not y includes (b) as well.

Thus for any given *koinōnia* it is a further question whether the arrangement itself has any value apart from its instrumental function in facilitating the distribution of goods to its various members—that is, whether the common good *essentially* depends on the good condition of its arrangement rather than on the sum total of individual advantages. It would appear, however, that the arrangements of most *koinōniai* possess merely instrumental value since they largely aim at some further end beyond the arrangements themselves. For instance, in a *koinōnia* of sailors the final end lies in the destination and in a *koinōnia* of exchange partners it lies in the goods or services procured after the activity of exchange takes place—hence the arrangements of these *koinōniai* are established as means to achieve their respective ends. If, then, a *koinōnia* solely (or primarily) aims at some end other than the *koinōnia*'s arrangement itself, the specific form of that *koinōnia* should largely be assessed in terms of its causal efficacy.<sup>12</sup>

This is why many commentators typically focus on the instrumental value of different political arrangements, for they assume, I think incorrectly, that the ultimate end of the *polis* is the good life for its individual members. But Aristotle is never this explicit—instead, he claims that the final end of the *polis* is the good life for *all*. Although subtle, the difference here is important since, as Aristotle observes, the term “all” can be interpreted as either “each individually” or “all collectively” and is thus ambiguous in scope (*Pol.*II.1261b16-32). If Aristotle means the former, then (a) ought to be given priority in respect to the common good over (b), and if the latter, then (b) over (a).<sup>13</sup> As I will argue, however, Aristotle does not endorse

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<sup>12</sup> The mere fact that an arrangement stands as an auxiliary good, however, should not deter questions pertaining to the expediency or justice of that arrangement. For instance, in the *koinōnia* of exchange mentioned above, there may be a further consideration as to whether an arrangement that deviates from proportionate requital is the most efficient or just. But even though such questions are interesting in their own right, they largely fall outside the scope of this paper and so I will not address them here in further detail.

<sup>13</sup> When Aristotle speaks of the *polis* as a collective he does so not in an additive sense but rather in the sense that it forms a distinctive, functional whole. That is, Aristotle does not conceive of the *polis* as an accidental collection of parts or a mere heap; see, e.g., *Pol.*V.1303a23. Hence any mention of the collective functioning of the *polis* (or any *koinōnia* for that matter) necessarily presupposes a specific arrangement or form. So if Aristotle says that the final end of the *polis* is the good life for all *collectively*, he may very well mean that the *polis*' *telos* consists of the

*either* and instead suggests that (a) and (b) are mutually dependent. In other words, the collective good of the *polis* constitutes an equally essential (i.e., non-instrumental) aspect of the common good alongside the sum total of individual goods. On this account, the arrangement endemic to the *polis* is not an extrinsic cause of each individual's good but rather stands as a constituent part of our *eudaimonia*. As such, the good of the *polis*' arrangement is not dispensable in the way that the arrangements of merely instrumental *koinōniai* are. If, then, the *polis*' arrangement constitutes a non-instrumental good, it follows that there is some intrinsic aspect of the arrangement that is choiceworthy in itself—thus each individual member realizes an important aspect of their *eudaimonia* by participating in the *polis*' arrangement *in a particular way* corresponding to that specific aspect of the arrangement that is non-instrumentally valuable. In order to see what this aspect of the *polis*' arrangement might be, we first need to determine more precisely what kind of *koinōnia* the *polis* is and what constitutes its final end. With Aristotle's whole-part conception in mind, I turn now to that discussion.

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separate advantages of its members; but he must at least be referring to the good of the arrangement as well. I therefore assume that “the good life for all collectively” includes both aspects of the common good, (a) and (b), as component parts of the *polis*' final end. Why this is the case is the main focus of section III.



### III. THE COMMON GOOD OF THE *POLIS*

The notion that political arrangements themselves are essential components of the common good of the *polis* largely derives from Aristotle's claim that human beings are by nature political animals. Aristotle offers two different (yet complementary) accounts of what it means to be a *zōon politikon*. The first comes from the *History of Animals* where Aristotle classifies various kinds of animals according to their particular ways of life and their actions (*HA*.I.487b33-4). Among gregarious animals, for instance, Aristotle distinguishes between those that live together in scattered groups from political animals that live in more cooperative communities and "have as their function (*ergon*) some single thing that they all do together" (*HA*.I.488a7). It is to this latter group that Aristotle claims human beings—along with bees, wasps, ants, and cranes—belong since our way of life always or for the most part involves working together with others in some kind of *koinōnia*. The second account comes directly from the *Politics* where Aristotle says that human beings are political animals in a *higher degree* than other gregarious animals since humans alone possess *logos*. This faculty of reasoned speech, Aristotle continues, enables us to communicate and deliberate about "what is advantageous" or just in regards to our common life with one another, and it is "community in these things" which makes a *polis* (*Pol*.I.1253a7-17). When taken with the account offered in the *History of Animals*, Aristotle's claim that we are *more* political than other gregarious animals shows that our capacity for *logos* allows us to organize our various differentiated functions into a common activity of maintaining complex *koinōniai*.<sup>14</sup> It is for this reason why Aristotle thinks that human beings are especially suited for life in *poleis*.

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<sup>14</sup> For more on this point, see Cooper (1990), *ibid.*, p. 227. Yack, on the other hand, rejects the *History of Animals*' account of our political nature in favor of the one offered in the *Politics*. According to him, the *History of Animals* passage supports the idea that political communities are "characterized by the subordination of individual to common ends" (p.51). He then claims that on this interpretation Aristotle cannot say that human beings are *more* political than other animals since other animals, e.g., bees and ants, subordinate themselves to common ends more

This account of our political nature explains why the *polis*, at least according to Aristotle, is the most complete or *teleion koinōnia*. Human beings, Aristotle observes, are not self-sufficient when situated entirely by ourselves, and so we must enter into association with others in order to procure the necessary means of subsistence. To be a political animal, then, is to be an essentially relative being—we can hardly live *at all*, let alone live *well*, unless we live with others.<sup>15</sup> But Aristotle is certainly aware that simply living together does not entail the kind of life involved at the level of the political *koinōnia*. In fact Aristotle recognizes two *koinōniai* that are prior (in generation) to the *polis*. The first *koinōnia* is the household which exists by nature in order to satisfy daily recurrent needs. As Hannah Arendt argues, the distinctive feature of the household, at least from a pre-political perspective, is that its members are “driven by their wants and needs” and that necessity rules “over all activities performed in it.”<sup>16</sup> But when several households interact with one another they establish some broader economic arrangement, i.e., a village, which can provide for *more* than just the necessary means of subsistence, presumably on account of an increase in the productivity of labor (*Pol.*I.1252b13-9). These preliminary *koinōniai*, then, continue to grow concurrently with the increasing wants and needs of their members until eventually they achieve economic self-sufficiency, thereby constituting a *polis*.

So a characteristic feature of the political *koinōnia* is that it provides its members with a more adequate level of external goods through a greater social division of labor than that of other, less complete *koinōniai*. But Aristotle goes further, for he says that while the *polis* initially comes into being for the sake of mere life, it *continues to exist* for the sake of the good life

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than humans do. Thus if human beings are more political than other species, the political community “must have some other meaning than devotion to a common end” (p. 52).

This interpretation, however, fails to address the fact that in almost every instance where he discusses the common good of the *polis*, Aristotle is careful to mention *both* the common good of the parts *and* the common good of the whole; see, e.g., *Pol.*III.1278b17-24, VII.1323b31-1324a1, 1325b15-16. Moreover, a community organized around a single common good does not entail a subordination of individual to common ends that Yack suggests. For it may be the case that the good condition of a *koinōnia*'s arrangement requires its parts to have their own individual goods as well. For instance, an ecosystem defined by active parts contributing to the whole process or cycle can have a common good in virtue of that ecosystem's continued functioning with each part following their own specific ends; that does not require any one part of the ecosystem, however, to subordinate its own ends to the ecosystem's overall arrangement.

<sup>15</sup> Things which imply and active and a passive capacity, Aristotle argues, are relative because “their very essence includes in its nature a reference to something else” (*Met.*Δ.1021a15-29). But humans are not just relative in the sense that we depend on others for mere life; rather, we depend on others for a *good* life. Similarly, Marx claims that the human being, because it is a political and not merely a gregarious animal, can “individuate itself only in the midst of society”; see *Grundrisse*, p. 223 in Robert C. Tucker (ed.) *The Marx-Engels Reader 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*, W.W. Norton & Company, 1978.

<sup>16</sup> See Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, 1958, Ch. II, sec. 5, p. 30.

(*Pol.I.1252b31-2*). In other words, Aristotle thinks that the *polis* not only secures various instrumental goods for the sake of mere living but additionally provides us with the conditions to achieve *eudaimonia*. That the *polis* is directly concerned with our highest good is, according to Aristotle, a consequence of our political nature:

It has been stated, in our first book [...] that “man is a political animal”. For this reason people desire to live a social life even when they stand in no need of mutual succor; but they are also drawn together by a common interest (*to koinēi sumpheron*), in proportion as each attains a share in the good life. The good life is the chief end (*telos*), both for the *koinōnia* as a whole and for each of us individually (*Pol.III.1278b17-24*)

Here again Aristotle distinguishes between (a) the good life for each of the *polis*' parts and (b) the good life of the *polis* as a whole. But as I mentioned earlier, this alone does not entail that the final end of the *polis* primarily includes the *polis*' collective arrangement, for it may well be that political arrangements merely facilitate our individual well-being. If, however, the good life for each of us essentially consists in actively participating and sharing in the *polis*' specific arrangement, then it will turn out that the good of a *polis*' parts and the good of the whole are interrelated.

From Aristotle's whole-part conception we know that the nature of a *koinōnia* as a whole is contingent on both the nature of its parts and the way in which those parts stand in relation to the whole. Just as specific words ordered in accordance with grammar and syntax produce a distinctive sentence, so too does a group of individuals in conjunction with a corresponding set of relationships produce a distinctive *koinōnia*. Since, then, Aristotle claims that the *polis* is primarily composed of citizens (*politai*), we must consider how he connects the essential characteristics of citizenship to the final end of the *polis* (*Pol.III.1274b40*).<sup>17</sup> According to Aristotle, the citizen (*politēs*) is strictly defined as anyone who has a share “in the administration of justice and the holding of office”—that is, anyone who has an actual position of power within the *polis*, including the “indeterminate” offices of the members of the council and the popular assembly (*Pol.III.1275a21-25*). Aristotle therefore construes citizenship in terms of actual functioning and thereby limits the *polis*' civic body (*politeuma*) to the *koinōnia*'s politically

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<sup>17</sup> In Book I Aristotle defines the *polis* as composed primarily of households whereas in Book III he defines the *polis* as primarily composed of citizens. Interestingly enough, these two accounts of the *polis*' primary structure are not mutually exclusive; in fact the household and the citizen were in many important respects synonymous at the level of Ancient Greek *polis*. To be a citizen was to be the head of the household.

active members. Aristotle then concludes that the *polis* in its *most proper sense* directly coincides with the *politeuma* (*Pol.III.1275b17-20*).<sup>18</sup>

At this point, however, I must pause to draw attention to Aristotle's distinction between the politically active citizens and the politically disenfranchised non-citizens, a distinction which I consider to be one of the most decisive assumptions Aristotle makes in the *Politics*. It initially comes to view after Aristotle discusses the relations of the household in which a master (*despotēs*) rules over his wife and slaves, and Aristotle returns to it later on when he attempts to ascertain the identity of the political *koinōnia*. From his teleological argument Aristotle concludes that the *polis* is composed of households, villages, and other less complete *koinōniai* standing in certain relations to one another. So on the one hand, because these subordinate *koinōniai* are partly composed of non-citizen members, Aristotle concedes that the *polis* must in some sense extend to these individuals as well. But he thinks that these non-citizen groups either completely lack the ability to deliberate (*to bouleutikon*) and live according to choice (*proairesis*) or possess this capacity but (for whatever reason) only in a form which "lacks authority" and so are unable to properly exercise the deliberative and judicial functions requisite for citizenship (*Pol.I.1260a12-6*). Conversely, Aristotle argues that the *polis*' free-born (male) inhabitants fully possess the capacity to deliberate and choose, and so he maintains that these members essentially "constitute the being of the *polis*" through their political activity (*Pol.III.1283a15*).

For now I wish to leave aside questions regarding Aristotle's justification for the exclusion of certain groups from citizenship. The important point here is that in making this distinction Aristotle effectively recognizes as a *politikē koinōnia* two very distinct social entities—the *polis* as a *koinōnia* of politically active citizens (i.e., the "politico-*polis*") and the *polis* as a broader social sphere cohabited by both citizens and non-citizens alike (i.e., the "geo-

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<sup>18</sup> Aristotle recognizes that this strict definition does not apply to all cases; e.g., in some *poleis* different members hold office for only a limited term and so are not constantly engaged in political activity. Rather than argue that these members are not actually citizens, Aristotle instead amends his original definition by claiming that the citizen is more generally defined as anyone "who is *entitled (exousia)* to share in deliberative or judicial office," thus shifting the requirements from actual functioning to capability (*Pol.III.1275b17-20*). As Irwin notes, Aristotle's addendum to his original definition of citizenship is meant to maintain his first definition but show that "it applies only to some degree in non-democratic constitutions"; see Irwin, "The Good of Political Activity" in Günther Patzig (ed.), *Aristoteles' 'Politik'*, 1990, p. 82.

*polis*”).<sup>19</sup> As we will see, Aristotle makes good use of this distinction, for it allows him to separate the common good of the politico-*polis*—that is, the common good of the citizens—from the common good of the broader geo-*polis*. The reason I mention this distinction here, however, is simply to clarify that when Aristotle refers to the final end or *telos* of the *polis*, he almost certainly has in mind the common good of the politico-*polis*. So for the moment I assume with Aristotle that the *polis*—along with the common good it achieves—extends *only* to those politically active members. I will therefore address the issue of non-citizens in more detail after I make Aristotle’s initial point more clear.

Focusing specifically on Aristotle’s restrictive account of the *polis*, we can now examine the connection Aristotle draws between the active life of citizenship and the good life. As Aristotle argues, the *polis* is primarily composed of citizens who engage in various political functions. But to the extent that these functions differ in kind, it would seem that each citizen exhibits a different sort of excellence corresponding to their particular function. Whereas the excellence of a juryman, for instance, consists in good judgement, the excellence of a member of the popular assembly consists in good deliberation, and so *prima facie* these two citizens do not possess a common excellence. But if we hold, as Aristotle certainly does, that the *polis*’ specific arrangement benefits its members in some way, then each of its parts must preserve this arrangement so as to remain a recipient of the peculiar benefits the *polis* confers. That is, even though the *polis*’ individual members exercise different functions, the final end which they *all* serve is “the safety of the *koinōnia*” (*Pol.*III.1276b26-8). So Aristotle concludes that there is indeed a single excellence common to all the citizens insofar as they individually aim at preserving the *koinōnia*’s overall arrangement through the continued exercise of their respective functions. In particular, Aristotle claims that the common function characteristic of citizenship involves cooperatively sharing and maintaining positions of political power. And since these positions of power are organized and distributed according to the specific nature of the constitution or *politeia*, Aristotle concludes that the excellence of the citizen “must be an excellence relative to the *politeia*” (*Pol.*III.1276b30-1).

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<sup>19</sup> I borrow this distinction from Josiah Ober; see “The *Polis* as a Society: Aristotle, John Rawls and the Athenian Social Contract” in Hansen (ed.), *The Ancient Greek City-State*, 1993, pp. 129-60, esp. p. 132-133. The geo-*polis* refers to the geographical or territorial space of a *polis*, including many non-citizens and peasants who did not partake in political affairs. The politico-*polis*, on the other hand, is exclusively composed of citizens.

If this is the case, however, then an individual's final end *qua* citizen does not necessarily correspond to their final end *qua* human being. For Aristotle holds that human beings are called good in reference to a single absolute excellence (*Pol.*III.1276b33). It is therefore incumbent on Aristotle to show whether the excellence of the citizen in some *poleis* is equivalent to the excellence of a good man. For if these two excellences coincide, the final end of the citizen, *viz.* active participation in the *polis*, will turn out to be, as Jennifer Whiting puts it, unconditionally or categorically good for us in a way that participation in other *ateleis koinōnīai* is not.<sup>20</sup> But when Aristotle first considers this question he initially concludes that the excellence of the citizen and that of the good man are not the same. The good man, he argues, is a good ruler and thus possesses practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) whereas the citizen “does not need to have *phronēsis*” but instead only requires “right opinion” (*Pol.*III.1277a15-6). Although somewhat misleading, Aristotle's argument here is nonetheless straightforward. As we have seen, Aristotle defines citizenship in functional terms—the citizens are those who share in the *politeia* through the exercise of deliberative and judicial functions and other political activities besides. As such, the citizens must know *both* how to rule (*archein*) and how to be ruled (*prattein*). That is, they must exercise their political activities cooperatively and in conjunction with other citizens, and so the excellence of the citizen consists in both “ruling and obeying well” (*Pol.*III.1277a26). If, then, the excellence of the good man consists only in ruling while that of the good citizen consists in both ruling and obeying, it follows that these two excellences “cannot be held in the same esteem” (*Pol.*III.1277a27-8).

But this conclusion does not satisfy Aristotle since it fails to distinguish between the two kinds of rule or *archē* which a citizen may exercise, namely, masterly (i.e., despotic) and political rule. The former, Aristotle argues, concerns ruling over slaves and other manual laborers who live “by the work of their hands” and perform menial services related to the necessary functions in life (*Pol.*III.1277a32-b1). The master who exercises this despotic sort of

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<sup>20</sup> Unconditional or categorical goods are those that Aristotle takes to be determined by something's membership in a natural kind and not by that thing's accidental (i.e. non-essential) properties; see Whiting, “Aristotle's Function Argument: A Defense,” *Ancient Philosophy*, 1988, pp. 33-48, especially sec. II, pp. 35-7. If, for instance, my being a member of the human race entails that I am an essentially political animal, then living in a *polis* of some sort is intrinsically and non-instrumentally good for me regardless of my idiosyncratic beliefs, desires, or interests. Now this is not to say that everything achieved by political *koinōnīai* can be validated by appeal to human nature. But if Aristotle is correct, it does show that there are at least some things inherent to political life that are good for me regardless of my individual interests.

rule therefore does not need to know how to perform these actions himself—instead he must simply “know how to command what the slave must know how to do” (*Pol.I.1255b34*). The latter sort of rule, on the other hand, is exercised over “those who are similar (*homoioi*) in birth to the ruler, and are similarly free” (*Pol.III.1277b7-9*). In order to properly exercise this sort of rule, Aristotle adds, the ruler must first learn how to be ruled. For by acting towards the citizens as an equal the political ruler expresses his or her willingness to be ruled by them in turn. So the political ruler—in contrast with a master-craftsmen or *architektōn* who in isolation directs an operation and whose thought alone is embodied in what is done—neither “creates from nothing nor moves in the turbid void of his own desires” but instead moves and acts within a public sphere composed of active social relations, limited by material conditions, and governed by laws and customs.<sup>21</sup> That is, the statesman or *politikos*, as opposed to Aristotle’s unmoved mover, cannot initiate motion without also being moved. Political rule, then, is in a sense inherently instructive, a sort of positive feedback mechanism whereby an individual is taught or habituated to exercise *phronēsis* in a certain way and by exercising it subsequently teaches others in turn.

Moreover, Aristotle considers the exercise of political rule to be something noble or fine (*to kalon*) and hence choiceworthy in itself whereas masterly rule “has nothing fine about it” (*Pol.VII.1325a25*).<sup>22</sup> That is because Aristotle claims that actions differ from one another in goodness according to the “end or object for which they are done” (*Pol.VII.1333a5-11*). So while good action is itself an end, the end of masterly rule is not directly realized in its activity. Rather, the *despotēs* exercises masterly rule in order to escape from the nature-imposed necessity of the household by appropriating the labor-power of slaves. The productivity of slaves in ancient antiquity, then, did not result so much in material products as it did in the “potential productivity” of their masters, i.e., the freedom of their masters to enter the political realm.<sup>23</sup> The rule of a master is therefore exercised for the sake of further activities made possible by the

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<sup>21</sup> Gramsci, *The Modern Prince & Other Writings*, trans. Louis Marks, International Publishers, 1957, p. 163. Hannah Arendt makes a similar statement in regards to political (as opposed to masterly) rule, saying that the *politikos* “always moves in relation to other acting beings” and so is “never merely a ‘doer’ but always and at the same time a sufferer”; *ibid.*, Ch. V, sec. 26, pp. 188-192. The point here is that the *politikos* is intimately connected to the environment in which he or she acts in a way that the *despotēs* is not.

<sup>22</sup> For more on how noble or fine things (*kala*) fit into Aristotle’s classification of goods, see Tuozzo, *ibid.*, pp. 304-309. The concept of *to kalon* is undoubtedly connected to Aristotle’s conception of leisure or the freedom from the necessities of life; see, e.g., *Rhet.I.1367a28-32*.

<sup>23</sup> Arendt, *ibid.*, Ch. III, sec. 11, p. 87. This fact probably explains why Aristotle says that the slave is “a servant in the sphere of action (*praxis*)” rather than production (*poiēsis*) (*Pol.I.1254a1-7*).

surplus-labor of others. Political rule, on the other hand, is the expression of practical wisdom related to one's common life with others. This sort of rule therefore aims at its own "reproduction", so to speak, insofar as the *politikos* is concerned with making other citizens capable of exercising political rule in turn. In other words, political rule aims at preserving the *polis*' common way of life. And since the *politikos* requires *phronēsis* in order to properly exercise political activities, it follows that the excellence of the citizen is the same as that of the good man when and only when the excellence of the citizen consists in exercising political rule.

This is why Aristotle claims that only correct or natural *politeiai* actually exist for the sake of the common good (and here I am still following Aristotle in referring only to the politico-*polis*). For he says that correct *politeiai* are those in which the rulers exercise *political* rule and thus are primarily concerned with the good of their fellow-citizens whereas deviant or unnatural *politeiai* are those in which the rulers aim at their own personal benefit (*Pol.III.1279a16-20*). Such unnatural *politeiai*, Aristotle argues, are despotic because the rulers do not share political power—hence the arrangements of these *politeiai* are *primarily directed* towards the interests of the rulers (*Pol.III.1279a21*). The arrangements of correct *politeiai*, on the other hand, aim at the common good because each member shares in both ruling and being ruled, and so all the members stand to benefit from the association *in the same way* (though not necessarily to the same degree). That is, the citizens derive benefit from a correctly constituted *polis* by exercising political rule with and towards other citizens—their collective agency entails their collective benefit. The final end of the citizen in this instance therefore consist in actively contributing to the good condition of the *koinōnia* as a whole. To the extent that this participation involves the exercise of political rule, the citizens of correct *politeiai* are also (presumably) good men.

If this is correct, then it would seem that there are certain political arrangements choiceworthy in themselves such that we realize an important aspect of our *eudaimonia* by participating in them.<sup>24</sup> But in what way is the non-instrumental good of the *polis*' arrangement

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<sup>24</sup> Recall that if x exists for the sake of y, then x is either an instrumental means to y or x is a component part of y. According to Aristotle's whole-part conception, the common good of every *koinōnia* refers to both (a) the sum total of individual goods belonging separately to each of its parts and (b) the overall arrangement of parts which further includes (b1) the relations each part stands to one another and (b2) the relations in which each part stands to the whole. Since everyone acts with a view to what they perceive as a good (*EN.I.1094a1-2*), we can assume that the final end of every *koinōnia* includes *at least* the separate goods of its individual parts and further that any given arrangement *at least* exists for the sake of this end, i.e.,  $x=(b)$  and  $y=(a)$ . Now for most *ateleis koinōniai*, x stands to y as a *merely* instrumental good, hence  $y\neq(b)$ . But because Aristotle claims that correct *politeiai* are those in which



*common* to its members, and to whom is it common? The distinction Aristotle draws between correct and deviant *politeiai* goes some way in providing us with an answer. According to Aristotle, every *koinōnia* is a product that is “jointly produced” by the activities of its parts, and in regards to the *polis* Aristotle claims that these parts consist of rulers and ruled (*Pol.I.1254a24-29*, *VII.1326b13-14*). The form of this product—the *politeia*—therefore represents the relationship between rulers and ruled, a relationship which Aristotle claims is “not only necessary, but also beneficial” (*Pol.I.1254a21*). This relationship thus stands as the fundamental element of every political arrangement. But there is a decisive qualification to the benefit this relationship confers at the level of the *polis*, namely, that it derives from the activities of the ruler. That is because Aristotle defines the *polis* as the “most sovereign and inclusive” *koinōnia* insofar as it directs the activities of both its various sub-communities and its individual parts (*Pol.I.1252a4-6*). This self-sufficient and authoritative aspect of the *polis* makes it a “product” of rational deliberation rather than a product of accident or chance unlike the earlier *koinōniai* from which it grew.

The rulers of a *polis*, then, can confer a first-order good on their subjects only by allowing them to share in this authoritative aspect. And if they do so, the rulers must necessarily be ruled by their subjects in turn. Hence the *polis*’ common good *qua* arrangement obtains between the members of a political *koinōnia* only if they stand in the same relation to the whole. So a correctly constituted *polis* exists for the sake of the common good because each citizen is enabled by the *politeia* to share in the authoritative good that the *polis* achieves. Up to this point, however, I have left vague many important aspects of Aristotle’s constitutional theory, so perhaps we can better understand the implications of Aristotle’s argument by looking more closely at how he conceives of *politeiai* generally.

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the good citizen is also a good man, these arrangements are not merely instrumental. If, then, human beings are by nature political animals; if the excellence of the political ruler is the same as the excellence of the good man; and if correct *politeiai* are characterized by the exercise of political rule, it follows that our *eudaimonia* is contingent on participating in these arrangements; so in this instance,  $y=(a)$  and (b).

#### IV. ARISTOTLE'S CONSTITUTIONAL THEORY

For Aristotle, the *politeia* constitutes the form in virtue of which the *polis* is able to perform its function—hence the nature of a given *polis* derives from its *politeia* (*Pol.I.1253a22*). So in addition to classifying the *polis* as a species of *koinōnia*, Aristotle holds that the *polis* is itself a genus under which are subsumed various *polis*-forms which differ in kind according to their particular constitutional arrangements:

A constitution (*politeia*) may be defined as the organization (*taxis*) of the *polis* in respect of its offices generally, but especially in respect of that particular office which is sovereign on all issues. The civic body (*politeuma*) is the sovereign of the *polis*; in fact, the civic body is the *politeia* itself. In democratic *politeis*, for example, the people (*dēmos*) is sovereign; in oligarchies, on the other hand, the few (*oligoi*) have that position; and this difference in the sovereign bodies is the reason why we say that the two types of *politeia* differ (*Pol.III.1278b8-12*)

Although Aristotle here seems especially focused on defining the *politeia* in terms of the *polis*' formal political structure, he argues elsewhere that the *politeia* has a more comprehensive role in determining “the nature of the end to be pursued by the *koinōnia* and all its members” (*Pol.IV.1289a15*). According to Josiah Ober, the *politeia* therefore includes the *polis*' legal arrangement of institutions by which formal political power is distributed as well as the ideological hegemony and socioeconomic practices promoted by the authoritative (*kurion*) element of the *polis*, viz. the *politeuma*.<sup>25</sup>

From this it is clear that the activities of the citizens must be commensurate with the character of their *politeia* if the *polis* is to remain the same. So by acting in accordance with the *politeia*, the citizens subsequently produce and maintain a specific mode of interaction common to the *polis*' parts. And since Aristotle argues that the *polis* is the most complete or *teleion*

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 131. Ober defines ideology as the “set of ideas sufficiently well organized to facilitate decision and action” while political ideology is the subset of ideology that “relates to the political sphere”; see Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*, Princeton University Press, 1989, Ch. I, sec. D, p. 39.

*koinōnia*, the particular mode of interaction propagated by the *politeuma* stands on an altogether different level than that of its various sub-communities. That is, the *modus operandi* of the *politeia* does not exist alongside other arrangements as a separate domain but rather encompasses and defines the sum total of relations within a given social sphere. Aristotle further observes that these social relations are fixed by laws (*nomoi*) which generally conform to the nature of the *politeia*. To the extent that our individual characters are shaped and habituated by our external conditions such as the laws and customs of our respective communities, the *politeia* also helps to coordinate the *life-activities* of a *polis*' members—hence Aristotle describes the *politeia* as an established way of life (*bios tis*) of the *polis* (*Pol.IV.1295b1*). The central good achieved by political *koinōniai* therefore resides in actually sharing in the *polis*' way of life, i.e., sharing in the ability to actively determine “the conduct of public affairs” through the relations of the *politeia* (*Pol.III.1278b5*).<sup>26</sup>

Because the *politeia* has the comprehensive role of shaping our individual dispositions and characters, Aristotle's constitutional theory occupies a central place in his ethical schema. The good life, Aristotle argues, consists in the activity of *logos* in accordance with virtue (*EN.I.1098a16-17*). In order for an action to be virtuous, however, the agent must not only choose the action for its own sake but must also act “from a firm and unchangeable character (*ēthos*)” (*EN.II.1105a30-b1*). Virtuous action, then, requires for its exercise some corresponding disposition or *hexis*, e.g., an individual can exercise courageous action only if she possesses the disposition of courage. This contingency leads Aristotle to conclude that although we are “adapted by nature” to develop virtuous characters (which are sets of *hexeis*), the moral virtues do not arise in us by nature (*EN.II.1103a24-25*). To illustrate this difference, Aristotle contrasts the virtues with the natural upward movement of fire which cannot be habituated to move downwards, “nor can anything else that by nature behaves in one way” (*EN.II.1103a23-24*). Human beings, on the other hand, possess a specific set of capacities (*dunameis*) that act as two-way powers capable of being directed in one way or another (*Met.θ.1051a5-14*). These bare capacities exist initially in a neutral form and can develop into a certain moral *ēthos* only through

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<sup>26</sup> For more on the claim that the final end of the *polis* consist in the exercise of political rule, see Cooper, “Political Community and the Highest Good” in James G. Lennox and Robert Bolton (eds.) *Being, Nature, and Life in Aristotle*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 226. I follow Aristotle in thinking of political leadership not just in terms of formal political functions but in a much broader, “indeterminate” sense in which an individual has the power to decide how to live in conjunction with others.

a kind of learning or habituation. Each individual therefore has a first potentiality to develop some kind of virtuous character, and the acquisition of a virtuous character thereby constitutes a first actuality (second potentiality) or *entelechia*. The actions which proceed from this first entelechy, namely, *energeiai*, are full expressions (or second actualities) of developed capacities, and the exercise of moral virtue falls within this category.<sup>27</sup>

So we cannot exercise virtuous actions unless we already possess a virtuous character; and a virtuous character, in turn, requires for its development some kind of compulsive force or habituation. But as Aristotle goes on to say, the sort of habituation needed to develop our natural capacities in the right way requires compulsive power beyond that of any one individual. This is due, I suspect, to the general observation that our characters—and, consequently, our actions—are affected and shaped by the broader social conditions in which we live. The source of our habituation, then, must be something which applies to a larger social sphere, and this authoritative source, Aristotle claims, is *nomos* which “has compulsive power, while it is at the same time an account proceeding from a sort of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) and intellect (*nous*)” (*EN*.X.1180a14-20). So Aristotle concludes that laws must be framed towards habituating the citizens to develop a certain kind of character.

Aristotle then goes on to say that the characters formed by the laws of a *polis* ought to be those that accord with its *politeia*. It should be noted, however, that this particular endorsement (at least in my view) is not so much a normative judgement as it is a practical consideration for how best to preserve political *koinōnīai* in the face of constitutional change (*metabolē*) and intra-state conflict (*stasis*)—if the members of the *polis* wish to preserve their association, it is necessary that they continue to act and enforce the rules and customs peculiar to their *politeia*:

The greatest, however, of all the means we have been mentioned for ensuring the stability of *politeiai*—but one which is nowadays generally neglected—is the education of citizens in the spirit of their *politeia*. There is no advantage in the best of laws, even when they are sanctioned by general civic consent, if the citizens themselves have not been attuned, by the force of habit and the influence of teaching, to the right constitutional temper—which will be the temper of democracy where the laws are democratic, and where they are oligarchical will be that of oligarchy (*Pol*.V.1310a12-20)

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<sup>27</sup> To use an example from the *De Anima*, the bare capacity to act either virtuously or viciously is similar to an individual’s capacity to acquire knowledge simply in virtue of the fact that she “falls within the class of beings that know or have knowledge” (*DA*.II.417a24-25). This first potentiality, however, is different from the potentiality of someone who actually has knowledge (or a virtuous character) but is not using it. Virtuous action itself, then, is analogous to someone who is already reflecting and is “a knower in actuality and in the most proper sense is knowing” (*DA*.II.417a28-30).

Notice how Aristotle says that even the best laws cannot be advantageous unless the citizens possess the right kind of character. For instance, if, due to a general disdain for wealth, the citizens of an oligarchy refuse to accept as legitimate an oligarch's claim to rule based on property holdings, then the laws of this *polis*, even if they are just, have nonetheless been established in vain. So the laws, political offices, and various economic relations seem to function in a certain sense as kinds of two-way powers similar to those of undeveloped capacities.

Taking this a step further, the way in which these material and cultural *dunameis* are integrated or "directed" into a whole—that is, the way in which they form a specific *politeia*—is analogous to the development of a stable character, albeit one which extends over a collection of individuals. The arrangement of the *polis*, then, is not some amorphous and unorganized heap of laws and institutions. On the contrary, the form of the *polis* is more like an *entelechia*, a first actuality—as such, every *polis* actively expresses some definite material and cultural milieu from which proceeds a certain kind of collective action, a particular way of life. In other words, a *politeia*'s specific arrangement of laws, institutions, and material resources conditions the *polis*' general mode of interaction and directs, by either coercive or cooperative means, the continued functioning of the citizen body towards some goal. The final end or aim of the citizen therefore centers on not only partaking in political functions but also on actively preserving the way of life established by the *polis*' arrangement.

To that end, the arrangement of the *polis* does not dissolve once it achieves its *telos*. Rather, the *polis*' ultimate end or aim resides in the actualization of the *politeia* viz. the collective action of the *politeuma*. And since the *polis*' common good *qua* arrangement is a common way of life predicated on various relations, those who primarily stand to benefit from this common good—i.e., those for whom this way of life exists—must be related to the *politeia* in the same way. To see how this is so, it might be helpful to contrast the *polis* with a *koinōnia* whose arrangement is merely instrumental to achieving some further end. Take, for instance, two individuals, A and B, who are both the sole members of a ship, and assume that A is permanently a ruler whereas B is always ruled. As mentioned before, the arrangement of a ship is merely instrumental for bringing about the *koinōnia*'s *telos*. Hence the arrangement is incomplete and disbands once the ship arrives at its destination. But while the ship is in motion, both parts view the arrangement as a temporary good that they share in common. So although they stand in an

asymmetrical relationship to one another and to the whole, this does not preclude A and B from both sharing in the end in the same way. For the end is not the ship's particular arrangement but rather the individual goods that the arrangement procures. And even when the ship is in the process of reaching its destination, A and B still share the good of the arrangement in common since the relationship is purely instrumental—that is, although they stand in different relations to the whole, they can still derive the same instrumental benefit.

The arrangement of a correctly constituted *polis*, however, is not merely instrumental for some further end. The good life is the end of the *polis*, and this end—both for each of us individually and for the *polis* collectively—consists in sharing in the *politeia*. The various offices, institutions, and other cultural and material resources are used to “sustain” the *politeia* by enabling those who share in it to exercise political activity and thereby direct the *polis*' way of life. To clarify, consider four individuals, A, B, C, and D, who together form a political *koinōnia* and who are all willing and able to exercise political authority. Further assume that at time  $t_1$  both A and B hold formal positions of political power—as such, A and B must act cooperatively with one another so as to not undermine each other's decisions or respective political functions. So A and B stand as both rulers and ruled relative to one another while also standing as rulers to the overall arrangement—i.e., (b1) and (b2) are the same in kind for A and B.<sup>28</sup> As a group, then, A and B internally exercise political rule. Members C and D, on the other hand, do not hold formal positions of power at  $t_1$ , and so we can at least conclude that (b1) is not the same between groups (A,B) and (C,D). But suppose that at some future time  $t_2$  A and B choose to give their political authority to C and D. In that instance, A and B rule at  $t_1$  in order to ensure that C and D exercise good political rule at  $t_2$ .<sup>29</sup> To the extent that these two groups are parts of the ruling class (either actually or potentially), they all stand in the same relation to the *politeia*, i.e., (b2) is

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<sup>28</sup> Here again I define (b1) as the relations in which each part stands to the other parts and (b2) as the relations in which each part stands to the whole. The distinction is important since, as this example shows, it is not necessary for (b1) to be the same in kind for a *polis*' members in order for them to share in the common good of the arrangement. Instead, the arrangement of a *polis* constitutes a single good that can be shared in common only by those members for whom (b2) is the same. So although the relations between, e.g., the members of the popular assembly differ from the relations between the members of the judiciary, they all share in the common good of the whole insofar as they actually share in the *politeia*.

<sup>29</sup> Even if A and B do not properly ensure that C and D become good political rulers, the mere fact that they abdicate their positions of power is sufficient for C and D to share in the *polis*' common good *qua* arrangement since they will have a share in the *politeia*.

the same in kind. Thus A and B allow for the *polis*' arrangement to become a good that is *common* to all the *koinōnia*'s members.

If, however, A and B permanently stand to the whole as rulers while C and D are always ruled, then it is not the case that they share the good of the overall arrangement *as such* in common. That is because A and B have a share in political power and are therefore able to partake in the activities constitutive of the *polis*' final end whereas C and D do not share in *this* good but stand outside of it, so to speak, as instrumental means—hence the arrangement as a whole is primarily directed towards the interests of the rulers.<sup>30</sup> This is not to say, of course, that C and D cannot receive *any* benefit from this arrangement; but unless they actually have a share in the *politeia*, C and D will be unable to fully realize their good because they do not have the opportunity to exercise certain moral and intellectual virtues when deciding how the *polis* functions—as such, their life ceases to be a product of joint deliberation that belongs to them. In this case, we must conclude that the good that C and D attain from the arrangement differs in kind from that of A and B.

Thus the non-instrumentality of the *polis* commits Aristotle to the view that those who share in the *polis*' common good stand to the whole in the same way. It follows that a *polis* which exhibits a significantly unequal distribution of political power does not, strictly speaking, achieve a good that is common to its members. Perhaps the best example of this is a tyranny in which a single person rules for the sake of his or her own interests. Such an arrangement, Aristotle argues, is not only the most unnatural of the despotic forms but also exists at the farthest remove “from a true *politeia*” (*Pol.IV.1289b3*). More specifically, consider what Aristotle says about a *polis* whose members no longer stand to the whole in the same way:

Thus there are those who are ignorant how to rule and only know how to obey, as if they were slaves, and, on the other hand, there are those who are ignorant how to obey any sort of authority and only know how to rule as if they were masters. The result is a *polis*, not of freemen, but only of slaves and masters: a state of envy on the one side and contempt on the other. Nothing could be further removed from the spirit of friendship or of a political *koinōnia* (*Pol.IV.1295b19-24*)

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<sup>30</sup> It might be said that this situation could be reversed such that A and B exercise political rule solely for the sake of C and D's own good; for instance, A and B could employ political power to secure enough leisure for C and D so that they can abstain from political duties and engage in contemplation. But because Aristotle attaches so much value to the exercise of political actions, I do not think that this reversal works. For if C and D completely abstained from political activities, then they would be failing to realize an essential part of their good even though they are capable of engaging in higher, contemplative activities.

This explains why deviant or unnatural *poleis* are especially liable to constitutional change and *stasis*. For Aristotle observes that an incorrect *polis* is characterized by rulers who pull the constitution towards their own interests. Under such circumstances, the various members of the *polis* no longer share in the *politeia* and so the association “dissolves” into either a “mere alliance” or a “state of faction” (*EN*.IX.1167b10-14, *Pol*.II.1272b13-17, III.1280b6-12). So the good of a given political arrangement is common only to those who actually have a share in the *politeia*.

It should therefore come as no surprise that Aristotle insists on separating the common good of the politico-*polis* from the common good of the broader social sphere which it inhabits. For if the politico-*polis*—that is, the *polis* in the strict sense—were to extend to the geo-*polis* as well, then all those who fall under the scope of this political sphere would have to share political power. So it is essential for Aristotle’s argument to restrict the *polis* to certain parts, i.e., the citizen body, for otherwise it would not be the case that the members of the *polis* stand to the *politeia* in the same way and hence it would not be the case that the citizens share in the common good of the *polis*’ arrangement. But what does it mean for the members of the *polis* to stand in the same relation to the *politeia*? As we have seen, Aristotle defines the *politeia* as the way in which the *polis* lives, and this way of life is in a sense synonymous with the composition of the *polis*’ civic body (*Pol*.III.1278b10-12). Since the primary agents of the *polis* are concurrently its primary beneficiaries through exercising political authority, the common good of the *polis* has a definite bounds which extends only to the members of the group who actively embody that authoritative way of life for the sake of which the *polis* exists.

So far, however, I have been speaking as if the authoritative element of the *polis*, namely, the *politeuma*, must direct the *polis*’ way of life through formal political institutions as traditionally conceived, e.g., deliberative or judicial offices. And while I think that these aspects of the *bios politikos* are certainly important, they are not the only way in which an individual or group can exert authority in the political realm. In fact, as Aristotle’s conception of the *politeia* shows, what rules over a given social sphere is not so much groups of individuals directly cooperating with one another as it is *nomos*, the prevailing custom or law of that society which determines the *polis*’ authoritative element. Moreover, the general law of a *polis* is not embodied in just a group of people but also—and perhaps more importantly—in an *arrangement* of people, that is, people who are positioned in definite relations to one another and to the association as a



whole so as to produce a common way of life.<sup>31</sup> And I submit that, according to Aristotle's political theory, the common way of life which ultimately directs the various activities of the *polis* is the way of life of the *economically dominant class*. For Aristotle rightly observes that the ruling class always seeks to have a "greater share in the *politeia*" and therefore rules for the sake of its own interests (*Pol.IV.1296a32*). If, then, a given social sphere embodies a class structure, it follows that the common good achieved by the ruling class cannot extend to any subordinate classes insofar as they stand in fundamentally different relations to the *politeia*. So before I focus on Aristotle's exclusion of non-citizen groups from the *polis*, it will be helpful to first turn to Marx's theory of class conflict in order to see what implications class structures have within the framework of Aristotle's whole-part conception.

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<sup>31</sup> That is why Aristotle claims that whenever the citizens rule and are ruled in turn, "such an arrangement is law" (*Pol.III.1287a17*). The law is the way in which the *polis*' relations are ordered into a whole.

## V. THE COMMON GOOD AND CLASS CONFLICT

According to Marx, the driving force of all social, political, and economic change is class conflict deriving from a specific historical mode of material production. As both Aristotle and Marx observe, human beings are continuously molded by the changing external conditions in which we live. But we cannot live at all without first securing the necessary means of subsistence, and so we are forced by necessity to act on the external world and appropriate “particular nature-given materials to particular human wants.”<sup>32</sup> And by acting on our physical environments we concurrently (albeit indirectly) produce our actual material life. So for Marx, the way in which human beings appropriate their external world results in a “definite mode of life” corresponding both “with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce.”<sup>33</sup> Marx then argues that with every mode of production there follows some concomitant mode of cooperation or social stage, e.g., wage-labor determines how buyers and sellers of labor-power generally interact with one another. Moreover, this mode of cooperation is itself a “productive force” which gives rise to a specific division of labor and, consequently, specific relations to production within that social system. The historic form of the social division of labor—that is, the way in which the various economic and cultural functions of a given society are distributed and organized—simultaneously determines the distribution of the products of labor, namely, property.

So the allocation of material resources (and the socio-political *dunameis* that it affords) corresponds to the prior established distribution of both the instruments of production and the members of society into different economic classes. From this it is clear that the distribution of the products of labor, e.g., wealth, property, leisure, etc., is the *result* of class divisions. But although this describes the general process of how classes develop and operate, we might still

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<sup>32</sup> *Capital Vol. I*, Pt. I, Ch. I, sec. 2, *ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>33</sup> *The German Ideology*, Pt. A, *ibid.*, p. 150.

ask what exactly constitutes a class. According to Lenin, classes are largely defined by their relations to production and the actions which those relations entail:

Classes are large groups of people which differ from each other by the place they occupy in a historically determined system of social production, by their relation (in most cases fixed and formulated by law) to the means of production, by their role in the social organization of labor, and, consequently, by the mode of acquisition and the dimensions of the sphere of social wealth of which they dispose. Classes are groups of people one of which can appropriate the labor of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy (from *A Great Beginning*)<sup>34</sup>

G.E.M. de Ste. Croix expands on this definition by emphasizing the exploitative nature of class structures. According to Ste. Croix, the distinguishing feature of each mode of production is not so much how production is done as how the dominant classes “ensure the extraction of the surplus which makes their own leisured existence possible” though their control over the conditions of production.<sup>35</sup> Hence class, insofar as it represents a relationship, can be defined as the collective social expression of the fact of exploitation, the way in which exploitation—that is, the “appropriation of part of the product of the labor of others”—is embedded in a given society’s laws, institutions, and cultural practices.<sup>36</sup> A particular class, then, is a group of individuals who stand in a certain position to the whole system of social production whereby at least one class, typically by means of their control over material production, is able to extract the surplus-labor of another class (or classes) and consequently establish itself as an economically and socially superior class. On this account, status and political power mostly derives from an individual’s relation to the economic system of production.

Turning now from general to specific, the means of production in Ancient Greek society largely consisted in land and unfree (slave) labor with the *oikos* or household standing as the

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<sup>34</sup> See V.I. Lenin, *A Great Beginning* in *Marx-Engels Marxism*, Foreign Language Press, 1978. This definition is widely considered to be the standard Marxist definition of class. It is important to note, however, that class is a particularly difficult concept to define, especially since the productive forces of society constantly change. For the problems involved with different conceptions of class, see Elster, “Three Challenges to Class,” in John Roemer (ed.), *Analytical Marxism*, Cambridge University Press, 1986. For instance, Elster argues that a definition based on relations to production does not sufficiently distinguish between “landlords and capitalists, nor between a small capitalist and a wage laborer who owns some of the means of production” (p. 143). Instead, Elster prefers to define classes in terms of the activities that a group is compelled to engage in based on their specific economic endowments, e.g., buying or selling labor-power (this definition, however, also involves certain difficulties when applied to pre-capitalist societies). Even so, I accept the definition offered by Lenin and believe it to be applicable in ancient economies. For more on the difficulties of applying Marxist concepts of class to Ancient Greek society, see G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, Cornell University Press, 1981, Ch. II, pp. 31-111.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. II, sec. (iii), p. 52.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. II, sec. (ii), pp. 42-49.

“primary productive unit” of the *polis*.<sup>37</sup> Wealth was quantified as capital in land upon which was cultivated agricultural products alongside the pasturing of livestock. The majority of the population engaged in production were small peasants and other freemen who had to work on for themselves without much property. But because Ancient Greece never reached a particularly high level of technological development (at least in regards to agricultural production), these small and independent producers almost always “worked at or near subsistence level” and were therefore unable to enjoy any significant amount of freedom or leisure.<sup>38</sup> So a comfortable and leisured existence, Ste. Croix argues, could be secured only by the possession of property (primarily in land) which alone gave the propertied classes that command over the labor of others through which they derived their surplus and by means of which they were freed “from the necessity of taking part in the process of production.”<sup>39</sup>

Thus the primary differentia of class in ancient antiquity was the ability afforded by the possession of property to extract a sufficient amount of surplus-labor from others so as to “live a life of leisure which combines liberality and temperance” (*Pol.*VII.1326b30-32). As mentioned above, the surplus-labor which guaranteed this leisured existence largely derived from slave labor—hence the primary exploitative relationship in this society was the relationship between master and slave, both of whom occupied respectively different positions relative to the means of production *viz.* the *oikos*. But it is important to note that the exploitation inherent in Ancient Greece extended beyond just the master-slave relationship. In Athens, for instance, Ober argues that the “laboring force from which the upper-class Athenian extracted the surplus that provided his leisure” consisted of both slaves “as well as working citizens.”<sup>40</sup> The historical *polis*, then, was always divided into at least two different classes with the dividing line firmly situated between those who had to work for their living and those who did not.<sup>41</sup>

That Aristotle considers the relations to production to be the decisive factor in whether or not an individual actually shares in the *politeia* is evident from his claim that the general way of

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<sup>37</sup> Ober (1992), *ibid.*, p. 133. Note the etymological connection between the Ancient Greek term for “economics” (*oikonomika*) and the term for “household” (*oikos*).

<sup>38</sup> Ste. Croix, *ibid.*, Ch. II, sec. (ii), p. 52.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. II, sec. (i), pp. 38-39.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. V, sec. A.1, pp. 195-196.

<sup>41</sup> For more on the division between classes in Ancient Athens, see Ober (1989), Ch. V. For the use and exploitation of free citizen labor in Ancient Greece generally, see Ste. Croix, *ibid.*, Ch. III, sec. v and vi, pp. 174-179, and Ch. IV, pp. 206-269.

life of a given social sphere is determined at least in part by material production. For Aristotle, just like Marx, maintains that the process of development from the *ateleis koinōnīai* of the household and village to the *polis* originates from the needs and wants of biological life. Consider, for instance, a striking passage from Book I of the *Politics* where Aristotle describes how groups of individuals differ according to the different methods they employ for procuring the necessary means of subsistence. Here Aristotle claims that there are “a number of different modes of subsistence” each of which produces some concomitant way of life (*Pol.I.1256a21-22*). He then goes on to say that these different ways of life (which he classifies as pastoral, freebooting, fishing, hunting, and farming) can be combined in various ways in order to “supplement the shortcomings of one way of life” (*Pol.I.1256b3-5*). Aristotle then concludes the passage by remarking that “as need impels people so they shape their lives” (*Pol.I.1256b6*).

Taken together with Aristotle’s teleological account of the *polis*, this passage clearly shows that the self-sufficiency achieved by the political *koinōnīa* directly results from some definite combination of the various methods used to appropriate the necessary means of subsistence which provides a leisured existence for at least some of the *polis*’ members. It follows that the *bios* of the political realm is defined by the way in which the *polis*’ material resources (including labor) are arranged into some definite whole. In other words, the *polis* is the most complete (*teleion*) *koinōnīa* because it represents the end (*telos*) of an economic process of development, a process whose motion derives from our innate capacity to collectively act on the external world and subsequently produce a common way of life. It is this collective activity that defines our political nature as well as the nature of our political communities.

This is why the *polis*’ way of life as Aristotle understands it is fundamentally predicated on class relations. For Aristotle says that the nature of the *politeia* is contingent on how the *polis*’ economic classes are arranged as parts (*mere, moria*) relative to the whole—that is, relative to the general ruler-ruled relationship (*Pol.V.1303a1-2, VI.1318a30-33*). If, for instance, farmers were to occupy the authoritative position within the *politeia*, the *polis* as a whole would have to rely heavily on general laws rather than on individual decrees since the way in which farmers stand to production prevents them from attaining the leisure-time socially necessary to participate in political affairs (*Pol.IV.1292b22-30*). With this in mind we can now see why Aristotle insists on excluding the *polis*’ subordinate classes from citizenship. The good life involved at the level of the political *koinōnīa* includes sharing in the *polis*’ authoritative element,

the *politeia*, so as to determine how the *polis* lives. The citizens, then, must be capable of developing or already possess virtuous characters in order to properly exercise the activities constitutive of citizenship, and this requires a sufficient amount of leisure as well as education, wealth, and other external goods.<sup>42</sup> Manual laborers, on the other hand, do not possess enough leisure-time for the proper development of virtue because they are constantly occupied by strenuous work undertaken as a matter of necessity while women and slaves simply do not possess the capacity for rational deliberation at all. So a good *polis* should not include these groups as citizens since they are—either by their own nature or by virtue of their occupation—unable to participate in the fine activities that the *polis* pursues.

The distinction Aristotle makes between citizen and non-citizen groups parallels the one he gives at the beginning of the *Eudemian Ethics* about the essential components and indispensable conditions of *eudaimonia*:

Then above all we must define to ourselves without hurry or carelessness in which of our belongings the *eudaimōn* life is lodged, and what are the indispensable conditions of its attainment—for health is not the same thing as the indispensable conditions of health; and so it is with many other things, so that the good life and its indispensable conditions are not identical (*EE*.I.1214b11-16)

It would seem, then, that Aristotle applies this same principle not only to the different kinds of activities found within the *polis* but also to the members of the *polis* themselves. To the extent that manual laborers are solely (or primarily) concerned with the instrumental function of providing the *polis* with material necessities—that is, insofar as they do not directly contribute to the *polis*' good life—they are distinct from the *polis*' essential parts, the citizens, who constitute the being of the association through their virtuous actions (*Pol*.III.1283a12-27, VII.1329a19-20). Such are the reasons Aristotle gives for restricting the citizen body to a select number of individuals at the expense of the majority non-citizen population.

And yet the sharp distinction Aristotle makes between the essential parts and the necessary conditions of the *polis* has traditionally been seen as an unfortunate but not seriously problematic aspect of his political theory. For Aristotle may simply be mistaken about the

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<sup>42</sup> Aristotle is quite explicit on this point. When describing the ideal regime in Book VII, Aristotle states that “leisure is a necessity, both for growth in goodness and for the pursuit of political activities” (*Pol*.VIII.1329a1). It is important to note that “leisure” or *scholē* defines engaging in an activity that is good for its own sake rather than a means to some further end—hence the term does appropriately apply to inactivity or relaxation. Conversely, the term “work” or “labor” is usually used to translate *ascholia*, literally the absence of leisure. For more on how external goods are necessary for the pursuit of virtuous action, see *EN*.VII.1153b14-21.

*inherent* capacity of non-citizen groups to develop and exercise moral and intellectual virtues. Irwin suggests that this is because Aristotle relies on two incompatible criteria for citizenship based on an individual's inherent level of virtue, namely, the absolute and relative criteria.<sup>43</sup> The former holds that there is some particular level of virtue that an individual must meet in order to qualify as a citizen, a level determined without reference to the virtuous capabilities of others. The relative criterion, however, holds that this level of virtue does in fact depend on an individual's relations to others such that any significant disparity in virtue would justify an unequal distribution in political privileges. After examining these two criteria, Irwin concludes that if Aristotle were to rely on just the absolute criterion, he could then claim that manual laborers and other non-citizen members are not completely disqualified from participating in political life. For if an individual can demonstrate that she is not deprived of deliberative and rational capacities in the way that natural slaves are, then that person has a reasonable claim to demand a share in citizenship, even if she is unequal to others in her capacity for virtuous action.<sup>44</sup> That is to say, if the members of subordinate classes are able to develop virtuous characters, then perhaps they can be admitted into citizenship in a way that is consistent with Aristotle's theory of virtuous political action while nonetheless *remaining in their class positions*.

The problem with this argument, however, is that it fails to consider the relations in which these non-citizen groups stand to the *politeia*. If my interpretation of Aristotle's conception of the common good is correct, then each individual's *eudaimonia* is partly constituted by sharing in the *politeia* with others so as to determine how the *polis* functions as a whole. Through the *polis*' laws, economic practices, and various political offices and institutions, the *politeia* is actualized and directed towards a particular way of life. The actual sovereigns of a

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95-97.

<sup>44</sup> Ober argues along similar lines in defense of an Aristotelian "natural" democracy, saying that Aristotle's broader theory allows for us to take the set of politically active citizens ( $C^a$ ) to be coextensive with the set of all *polis* residents culturally imaginable as citizens ( $C^i$ ) as well as with the set of all *polis* residents naturally qualified to be citizens ( $C^n$ ), i.e.,  $C^a=C^i=C^n$  (as can be seen, the last condition  $C^n$  implicitly relies on some absolute or objective criterion of virtue). If, as Ober argues, this equation is correct, then we arrive at a natural democracy in which "no body of persons holding either cultural expectations of citizenship or the natural capacity to exercise citizenship" is left outside the actual political body; see Ober, "Aristotle's Natural Democracy" in Kraut and Skultety (eds.), *Aristotle's Politics: Critical Essays*, 2005, pp. 223-43. While I agree that such an identity is compatible with Aristotle's remarks about citizenship, I believe that his interpretation, along with Irwin's, does not go far enough in evaluating how certain socioeconomic relations impact the ability of an individual or group to share in the common good of the *polis*' arrangement.

*polis*, then, are those who share in this authoritative way of life which ultimately directs and limits the *polis*' arrangement as well as the arrangements of its various sub-communities. Moreover, having a share in either the *polis*' cultural (i.e., socio-political) or material (i.e., economic) functions entails having full possession of the normal rights and privileges attending those respective functions in accordance with some general law or custom established by the *koinōnia* and further supported (either coercively or cooperatively) through ideological means. Therefore, an individual shares in the *politeia*, that is, in *sovereignty*, if and only if—and to the extent and only the extent—he or she shares in *both cultural and material production*.

From this it follows that merely granting political privileges to an economically subordinate class is insufficient for that class to actually share in the *politeia* since they are prevented by their class position from sharing in an essential aspect of the *polis*' sovereignty in virtue of which the *koinōnia* functions as a whole. For on the one hand a *polis*' various cultural and economic “powers” or *dunameis* are used to propagate a general way of life—that is, a *politeia*—that extends to all of its members and operates within a framework of some widely accepted ideological hegemony that cuts across class-lines. On the other hand, however, the fact remains that the *dunameis* of a given political *koinōnia* are arranged in such a way as to fundamentally support and sustain the activities of the *polis*' dominant sub-group, the sovereign element of the *politeia*. All those who stand outside of this dominant sub-group are therefore used as instrumental means to support the *polis*' overall arrangement:

In the *polis*, as in other natural compounds (*suntheta*), the conditions which are necessary for the existence of the whole are not parts of the whole system which they serve [...]. There must be some one thing which is common to all the members, and identical to them all, though their shares may be equal, or unequal. The thing itself may be various—food, for instance, or a stretch of territory, or anything else of the kind. Now there is nothing joint or common to the means which serve an end and the end which is served by those means—except that the means produce and the end takes over the product. Take, for example, the relation in which building tools, and the workmen who use them, stand to the result produced by their action. There is nothing joint or common between the builder and the house he builds: the builder's skill is simply a means, and the house is the end (*Pol.VII.1328a21-34*)

This passage is further supported elsewhere by Aristotle such as when he compares the ruled to a flute-maker and the ruler to a flute-player “who uses what the flute-maker makes” (*Pol.III.1277b28-29*). In both these instances, the necessary conditions of the *polis* function so as to maintain the *polis*' material resources and economic self-sufficiency. As such, they do not



stand in the same relation to the *politeia* as those who are in a position of authority to actually wield the *polis*' material and cultural resources in order to direct the *polis*' way of life.

For Aristotle, then, classes stand in an asymmetrical position of power to one another in respect to their life-activities. Aristotle's discussion of the master-slave relationship illustrates well how he thinks of the those who act as mere instrumental means to maintain a *polis*' socioeconomic structure. The rule of a master, Aristotle argues, is characterized by despotic rule directed primarily towards the interests of the ruler. Since, then, master and slave occupy fundamentally different positions relative to one another, it follows that they do not share in a *common* good. Instead, the good of both "belongs to the one for the sake of which the pair exists" (*EE.VII.1241b18*). And yet in the *Politics* Aristotle says that there *is* a common interest between master and slave, for although the activity of this relationship is primarily directed towards the interests of the *despotēs*, it is nonetheless exercised "incidentally with a view to that of the slave, who must be preserved in existence if the rule is to remain" (*Pol.III.1278b32-37*). What are we to make of this claim?

I think Aristotle's point here is that, roughly speaking, there are potentially multiple "levels" to the common good of every *koinōnia* such that an arrangement at least instrumentally benefits all members while simultaneously conferring a higher-order good on some subset of the association. Similarly, although different classes may engage in mutually beneficial actions, the fact remains that the ruling class has a different kind of share in the *politeia* so long as they maintain their class position.<sup>45</sup> As the Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci remarks, the existence of classes is sufficient to guarantee that a social order is fundamentally directed towards one section of the population, even if every member derives some benefit:

The fact of hegemony undoubtedly presupposes that the interests and strivings of the groups over which the hegemony will be exercised are taken account of, that a certain balance of compromises be formed, that, in other words, the leading group makes some sacrifices of an economico-corporative kind; but it is also undoubted that these sacrifices and compromises cannot concern essentials, since if the hegemony is ethico-political, it must also be economic, it must have its foundation in the decisive function that the

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<sup>45</sup> Aristotle, for instance, mentions how some *poleis* "devolved" from kingship to aristocracy and then to oligarchy because the rulers of the *polis* limited the *politeuma* "to a narrower and narrower circle" and in doing so they "strengthened the *dēmos* until they rose in rebellion and established democracies" (*Pol.III.1286b10-20*). Under these circumstances, then, two different ideological hegemonies fought for dominance on the political plane, thus presupposing that the masses were able to form their own arrangement in opposition to the dominant subgroup.

leading group exercises in the decisive sphere of economic activity (from *The Modern Prince*)<sup>46</sup>

In other words, the existence of classes entails that the *polis*' way of life is controlled by the interests of the ruling class. To the extent that the hegemony of the ruling class constitutes the *bios* of a political association, we can say that the common good *qua* arrangement is common to one class in a different way than it is to those who can only incidentally share in it.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155. In *Mass and Elite*, Ober explicitly inverts Gramsci's conception of ideological hegemony and concludes that the Athenian *dēmos* "controlled the upper-classes through ideological means," and he goes on to extrapolate that lower-classes generally "can achieve major changes in the organization of society *without overt struggle on the material plane*"; see Ober, *ibid.*, Ch. VII, sec. G.2, p. 339. Although I accept Ober's claim that democracy in Ancient Athens was able to *mitigate* (but not abolish) the class-struggle between the different classes which composed the Athenian citizenry, this does not mean that the lower-classes were able to achieve full sovereignty. Indeed, throughout the fifth and fourth centuries BC property rights were carefully preserved for the upper-classes; for more on how the interests of upper- class Athenians were secured during the highest stage of Athenian democracy, see Ste. Croix, *ibid.*, Ch. V, pp. 278-326.

This is not to deny the importance or efficacy that democracy has in allowing lower-classes to potentially achieve sovereignty. Even so, it is important to note that sovereignty as I have described it here and as Aristotle describes it throughout the *Politics* necessarily involves both political *and* economic sovereignty. To that end, Ancient Athens was never a *full* democracy, even if we focus on just the citizen population and ignore the class positions of women and slaves (nor could Athens have been expected to achieve full democracy given the levels of socioeconomic development in pre-capitalist modes of production and the limitations they impose). So I think that Ober's conclusion seriously distorts Gramsci's conception of ideological hegemony. As Lenin argues, the *forms* of the class struggle (e.g., whether it is latent or manifest, whether classes make compromises and alliances or lock themselves in a political stalemate, etc.) "may and do constantly change" in accordance with particular, temporary circumstances, but that "the *essence* of the struggle, its class *content*, cannot change while classes exist"; see Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, International Publishers Co., Inc., 1939, p. 75.

## VI. CONCLUSION

For Aristotle, the *polis* is not just some instrumental means to achieve our individual well-being—instead, the *polis* expresses a complete and self-sufficient way of life that essentially relates to our political nature insofar as it is characterized by deliberation and choice rather than by accident or chance. As such, we realize an important aspect of our *eudaimonia* by actively sharing in this “most sovereign and inclusive *koinōnia*” (*Pol.I.1252a6*). I believe that individualistic notions of the common good not only fail to capture this communal aspect of the *polis* but also do not adequately address how an arrangement can stand as a good that is shared *in common* by a *koinōnia*’s members. Now in regards to associations whose arrangements are merely instrumental, e.g., a *koinōnia* of exchange, the kind of benefit conferred on the relevant parties need not be the same in kind for the arrangement to classify as a common good. But when an arrangement itself stands as one (among many) of the ends primarily aimed at by the members of the *koinōnia*, the type of benefit conferred makes all the difference for whether the arrangement is a good that is held in common.

So for political *koinōniai*, the common good of the *polis*’ arrangement, *viz.* the authoritative way of life enabled by the *politeia*, necessarily corresponds to how the *polis*’ various “powers” or *dunameis*—that is, the laws, political offices, economic resources, etc.—are integrated and directed into some definite whole. And if this arrangement is predicated on class relations, it follows that there is a stable and permanent separation between rulers and ruled such that the rulers are essential parts of the system and the ruled are necessary conditions for that system. In other words, the common good of the ruling class, insofar as it ultimately determines the *polis*’ overall way of life through cultural *and* material production, is distinct from any common good that obtains between those over whom the rulers rule. I therefore firmly maintain Aristotle’s separation between the essential parts and necessary conditions of the *polis*, but not on the grounds that the intrinsic qualities of the subordinate classes prohibit them from

participating in the common good, nor because their actions are inherently instrumental. Rather, I believe that Aristotle's separation between a *polis*' essential parts and necessary conditions holds within a class-based society because the actions of the subordinate class—and by extension their life-activities—are instrumental *within that class context*. That is, they are prevented from participating in the highest good of the *polis*' arrangement due to the external conditions under which they operate. This is not to say that the lower-classes cannot benefit from the system *at all*—indeed, they often must receive some benefit if the system is to be preserved. But they cannot commonly share in the good of the *polis*' arrangement *as such* unless they become, either individually or collectively, the ruling class.

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