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Aristotle's Ideal Regime as Utopia
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Abstract: Although Aristotle's ideal regime discussed in books seven and eight of his *Politics* seems much more feasible and less utopian than the regime outlined in Plato's *Republic*, a few scholars have questioned its feasibility in light of the real world demands of politics. Similarly, I argue that carefully considered his ideal regime turns-out not to be feasible or a practical recommendation for politics, but rather a thought experiment like Plato's *Republic* meant to show the limitations of what is politically achievable. I do so by comparing his ideal regime to his prior discussions of democracy in the earlier books of the *Politics* and in particular what he considered the best type of democracy.

Scholars have indicated problems with Aristotle's ideal regime discussed in books seven and eight of his *Politics*. It requires conventional slavery, which Aristotle had earlier argued is unjust. It seeks self-sufficiency but ultimately still needs other cities. It is unclear whether it allows for philosophy, or how many, if any, of its citizens would be philosophers. Due to such short-comings, some scholars have suggested that the city, despite its seeming real plausibility compared to Plato's *Republic*, is ultimately just as utopian, i.e. very improbable that it could come into being and equally improbable that it could be sustained very long if it did. Mary Nichols, for example, argues that "its full flourishing is impossible" due largely to the unresolvable tension between political rule and despotism.¹

I will also argue that the city is a utopia. Despite the fact that Aristotle makes more concessions to the practical demands of politics and necessity, when thought through there are simply too many problems to make its sustainability plausible even in the unlikely circumstance that it did come into being in the first place. Thus, like Plato's *Republic*, in the final analysis, it is a sort of thought experiment meant to show the limitations of what can be achieved, or hoped for, in politics. I will make this argument by comparing the ideal regime to Aristotle's discussion of democracy, which, as far as I am aware, no scholar has systematically undertaken. I think this is the best way to approach the argument, because, in a sense, Aristotle's ideal regime is an ideal democracy. Also, although not pro-democratic per se, there is, arguably, a tacit preference of a sort in the *Politics* for democracy of some kind despite its problems.

I will begin by saying something about Aristotle's discussion of democracy in general and then his explicit discussion of it in book six. Despite Aristotle's subsequent discussion of democracy in the *Politics*, his first explicit mention of it in book two does not seem very favorable. There Athens does not come to light as one of the cities he considers to be best governed at the present time. Surprisingly, the best governed city turns out to be the barbarian city of Carthage, which does not much resemble a democracy (1272b25-42).² The other two well governed cities Aristotle discusses, Sparta

¹ *Citizens and Statesmen: A Study of Aristotle's Politics* (Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield, 1992), 164.

² It is also worth noting that unlike the other two cities mentioned, Sparta and Crete, Carthage has no founder. Cf. Robert Bartlett, "Aristotle's Science of the Best Regime,"

and Crete, also are not very democratic. Consequently, the first impression we get is that democracy is not a well governed regime. It is too volatile and susceptible of internal change in contrast to Carthage, which merits his praise chiefly due to its stability. However, is Aristotle's reserve about Athens, his absence of praise, really a tacit criticism of democracy as such? I do not think so.

Athens was an aristocratic democracy and not, at least by Aristotle's day, what he considered a healthy democracy. In fact, he later indicates that present day Athens is what he understands as one of the least desirable types of democracy (1298b28ff).³ Athens was no longer the austere polis of Marathonian virtue, the city of Aeschylus' youth. Owing to the advent of a formidable navy, the once austere city had become more like the feverish city that Glaucon desires in Plato's *Republic* (372e). Despite his reticence about early Athens, the Athens that emerged after Solon's innovations and particularly after Peisistratus' tyranny (*Athenian Constitution* XIII-XV), it is likely that Aristotle's judgment of that early Athens was favorable and very similar to the democracy that he later describes as the best (1318b6).⁴

Aristotle next discusses democracy in book three in his discussion of citizenship. What is a citizen is disputed from city to city: what is a citizen in a democracy will not be the same as in an oligarchy (1275a4). Nonetheless, Aristotle goes on to seek the citizen in an unqualified sense. He concludes, "The citizen, simply, is determined by no other thing than having a share in decision and office (1275a22-24)."⁵ From this Aristotle defines a citizen as those "for whom there is the means to have a share in a legislative (*bouleutikēs*) office (1275b16-18)."⁶ In this way, Aristotle implies a first, tentative definition of democracy: a regime in which all the citizens "have a share in legislative office."

Why would this tentative idea of a city, and form of government, be more just than others? From the argument made in the opening of the *Politics*, it best fulfills our political nature. What separates us from the rest of the animals, Aristotle argues, is our capacity for reason/speech (*logos*) (1253a10-15). This capacity allows and facilitates discussion of what is useful and harmful and just and unjust. Discussion and practice of these things brings the polis into being. It is some sort of agreement about these things, i.e. the just and the unjust, noble and shameful, etc., that makes a polis a polis as opposed to simply an alliance of some sort (1280a31-37). Therefore, that polis is best which most actualizes this potential in citizens: best or most just by nature, because it best completes human nature. In order for there to be agreement, there must be discussion and participation among the citizens. Therefore, democracy, of some kind, is the best type of regime by nature.

American Political Science Review 88 (1994) and Leo Strauss, "On Plato's *Republic*," in *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 52-53.

³ See Andrew Lintott, "Aristotle and Democracy," *Classical Quarterly* (Great Britain, 1992), 120. Lintott also argues that the four forms of democracy discussed in bk6, ch4 of the *Politics* are historical stages of Athenian democracy (124). Cf. Gerald Mara, "The Culture of Democracy: Aristotle's Athenian Politeia as Political Theory" in *Aristotle and Modern Politics* (Indiana: University of North Dame Press, 2002), 311-312.

⁴ See Lintott 115.

⁵ This and all subsequent translations from the Greek are my own from *Aristotelis Politica* (Lipsiae: In aedibus B.G. Teubneri, 1909).

⁶ Some manuscripts read: "legislative and judicial office".

Aristotle's next remarks on democracy occur in book four in his analysis of different types of regimes or what makes regimes differ. There he gives a delineation of six pure or unmixed regimes: three good and three deviant. Now, it comes to light that there are, in fact, two different types of democracy: one good, which promotes the common good, and another which is deviant and seeks primarily the interest of the ruling element. The correct (*orthos*) one Aristotle calls *politeia* and the deviant (*parekbasis*) is called democracy (1289a28-30). *Politeia* is the Greek word for the form of a city, i.e. regime or constitution.⁷ It makes sense to the extent that democracy is the form of government that best fulfills the nature of what a city should be, as explained above, and thus would have a name derived from polis: it has the greatest or fullest degree of *cityness* (*politeia*) owing to the fact that all its citizens participate in the city and exercise their capacity for reason (speech) and virtue.

Democracy, on the other hand, makes sense as the name of the deviant type. *Demos* means people, but it can have a pejorative connotation (and usually does for Plato and Aristotle) so as to imply the rabble or hoi polloi. *Kratia* means power. Therefore, "democracy" suggests rule by majority will or passion for partisan or self-interest as opposed to deliberation about the common good. However, of the deviant types of regimes, democracy, Aristotle argues, is the least bad or "most moderate" (1289b4). It is the most stable of the deviant types, and also presumably the easiest to reform in the direction of a good type of regime directed to the common good. Also, it is the least removed from the good form of government of which it is the deviant. Consequently, there is a fine line between the two and perhaps much easier to confuse the one for the other than monarchy for despotism.

Aristotle turns to a detailed discussion of democracy in book six. Along with oligarchy, democracy is the most extensively discussed type of regime in the *Politics*. This would seem to be for a couple of reasons. First, as I have argued, some type of democracy is the best sort of regime by nature. Second, as cities become larger they tend to become more democratic. Aristotle doubts whether a very large city could be anything but democratic for very long (1286b20-22). Finally, all actual democracies have some element of oligarchy or hierarchy. A pure democracy is not practically workable.

Aristotle begins by noting three things that account for different types of democracy. First and most important is the character of the people, e.g. whether it is a farming community, seafaring community, ethnically homogenous or diverse population, etc. (1317a23). Second, is the number and types of offices (1317a28). This has an influence, but should not be unduly considered. It is the character of the multitude, according to Aristotle, that by and large determines the types of offices and institutions not the other way around even though citizens of democracies often confuse cause and effect thinking that it is their constitution and institutions that make them a democracy.⁸ Finally, there is the degree to which it is a mixed regime, has characteristics of other types of regimes, which is discussed at various places in the *Politics*.⁹ Aristotle discusses mixed regimes at length, because most all actual regimes are mixed to some degree. Also, mixed regimes are generally more stable than pure ones.

⁷ It is the Greek word used for the title of Plato's *Republic*.

⁸ Michael Davis *The Politics of Philosophy: A Commentary on Aristotle's Politics* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), 108-109.

⁹ 6.5-7, 5.5, 5.7, 4.4-9.

The type of multitude that makes for the best democracy is a farming multitude of common language, ancestry, and ancient or long standing mores and tradition (1318b8-12). Common language and ancestry reduces faction, which is one of the chief dangers in a democratic regime, and makes the citizens more inclined to identify with and care about one another.¹⁰ This creates like-mindedness (*homonoia*), which Aristotle argues should be a primary goal of legislators and statesmen in the *Ethics* (1155a25). Not only does it reduce faction, but it is instrumental, if not essential, for directing citizens to the common good as opposed to private distractions and self-interest.

Mores rooted in tradition are better than written constitutions (1287b4-6). They are more likely to be followed, because they have been long engrained through habituation and citizens do not even think of questioning them.¹¹ Consequently, it is often detrimental to change customs even if they are bad, because the power of custom and law resides more in habit than reason.¹²

Farmers make good citizens for several reasons. First, they are rooted to the land for their sustenance and therefore more dedicated to it than those who do not depend on the land. This means they are more willing to fight and die for it. In the *Ethics* Aristotle notes that mercenary soldiers are more skilled than militias. However, ultimately militias taken from the citizens are better, because they are willing to stand their ground and die if necessary in defense of their country whereas mercenaries run when it becomes clear that they are losing and in danger (1116b15-23). Second, because they are rooted to the land they are more mindful of their neighbors and the well-being of their community.

The work farmers do keeps them healthy and moderate (*sophrosyne*) (1318b14-15). Farmers are relatively self-sufficient, not dependent on others for their livelihood, but their way of life does not create much wealth (1318b12). This is advantageous because it creates a sort of natural equality in terms of property, which is a condition necessary for democracy. This remedies problems that occur from having to establish and maintain equality, a middle class or middling element, through laws and institutions.¹³

Thus, farmers are ruggedly independent, but not arrogant. They mind their own business, but cannot be pushed around.¹⁴ Farming is time consuming and farms are outside the city. This means farmers do not have much time for politics. They are content with limited participation: voting and veto power of a sort (1318b20-21). This is good for three reasons. First, it helps control factions. Idle hands are the devils workshop. The more time people have to become politically active the more factions develop in the city. Second, although most citizens will have the means for a degree of liberal education, few have *phronēsis* (prudence or political wisdom), the virtue that enables one to understand how to bring about the common good in different situations (*Ethics* 1141b12-20). It is therefore good that most will not desire much share in office and political power, since they will lack the skill to govern well. Finally, wealth tends to translate into luxury and vice, which corrupt civic responsibilities. Aristotle remarks that farmers, unlike many other professions, tend to enjoy their work (1318b14). This

¹⁰ 1305b38, 6.5, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1161a10-29, Davis 112, Cf. *Federalist Papers* 39.

¹¹ Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103b5-10.

¹² Cf. Plato's *Crito* 52a1-e5.

¹³ On this issue and the problems of establishing and maintaining equality through laws as opposed to the character of the multitude see Davis 114.

¹⁴ Davis 115.

combined with the fact that they do not make much extra income makes them less likely to adopt vices that are harmful to themselves and the city.

Finally, and this is the most subtle but arguably most important aspect of an agrarian society: it is by nature politically moderate.¹⁵ Unlike occupations in cities, farming is precarious. It is subject to nature and chance in ways that technical skills like ship-building, shoe-making, and carpentry are not: the weather, the condition of the soil, insects, disease, etc. This means farmers are less likely to be deluded or misled by the power of reason and technical know-how to control politics. They are more likely to think of politics as an art like farming than an art like shoemaking, i.e. an art in which human skill and reason exercise some influence, but there remains much beyond human control unlike shoemaking where the artisan is in almost complete control of the product from start to finish. In sum, men who have an intimate knowledge of the earth tend to have far fewer illusions about man's ability to control nature (both human and non-human) than those who "conquer" the world by means of manual craft or abstract thought.

This means farmers are by their nature leery of change and more rooted in tradition. Per Aristotle's discussion of law, as mentioned, this is good, because laws and political stability in general are largely due to habit and tradition. Innovation is dangerous because it tends to disrupt mores.¹⁶ Further, Aristotle suggests that human nature itself inclines us to desire change even when it is for the worse (*Ethics* 1154b28-32). Because of the nature of freedom and power of the majority in democracies, democracies are especially prone to change more so than other types of regimes. This means the best democracy will be the one that is least prone to change by its nature and does not need specific laws and institutions to try to limit and slow change, e.g. checks and balances, separation of powers.

A second type of multitude that produces a good or stable democracy, but not quite as good as farmers, is a ranching community. Ranchers have many of the same virtues as farmers. For example, their work makes them particularly fit for military service (1319a23-24) and does not incline them to the hubris of technical laborers. However, it differs from farming in two respects. First, ranchers are not as rooted to the land: ranching is like a moving farm (1256a34). Thus, they are not as tied to, therefore concerned about, particular communities and neighbors. Second, ranching has more potential to create wealth and therefore a greater tendency towards oligarchy. Horse breeding is more characteristic of ranches, and owning horses is characteristic of aristocrats. Extra wealth translates into luxuries, which erode virtue and result in unnecessary and potentially detrimental (both to oneself and the city) vices.¹⁷ Further, as mentioned, wealth tends to make citizens arrogant (*Rhetoric* 1384a3-7) and also gives them more leisure to participate in politics as opposed to minding their own business like farmers. Thus, large ranching communities tend to transform into oligarchies unless there are laws and mores that inhibit this tendency.

¹⁵ I owe this observation in particular, as well as others noted above, to Davis 114-115.

¹⁶ This is true of technical innovations as well as political, e.g. consider how cell phones have changed the mores of those growing up with them. Also, there is the problem of increasing power without a concomitant increase in practical wisdom (*phronesis*).

¹⁷ Consider the transition from the city of utmost necessity to the feverish city in Plato's *Republic*.

After discussing these two good or stable types of democracy, Aristotle discusses two deviant forms of democracy. The first is a commercial multitude: the majority of citizens no longer earn their living from farming but move to the city and become wage-earners.¹⁸ This way of life loses the virtues of farming. First, the work is not as intrinsically pleasant or satisfying as farming: Aristotle, to some extent, anticipates Marx's theory of alienation of labor. Second, their labor is not as time consuming as farming and there is potential for greater profit. These factors make them more likely to adopt vices: they have the extra time, money, and are looking for distractions from their work, which they have easy access to because they live in the city. This makes them more intrinsically restless.

Combine this with the fact that most will engage in technical professions that lack the moderation of farming. They will be more inclined to believe in progress, since technical skills are always advancing. Consequently, they tend to believe similar progress can be made in politics, that human reason and ingenuity can control politics beyond what may be prudent and practically feasible: city dwellers are politically progressive, more inclined and eager for change. This progressive demeanor has a tendency to overturn mores and lead to the final type of democracy. However, as long as mores remain relatively unchanged and the population of a common language and ancestry, there will still be some sense of a common good and devotion to it.

Nonetheless, it seems difficult, if not impossible, to stop a commercial democracy from changing into what Aristotle calls a final or ultimate democracy, which is the most precarious or unstable type (1319b1-30), in the long run. This occurs due to the increasing population of a commercial democracy and the continual demand for greater profits and more affluence. This stems from the nature of commercial democracy itself, as mentioned, i.e. a way of life that is not intrinsically pleasant pursued as a means to an end, not a way of life or end in itself. Citizens seek fulfillment in recreation, which requires more and more money. Citizenry expands to include foreigners as new markets are sought for goods. Requirements for citizenship are lowered to admit more and more people (1319b8-10). At the extreme, the criterion of citizenship breaks down, foreigners and natives alike are given equal rights.¹⁹

The population becomes more diverse, which creates more faction and eventually dissolves a sense of common good. Rapidly changing mores disrupt civic responsibility and family life. There is no longer order in the household (1319b28-29). Eventually, the native population declines, because citizens forego having children to spend their money on themselves.²⁰ Aristotle goes so far as to describe this final type of democracy as a tyranny (1292a17-18).²¹ Let me turn now to Aristotle's ideal regime and see how it compares with what he has said about democracy.

¹⁸ Arguably, this is the transition America made in the 1920s, e.g. the restlessness and agitation of bourgeois life depicted in Lewis Sinclair's *Babbitt*. Cf. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* "Why the Americans Show Themselves So Restive in the Midst of Their Well-Being" (Vol. 2, Sec 2, Ch13).

¹⁹ Cf. *Republic* 563c-d.

²⁰ Cf. Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, Bk36.

²¹ Cf. de Tocqueville's description of the Tyranny of the Majority, *Democracy in America* Vol.2, pt.4, sec.6-7.

It is debatable whether “the regime we would pray for”, or Aristotle’s best city, discussed in books seven and eight is more like a democracy or an aristocracy. On the one hand, citizenship is very restricted. On the other hand, all the citizens do take turns ruling and being ruled. Scholars considering it an aristocracy point to the restricted nature of citizenship and the city’s dependence upon servants and skilled laborers (*banausoi*) who are not themselves citizens.²² However, by Aristotle’s own definition of democracy, it nonetheless is principally democratic, since the servants are not technically part of the city. Further, regardless of wealth or family lineage “all citizens have the same chance of being allotted high or low office.”²³

Nonetheless, despite its democratic features, it is at first surprising how different it is from the best type of democracy discussed in book six. Yet, when carefully compared to the farming democracy, I think it proves to be more similar to it than other types of regimes Aristotle discussed. Still, by considering how different it is, we see its problems and ultimate unfeasibility.

In a sense Aristotle accentuates the positive features of the farming democracy and seems, at first, to negate the negative aspects by making it aristocratic. All citizens are exempted from toil so as to devote themselves wholly to moral virtue, the condition and character necessary for ruling and being ruled in turn. The virtues that a farming way of life instilled in citizens are replaced by a rigorous civic education with great attention and emphasis given to the liberal arts, particularly music.²⁴ This substitution has two goals. In part, the intention of this education is greater *homonoia* (like-mindedness), which Aristotle says in the *Ethics* should be the chief goal of legislators, than that which farming brought about. This *homonoia* goes beyond the sake of the necessary: reducing faction and maintaining regime stability. It seeks, rather, to reconcile, as much as is possible at any rate, the tension between the private good and the public good, the good of the city and good of the individual. Consequently, this city will be more socialist than the farming democracy. While still owning private property, they will largely share it with each other, something made easier since the citizens in general will be wealthier and less needy than the farmers of a farming democracy. The ideal regime seeks much more than the agrarian democracy to make the good person and good citizen one and the same, since, as Davis argues, “Good farmers do not make good men”, despite what virtues they have.

The second and more important goal is to introduce an element of contemplative virtue in the form of music and poetry, which was absent from the farming life. This seems to be the main problem with farming and the farming democracy if one considers it in light of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: it did not allow the leisure and wealth necessary for the contemplative life, philosophy in particular, Aristotle concludes is the best at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Philosophy and the contemplative arts come to fruition in commercial, Periclean Athens.

²² Thanassis Samaras, for example, argues that it is a “clear-cut aristocracy”. “The Best City in Aristotle’s Politics”, *Philosophical Inquiry* Vol 25, No 3-4 (2003). Cf. Stephen Salkever, *Finding the Mean: Theory and Practice in Aristotelian Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 34.

²³ Richard Kraut *Aristotle: Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 227.

²⁴ Music in Greek means the arts and sciences governed by the Muses, e.g. epic and tragic poetry.

The problem, however, is that the contemplative life, particularly the life of the philosopher, is not simply compatible, but, in fact, somewhat at odds, with the life devoted to the good of the city and civic duty, a problem that comes starkly to light in the *Republic* when Glaucon balks that it is most unjust to force the philosophers, the best of the citizens, to go back into the cave and rule (519d). The virtue of the philosopher or the virtue that constitutes the most happy life is not explicitly political but more of a private nature. It is the more or less solitary activity of contemplation, shared, perhaps, with a few friends, that characterizes the best or most choice-worthy way of life, not the busy and tumultuous life of the politician.

Why, then, would it be good that the citizens participate in politics aside from the necessity of having to do so like the philosopher-kings of Plato's *Republic* who must take turns doing so but will spend most of their time philosophizing (520d)? I think there are two reasons. First, Aristotle, like Plato, recognizes that there are innately different capacities and dispositions, which is reflected in the Noble Lie in Plato's *Republic*. Consequently, not all citizens will be equally capable and satisfied by the solitary, contemplative life that Aristotle concludes is the best in the *Ethics*. Nonetheless, Aristotle still seems to think it is the best way of life to the degree it is pursued even in mitigated form. Participating in the legislative process, since it is a contemplative activity of a sort, does give a share of the best way of life to all the citizens to some extent. It makes them more inclined to at least one form of contemplation, aside from music, than they would otherwise engage in if left to live simply as they please.

Also, this particular sort of contemplative activity is good for them and the city. It is good for them, because it forces them, to a degree, to think beyond mere self-interest. They must consider what is good for the community as a whole, albeit as it relates to their own good, an act which in itself fosters moderation and self-restraint in the same way that constructing a city in speech in Plato's *Republic* moderates Glaucon's personal and private sensual desires for material goods and tyranny. This, in turn, is also good for the city, because it fosters a citizen body that is more moderate and inclined to restrain their private concerns and self-interest for the sake of the common good.

Second, the city as a city simply cannot foster exclusively, or even primarily, the highest sort of contemplative, solitary activity, which is revealed to be the most choice-worthy way of life at the end of the *Ethics*. Its well-being and very existence depends upon more mundane, utilitarian forms of planning and contemplation, those that require discussion, cooperation, and compromise with other citizens. At any rate, this, I would suggest, is why philosophy is not explicitly mentioned in books seven and eight. Rather, contemplative virtue must be introduced in a diluted form that is politically salutary, i.e. will not disrupt but can contribute, to a degree, to civic virtue and more egalitarian in nature than philosophy. This turns-out to be music and poetry, particularly epic poetry about heroes and civic virtue.

This sort of leisure activity, watching tragedies and listening to music excites certain passions and performs a cathartic function: it dispels passions, to an extent, that are disruptive to the household and city, e.g. anger, pity, fear, jealousy. This is of great importance because the leisure the citizens have creates much more opportunity for faction and turmoil, opportunity that the farmers did not have because they were too busy working. Thus, the elimination of work, while granting the opportunity for more education and greater commitment to virtue and the common good also creates conflict with it: more leisure and resources make the citizens more likely to realize and distinguish between their own good and good of the city, a problem that was suppressed

in the farming community due to the necessity forced upon them by meager means, i.e. the necessity of depending and looking to the good of the city and the lack of time to consider the tension between their private good and the public. Thus, music attempts to be the remedy of the problem caused by leisure and is in that sense its purpose. Davis remarks, "Music, then, keeps us from breaking up the home; it substitutes simulated motion [war, domestic strife, etc.] for real motion."²⁵

Despite the dangers of leisure, it does allow the possibility of the philosophic life for the few suited and inclined to it by nature. Consequently, in a sense Kraut, in contradistinction to other commentators, is correct that the ultimate goal of the best regime is the philosophic life.²⁶ However, Kraut thinks that equates to the life of the intellectual as opposed to philosopher in the strict sense of the word. That, I think, is precisely the problem: a few, if not most, will not be satisfied with the life of the intellectual: their leisure will disrupt and ultimately destroy the city. It is in this sense, I think, that it is the regime we would pray for, i.e. it is doubtful that music can really successfully fulfill this function: leisure will probably end-up destroying the city.

This becomes clear when comparing it more closely to the farmers. First, these citizens will not be as naturally politically moderate as the farmers and thus more inclined to change and innovation. While they will not be as susceptible to the illusion that technical skill can conquer chance and nature as craftsmen who practice it every day, they nonetheless will not work with and be subject to the vagaries of nature the way farmers will. Second, and more important, although their education is liberal, it is not effeminizing like modern liberal education: these citizens are not modern men. It must emphasize, both in physical training and music, martial virtues due to the political necessities of the ancient world, i.e. constant threat of war. The music will emphasize epic poetry and heroic deeds: there is no mention of the extensive revision of Homer made in the *Republic*, and even there philosophers do not really reduce the emphasis on martial virtues. The army must be a citizen militia, and because the city cannot or should not be very large, they must be formidable fighters like the Spartans.

Thus, it is no surprise that in Aristotle's discussion of the three correct and three deviant regimes in the *Ethics* the counterpart of democracy, the good democracy, he calls not a *politeia*, as he does in the *Politics*, but a timocracy (1160a35). *Timos* means honor. Therefore timocracy is a regime whose guiding principle is the pursuit of honor. In other words, the best democracy is a democracy whose chief principle is not freedom, but rather where freedom is subordinated to the higher principle of honor. Why honor and not virtue? Because honor is an easier, more egalitarian and thereby more achievable public substitute for virtue. The citizens of the best regime are not philosophers, but music loving soldiers. Virtue is more difficult to cultivate and more difficult to judge. Honor as a principle requires mainly just military virtue, which is easier to achieve. Also, it mitigates against the negative undercurrents that cause democracy to become a deviant form of government, e.g. fear (military training cultivates courage) and materialism (soldiers lead austere lives, learn to do without material comforts, and somewhat look down upon them as unmanly and effeminate).

However, there are problems with timocracy. For one, as we see in Sparta, it is hostile to philosophy and holds no place for the contemplative virtue that must in some sense characterize the best regime. More importantly, it is expansionist: you gain honor

²⁵ 135.

²⁶ 199.

by valor and conquest in battle. Thus, the young citizens, especially, will push for war and expansion even given the potential loss of property, since all citizens must own property on the outskirts. Further, although Aristotle wants to make the city independent of others as much as possible, he, nonetheless, chooses to locate it near the sea so as to have a port and all the advantages of maritime trade of which wealth would be one. Thus, the city will not really be independent in the final analysis, but must deal with other cities and face the question, sooner or later, of whether to rule or be ruled by them, as Sparta and Athens had to. Finally, the leisure their wealth and servant population gives them, will make them restless, especially the young, and their music education cannot help but heighten their desire for battle, again especially in the young, who will have more leisure, presumably, because they will not have the political duties of their elders. In fact, on-going conflict and periodic battle of some kind may be necessary to restrict leisure. This becomes clearer by examining its precondition: freedom.

Freedom is understood by Aristotle in two ways, because there are two different types of freedom in popular regimes. “One freedom is having a share in ruling and being ruled (1317b1).” It is the freedom to hold an office and to have a say in the affairs of the city, which is an essential part of being a citizen in the best regime. Another meaning of freedom is “to live as one wishes” (1317b12). The first type of freedom is a condition that facilitates cultivating and practicing moral virtue. The second type of freedom is desirable for the leisure necessary for the contemplative life outlined in book ten of the *Ethics*, but otherwise dangerous and potentially disruptive. Given the choice, i.e. freedom to live as one wants, few will pursue virtue, as Aristotle argues at the end of the *Ethics* and Socrates makes explicit in his critique of democracy in book eight of the *Republic*. Hence, these two types of freedom are actually at odds with each other: civic duty is not the same as living as one wants. When the second type of freedom becomes more important than the first, civic duties are neglected and liberty degenerates into license: *politeia* becomes democracy. It is unlikely that their liberal education will help much in preventing this for two reasons: the citizens are not philosophers or even intellectuals, as Kraut argues, but primarily soldiers. Consequently, the education is not pleasant for them, per se, as it seems learning and philosophy in particular are for the potential philosophers in Plato’s *Republic*. Some, if not most, will prefer physical exercise, and the excitement and potential honors of war.

For all these reasons, Aristotle’s ideal regime seems unworkable in practice. When he says it is the regime we would pray for, he means not that it could actually exist, but that it could not, which is why divine intervention would be necessary to make it work. And, yet, if I, and other scholars who argue along similar lines, am correct in thinking Aristotle does not really believe his ideal regime could exist, as Kraut and others think, why is he not more clear about it, like Socrates in the *Republic* who ultimately admits that it does not matter that the kalipolis could not exist on earth, but “there is a pattern for it laid in heaven” that the philosopher lives by.

Here, I can only suggest that I think Aristotle leaves open the hope that a better regime can exist, because hope is necessary for all political reform for the better. Just as the city needs courageous soldiers to defend it, and thus must to some extent promote the illusory honors of war, so it needs courageous statesmen who work for reforming bad regimes and maintaining good ones, or good elements of existing regimes. Not every citizen can or should be made aware of the ultimately unsatisfying, not to say tragic, nature of politics and political action in this world in the final analysis.

Thus, I have argued that Aristotle's ideal regime is a utopia (*ou topia*), something that can literally not exist. Despite the fact that it seems quite a bit more plausible than Plato's *Republic*, in the final analysis, it too shows the limitations and tragic nature of politics: the impossibility of resolving the tension between the individual good and good of the city and the demands of justice in this world. This came to light by considering Aristotle's prior discussion of democracy in the *Politics*, since a popular government of a type, as I have argued, is the best by nature, and the ideal regime is a democracy of a type. In particular, by comparing his ideal regime with what he considered the best sort of democracy, the agrarian democracy, we have seen how the ideal regime attempts to correct the short comings of the farming democracy by introducing wealth, a servant population, and thereby leisure and liberal education, which in turn allow for greater *homonoia* and opportunity for the contemplative life.

Yet, when examined these improvements undermine the regimes' stability and feasibility. Their wealth and lack of work with nature and the earth will make them more restless, arrogant, and immoderate. Their liberal education cannot help but entice them into war and the potential honors that go along with it. In fact, war may be necessary, and therefore expansion and empire, simply to prevent being ruled by another city and more importantly to prevent freedom from degenerating into license and neglect of civic duty and the common good. It is too much to ask of their liberal education that all or most of the citizens will use their leisure well, i.e. for peaceful, contemplative pursuits as opposed to directing it toward internal or external conflict, internally would be pushing for ever more freedom, a chief characteristic of democracy in Socrates' critique of it in book eight of the *Republic*, and creating factions. Thus, the regime must be one we would pray for, because it could never exist by chance, nature, or reason, but would require divine intervention, a change in human nature or the natural condition of men.

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