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ARISTOTLE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF VIRTUE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POLITICS AND THE NICOMACHEAN ETHICS AND ITS RELATION TO TODAY

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**ARISTOTLE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF VIRTUE IN THE CONTEXT OF
THE *POLITICS* AND THE *NICOMACHEAN ETHICS* AND ITS RELATION TO
TODAY**

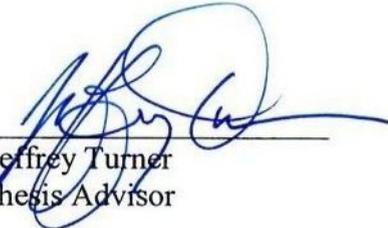
by

Kyle B. Anthony

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of
Bucknell University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors in Philosophy
April 29, 2010

Approved: _____


Jeffrey Turner
Thesis Advisor

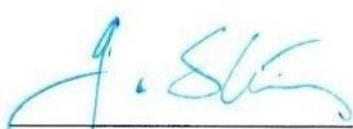

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Abstract

While much of Aristotle's works are preserved in various volumes, two of his famous works are the *Nichmachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, both of which contain a rich compilation of ethical and political thought. In the *Ethics*, Aristotle describes a thorough understanding of ethical and intellectual virtue. By pursuing these virtues, Aristotle argues that a person can achieve a life of fulfilling happiness. The ideal polis as described in the *Politics* serves as a place where the virtuous life is attained in the best manner. Citizens who pursue virtue make the polis better, and the rulers that guide the polis ensure that the citizens have every opportunity to pursue the virtuous life.

In this thesis, I see how relevant Aristotle's theory is by laying out the basic principles of the *Ethics* and the *Politics* and the connections between the two works. In doing so, I found that Aristotle's ideal theory points out a significant flaw in our political system: the fact that we do not share a common moral conception such as the one concerned with the virtuous life as Aristotle proposes. This does not suggest that Aristotle's view was actualized during his time period, but that Aristotle conceives of an ideal life and an ideal polis that *could* be realized. Certainly there are issues with Aristotle's thesis concerning the inferiority of slaves and women. But what is more poignant is the impracticality of instituting a shared common conception when today's¹ political system permits various ideas about ethics and morality.

¹ By today's society, I am really focusing on the United States, and will use that as a model throughout my entire thesis.

Introduction

Before I begin to discuss the actual thesis, it is helpful to first have a brief understanding of Aristotle's background. It is said that Aristotle was a wealthy philosopher who devoted his entire life to reading and writing. He took a special interest in ethics and politics, hence why I chose to focus my thesis on two of his texts, the *Nichomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*. In addition, Aristotle, like most wealthy people of this ancient time period, had a prejudice against manual labor, and it is likely that this attitude influenced his philosophical and political thought. Another fact that affected his political thought is the traveling that Aristotle did; he traveled occasionally between Macedonia and Athens due to wars and the death of various kings, and his observations about various political systems are shown through the non-ideal political systems. At one point, Aristotle opened up a center for research called Lyceum where he taught, which explains why his texts are written in a lecture style. Both the *Ethics* and the *Politics* are works that include his translated lectures, so some ideas are reiterated throughout various chapters of both books. Because Aristotle taught in Athens and spent a good amount of time in Macedonia, it is probable that the rise of the Macedonians during this time period affected Aristotle's political philosophy. The political frame of Aristotle's life does provide a historical background to his work, but most critics agree that the politics this time did not influence his political philosophy because Aristotle does not reference the rise of Macedonian power or the threat it posed to Athens.²

² The information in this paragraph can be found on pages 6-9 of Kraut's [Aristotle](#).

One of the reasons Aristotle is such an important figure is because he was one of the first philosophers to note and describe differences between the topics of ethics and politics. Prior to Aristotle, ethics and politics were thought to be very closely related, so distinguishing the texts was certainly an innovative move. While Aristotle does recognize that ethics and politics are distinctive of each other, he maintains both texts should be analyzed because their themes support each other. We will see this in more detail in the thesis itself, especially in chapter 3, a chapter in which I connect various ideas between the *Ethics* and the *Politics*.

On the topic of the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, there are two points to note about these texts. First, there is some debate about when these two texts were written. It seems as though most of the *Politics* was written before the *Ethics* was completed because “the closing sentences of the *Ethics* suggest that some parts of the *Politics* had already been drafted” (Kraut 17).³ There is another work that has strong similarities (some argue it is a rougher version of the *Ethics* itself) to the *Ethics* that is not included in this discussion – the *Eudemian Ethics*. They cover much of the same topics, but Kraut highlights an astonishing fact about the *Eudemian Ethics*: the work does not highlight or enhance Aristotle’s political thought. Further, the *Nicomachean Ethics* seems to demonstrate a

³ The closing lines of the *Ethics*: “First, then, let us try to go over those parts which have been stated well by our predecessors, then from the constitutions we have collected let us investigate what kinds of things tend to preserve or destroy the states or each of the forms of government and why some states are well while others are badly administered; for, having investigated these matters, perhaps we would also be in a better position to perceive what form of government is best, how each form of government should be ordered, and what laws and customs each should use. So let us start to discuss these” (1181b16-25). These lines indicate strongly the developing thesis or one of the goals of the *Politics* which at that point was safe to assume that some of it had already been written.

greater understanding and depth of ethical discussion in contrast to the *Eudemian Ethics* (Kraut 18-19). Thus I only refer to the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* when comparing the two works. Furthermore, I assume that Kraut is correct in stating that most of the *Politics* was written before the *Ethics*. Second, most of the *Politics* was actually written before the *Nicomachean Ethics*, so it is possible that some of the themes in the *Ethics* may not correlate with the *Politics*.

Now that I have explained the purpose behind choosing these texts, I turn to the structure of the thesis itself and the significance of this comparison. In short, I argue that Aristotle's conception of the ideal virtuous life and his views on the ideal polis are important themes that, to a certain extent, should continue to be important to today's society. In chapter 1, I discuss Aristotle's *Ethics* and how he describes the virtuous life. Aristotle sees virtue in two different categories: ethical and intellectual virtue, both of which are essential to living a virtuous life. Further, I explain the ethical virtue of bravery in order to provide an example of how Aristotle articulates each of the virtues. After this, I hone in on justice, and there are two types: justice as complete virtue and justice with respect to proportion. These ideas are vital to the virtuous life because without the pursuit of virtue, happiness cannot be attained. However, Aristotle approaches this view with an ideal mindset; in no way is his model one that occurred during his time period, rather he observes people in order to imagine what the best possible life looks like using the best examples.

In the second chapter, I focus on the *Politics*, where Aristotle devotes much of his energy in describing the ideal polis. Before I discuss Aristotle's conception of the ideal

polis, I focus on the development of a polis and how it begins with a small household association and its transgression that could emerge into a polis. Once this has been established, I talk about the features of an ideal polis. Within that description I bring up the role of the citizen and the ruler in the ideal polis and discuss what kind of lives these groups should lead. However, not all people who live in a polis are called a citizen, which leads me to my next point. Aristotle does not include slaves, women, farmers, and artisans as citizens of an ideal polis. Aristotle suggests that these groups are essential to the idea polis, yet they as individuals are not regarded as citizens because of various flaws. Finally, I end this chapter talking about some political systems that are not the most ideal. Aristotle believes that rulers must understand the different kinds of political systems because the knowledge gained from examining these systems enables the rulers to better resolve any issues that arise within the polis.

In the third chapter, I focus on three crucial connections between the *Ethics* and the *Politics*. Virtue is a fundamental component in both texts, so I draw this out more fully in this chapter. In the *Ethics*, the idea of virtue provides people with practical actions that they can pursue in trying to achieve the virtuous life. Virtue is essential to the polis as well; since the aim of the polis is to make its citizens better, the citizens must know how to achieve this. Virtue as described in the *Ethics* provides a foundation upon which the *Politics* is built.⁴ Also within both texts is the non-citizen aspect. As mentioned before, the *Politics* is explicit about what constitutes a citizen. The *Ethics* provides

⁴ Here I am arguing that the principles of the *Ethics* serve as a foundation for how the *Politics* functions, not necessarily the temporal (or the fact that the *Politics* was written before the *Ethics*).

support for this view because Aristotle talks about the varieties of friendship. In this sense, the *Ethics* details how people ought to be treated, and the polis provides not only a place in which these friendships are enacted, but the roles that people play within the polis. Finally, I discuss the importance of ruling. The *Politics* contains much information about how a person ought to rule and the different types of ruling there are. The purpose of the *Ethics* is to provide the ruler with the virtues essential to carrying out that task and to push the rest of the polis in striving toward the virtuous life.

In chapter four, I raise a number of objections that question whether or not Aristotle's conception of ethics and politics relates to a modern society. In this section I focus on MacIntyre's emotivism argument. MacIntyre believes that our society does not share a common moral language. Instead, we make moral judgments based upon our own feelings, attitudes, emotions, and the like. Since we appeal to our own moral sphere, we cannot rationally engage in moral debate with each other; thus we talk past one another. MacIntyre recognizes this as a disconnection that needs to be addressed, and he believes that we can completely overcome our emotive state if we get rid of our current political association. Today's current political system, at least in the United States, praises the diverse number of institutions that have different types of moral backgrounds. Our political system opposes the idyllic Aristotelian life of virtue and happiness that people share, which is why the Aristotelian view does not fit into our modern society. Due to the unlikelihood of the Aristotelian model replacing the present political system, MacIntyre concludes that we will not attain such a common moral conception. Another concern that is raised against Aristotle's theory is his treatment of the non-ideal citizens. While slavery

still exists today, it is not tolerated, as there are many efforts to raise this awareness and to combat this wrongdoing. Along similar lines, I will also examine the role of women, farmers and artisans as well. Finally, I conclude the chapter by questioning whether or not it is important to pursue the virtues as intensely as Aristotle describes. As citizens of the polis, is it necessary for them to put so much effort into the pursuit of the virtuous life such that we, as citizens, require slaves so that we have more time to achieve this goal? I do not think that it is entirely necessary to see it exactly the way that Aristotle does, and I will develop this idea more thoroughly in this chapter.

I conclude by arguing that Aristotle's overall conception of the best life possible in a polis does give us enough to claim that we should still retain some of his philosophical and political thought in today's society. I also stress the importance of education as a means that could lead to the creation of a common moral language that everyone could learn and use such as MacIntyre describes in his argument.

Chapter 1

What does it mean to live a good life?

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle posits an answer to the question of how to live the best life. In a modern day context, a typical answer to living a good life is found in the “American Dream”: a big house in the suburbs with a front and backyard, two point five kids, two cars, a white picket fence, etc. According to Aristotle, few people will be able to articulate the steps that lead to the achievement of that dream. He posits that “all aim at some good and seek what is lacking, and yet they leave out the knowledge of it” (*Ethics*, 1097a5-6). This is what makes Aristotle such an important figure to study because he gives us the knowledge of how to live the best life possible. It may not always end with the achievement of the American Dream, but following Aristotle’s advice by pursuing a virtuous life will likely improve the well-being of any given individual. In this chapter, I examine how Aristotle defines goods and how the pursuit of these goods leads to virtue. Then I discuss virtue and the differences between ethical and intellectual virtue, how they are related, and how they affect the pursuit of a virtuous life. Then I look at justice, the virtue that Aristotle acknowledges as the most complete virtue. Finally, I show how Aristotle uses justice as a proportion and as a complete virtue and its significance to the virtuous life. Aristotle uses these ideas as a foundation for people should they desire to choose the best life possible. The most remarkable aspect about

Aristotle's articulation of the virtuous life is that he imagines one that can actually be realized.⁵

The virtuous life

The pursuit of the good life begins with categorizing kinds of goods. According to Aristotle, there are three types of goods: external, such as friends and wealth; bodily, or the beauty, health, and strength of an individual; and those concerning the soul, which includes virtue (*Ethics*, 1098b13-16). Activities that are done with accordance to the soul are the “most important and are goods in the highest sense” and actions and mental activities are associated with the soul as well (*Ethics*, 1098b15-16). In this regard, activities of the soul are the highest goods, but what does that mean? Before we tackle this idea, we must understand that these activities must be performed according to reason (*Ethics*, 1102b32-33). Reason comes in two senses: “that which has reason in itself, this being the principle sense, and that which listens to reason, like a child listening to a father” (*Ethics*, 1109a3-4). Aristotle combines both the virtuous activity and reason by introducing the distinction between a lyre player and a good lyre player. A good lyre player plays well because he plays nobly and in accordance with how a lyre sounds (*Ethics*, 1098a11-15). In other words, a good lyre player plays the right notes in a rhythm, tone, and pace that is correct. On the other hand, the lyre player achieves this by using reason during the activity; the lyre player thinks about how to pluck the correct strings at

⁵ In reading this thesis, please bear in mind that Aristotle does not articulate the idea of a virtuous life in the sense that it occurred during his lifetime. Aristotle observes the world around him, makes observations, and hypothesizes what sorts of things will lead a person to live the best life possible. Thus Aristotle's conception is both an ideal one but also one that has the capability to be realized.

the right times and in the right sequence (*Ethics*, 1098a7-8). This picture is analogous to the person who strives to live the virtuous life. The person must practice virtues until the virtues develop into habits;⁶ this is the function of humankind (*Ethics*, 1098a10-12).

Hence this explains why Aristotle believes that a person should pursue the “activity of the soul according to virtue, and if the virtues are many, then according to the best and most complete virtue. And we should add ‘in a complete life’” (*Ethics*, 1098a16-19). At this point, we understand that virtues are actions associated with the soul and practicing and honing these actions will lead us to the highest good.

But is it necessary to pursue the highest good? External goods such as wealth, friends, strength, and beauty are definitely extolled through the media. These trends include luxurious but economical cars, beauty, going to college, health, proper dieting, among many other ones.⁷ These are certainly important points; however, Aristotle believes that we ought to pursue the highest good because it is the most complete one (*Ethics*, 1097a26-30). What he means to say is that we should seek a good for the sake of itself and not to use it to gain some other good. For instance, imagine that beauty is the highest good that we pursue. Can that be an ultimate realistic goal in Aristotle’s conception? Does beauty serve other purposes? It can attract others which could lead to marriage, so beauty could be used to find love. Beauty may help to secure a modeling job. Aristotle would contend that this good should not be pursued only for itself and not for

⁶ This idea mostly applies to ethical virtue, not intellectual virtue, as noted by the word “habit.” See further on for more explanation about the definition of ethical virtue.

⁷ This is a broad overview, mostly about the society of the United States. Certainly these trends do not apply in all cases.

the sake of something else, but that does not devalue beauty; it is simply not the most sought after good. From these instances we can see that beauty is probably not the most complete good because it is not pursued for its own sake, but for the sake of other things. In other words, the external goods are not the best goods to pursue; virtue is, and Aristotle reasons that “clearly, then, virtue, according to these, is superior to the other goods” (*Ethics*, 1095b30-31).

So instead of pursuing the external goods, Aristotle argues that we should focus on the Greek concept of *eudaimonia*, which in English translates roughly as “happiness”⁸ (*Ethics*, 357). It is crucial to understand the definition of *eudaimonia*, for *eu* means “well” and *daimon* means “divinity” or “spirit,” which indicates that the person lives in accordance with some kind of divinity (Kraut, 53fn4). This definition demonstrates that this happiness is more than just a temporal feeling. Rosalind Hursthouse echoes this definition as she sees Aristotle’s conception of happiness as more than just “living in a fool’s paradise, or engaged in what we know is pointless activity” (Hursthouse 10). Hursthouse sees this conception of happiness as “only possible for rational beings,” or humans (Hursthouse 9).⁹ Hence this type of “happiness” is a more developed and more fulfilling sense of happiness. Aristotle believes that is the case because he says that “happiness is something perfect and self-sufficient, and it is the end of things we do” (*Ethics*, 1097b20-21). Unlike wealth, beauty, strength, or any of those other mentioned

⁸ I will use “happiness” throughout the rest of this paper, using the definition that Aristotle gives unless otherwise noted.

⁹ By “rational beings,” I take Hursthouse to mean that this type of happiness is only capable for human beings, since they are the ones who have the ability to reason.

ideas, happiness is pursued for its own sake and not to obtain something else. This is why Aristotle concludes that the ultimate end we seek in pursuing the virtuous life is to have a fulfilling happiness, and the virtues are actions that we take in order to attain happiness. By engaging in virtue, we also partake in happiness.

How does one pursue complete happiness? Aristotle says that “for happiness requires [...] both complete virtue and a complete life” (*Ethics*, 1100a4-5). In other words, one cannot attain happiness by remaining idle, but through action. Virtue ties into the makeup of the best and most complete life as well because virtues are purposeful actions. Aristotle also mentions that a person who pursues virtue should “always be engaged always or most of all in actions and studies of things done according to virtue” (*Ethics*, 1100b19-20). Aristotle defines virtue in association with “the soul, for it is of the soul, too, that happiness is stated by us to be an activity” (*Ethics*, 1102a16-18). Therefore if we want to participate in happiness, we involve ourselves in virtuous actions.

According to Aristotle, there are two different categories of virtues: intellectual and ethical. Intellectual virtues (wisdom, intelligence, prudence, etc.) are those that “[originate] and [grow] mostly by teaching” (*Ethics*, 1103a5; a14-15). In this category of virtues, it is required that a person teach these virtues, for they are learned only through that medium which one learns through education. On the other hand, ethical virtues (generosity, temperance, etc.) cannot be taught to a person but are attained by habituation (*Ethics*, 1103a20-1). Aristotle displays this ability to acquire habits by learning how Aristotle learned them: by observing and documenting at other people who resemble such an ethical virtue. Consequently, if a person wants to learn how to be brave, the person

observes the actions of a brave person. To deepen this definition, Aristotle claims that ethical virtue “is a habit, disposed toward action by deliberate choice, being at the mean relative to us, and defined by reason and as a prudent man would define it” (*Ethics*, 1106b36-1107a2). These virtues are not inherent; we have the capacity to pursue them. Still, we need to practice these virtues in order to transform them into habitual dispositions that we possess all the time and use when necessary. For instance, parents can *teach* their children what generosity *means* and demonstrate how to carry out the virtue, but if the child does not listen and practice being generous, the child will not acquire the virtue. Once the child practices the virtue enough and acquires the habit, the child no longer has to constantly use the virtue at every moment in order to possess an ethical virtue – the habit remains within the child.¹⁰ Although we are not born with virtues, we have the capacity to accept and perfect virtues within our lives in order to achieve the best life (*Ethics*, 1103a24-6).

Aristotle believes that we have the power to make our own choices insofar as doing what is right or wrong is concerned; in other words, to do evil is a voluntary act of will (*Ethics*, 1113b10-16). The same format applies to society and the law. If a person commits an evil act, that offender will be punished by the legislators¹¹, but if a person

¹⁰ I say this not to mean the child never has to practice that virtue ever again. I say this to mean that the child never has to practice that virtue again – surely Aristotle would not agree with that either. What I mean is that an individual does not have to practice the virtue at every single moment of one’s life in order to maintain it.

¹¹ “...Unless these [actions] are done by force or through ignorance caused not by the doers themselves” (*Ethics*, 1113b34-25). It is also important to point out that not all actions are punishable by law – here I am focusing on actions that are.

performs a noble action, such as returning a lost wallet, the person will likely be honored or rewarded (*Ethics*, 1113b23-26). A counterargument that undercuts this idea is that a person could be inebriated while the person commits an evil act. Aristotle rebuts this claim when he says that a person “has the power of avoiding drunkenness, which is the cause of his ignorance while drunk” (*Ethics*, 1113b33-34). To strengthen this quotation, ignorance of the law is also not a reasonable excuse to commit an evil act, for “men are punished also for being ignorant of certain legal matters which are not difficult to learn and should be known” (*Ethics*, 1113b36-1114a1). Therefore the actions that we take determine the type of person we are, so next I take a closer look at the type of actions that people take, namely through ethical virtue.

Ethical virtue

Aristotle defines ethical virtue as “a habit, disposed toward action by deliberate choice, being at the mean relative to us, and defined by reason and as a prudent man would define it” (*Ethics*, 1106b36-1107a2). Recall that habits are learned only through the deliberate practicing of them, so once ethical virtues are acquired, they become dispositions that are possessed at all times. Ethical virtues are means between deficiency and excess, or vices. Aristotle warns that we should avoid these vices and focus on the mean, or virtue, which “is such as right reason declares it to be” (*Ethics*, 1138b18-20; *Ethics*, 1104a11-13; a26-7). But it is important to recognize that Aristotle says “mean relative to us,” so there is no precise “mean” that people should follow. Aristotle gives a clearer picture of what this looks like by using the example of a trainer working with athletes. He hypothesizes that if ten pounds of food for an athlete is too much and two

pounds for the same athlete is too few, then the mean would be six. But this same formula does not apply to a trainer's coaching methods consistently across a range of athletes. Ten pounds could be too much for one particular athlete but the right amount for one that needs more food in his diet.

Recall that ethical virtue is defined by reason *and* as a prudent person would define it, so we must explore what Aristotle means by a prudent person. By Aristotle's definition, virtue is part of the soul (*Ethics*, 1099a13-15, 22-23),¹² so Aristotle introduces the discussion about the intellectual virtues through the examination of prudence.¹³ For Aristotle, a prudent person "is thought to be one who is able to deliberate well concerning what is good and expedient for [the person...and the kinds of things which are good and expedient for living well]" (*Ethics*, 1140a26-28). A person who demonstrates prudence possesses the ability to distinguish what is good and bad for the person to live well. Aristotle believes that deliberation comes from the "estimative part" of the soul "which has reason" (*Ethics*, 1139a15), so in order to deliberate well, reason must guide it. It is here that Aristotle sums up ethical virtue and reason: "since ethical virtue is a habit through intention while intention is desire through deliberation, reason should, because of these, be true and desire should be right, if indeed intention is to be good, and what reason asserts desire should pursue" (*Ethics*, 1139a22-26). As mentioned before, in order to live the best life, reason must be associated with ethical virtues, which means that

¹² This quotation does not state explicitly that virtue and the soul are connected. However, it does say that noble things are pleasant and that they too are actions according to virtue. These actions are also "in the highest degree" (23), and it was discussed earlier that the "most important goods in the highest sense" (1098b15) are actions of the soul. By this logic, virtues are associated with the soul.

¹³ In the glossary found in the back of the *Ethics*, prudence means "a disposition by means of which one can deliberate truly concerning one's conduct for a good life" (360).

actions must also be under the guidance of reason as well. These deliberate actions are chosen by the person voluntarily, or with intention.

What does Aristotle mean when he mentions intention and deliberation, both of which are ambiguous terms? It is helpful to understand that intention connects to the idea of ethical virtue “since ethical virtue is a habit through intention while intention is desire through deliberation” (*Ethics*, 1139a23-24). It is already known that ethical virtues are practiced habits and that these habits develop through intention, but how? Intention is a *source* of motion (*Ethics*, 1139a31) – that is, it is similar to thought in that it does not create movement but that it provides a foundation “for the sake of something” (*Ethics*, 1139a37). So far we know that ethical virtue occurs when the person has the thought or idea of it *plus* the desire through deliberation. Moreover, we can deliberate about “the things which he can do by himself [...] things which are possible [...] whose outcome is not clear [...] which there is something indeterminate” (*Ethics*, 1112a35-b9-10). Here Aristotle hones in on the objects or phenomena that we try to solve.

One idea about which we can deliberate is what Aristotle calls gymnastics, a term that most nearly means “athletics” in a modern context. Imagine that in today’s society there is a coach and a high school track and field athlete who intends to become a triple jumper with the ultimate goal of competing at the state meet. The coach must deliberate, or think through various ways in which the coach can help the athlete realize these goals. The coach puts the athlete through a conditioning program which includes running, abdominal, and strength exercises to get the athlete into shape. The athlete pursues this for a period of time and then the coach sees how the athlete responds. If the athlete is not

getting into shape or if the athlete continues to get hurt, the coach must try and find another way to help the athlete reach the goals. If the training works, then the coach can move to more advanced skill-based training. The coach uses various drills to try to get the athlete faster, to become more attune with the body, and to understand how to triple jump correctly. If the drills work, then the coach continues to use them. However, if the athlete cannot perform them, the coach must find other ways to help the athlete carry out these drills effectively. During this time, the coach takes the athlete to various competitions to see how the athlete performs in response to the training. The coach evaluates the athlete and then deliberates about how to get the athlete to improve areas that need improvement so that the athlete performs better. This example shows how deliberation is used to think through events whose outcome is not certain. The deliberation shows through in the coach's ability to change workouts that best fit the athlete. Intention is necessary because it is that source of motion that motivates a person to take action.

Merging all of these concepts together, we see that Aristotle defines ethical virtue (bravery, e.g.) as a habit (a carried out action) through intention (a thought that provides the foundation or reason for motion) while intention is desire through deliberation (thinking through various techniques to determine a reasonable conclusion). Aristotle's claim that a soldier demonstrates bravery in a war situation helps to illustrate this idea (*Ethics*, 1115a25-35). A brave soldier knows that a person can die at any point in battle, but the soldier enters battle looking past that fear. However, a brave soldier does not just charge recklessly into battle because doing so would certainly lead to an instant kill. Instead, the brave soldier kills people tactfully by picking people off nearby and waiting

to see if it is safe to move to the next location. In this sense, the brave soldier already possesses the intent to go into battle and deliberates about the best way to kill people while still holding on to the soldier's life. If this is the case, then does it follow that ethical virtue is likewise a debatable topic of interest? It must be the case because like the athlete and the soldier, there is no single training regime or battle tactic that fits every single person.

But for Aristotle, ethical virtue must be “defined by reason and as a prudent man would define it” (*Ethics*, 1107a1-2). Recall that prudence relates to the intellectual virtues when you consider how Aristotle discusses the general overview of what makes a prudent person: “a prudent man is thought to be one who is able to deliberate well concerning what is good and expedient for himself [...] the kinds of things which are good expedient for living well [in general]” (*Ethics*, 1140a26-28). Aristotle highlights the importance of the prudent person's ability to recognize and discern the things, or virtues, that are good for that person. Virtues are not ends; they are means to an end that lead to the highest, most complete good (*Ethics*, 1097a28-30). In essence, virtues serve as the kinds of goods that help a person live a good life, and a prudent person knows what means are best and expedient for the person to follow. This is why a prudent person possesses the ability to define ethical virtue.

However, there is some confusion with respect to what Aristotle says about prudence. He mentions twice that prudence concerns one's self (*Ethics*, 1140a26; 40b10), but he seems to counter those claims when he writes that “prudence, then, must be a disposition with true reason and ability for *actions* concerning human goods” (*Ethics*,

1140b21). The text implies that a person who enacts prudence is not solely concerned with the goods for the self, but also the goods for other people. And this is exactly what Aristotle means: Aristotle believes that prudence is concerned with both goods for the self and for others. This is shown through the point Aristotle makes about Pericles, a prudent man, who has the ability to “perceive what is good for [himself and people like him] as well as for other men” (*Ethics*, 1140b9-10).

Aristotle argues that prudence relates to the ideas of ethical and intellectual virtues. Looking back to the original definition of ethical virtue, we see that the prudent person deliberates about the things that pertain only to that prudent person. But the prudent person does not give a concrete or particular list of what qualifies as prudence and what does not. Instead, the prudent person articulates a broad range, or a universal concept, of what is good for humans, and that is where the ethical virtues become important. The prudent person lists those virtues, such as bravery, generosity, temperance, high-mindedness, etc. But prudence is also “a disposition with true reason and ability for actions concerning human goods” (*Ethics*, 1140b21-22), and since all virtues are considered good and helpful in leading the best life, intellectual virtues associate with the ideas of prudence as well. This passage is a general overview because Aristotle does not state any specific guidelines.

While the universal conception might be helpful to understand this picture, Aristotle warns against *only* knowing the universal. He demonstrates this issue by example, saying that “if a man knew universally that light meats are digestible and healthy but did not know what kinds of meats are light, he would not produce health, but

a man who knows that chicken is light and healthy is more likely to produce health” (*Ethics*, 1141b18-21). Knowing both the particulars and the universals enables a person to know more about health, and the same logic applies to the virtues as well. If a person knew that living a virtuous life is the best life to live but did not know how to live according to bravery or generosity, then the person would be unable to live a virtuous life. It would be better for any given person to know how to be generous, when to demonstrate bravery, what level of temperance is acceptable, and so on.

For Aristotle, one particular moment or one particular action does not define a person; it is the acquired disposition of the virtues that determines the virtuousness of a person’s life. Both ethical and intellectual virtues take time and experience to develop (*Ethics*, 1103a16-18). To strengthen this point, Aristotle uses an analogy to help us understand the reasoning behind the length of time: “for one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day; and so too one day or a short time does not make a man blessed or happy” (*Ethics*, 1098a19-20). According to Aristotle, it is also impossible to claim that the person lived a happy and fulfilling virtuous life having never demonstrated a single virtue. Therefore, when Aristotle discusses prudence and the particulars that “become familiar from experience,” he is skeptical of youth because “a young man is not experienced, for experience requires much time” (*Ethics*, 1142a15-16). Continuing with Aristotle’s train of thought, young people do not have time to be taught the intellectual virtues of prudence or intelligence nor can they acquire the ethical habits of temperance and generosity (*Ethics*, 1103a14-15; a19-21). In order to do so, people must do what Aristotle does throughout all of his work: look to people whom we see as brave,

temperate, generous, high-minded, etc., and to know ourselves well enough to say “I am a little less courageous in some areas” and “I am a little more generous” in others. In order to see how ethical virtues apply more practically, let us take a look at how Aristotle conceives of the virtue of bravery.

Bravery as an ethical virtue

Aristotle sees bravery as a mean between cowardice and rashness – but what does this mean? A deficient amount of bravery results in cowardice, but an excess of bravery makes a person rash (*Ethics*, 1107b1-4). But what does Aristotle *really* mean when he says that someone demonstrates the virtue of bravery? Aristotle sums up the discussion of what it means to be a brave person when he says that “he who faces and fears those fearful things which he should, and for the right cause and in the right manner and at the right time, and who shows bravery in a similar manner, is a brave man” (*Ethics*, 1115b16-20). For instance, a brave person ought not to fear poverty, disease, or anything in that category that is not in the person’s power to control (*Ethics*, 1115a18-19). This seems on target because if a person becomes too consumed with worry over the uncontrollable, e.g. the fear that a life-threatening disease would strike, living a good life would be difficult. On the other hand, Aristotle maintains that it is noble to fear a bad reputation - in fact, if people do *not* fear this then Aristotle calls them disgraceful, “for he who fears this is a good man and has a sense of shame, while he who does not is shameless” (*Ethics*, 1115a13-15). Aristotle builds on the concept of fearing the right things, but what does that mean? Aristotle maintains that “[the brave man] will fear even

such terrible things, but as he should and as *reason* follows, for the sake of what is noble; for this is the end of virtue” (*Ethics*, 1115b11-13). Reason allows a person to pursue virtue in the right manner. For Aristotle, there is no “one” thing that makes one person brave over another because “what is fearful is not the same for all men” (*Ethics*, 1115b7). What matters most is that reason is associated with ethical virtue, and without reason guiding virtuous actions, achieving happiness would not be possible.

Assuming that Aristotle is right about death being the most fearful thing known to man, he argues that it is reasonable to fear death in certain circumstances, such as times of war, since the “perils here are the greatest and noblest” (*Ethics*, 1115a28-32). By the same token, he calls a person brave “if [the person] is fearless in facing a noble death or in facing emergencies in which death is close at hand” (*Ethics*, 1115a33-35). Certainly the person cannot charge into battle recklessly without reason because that person would die. Not only would that be a bad decision, but it would seem to be what Aristotle defines as a rash person. However, Aristotle defines a rash man who “is thought [...] to be boastful and a pretender to bravery” (*Ethics*, 1115b29-30), or a person who has the appearance of being brave but does not carry out any brave actions.

Likewise, the person cannot fear death to the point where the person becomes a coward, which is the deficiency of bravery. A coward “fears the things he should not, and in the manner he should not [...] and he is also deficient in courage [...] for he is afraid of everything” (*Ethics*, 1115b35-1116a1; a3). If the person were to fear the wrong things, then it is certain that the person’s fear of death would paralyze the person in battle, thus being ineffectual and taking no action or the wrong actions. Aristotle wants the brave

person to avoid the vice of cowardice because a coward fears things that should not be feared. For instance, Aristotle considers war as the noblest occasion to demonstrate virtue. A coward might fear something much more disgraceful, such as death by consuming too much alcohol. Not only is alcohol intoxication a disgraceful act, but it is also within our power to choose to imbibe alcohol (*Ethics*, 1113b6-8).

We can choose to demonstrate bravery in battle as well; in order to demonstrate this action, we must have already acquired the habit of bravery. Aristotle emphasizes this theme throughout his work: there is a right manner, or right reason, for a person to exude courage and fear; and when the action is done according to right reason, it is virtuous. When actions are not performed in accordance with virtue and reason, it results in a vice. This is how Aristotle presents the rest of the ethical virtues; he discusses the virtue, its two vices, and details actions that people take that put them somewhere along the spectrum of deficiency, mean, and excess, with the mean being sought after. Those who perform these virtues according to right reason will maintain the right kind of happiness.

Justice

Now that we have talked about the importance of virtue from an ethical standpoint, it is crucial to examine what Aristotle considers as the best and most complete virtue – justice. There are two different types of justice: justice as a complete virtue, and justice with respect to proportion. Aristotle takes a slightly different approach in defining justice as a complete virtue by talking about it in terms of its contrary – injustice. The unjust person is more or less “the lawbreaker [...] the grasping or unfair man,” while the

just person is the “law-abiding man or the fair man” (*Ethics*, 1129a33-35; 29b1-2). Laws are made for the common good of the community “with respect to virtue or with respect to some other such thing [e.g., honor]; so in one way we call ‘just’ those things which produce or preserve happiness or its parts in a political community” (*Ethics*, 1129b14-19).¹⁴ Aristotle demonstrates that one way to see law is through the connection between virtue and living a good life and the law. If breaking the law results in injustice, then laws must be just (*Ethics*, 1129b12). Since virtue is a part of the law, and breaking the law results in injustice, then the law “orders us to perform the *actions* of a brave man (e.g., not to desert our post, nor to take flight, nor throw away our arms) [...] and similarly with respect to the other virtues and evil habits, commanding us to do certain things and forbidding us to do others; and it does so rightly if it is rightly framed, but less well if hastily framed” (*Ethics*, 1129b20-21; 24-26). The law demands that its citizens perform the actions of a brave person, and in order to carry out brave actions, the citizens must possess the habit of bravery. If a person neglects these actions, the result is injustice. Not only is it an act of injustice to forego the acquisition of virtues, but it is unlawful; therefore we have a lawful obligation toward the rest of the people in a given society. The law demands that citizens “meet minimal standards of character” (Kraut 395) which signifies that citizens should possess some kind of virtue, because those who possess virtues demonstrate good character. True virtue can only be demonstrated toward another person. Hence it is important for citizens to have virtues because “[in the best state] the

¹⁴ I will leave the “political community” alone for now because that is a topic that Aristotle addresses in the *Politics*; hence it is better fit for that idea to be discussed in the following chapter.

virtue of a citizen and of a ruler is the same as that of the best man [...and] the task of a law giver would be (a) to see that men become good” (*Politics*, 1333a12-15).

If the concepts just and *fair* serve as means, where does that leave injustice? Aristotle considers injustice both a deficiency and an excess. Injustice is an excess “of what is beneficial without qualification” and it is a “deficiency of what is harmful” (*Ethics*, 1134a9-12). The term “without qualification” is a confusing term which needs elaboration, and to demonstrate this, I use the following example. Imagine that there is a boss who has two employees working for him. One employee receives less than the other one yet they both put in an equal amount of work. If the two workers did not have any other outstanding credentials – perhaps one worked for more years and thus deserves a higher pay or one received a bonus for acquiring more clients – then the employee who received more for less gained that extra money “without qualification,” or obtained it without a logical reason. A “deficiency of what is harmful” may occur if the boss of the employees decides to cut drastically one of the employees’ pay for no good reason so that he could not afford to sustain his life. To show how unjust this action is, imagine that the company grosses more than enough to allow everyone to have a luxurious salary. This example illustrates some serious wrongdoings because it affects people in a negative and undeserved way. Recall that law and virtue is related; since the law is a branch of justice, people commit an injustice as well. But this kind of justice is complete virtue because it includes all of them, so committing an injustice is much worse than neglecting one virtue.

Still within the context of justice as a complete virtue, Aristotle praises the “just person” who “acts for what is expedient for someone else, whether for a ruler or a

member of the community” (*Ethics*, 1130a5-7). Justice is a virtue that always impacts others. On the other hand, the worst kind of person is one “whose evil habit affects both himself and his friends” (*Ethics*, 1130a7-8). In Aristotle’s conception, neglecting or committing injustices over a span of a lifetime leads to one to become an evil person.

Aristotle keys in on two conceptions of justice: proportional justice and complete justice. Proportional justice, or a justice based on equal geometrical proportions, and corrective justice, which contains a judge who restores the balance of proportions when it is disrupted. Proportional justice depends on “four things; for the persons to which it happens to be just are [at least] two and the things are distributed into [at least] two parts” (*Ethics*, 1131a19-21). This logic applies to the equal as well, based on the idea of proportions. The commentary at the back of the *Ethics* provides an example of the kind of proportion that Aristotle acknowledges:

For example, 5 is greater than 3 but less than 8, and it is also equal to the sum of 3 and 2. Now in transactions, what is given may be of greater value or of less value than what is received. Hence it is possible for what is given to be equal in value to what is received [...] fairness is a species or an application of equality. Evidently, just as the equal lies between the greater and the less, so the fair lies between what is unfair in excess and what is unfair in deficiency (*Ethics*, 262).

This equality becomes an important component with respect to the mean of fairness and how it is distributed; if the parts are not divided equally, “quarrels and accusations arise” and this occurs when the “equality of ratios” is not adhered to (*Ethics*, 1131a24; 32).

Aristotle considers those who violate this proportion as unjust, but how? For instance, imagine another scenario where a boss has a bonus to distribute to two members of the company. Both members worked on the same project for an equal amount of time and both put in an equal amount of work to see the project succeed. However, the boss gives one of the workers double what he gave the other one. In Aristotelian logic, the boss committed two injustices: he acted unjustly by giving one of the workers more than he deserved, and the other worker was *treated* unjustly by receiving less than the worker earned (*Ethics*, 1131b17-21). Ideally the two workers should receive the same payment, and in a just society, everyone should work to keep these proportions equal.

Nevertheless, humans will always make mistakes and commit wrongs that destroy the proportion. So Aristotle includes one more type of justice: corrective. Unlike proportional justice, corrective justice measures the “amount of harm” that occurred within the exchanges and it serves to “[treat] both parties as equals” (*Ethics*, 1132a5-7). Corrective justice differs in another respect as well: a righteous judge exercising justice attempts to equalize situations given in the court. If a person kills another, “the suffering and the *action* are distinguished as unequals,” so the judge steps in and tries to balance the loss that the victim experienced “by means of a penalty which removes the gain of the assailant” (*Ethics*, 1132a8-13). The judge acts as a type of mean because the judge tries to restore justice and harmony to the unjust cases. Having corrective justice in a society restores the loss of the offended and removes the gain that the perpetrator took. The restoration is important because the perpetrator who serves out the penalty can return to society and can still maintain a virtuous life. However, if the person continues to pursue

these unjust actions, Aristotle would not consider the person as living a virtuous life if all the person does is spend time in jail, on parole, or whatever sentence the judge gives (*Ethics*, 1132a20-25).

In order to live a virtuous life, a person must not only understand virtue, but must practice it throughout a person's life and the person's descendants. Both ethical and intellectual virtue connects to prudence, or the ability to deliberate well about what is good and bad for a person. While ethical virtues such as bravery, generosity and good temper are important habitual dispositions essential to living a virtuous life, it is justice that Aristotle acknowledges as the most complete virtue because it incorporates all of the other ones. By neglecting any given virtue, the person also breaches justice as well. To pursue the virtuous life means that a person ought to follow the law and pursue virtuous actions. Aristotle's conception of the virtuous life serves as a strong foundation for the way in which citizens ought to conduct their lives. We must turn to the *Politics* to understand Aristotle's conception of the polis, a term that will be defined in the next chapter, and how the virtuous life fits into the polis.

Chapter 2

The *Politics* and the ideal polis

In the *Politics*, Aristotle develops and articulates what he sees as an ideal polis for people to use as an ideal model, so much of this chapter will center on how Aristotle articulates this idea. While Aristotle maintains that the preservation of a political system should remain as the top priority of any polis, he grants exceptions to regimes whose rulers have become tyrannical to the point where the ruler forces citizens to perform actions that do not seem to be just or right. Hence it is important to have both virtuous citizens and virtuous people, and the distinction between these kinds of people will be made clear in this thesis. In this chapter, I discuss how a household association progresses to a polis. Next, I examine key features of an ideal polis and the role that citizens play in it. Within that conception, I discuss the role of the ruler. In addition to these, I stress the importance and the purpose that education has within a polis. Educating upcoming citizens within the polis allows the polis to prosper. I look at Aristotle's treatment of slaves, women, farmers and artisans and consider why they were not recognized as citizens. While Aristotle does not recognize these groups as citizens, he does see each group as essential to the polis. Finally, I discuss non-ideal political systems with respect to the ideal polis. In order to be an effective ruler of a polis, one cannot just settle on one system of handling conflicts that arise within a polis, because sometimes another perspective can solve the problem. Having the background knowledge of how other polities conduct their regime give other rulers ideas about how to react to certain

dilemmas and inconsistencies that occur.¹⁵ Similar to the virtuous life seen in the *Ethics*, it is equally important to have a conception of an ideal polis. It provides an ideal model for people to see how the best polis functions.

Development of a polis

In the *Politics*, Aristotle discusses the importance of examining a political society from a variety of perspectives. In particular, he stresses the importance of the development of a polis and how the polis emerges from a single household association into a polis. The process of development begins with the household, the smallest unit that a person lives in. Smaller, more primitive communities contain a number of households, and when these households begin to work together, they form a village (Kraut 240). How do these households decide to come together? According to Aristotle, man is “by nature a political animal” (*Politics*, 1253a3; *Ethics*, 1097b11), and this nature derives from the assumption that men have the innate desire to live and associate with other human beings (Kraut 243; *Politics*, 1253a29-30). Since this desire to live with human beings is a part of human nature, Aristotle contends that one who refuses or cannot belong to such a community will be labeled a beast, a god, or simply “not a genuine human being” (Kraut 255; *Politics*, 1253a27-9). As more villages come together, the basic desires and goods become easily attainable and the people now have more time to pursue other, arguably higher and more desirable, goods. More complex social organizations emerge with the growing population, and out of this a polis is born (Kraut 241-242). What keeps the polis

¹⁵ I will also talk about how Aristotle believes that in an ideal polis, citizens should take turns ruling, so it is important for citizens to learn to rule and learn how to be ruled well.

running is the innate desire to belong with other human beings; the stronger the connection, the stronger the polis.

A striking feature of this argument stems from Aristotle's claim (which Kraut takes as Aristotle's implicit assumption) that the pursuit of higher goods does not derive from reasoning, but from living in a polis (Kraut 241). The people contribute to the polis that they live in, which makes it easier for people to acquire the basic necessities of life: food, shelter, clothing, etc. These necessities are much easier to acquire because everyone pitches in to make life more expedient. For instance, the adult male citizens have a plot of land that they can cultivate and produce food that benefits the entire polis. This way of obtaining goods triumphs over growing and hunting food, building houses, and sewing clothes in small household associations. Because one of the roles of the polis includes the provision of resources such that the people who belong to it do not have to struggle to exist, then the people gain the natural opportunity to pursue these higher goods (Kraut 241). In this sense, Aristotle argues that only those who live in a polis-like setting have the capability to live the best lives and that those who live in smaller, more primitive communities¹⁶ do not have that capability. In smaller societies, people must constantly work hard to maintain these basic necessities. In establishing this difference, Aristotle notes that "the association which aims in the highest degree and at the supreme good is the one which is the most authoritative and includes all the others. Now this is called a

¹⁶ Small societies are not necessarily more primitive. I take Aristotle to mean that a group that is not able to carry out virtuous actions because they are too busy fulfilling the basic needs of life because of the lack of people or some other feature would not be considered a true polis.

‘state,’ and it is a political association¹⁷” (*Politics*, 1252a5-8) as the type of place that he goes on to describe in further detail. Hence a political association, or a polis, seems to be the only kind of gathering where the highest good can be sought after and achieved.

The progression from the small household unit to a bustling polis must be examined further, as it contains a fairly complicated structure. For Aristotle, “the city is prior by nature to the household and to each of us” (*Politics*, 1253a19), and “the polis exists by nature [...] [and] a human being is a being of a kind naturally adapted to live in a polis” (Barnes 235). Kraut provides some insight into what Aristotle means by *prior*, or that the city is arranged in relation to the first individual. In other words, “the city predates the existence of each of the citizens of which it is composed” (Kraut 256). Aristotle does not say this to mean that the city is defined by a single individual, for “no whole is defined in terms of a single part” (Kraut 258); rather the idea of *prior* is that the ability for a city to exist must already exist within humans as a possibility. The existence of a city predating the individual is shown through the desire of humans who want to be in association with others, and that explains why a city comes to be in the first place (Kraut 242). This means that household associations and polities both occur by nature as well, since these compositions emerge through man’s natural desires (Barnes 235-236). Kraut shows Aristotle’s argument is that the good of the whole is better than the individual good – that is to say, “it is worse for a whole city to be destroyed than for any single member of the community to be destroyed, and not merely because it is better to

¹⁷ In talking about Aristotle’s *Politics*, I will use the term “polis” as meaning city, city-state, etc. because Aristotle does the same thing in talking about the *Politics*.

save many than to save one” (Kraut 267-68). In a polis, the city is more important to maintain than the individual; if the polis were to be expended at the cost of saving one person, then the polis would lose the very components that make it what it is and therefore would no longer serve as a polis. But how can Aristotle talk about the ideal polis when there are a number of different types of polities that he recognizes and discusses in detail? That will be discussed at a later time, but now I want to focus on some of the important features of an ideal polis.

Features of an ideal polis

Now that the general makeup of a city has been defined, I find it important to look at how Aristotle discusses the features of an ideal polis. In Book B of the *Politics*, Aristotle deepens the discussion of the development of a polis by questioning its level of unity. In doing so, Aristotle objects to Socrates’¹⁸ idea that a polis must be completely unified when looking at the relationship between children and their parents (*Politics*, 1261b20). How property is dispersed creates a tension when trying to introduce the concept of a completely unified society and this will have to be examined as well. Other features that Aristotle describes include the size and location of the polis, and the exchange of goods.

According to Aristotle, a society where “all men possess the same things is in one sense [i.e., each separately] a fine thing yet impossible, but in another sense [i.e., all taken together] it does not lead to harmony at all” (*Politics*, 1261b31-33). In positing this claim,

¹⁸ It is difficult to determine whether it is Socrates or Plato who came up with this idea. It is likely that it is Plato because Aristotle does mention that this source derives from *Plato’s Republic*. However, I will state that it is Socrates’ idea but understand that it comes from Plato’s writings.

Aristotle assumes that a society that acts as a complete unit is one where “all men possess the same things” (*Politics*, 1261b31). To determine how this might fit into Aristotle’s conception, let us presume that there exists a society that embodies this Socratic unity. If each member of the society is held responsible for all of the same things, then Aristotle does not agree that this format leads to harmony. Aristotle’s interpretation of the Socratic unity is that “each man pays most attention to what is his own, but less attention to what is common, or else, as much as contributes to his own interest. For each man, besides other reasons, thinks that the others will take care of the matter and so pays less attention to it” (*Politics*, 1261b35-38). How might this idea look in a modern context? Visualize that there is a particular neighborhood where families live. In this neighborhood, everyone in the neighborhood knows everyone else: it is a “tight-knit community.” One day, a child, Natasha, trips another child, Brandon, who falls and scrapes his knee. Both parents witness the conflict, but whose responsibility is it to console the crying child and reprimand the offender? According to the Socratic unity, both parents are responsible for consoling and punishing each respective child (*Politics*, 1261b20-28). In Socrates’ unitary conception, the typical family structure is broken and the roles become much broader. In this type of society there appears to be no distinction between a biological parent and a parent who is a part of the neighborhood. In the Socratic view, any parent carries the same burden of responsibility, but because their effort is a conjoined one, either parent (or any parent in the community) will leave it to the responsibility of the other, neglecting the child completely (*Politics*, 1262a1-6).

Socrates' belief in the complete unity of a community seems to be an impossible task especially when the responsibility of raising all of the children is given to the entire community. Aristotle believes that "this kind of association [which Socrates advocates] would necessitate a diluted sort of friendship" (*Politics*, 1262b15-17). If the parents of the community all shared the same responsibility for every child, it would result in a diluted friendship because the parents would not spend enough time with every child. Not only will this lead to an unfruitful friendship, but pursuing this type of unity will not provide the close attention and the love for a child if everyone has the same responsibility. Moreover, it is unlikely that the unlikelihood of all parents can devote all of this time to all of the children without neglecting their own duties in other regards. Kraut highlights a point that Aristotle makes about children and their need for "extraordinary care from a small number of loving adults" (Kraut 317). Aristotle desires to see parents who pay close attention to their children. This idea opposes Socrates' concept of unity, but this point helped Aristotle to formulate his own ideas about unity. Aristotle is right to give responsibility to the primary caregivers because in theory they know the children better than anyone else. Furthermore, it would be quite an arduous ask for every primary caregiver¹⁹ to assume that they must provide as much as they would for their own child as they would for another considering how difficult it is to raise a child in a traditional setting. One can only devote so much time to another human being without neglecting other necessary daily tasks. Additionally, a complete unity weakens relationships if a

¹⁹ This includes parents, family relatives, adopting parents, etc.

person spreads his or her time with too many people; thus the person is unable to develop a true relationship. This idea references an earlier point made about diluted friendship, or the idea that “the words ‘my father,’ ‘my son,’ and the like would be uttered with the weakest feeling of friendship” (*Politics*, 1262b16-18). Hence the level of unity within a polis in regards to raising children should not be the responsibility of every citizen, but should rely primarily on the parents or of those who assume legal responsibility of said offspring.²⁰

Other than unity, another important feature of an ideal polis is the distribution of property. He sees property as falling under two different categories: private and public. Aristotle states three ways in which property is divided up:

the plots of ground are privately owned, but the crops are brought into the common stock for consumption (which is done by some nations), conversely, the land is commonly owned and cultivated but the crops are distributed and used privately (this manner of sharing is said to be done by some barbarians), and both the plots and the use of the crops are common (*Politics*, 1263a2-7).

Aristotle describes all three options because he understands that the polities during his time used these methods. Even though Aristotle seeks the ideal polis, he does so with the intent that the goal can be realized; that is, it has a practical application. Aristotle’s idea about property distribution and his overall conception of the polis is not merely

²⁰ The type of parenting seen here is an ideal picture. Certainly not every parent acts in this manner, but to talk about every instance of how parenting works would be making my thesis go off track.

theoretical; property distribution is something that can actually occur throughout every facet of this conception. Out of the various distributions of property that he recognizes, Aristotle highlights the way in which the distribution contains “the goodness of both systems” (*Politics*, 1263a24-25), or a system that has both public and private elements. Aristotle sees more advantages in the system where the people cater to their own property because “men will not complain against one another [in matters of property], and they will produce more since each will be paying special attention to what he regards as being his own” (*Politics*, 1263a26-28). If people possessed their own plot of land, they would take care of it without the worry that others might try and conquer it or become jealous that others make more than they do. How does Aristotle see this goal achieved? The goods the citizens produce go into a public sphere which people share communally, so citizens would use their property in a manner that helps the polis as a whole. This way produces fewer conflicts and boasts more advantages because it creates an amiable atmosphere for maintaining an ideal polis (*Politics*, 1263a25-30).

However, one might question whether or not the adult male citizens working their lands will really do their fair share of the work. Aristotle would respond this challenge using the idea of virtue, “because of virtue, the use of property will be according to the proverb ‘common are the possessions of friends’” (*Politics*, 1263a29-31). People in a polis who pursue virtue will want to help out the whole polis by doing the necessary work. Additionally, to build upon this point, “one’s *greatest* desire ought not to be for a happiness that surpasses anyone else’s, or for superiority to everyone else as a public benefactor; rather, what we should want most of all is to live well by serving our

community” (Kraut 334). In essence, living well and the desire to serve one’s community drives one who owns a private property to *want* to raise many crops and food to put into the communal meal so that the polis as a whole does not struggle to meet basic needs.²¹ In an ideal polis, the people work for the common good of all, and Aristotle uses Sparta as a practical example of what this might look like (*Politics*, 1263a36-39). In such a polis, the citizens “have their own property, but use each other’s slaves, dogs, and horses as though they were their own” (Kraut 329). Within this polis, the citizens demonstrate virtue because its citizens are trustworthy and generous enough to allow their fellow members access to their belongings with little preoccupation. This example defends against the doubt of whether the adult male citizens will do their share of work because its citizens would abuse it. It shows the citizen’s friendship toward one another, a key element in maintaining an ideal polis.

Size is another feature that Aristotle discusses with respect to the ideal polis. He does not state explicitly its precise size, but he does object to a polis that is too large because “it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, for a state with a very large population to be well-managed” (*Politics*, 1326a26-27). A polis that is too large makes it too difficult to maintain law and order, and “to be a great state is not the same as to be a state with a great number of men” (*Politics*, 1326a24-25). Not having as many people helps the ruler better manage the polis, allowing the polis to “be regarded as being the greatest if it can best fulfill its function” (*Politics*, 1326a14-15). What this says seems accurate,

²¹ The people who live in a polis must have some common interests but not to the degree that Socrates maintained in *Plato’s Republic*.

but what does it mean for a polis to carry out its function? Translator Gerson gives us a better understanding of the function of a polis using the analogy of a shoemaker:

The function of a good shoemaker is to use only enough leather of good quality to make a shoe of good quality; a large quantity of leather alone is no guarantee that a good shoe will be made. Similarly, the function of a good state is to make its citizens happy; and the number of its citizens must be such as to make this possible (*Politics*, 352).

Therefore the function of a polis is to make its citizens happy; simply because a polis has a reasonable size does not mean that it will then have the ability to carry out its duties in the proper manner. However, a large size will impede the function of the polis and will make it difficult, if not impossible to make its citizens happy. On the other hand, a polis cannot have too few people, as this too will inhibit the polis' effectiveness. Moreover, with too few members, such an "association is not self-sufficient" (*Politics*, 1326b2),²² and "it is not easy for a government to exist" (b5-6). If the polis were too small, it would be unmanageable for the ruler. In any given polis, citizens have roles²³ that need to be fulfilled, and with a small polis people would spend too much time trying to fill every role and they would have no time to do anything else; the polis would be in chaos and happiness would not be attainable.

²² In order for a polis to be self-sufficient, it must "have everything and lack nothing" (*Politics*, 1326a30-31).

²³ This too is a subject that I will focus on in more detail further in this chapter.

Finally, location is a feature that Aristotle discusses for reasons gearing towards protection and sustainability of a rising polis. Location should be “difficult for the enemy to invade, but easy for the citizens to go out from” (*Politics*, 1326b41-27b1). It is vital that citizens feel safe in their own polis. If a polis has a weak military, it is possible that other polities will conquer it. Not only should the polis be situated in a safe location, but the polis should be close to the sea and to important resources. He sums one hypothetical description of an ideal polis when he says that “it should be convenient for every part to receive protection from the other parts, and (b) the fruits of the earth should be easily transportable to all parts, and so should timber and any other such products which the territory happens to possess” (*Politics*, 1327a6-10). Polities that have an abundant source of materials thrive much better because they are more self-sufficient. Today, a country like Japan might fail to fit Aristotle’s conception of an ideal location due to their lack of resources. However, since they trade with many other countries whose goods transport favorably to those areas, Japan could still be a reasonable place to live. While not all areas have a balanced unity, a distribution of property agreeable to all citizens, and an ideal location, I find that it is best to see Aristotle as a person who formats the idea of an ideal polis as a model for rulers to compare their polities. In addition, the purpose of the polis is to allow and promote living well for all of its citizens. But citizens who live in a polis also have a duty to fulfill, and I address how Aristotle articulates that role in the following section.

What does it mean to be a citizen of a polis?

One of the most fundamental components of the polis is the citizen; regardless of its level of unity, size, location, or its proximity to effective resources, the actions of its citizens will determine the effectiveness of a polis. On a basic level, Aristotle defines a citizen as “a man who has the right to participate in a legislative or judicial office of that state [...] so the right to deliberate or decide some or all matters is assigned to these persons” (*Politics*, 1275b19-20; 16-17). Deliberation evokes the idea of virtue, so it seems plausible to infer that a citizen must have a degree of virtue so that a citizen can deliberate well. Remember that a person deliberates about “the things which he can do by himself [...] things which are possible [...] whose outcome is not clear [...] in which there is something indeterminate” (*Ethics*, 1112a35-b9-10). Kraut strengthens Aristotle’s point about the virtuousness of the citizen because in a polis by saying that “every citizen must meet minimal standards of character; and this is the most important qualification of all, because the goal of the [polis] is to promote the development of fully realized human beings who have the resources they need to exercise their powers” (Kraut 395).²⁴ Overall, one of the duties of being a citizen involves the exercise of acquiring and demonstrating virtues.

However, Aristotle notes a difference between virtuous citizens and virtuous people which relates to the duties of a citizen. According to Aristotle, “a virtuous citizen does not necessarily possess the virtue of a man” (*Politics*, 1276b34-36). Why not? It is

²⁴ This idea is echoed in chapter 1, specifically within the discussion of justice as a virtue.

due to the fact that the virtues of a citizen change between different polities (*Politics*, 1276b28-34). However, a person who is said to be virtuous does not transform their virtues to the political system they associate with; rather the virtues and the character of the person remain consistent regardless of the polis. In this regard the person's virtue and actions are better because they do not change. Thus Aristotle concludes that a good ruler must possess both the virtue of a citizen of that particular polis and the virtue of a good person (*Politics*, 1277a14-15). Since the citizens are an integral part of the polis, it is important for them not only to be good rulers, but good citizens as well.

In an ideal polis, the ability to rule is an important component of being a citizen, so it is no wonder that Aristotle recognizes this as a characteristic for citizens. Not only is it important for citizens to rule, but it is equally important for them to be ruled as well (*Politics*, 1277b14-15). Ideal polities contain many virtuous citizens who can take turns ruling over one another, for "all must alike share in government by ruling and being ruled by turns" (*Politics*, 1332b26-27; Kraut 360). Here Aristotle refers to "all alike" as the adult male citizens, and these citizens will take turns ruling the polis. Rotating citizens in and out of office gives them equitable power so that no one person has more influence than the other. At the same time, this approach reduces the ability of abusing power (*Politics*, 1308b32-36); once the offender leaves office, the offended person could take revenge. In an ideal polis, such events would not occur because both the rulers²⁵ and the citizens will be virtuous. Aristotle realizes that conflicts will happen, and so he uses the

²⁵ If citizens take turns ruling, and citizens have to be virtuous, then it must be the case that rulers are virtuous as well – see previous page.

rotation of ruling as a preventative measure. However, a polis without enough citizens who are able to rule well makes it difficult to make modifications to the political system. It is important for a citizen in charge of the polis to promote and live the virtuous lifestyle, attain happiness, and a complete life (*Ethics*, 1100a4-5). Kraut supports Aristotle's claim about virtuous citizens because citizens who can rule are also able to "make what is defective less defective [and] not to substitute one kind of defect for another" (Kraut 373). In order to be a virtuous citizen, it is also crucial to understand the polis enough to make the necessary improvements and to resolve any issues that arise.

Aristotle's views on education

Education serves as a foundation for not only pursuing the political life, but also for any type of trade or profession. Aristotle charges each polis with the responsibility of educating the children because "every state has a single aim [and] there must also be one and the same education for all citizens" (*Politics*, 1337a22-23). If the citizens of the polis deliberate about certain affairs that may or may not happen within the community, then having an equal and common education for all will help them in achieving a shared conception of morality. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the polis to educate its children. In fact, Aristotle admonishes polities that fail to educate its upcoming citizens, arguing that "it is the lawgiver most of all who should attend to the education of the young; for if this is not done in states, their governments are harmed" (*Politics*, 1337a13-16). In other words, Aristotle argues that governments who do not educate their young weaken the structure of the government. A citizen "should regard himself as belonging not to himself but to the state" (*Politics*, 1337a28-29), so a government that does not

educate the young fails to preserve the status of the polis. In order for the citizens to share a common mindset, education must prevail. Thus the ruler of the polis ought to ensure that the upcoming citizens receive such an education.

Moreover, it is important for a government to be made up of citizens who have appropriate characters because those individuals are responsible for preserving that polis (*Politics*, 1337a16-18). A polis composed of citizens who do not have an education would last a short amount of time because its citizens would not agree on matters which concern the polis.²⁶ This reveals another side of the polis that needs to be unified, that there should be a common education for all (*Politics*, 1337a26-27). Aristotle considers education as an integral part of the polis because the education should be public, accessible to all citizens, and the education is “one and the same education for all citizens” (*Politics*, 1137a24-26).

What does Aristotle say about education in a polis? Aristotle highlights four essential categories that education should focus on. These subjects include reading and writing, drawing, gymnastics, and music. In general, education is helpful in the goal of pursuing a virtuous life (*Politics*, 1337b31), but how? The acquired skills of reading and writing enable children to pursue other types of learning (engineering, mathematics, science, etc.) but education has practical purposes as well. Reading and writing is used in “money-making and household management and learning things and in many political actions” (1338a16-18); so these skills are imperative for someone to develop these skills

²⁶ The purpose behind education is not to instill character. But in order to pursue education, it is important that a child be brought up with virtue.

in order to partake in political matters. Children who learn to draw become more appreciative of beauty and “avoid [making mistakes] in purchasing things²⁷ or being deceived in buying or selling articles”; learning to draw “makes us better judges of the works of artists” (*Politics*, 1338b1-3; 1338a18-19), and this provides citizens with the right kinds of pleasures and the ability to recognize the right kinds of objects.

Participating in exercise and good dieting habits encourages children to maintain their health and beauty, which is related to gymnastics. Tessitore digs deeper into the kind of education Aristotle discusses when Tessitore argues that “a healthy political education does not overbreed the citizens in the regime’s specific character, but instead fosters moderation, nourishing both civility and a decent way of living” (Tessitore 311). Here Tessitore recognizes virtues (decent way of living) as coexisting with political ideas.

Music is the fourth educational category that Aristotle discusses. However, some rulers in political societies think less of music and do not believe it belongs to the common education system. Aristotle argues that music affords both pleasure and relaxation that enthuses our souls. He reasons that “since music happens to give us pleasure, and since virtue is concerned with being delighted and loving and hating in the right manner, it is clear that there should be no greater concern than that of learning and acquiring habits which make us judge rightly” (*Politics*, 1340a14-18).

Education and living the virtuous life are key themes for Aristotle, but is one more important than the other? Aristotle does not see the learning of good habits (virtues)

²⁷ Here Aristotle likely refers to art, painting, sculpture, etc.

as training that is above this education, which is why he concludes with this point about good character when he says that “it is evident that the education of [good] habits in children should precede the education of their reason” (*Politics*, 1338b4-5). In this sense, the citizens of a polis must agree on a common conception of the virtuous actions and good characteristics that all children will be expected to acquire and maintain for the sake of the polis. The reason for that is because “a young man is not a proper student of [lectures on] politics; for he is inexperienced in actions concerned with human life, and discussions proceed from [premises concerning those actions] and deal with [those actions]” (*Ethics*, 1095a3-6). A child must acquire these essential habits not only to engage properly in politics, but for the child’s education as a whole. However, the common education that Aristotle discusses applies only to citizens. To engage properly in political thought, a person needs to be grounded first in the virtues, followed by education. In the next section, I will talk about the groups that Aristotle does not recognize as citizens, his reasons, and why he believes these groups are still important to an ideal polis.

Social groups in a polis who are not recognized as citizens

Depending on the polis, citizenship varies; in some cases, artisans and farmers and other groups are included within the definition (*Politics*, 1328b29-31). However, in an ideal polis, Aristotle maintains that “a citizen should not lead the life of a [vulgar] artisan or a tradesman; for such life is degrading and inconsistent with virtue. Nor should a citizen who is to be [happy] lead the life of a farmer; for he should have the leisure to acquire virtue and to perform [good] political actions” (*Politics*, 1328b39-29a3). Citizens ought to pursue the virtuous life because it is the best life to live, but it requires the ability

to reason and deliberate and time to participate in government. Slaves lack the capacity to reason and therefore cannot be of any use to the government. Women are seen as inferior to men and thus cannot pursue the virtuous life either. Farmers and artisans have the capability to pursue this life, but their tasks are such that they leave little time to develop virtues and to participate in government. In this section I explore Aristotle's treatment of these groups. I also discuss the roles these groups have in a polis.

One of the most polemical subjects that Aristotle argues for is slavery. In talking about slavery, it is useful to understand some of the context of Aristotle's time. Slavery in Athens differs from the type of slavery employed for over 200 years in the United States. In 431 BC, the slave population was approximately 100,000 in Attica,²⁸ compared to the 50,000 adult male citizens that lived in the same region (Kraut 279). These facts demonstrate that it was not only the wealthy minority that owned slaves; those who could afford to own slaves did. Slaves also outnumbered the number of adult citizens, so it is likely that households owned more than one slave. In addition, most slaves were foreigners to Athens, so the probability that many of the slaves were conquered by ancient Athens was high.

According to Aristotle, there are two different kinds of slaves: one can be a "slave by law who serves a master" and one becomes a slave because the slave is conquered and thus "[belongs] to the conquerors" (*Politics*, 1255a5-8). In other words, it seems that Aristotle believes that slavery is a natural institution, especially because Aristotle

²⁸ This includes Athens and the countryside that surrounds it (Kraut 279).

considers a slave as “an animate possession” (*Politics*, 1253b33-34) of any given household. More support for this view occurs further on: “for a slave by nature is a man who can belong to another [...] and who can participate in reason [...] but [who cannot possess] it” (*Politics*, 1254b20-23). From this quotation we can infer that there are slaves who are naturally servants whether by nature or by being conquered.

Aristotle defines a slave as “an individual who [...] is by his nature not his own but belongs [wholly] to another [man]; and a man is said to belong to another if, being a man, he is a thing possessed; and as a possession he is an instrument which, existing separately, can be used [by the master] for action” (*Politics*, 1254a15-19). A slave belongs to a master as a mere tool that is used at the master’s discretion. While the slave completes all of the difficult tasks that involve working with the hands, the master is able to fully pursue “higher activities” such as “politics, poetry, music, and the like” (Kraut 281). The menial work that the slave performs prevents the master from activities that may “dull his mind” (Kraut 281). Such tasks involve manual labor such as cooking, cleaning, tending the crops, house repairs, etc. Since the slave spends much of the time carrying out the master’s tasks, it follows that the slave does not have the time to pursue to virtue.

This same view is out of context in most of today’s households because slavery is illegal and/or looked down upon in some countries. However, we do have occupations that may seem to function similarly to slaves – butlers and maids, custodians, window and car washers, etc. However, there are major differences between these types of work. During Aristotle’s time period, treating slaves poorly and unfairly would be more of a

social and ethical concern that may or may not be addressed, whereas in today's society mistreating a butler or a custodian could lead to more severe consequences. Slaves undertake all the hard manual labor work so that the master can pursue other, higher faculties. In contrast, custodians take care of buildings and keep places clean so that when people come to visit they do not become sick due to unsanitary conditions. In a modern context, it is more appropriate to consider butlers and maids, custodians, and similar parties as a part of the Aristotelian conception of the farmer and artisan category. This shows that slavery has become a dying practice and thus does not fit into a modern conception.

Kraut sums up one rebuttal against this claim by saying that "some human beings are by nature slaves" (Kraut 281). Looking back to the definition that Aristotle gives, it is shocking to notice how he objectifies the slave as an instrument and not as a human being to help the master become more of a virtuous person. Aristotle wants the reader to think about the master-slave relationship in terms of a tangible example about possession. The two types of possession that Aristotle draws attention to are inanimate and animate. Inanimate possessions are like rudders: they do not move on their own because animate possessions (in this example, the lookout person) move them. The lookout person makes sure that the person who steers the ship does not run into ships, rocks, or other hazards. To sum up, slaves are animate possessions (lookout people) that are used by the master (the person steering the ship) in order to promote the betterment of the entire household (ship) (*Politics*, 1253b-1254a9). In this sense, slaves serve as animate tools and not living, breathing individuals.

Nevertheless, Aristotle believes that the master does have some positive effect on the slave. Since slaves lack virtue and “the deliberative part of the soul” (*Politics*, 1260a17-18) and because a good master possesses virtues, the slave can learn some of what the master either teaches or demonstrates. Unfortunately, a slave is only useful “for the necessities of life; so it is clear that he requires but little virtue, as much as is needed to prevent him from failing to perform his work because of intemperance or cowardice” (*Politics*, 1260a34-37). To a certain extent, slaves require some acquisition of virtue. However, a slave does not need to pursue complete virtue in order to perform these daily tasks because the slaves’ duties do not call for complete virtue. In an ideal polis, since slaves cannot pursue the virtuous life, and because citizens are required to develop virtues in order to be good citizens, slaves cannot become citizens in an ideal polis.

Similar to slaves, women are not regarded highly in Athens. Aside from the obvious fact that in both texts the male presides as the dominant figure both as a figure and within the masculine language, the male is “by nature superior to the female, and [it is better for] the male to rule and the female to be ruled” (*Politics*, 1254b13-14). Kraut would interpret this quotation by arguing that “all human beings—including women and natural slaves—naturally want to join with others [...] but only free man are political in the more specific sense; only they (Aristotle wrongly supposes) have an impetus to participate in civic life” (Kraut 249). Aristotle thinks that women do not want to participate in political affairs, which is why he concludes that women are better off being ruled. This may also be seen as Aristotle’s view that women are inferior to men.

Another, more direct reason why Aristotle sees women as subordinate to men is because “the male is by nature more able to lead than the female,” and Aristotle compares this relationship to that of a kingship: “for a king, although of the same race as his subjects, should be by nature superior to them” (*Politics*, 1259b2-3; 15-16). Even though man and woman come from the same race, Aristotle maintains that man is by nature superior to women with regard to ruling, so man should hold that high position. The same kind of ruling occurs in a marriage as well, for a man also rules over his wife politically. A woman lacks the ability to rule because she “has [the deliberative part of the soul] but it has no authority” (*Politics*, 1260a13-14). A woman seems to be capable of pursuing the virtuous life, but since she lacks the authority and is not as worthy as men to rule, she cannot participate in government, as authority is a crucial component of ruling. From this it is clear that Aristotle does not see women as worthy enough of being called a citizen because of the lack of authority and the inferiority to the male dominance.

In an ideal polis, farmers and artisans rank slightly above women and slaves, but Aristotle does not consider them as full citizens like the adult males in the society. However, he does recognize that both types of people are necessary *to* the polis, but they are not actually a part of it like its citizens are (*Politics*, 1329a36-38). Why is it that “the tradesmen and craftsmen are recognized as necessary to the existence of the State, but (to a modern eye) seem to enjoy none of its privileges, and are too easily declared to be debarred by the nature of their work from political ‘virtue’” (Allan, 144)? The work that farmers and artisans perform is not within the scope of the political virtues. Aristotle does not see the artisan or the farmer as part of an ideal polis because “a citizen should not

lead the life of a [vulgar] artisan or a tradesman; for such life is degrading and inconsistent with virtue. Nor should a citizen who is to be [happy] lead the life of a farmer; for he should have the leisure to acquire virtue and to perform [good] political actions” (*Politics*, 1328b39-29a2). These groups are too consumed with trying to provide the polis with materials necessary for the polis to exist and thus do not have time to pursue the virtuous life. Moreover, these groups of people lack the time and the lifestyle appropriate for a citizen to pursue. They could not participate in government because they do not lead or pursue virtuous lives, and it is probable that they do not pay close attention to political affairs due to their duties as farmers or artisans.

I conclude that this is how Aristotle sees the ideal polis. However, Aristotle also acknowledges the importance of looking at other political systems as well, for it is important for a ruler to have an understanding of more than one political association. We will see why that is when we begin to examine other non-ideal political systems and the key items that rulers can learn from them.

Non-ideal political systems

A peculiar feature of Aristotle’s project is that he pays attention to political systems that *aren’t* necessarily ideal (Kraut 427), but why? Aristotle finds it fruitful to examine political systems that are not as desirable because he believes that political scientists ought to be aware of all the different kinds of government there are and the number of ways that they combine with one another to produce other kinds of governments (*Politics*, 1289a11-13). These in turn help the ruler of the polis deal with conflicts by approaching an issue from a different perspective. Furthermore, if citizens

are supposed to be good rulers and they recognize that some features of one political system might be better for their political system, then it is possible for them to make small adjustments to make the polis better. Thus an understanding of how other polities rule guides the rulers in knowing which parts of systems work and which ones fail.

Aristotle asserts that certain features of all political systems are universal, two of which are quality and quantity. According to Aristotle, some of the features of quality are “freedom, wealth, education, and noble birth” (*Politics*, 1296b18-9) and for quantity, “superiority in numbers” (*Politics*, 1296b20). Different political systems accentuate different qualities and quantities: for instance, oligarchies emphasize education and wealth while the people’s rule²⁹ highlights freedom. Another universal factor is that each state has three distinct classes: wealthy, poor, and a middle class (*Politics*, 1295b2-3). Again, the quantity differs among the different political systems, but the general idea exists within each of them. While there are other attributes of different political systems that might be worth mentioning, these are the ones that Aristotle chooses to focus on within the context of this topic, so in the next paragraph, I explore some of the attributes of the political systems.

Aristotle argues that the absolute kingship is the best and the most divine political system while tyranny is the worst one (*Politics*, 1289b2-3). Out of the political systems, democracy is the branch that is most popular (*Politics*, 1294a16). Democracy is a blend of oligarchy and the people’s rule (*Politics*, 1293b34) which Aristotle defines as a

²⁹ “People’s rule aims at the interest of the poor [only]” (*Politics*, 1279b9); “Most are content enough even if not all of them share in electing officials but only some of them are elected from by all turns and have the authority of deliberating” (*Politics*, 1318b23-27).

“government by a poor majority” (Ross 259) whose foundation rests on the equality for all freemen (Ross 260). Democracy is also built on a mathematical equality with the idea that classes should not dominate or control one another, but that all share an equal power (Kraut 458). So what are oligarchy and the people’s rule based on? Oligarchies are based on the wealthy and their authority over the polis (*Politics*, 1290b2-3) while the people’s rule is based on equality, or the fact that no group should have authority over another but that all groups are similar (*Politics*, 1291a30-4).

While there are various kinds of people’s rule and oligarchy, I address the general characteristics of each system to reveal their significance. Political systems vary depending on the types of citizens that exist within the polis. For instance, imagine that ancient Athens was a polis such that there was a good mix of upper-class citizens, middle-class citizens, and poor citizens. An oligarchy would not be a good political association, but why? The poor people would rebel because the wealthy would try to keep them in a subordinated position while the wealthy would rule in high favor of the upper-class citizens. Likewise, the people’s rule would not serve as an adequate political system. The wealthy people would want to remain superior to all citizens, and in this rule the poor people dominate the politics because it would be based on a majority rule (*Politics*, 1302a23-28).³⁰ In such a society there could be no justice because frequent disagreements between the social classes would arise, so the people’s rule would be inadequate for their polis. A ruler who has an understanding of both oligarchy and

³⁰ The wealthy would not have the majority rule, as there were more middle-class / poor citizens than the wealthy class.

people's rule could blend the benefits of both political systems in order to try and maintain good relations among all of the people in the polis. Hence a ruler should become familiar with all types of political systems.

Sometimes a form of government does not fit the polis and it needs to be changed. If such a change must occur, Aristotle recognizes that it is in the best interests of the polis to start a revolution. However, this should take place if tyrants become unruly to the point where the tyrant demands that its citizens perform shameful acts that go against the law (Kraut 374; 384). Once the tyrants force its citizens to perform these acts, these orders should be disobeyed by the citizens and rebellion should occur (*Ethics*, 1110a4-8). Aristotle notes a number of rationales that could provoke citizens to revolt. Citizens might rebel due to some of the following reasons: "gain, honor, insult, fear, superiority, contempt, disproportionate advance in standing, intrigues, carelessness, pettiness, dissimilarity" (*Politics*, 1302b1-5).

If the citizens and legislatures of the government create and refine a political system that eliminates most or all of these threats, then the polis would prosper and rebellions would not occur. One way to prevent rebellion is to "get the needy to mingle with the prosperous, or to increase the number of the middle class; for the result of this tends to do away with rebellions which arise because of inequality" (*Politics*, 1308b29-31). But if the current constitution is severely deficient in various areas, then its citizens should rebel and establish a new constitution.

Nonetheless, it is best for citizens of a polis to seek other ways to make the polis better, as rebellion is a last resort. Aristotle agrees with this, and there are two reasons

why people should strive to maintain the current political system. First, it is unrealistic to completely transform the current regime to a different one. It would require a substantial amount of work, a drastic change of major policies, and a great deal of time. It would be quite frustrating to install a completely new regime, especially when the problem can be solved in other, easier ways, which brings me to a second reason. In order to fix the political system, one must study it in order to understand it better (Kraut 433). If the citizens continued to participate and be active within the community while the ruler studies all of the parts of the polis (the “political scientist) then its citizens and the ruler will know and understand the system and be able to make those necessary modifications so that the system functions better (Kraut 433).

Another objection that Aristotle raises is the idea that some citizens might prefer a different constitution over another because theirs is not the most ideal. They might become jealous that other forms of government are better than theirs and desire to switch governments. Aristotle responds to this argument by proposing that there are ways to govern the polis “so that the character of the citizens is somewhat improved—though not so much that they become good citizens and their cities acquire good constitutions” (Kraut 435). In some political systems, citizens can rise up and become better ones. In political systems dominated by a large middle-class, it is possible to do so *because* of the influence of the middle-class.³¹ They make excellent citizens because “the moderate and the mean are the best” (*Politics*, 1295b3-4).

³¹ Aristotle never uses the term “middle-class”; instead, he acknowledges their class by saying that they are below the wealthy but above the poor (1295b1-3).

In the *Politics*, Aristotle describes an ideal polis that could be realized. To show this, he paints a picture of the trajectory from household association to a full polis. Then he looks at some of the main features of an ideal polis such as unity, distribution of property, size and location. The role of the citizen is crucial to the polis because they determine how it runs and its overall ultimate success. However, according to Aristotle, slaves and women are not seen as “citizens” even in an ideal polis because they lack the deliberative qualities. Not all polities function that way, and that is why rulers and citizens must familiarize themselves with non-ideal constitutions. Occasionally polities may require adjustments, and that is why citizens must be both virtuous and they must study other political regimes to see what is expedient for the community. These tactics do not always work, and a revolution may occur if the citizens cannot change the situation. Aristotle holds the view that a revolution is the worst-case scenario because it is preferable to preserve the current political regime. This then should be a satisfactory broad account of Aristotle’s main ideas as stated in the *Politics*. However, one cannot simply examine each text: it is important to draw out some of the important connections between the *Ethics* and the *Politics*. Both the *Ethics* and the *Politics* contain important similarities that I address in the next chapter, as well as the purpose behind connecting these two important texts.

Chapter 3 Connections between the *Politics* and the *Ethics*

In the preface of *Politics, Books VII and VIII*, Richard Kraut acknowledges the importance of connecting the *Ethics* and the *Politics* when he writes that “[Aristotle’s] political thought will be poorly understood if it is broken into pieces that are studied in isolation from each other [...] It is only when one reads the work as a whole, and integrates it with Aristotle’s ethical writings, that one can appreciate the power and the scope of his project” (Kraut, Preface).³² In other words, a person cannot fully understand the *Ethics* without reading the *Politics* and vice versa because these are texts whose major themes depend on each other. In this chapter, I highlight important similarities between the *Ethics* and the *Politics* and explain how each text supports the other. One major theme that connects both texts is virtue. In the *Ethics*, Aristotle sees virtue as a fundamental pillar in attaining happiness. People who pursue virtue aim for the best life possible. In the *Politics*, Aristotle maintains that “the association which aims in the highest degree and at the supreme good is the one which is the most authoritative and includes all the others. Now this is called a ‘state’ [polis], and it is a political association” (*Politics*, 1252a5-7). The idea that the polis aims at the highest good parallels the highest good that people seek in the *Ethics*; both ideas are also connected to the idea of virtue. Another important connection in the *Ethics* and the *Politics* hinges on the roles that slaves, women, farmers, and artisans fulfill. They are not considered part of the polis and are thus left out

³² Kraut, Richard. Aristotle Politics: Books VII and VIII. Oxford Clarendon Press. Oxford: 1997.

of pursuing the ideal life. Yet these groups help the polis become a better one, an idea that is expounded upon in the *Politics*. Although in the *Ethics* Aristotle posits three types of friendships, I will focus only on one type of friendship. This type of friendship relates to farmers and artisans. There are other unlabeled types of friendships that I discuss in this chapter which relate to slaves and women, as stated in the *Ethics*. Friendships based on these themes best pertain to the relationship between slaves, women, farmers and artisans because in an ideal polis, these people are regarded as inferiors to the adult male citizens of the polis. Finally, I want to focus on the importance of ruling, as the rulers will lead the polis to living the best life and they must also decide the criteria for citizenship. In the *Ethics*, Aristotle argues that the statesman has an obligation to make the citizens of the polis better and to ensure that they follow the law (*Ethics*, 1102a9-10). In the *Politics*, a citizen ought to possess the ability to rule as a statesperson³³ and to be ruled as a citizen so that the polis will prosper (*Politics*, 1277b15-17). Arguably these are the most important connections between the *Ethics* and the *Politics* because the connection shows the aim of the polis and its citizens, distinguishes between a citizen and a non-citizen, and these connections show the influence of those who run the polis – the rulers.

In the *Ethics*, Aristotle sees virtues as essential to attaining happiness. People must pursue virtue in order to attain happiness, and once that lifestyle is set, the person “will be such a man throughout his life; for he will be engaged always or most of all in *actions* and studies of things done according to virtue, and he will bear the fortunes of life

³³ Aristotle says “statesman,” but outside of Aristotle’s texts I will refer to statesman as statesperson.

most nobly and with propriety in every way like a man who is truly good” (*Ethics*, 1100b17-22). The key to living a good life does not consist only in virtuous actions in a polis throughout an entire life, but it includes happiness as well. After all, happiness “is the highest good, and the most noble, and the most pleasant” (*Ethics*, 1099a24-26), and since happiness “requires [...] both complete virtue and a complete life” (*Ethics*, 1100a5), happiness must be an element that results in continuously pursuing a virtuous life. Recall that this kind of happiness is not an ephemeral type of happiness – it is the Greek concept *eudemonia* that I spoke of in chapter 1 (*Ethics*, 357). That is why Aristotle argues that “happiness [is] the most worthy of choice and not capable of being increased by the addition of some other good” (*Ethics*, 1097b14-15).

How does the idea of a virtuous life connect to the idea of a citizen living in a polis as the *Politics* says? Aristotle believes that people who listen “effectively to lectures concerning noble and just things and, in general, to subjects dealt with by politics should be brought up well in ethical habits” (*Ethics*, 1095b4-6). To pursue politics in the right manner, an individual needs to have an understanding of the ethical virtues. To strengthen his point, Aristotle quotes Hesiod to warn those who do not acquire ethical habits: “the man who neither for himself can think nor, listening, takes what he hears to heart, this man is useless” (*Ethics*, 1095b12-14). Ethical virtue is certainly tied to the previous quotation, for those who do not possess ethical virtues are considered useless. Therefore in order

to be a good citizen and be able to promote the well-being of the polis, a citizen needs to be brought up in ethical virtue.³⁴

Since virtue is an essential part of a happy life, let us look again at the ethical virtue bravery, but in the context of living in a polis. As mentioned before, Aristotle defines a brave person as one who “faces and fears things which he should, and for the right cause and in the right manner and at the right time, and who shows bravery in a similar manner” (*Ethics*, 1115b16-20). Stating it this way demonstrates that Aristotle does not intend bravery to mean self-sacrifice in spite of positing that military bravery in the face of death is the highest and noblest virtue of bravery in that “the perils” of war “are the greatest” (*Ethics*, 1115a27; 30-32). Aristotle argues that virtues are relative to people and to different circumstances. But what types of circumstances? Here is where the *Politics* fills in some of that gap because it gives us potential situations to consider. Politically, we may fear “a bad reputation, poverty, disease, friendlessness, death, etc., but a brave man is not thought to be concerned with all of them” (*Ethics*, 1115a10-13). In this sense, Aristotle provides us with subjects that we are right to fear, but these alone do not create bravery.

Additionally, Aristotle maintains that “a man should not fear poverty or disease or whatever arises not from vice or is caused not by himself. Still a brave man is not a man

³⁴ In the *Politics*, Aristotle distinguishes between a virtuous citizen and a virtuous person. Aristotle maintains that “the virtue of a citizen and of a good man cannot be one [in kind]; for the virtue of a virtuous citizen should belong to each of the citizens [...] but the virtue of a good man cannot belong to all citizens since not all of them can be good men in a virtuous state” (*Politics*, 1277a2-5). Thus a virtuous citizen acts upon those virtues according to the form of government and a virtuous person is virtuous no matter what political association the person belongs to.

who is fearless of these things” (*Ethics*, 1115a17-19). Garver remarks on this point by saying that “courage³⁵ concerns those fears connected with situations we are responsible for creating. Unless there is a hidden political premise, that criterion would not eliminate poverty or disease” (Garver 133). Garver appears to echo Aristotle, but then Garver introduces scenarios that distinguish our moral world from Aristotle’s ideal conception. One question that Garver posits is, “am I courageous if I quit a degrading job and try to earn a living by myself?” (Garver 133). This scenario could play out many different ways depending on the person, and as Aristotle states, virtues are relative to each individual. Regarding Garver, one scenario in which the act could be considered courageous is if a woman left her degrading job and began an entrepreneurship with little startup money. She intends to benefit other people even with her lack of finances, so it would be a risky decision. She must have enough courage to look past poverty in order to pursue her dream. Examining the same scenario through the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, we arrive at a question that the person must ask: does this action aim toward happiness not only for this woman but for the improvement of the polis as well? If this is a possibility, then she should go through with her decision. In an ideal polis, she will be supported by fellow citizens who want to see the polis prosper because the citizens cooperate with one another (Kraut 468). This displays the connection between the *Ethics* and the *Politics*: people working together in the same polis who aim for both the good of the polis, and aim for the good of a person’s life by pursuing virtue.

³⁵ Aristotle uses the term “bravery” in the same way that Garver uses “courage”; however, when I use the word bravery, then I am referring to Aristotle, and with courage, Garver.

However, there are people who live in the polis whom Aristotle does not consider as part of the polis, a fact which he makes clear in the *Politics*. These groups include slaves, women, farmers and artisans. In chapter 2 of this thesis, I quoted that slaves cannot be citizens because “a slave by nature is a man who can belong to another [...] and who can participate in reason [...] but [who cannot possess] it” (*Politics*, 1254b20-23). In other words, slaves are able to use reason to a certain degree, but they are unable to exercise it to its fullest extent like the adult male citizens.

Thus slaves cannot be full citizens in a polis, but what about women? After all, they do possess reason. However, Aristotle states that “the woman has [the deliberative part of the soul] but it has no authority” (*Politics*, 1260a13-14), and women’s lack of authority distinguishes men and women with regards to citizenship. Aristotle talks about the deliberative part of the soul as the ability to use good reason in determining what is good and expedient for the person to pursue, a quality that is essential for pursuing a virtuous life (*Ethics*, 1140a26-28). One of the larger points found in chapter 2 is that women lack the ability to deliberate. If a person cannot deliberate what is good for the self, then the person cannot achieve a virtuous life; hence women as a whole cannot realize the virtuous life and cannot be considered citizens.

But the farmer and the artisan both possess reason equivalent to the adult male citizens; what prevents these groups of people from becoming citizens? Aristotle does not see the life of the farmer or the artisan as desirable because “a citizen should not lead the life of a [vulgar] artisan or a tradesman; for such life is degrading and inconsistent with virtue. Nor should a citizen who is to be [happy] lead the life of a farmer; for he should

have the leisure to acquire virtue and to perform [good] political actions” (*Politics*, 1328b39-29a3). The farmer and the artisan spend too much time pursuing their craft that it leaves little time for them to pursue the virtuous life. In this sense, they too fail to be recognized as citizens in an ideal polis.

How does the *Ethics* strengthen Aristotle’s treatment of these groups as stated in the *Politics*? In the *Ethics*, Aristotle does not focus on how these groups of people do not fit into the polis; rather, their status is already assumed and Aristotle displays how these groups ought to be treated. Aristotle employs the idea of friendship and he discusses three kinds, but I will only focus on usefulness and pleasure because these types of friendship are pertinent to my argument. Aristotle describes the friendship of usefulness as those “who like each other because of their usefulness to each other do so not for the sake of the person liked but insofar as some good may be obtained from each other” (*Ethics*, 1156a11-13). This type of friendship hinges on a kind of reciprocal relationship: it exists only because both parties receive something out of it. Aristotle warns that this type of relationship “does not last long but changes from time to time. So when the cause of men’s friendship is broken, their friendship too is dissolved” (*Ethics*, 1156a23-24).

Arguably this type of friendship somewhat resembles a similar relationship between farmers and artisans, and adult male citizens. The adult male citizens need the products that the farmers and the artisans make; likewise, the farmers and the artisans depend on the money that the adult male citizens have. Thus this could be one type of relationship within a polis. A similar case can certainly be made for the friendship between a slave and the slave’s master. The master needs the slave to complete tasks that

associate with manual labor so that the master can pursue the virtuous life, and the slave needs to learn a limited kind of virtue from the master (*Politics*, 1252a31-4; Kraut 281). Aristotle deepens this idea in highlighting the unequal relationship between the slave and the master. Since the master is superior and the slave is inferior, the relationship must be “proportional, e.g., the better party should be liked more than he likes, and so should the party which bestows greater benefits” (*Ethics*, 1158b24-26). The slave should display greater appreciation for his master because the master has more to offer the slave than the slave has to offer the master.

One type of friendship that Aristotle does not specifically label is between a husband and wife. Aristotle describes the friendship in this way: “there is another kind of friendship in which one of the parties is superior, e.g., [...] that of a husband to his wife” (*Ethics*, 1158b12-14). In this sense, the husband rules over the wife and not vice versa. Aristotle makes this clear further in the same passage, for the friendship that runs from “a husband toward his wife is [not] the same as that of a wife towards her husband” (*Ethics*, 1158b15). As mentioned in the *Politics*, Aristotle sees the husband as the ruler of the household, including his children and his wife. Again, the role of the woman assumes a subordinate position within the household. Further, “the better party should be liked more than he likes, and so should the party which bestows greater benefits” (*Ethics*, 1158b25-26). Not only should the wife submit to the husband, but the wife should like and appreciate the husband more than the husband should appreciate the wife.

Not only are virtue and friendships important in both the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, but ruling is as well. In Aristotle’s conception of the ideal polis, citizens possess the

capability to be ruled and to rule. Rulers of the polis must possess a higher degree of virtue because “then the best way of life for every state as well as for every citizen would be the practical life [i.e., a life of action]” (*Politics*, 1325b16-18)³⁶ because the ruler would impose this kind of life on the citizens. In the *Politics*, Aristotle mentions two specific types of ruling: despotic and political. Despotic rule is “concerned with the performance of necessities [only], and the ruler need *know* not how to perform these but rather how to make [good] use of them” (*Politics*, 1277a33-35). In other words, the despotic ruler does not have to know how to perform the task, as that burden is upon the artisans, slaves, and those who work in manual labor. Instead, the despotic ruler knows how to use the products or services that come out of those tasks. An endnote found at the back of the *Ethics* gives more insight into the idea of the despotic ruler, where it is noted that “the distinction here is that between *actions* as ends in themselves and services or productions as necessities or instruments for the sake of those actions” (*Ethics*, 286). In other words, the manual laborers, slaves, and artisans work to make *necessities* that the polis will use, and it is the role of the despotic ruler to make use of these services in relation to the rest of the polis.

On the other hand, political rule differs from despotic rule because the political ruler “should learn by first learning how to be ruled” (*Politics*, 1277b9). Aristotle offers examples to show what kinds of people ought to follow this format, such as “a commander of a cavalry or of an army or of a squadron or of a company” (*Politics*,

³⁶ The virtuous life is an active life – see chapter 1 of this thesis regarding the virtuous life.

1277b11-12). To be an effective political ruler, a person must work underneath that position in order to see how the occupation works. Then, when the person steps into the position, the person understands their role in what the person needs to accomplish (*Politics*, 1277b13). Although Aristotle distinguishes between the virtue of a ruler from one a ruled citizen, he maintains that a good citizen ought to understand how to rule and to rule both from a citizen's perspective, because in an ideal polis, citizens take turns ruling (*Politics*, 1277b15-17). Remember from chapter 1 of this thesis that Aristotle regards a virtuous person as one who performs virtues with right reason at the proper times. The virtues of a ruler differ from a virtuous person because a virtuous ruler knows how to run a city effectively. Like a virtuous citizen, the virtues of rulers differ among the political systems. Contrastingly, virtuous *people* remain constant no matter what polity the person belongs to, meaning that their virtues do not change from polity to polity. According to the commentary at the back of the *Politics*, "the definitions of ruling and of being ruled are different, and so are those of *knowing* how to rule and *knowing* how to be ruled" (*Politics*, 287). Thus it is important for a ruler to possess both attributes in order to aim for the best polis possible, which in turn allows the citizens to pursue the best possible life, one full of virtue and happiness.

How is the ruler seen in the *Ethics*? Aristotle argues that the "statesman"³⁷ [...] should be investigating attributes of the soul, both for the sake of these and as much as is adequate to what is sought, for greater precision is perhaps rather burdensome in view of

³⁷ Statesman or ruler – both mean the same thing. Statesman is found in the *Ethics*, while ruler is found in the *Politics*.

what he is aiming at” (*Ethics*, 1102a24-26). The “attributes of the soul” that the statesman investigates relate to “human virtue,” an idea that was mentioned earlier about the association between virtue and the soul (*Ethics*, 1102a16-17). “The sake of these” refers to the idea that the statesman investigates “the soul for its own sake” and to “seek knowledge for its own sake” (*Ethics*, 222). Aristotle wants the statesperson to pursue virtue for its own sake and in doing so, the statesperson will attain happiness. The statesman should not only aim for the good of the self, but for the good of the polis as well. Therefore “what [the statesperson] is aiming at” is to “make the citizens good and obedient to the laws” (*Ethics*, 1102a10). In sum, the role of the statesman is to pursue virtue for its own sake and understand it well enough to help all of the citizens of the polis to pursue the same lifestyle. In this sense, the statesman must push the citizens to become better people, which in turn will make the polis as a whole even better.

Chapter 4

Difficulties in applying Aristotle's theories into a modern setting

While Aristotle's ethical and political theory may sound convincing, it would be extremely difficult to incorporate all that Aristotle argues for in today's society. In this chapter, I raise some concerns about the effectiveness of Aristotle's theory in relation to a present society. One obstacle that I raise in this chapter concerns the difference in how morality is seen between our culture and Aristotle's, which is one of the reasons why implementing Aristotle's theory into a modern context is so difficult. MacIntyre understands this disjunction, and he argues that we live in an emotivist society – that is, we use moral language in order to express our feelings about certain issues (MacIntyre 31). This is a problem because not everyone uses the same moral language which causes us to speak past each other. MacIntyre offers a modern perspective that preserves Aristotle's core values from his theory in positing that “the Aristotelian tradition can be restated in a way that restores intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes and commitments” (MacIntyre 259). Another issue with Aristotle's theory concerns slavery, as it is no longer as widely acceptable as it was during Aristotle's time. As mentioned before, Aristotle claims that slaves lack the ability to deliberate, a key feature in the ability to live out the best possible life. Already Aristotle has established a social hierarchy in this regard, and it is not simply with slaves, because Aristotle includes women, farmers and artisans in this category of non-citizenship. Returning to Aristotle's view of such a distinct stratum would erase hundreds of years of fighting for equal rights in the United States, and to relinquish all of that is problematic. Another critique about

Aristotle's work is the idea that citizens must devote almost all of their energy in pursuing the virtuous life. This does not seem completely possible nor entirely necessary, because once a person acquires virtue, then they possess that virtue whether they are exercising it or not. While a person must continue exercise virtue throughout an entire life, it is not entirely necessary that a person must devote so much time and energy into achieving such an ideal. In spite of all this, Aristotle's general conception of the virtuous life and the ideal polis and their connections still relates to today. By breaking down the aspects that we appreciate and altering the parts we feel less certain about with respect to Aristotle's thesis, we can better understand ourselves. Further, Aristotle's conception gives us an idea and a model for rulers and citizens who desire the virtuous life to follow.

Aristotle's conception of the virtuous life and the overall picture of the polis cannot directly cross over to our modern world for an important reason: today we do not all share the same moral language. MacIntyre argues that "there seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture" (MacIntyre 6). Unlike the Aristotelian ideal polis where the standard virtuous life is understood and agreed upon, our present society lacks that sense of concord in morality to the point where we seem to talk past one another. MacIntyre identifies this detachment as a "conceptual incommensurability," or the fact that "each premise employs some quite different normative or evaluative concept from the others, so that the claims made upon us are of quite different kinds" (MacIntyre 8). When we engage in debates concerning the value of human life, for example, we express our opinions using moral language. However, we use such language to express our emotion and passion in an attempt to win a debate. Since moral language is

being used as a tool for conveying personal emotion, it is difficult for people to communicate because society is inconsistent³⁸ in using different moral terms for various circumstances. Hence MacIntyre claims that we live in an emotivist culture, one that propagates this miscommunication.

What is emotivism? According to MacIntyre, emotivism is “the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing but* expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character” (MacIntyre 11-12). Emotivism is the idea that people express their personal preferences through emotion yet pass off these preferences as moral judgments. In other words, emotivism is the claim that a moral judgment goes beyond a mere emotion. To understand this quotation, consider the following example. MacIntyre presents three emotivist characters that exemplify the crux of emotivism: the rich aesthete, the manager, and the therapist, all who “share the emotivist view of the distinction between rational and nonrational discourse, but who represent the embodiment of that distinction in very different social contexts” (MacIntyre 30). MacIntyre argues that examining these characters reveals their lack of moral debate. In order to contextualize their emotivist reactions as MacIntyre illustrates them, I pose the following question: how

³⁸ This is seen in the following example about the three people (rich aesthete, manager, and therapist).

would each character respond to a pregnant teenage mother who was deciding whether or not to have an abortion?³⁹

The rich aesthete man would probably overlook the pregnant teenager's⁴⁰ situation because the rich aesthete "searches restlessly for ends on which he may employ them; but the organization [bureaucratic structure] is characteristically engaged in a competitive struggle for scarce resources to put to the service of its predetermined ends" (MacIntyre 25). The rich aesthete only considers his own good, so his only interest would be what he could get out of her situation. Even if she was his daughter, his concern would rest on the reputation of the family, and if having an abortion means holding onto the good family name, it is probable that he would want her to choose that route. The manager approaches the situation differently, as he "treats ends as given, as outside his scope; his concern is with technique, with effectiveness in transforming raw materials into final products, unskilled labor into skilled labor, investments into profits" (MacIntyre 30). The manager judges based on "matching means to ends economically and efficiently" (MacIntyre 25), so if having the abortion was a better way to save money, he would advise her to choose this route. The therapist "also treats ends as given, as outside his concern is with technique, with effectiveness in transforming neurotic systems into directed energy, maladjusted individuals into well-adjusted ones" (MacIntyre 30). The

³⁹ In positing this example, I am taking MacIntyre's treatment of these three people and using my own example of the polemical issue abortion. I use this in order to explain how MacIntyre conceives of the concept emotivism.

⁴⁰ The situation might be different if the teenager were his daughter. Even then, the rich aesthete would still be looking after his own self-interest.

therapist would speak to her in order to find out the mental state of her health and then try to transform her into a well-adjusted person so that the pregnant teenager could deal with the issues herself. If she does not have the abortion, the technique would be to work with her throughout the pregnancy to ensure that she becomes a well-adjusted individual.

In all three cases, each character utilizes their personal background and makes a decision based “in the sphere of personal life,” whether it is completely self-interested, managerial, or reformative (MacIntyre 30). These judgments are not moral because they are based upon their personal preferences. If these characters met, they could never engage in moral debate, but instead they would invoke their feelings toward the issue of abortion by appeals to their moral sphere. Since these individuals do not share the same moral language, they would not be able to understand the situation. Each character bases their moral language on different standards, so it is no wonder that they would not be able to reason with one another. Thus the previous model represents the interactions of current society.

As we do not share a common moral language similar to the one Aristotle conceives, we cannot hope to resolve or deliberate these issues properly. Fortunately, MacIntyre realizes the disparity between Aristotle’s ethical world and our own, and so he discusses three principles that relate to Aristotle but are tweaked so that they make sense in a modern setting: practice, narrative, and tradition.

MacIntyre classifies a practice as follows:

Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are

realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended (MacIntyre 187).

In other words, a practice is a complicated activity that produces goods, both externally and internally. External goods are common to similar activities, while internal goods are ones gained only through that specific activity. An example of a practice is triple jump, an event within the sport of track and field. Internal goods are such that “their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice” (MacIntyre 191), and all practices contain internal goods. In other words, people who engage in the sport may acquire body coordination and athleticism specific to triple jumping, and this is the internal good. External goods are ones that “when achieved they are always some individual’s property and possession” (MacIntyre 190). An external good for triple jump would be winning a medal during a competition. Not everyone wins a medal, so it is only related to that particular individual. Moreover, a person can win a medal in another sport or a completely different activity; this makes medals external goods.

Where does Aristotle come into this picture? Practices relate to virtue because like a practice, engaging in virtue produces internal and external goods. Internal goods specific to virtue would be habits, and external goods would be

happiness. A stronger connection between practice and virtue is that the internal goods within a practice can only be achieved through virtue (MacIntyre 191). Again, consider the example of triple jump. To acquire the internal goods of the actions of triple jumping, a person must possess temperance. If a girl became upset and left practice each time she did not perform the jump correctly would never learn how to do it. Along similar lines, the virtue of perseverance works in this example as well, for the girl must work hard in order to develop a good work ethic. Therefore, in triple jump, the person acquires the internal goods (the ability to jump and body coordination) if they practice the skill (habit of jumping) a number of times which means that standards need to be met, and is key to the idea of a practice (MacIntyre 193).

A second feature of MacIntyre's modern conception of Aristotle's theory is the narrative. MacIntyre sees a person fitting into the narrative as one who is "open to being asked to give a certain kind of account of what one did or what happened to one or what one witnessed at any earlier point in one's life than the time at which the question is posed" (MacIntyre 217-218). But these narratives do not just relate to the self, as "each of our dramas exerts constraints on each other's, making the whole different from the parts, but still dramatic" (MacIntyre 214). Understanding ourselves from a narrative perspective allows us to be involved in a story – a story that we all belong to, including past, present and future. Hence MacIntyre argues that "the unity of a human life is the unity of a human quest" (MacIntyre 219) – a quotation that demonstrates the unity that we all share in

desiring the good life. If all of the citizens of the ideal polis shared this desire to pursue the same conception of the good life, then pursuing the virtuous life will create a common lifestyle, which in turn creates a common moral language that all of the citizens use (MacIntyre 219). In order for this to occur, there must be an agreement about the virtues and the virtuous life. By understanding that we are all caught up in each others' narrative, it will bring us closer to creating a common conception of the good that we can all agree on. In this sense, MacIntyre preserves a similar Aristotelian notion of a shared common conception.

A third component of MacIntyre's articulation of Aristotle's thought is tradition, defined as "a historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition. Within a tradition the pursuit of goods extends through generations" (MacIntyre 222). As traditions carry much historical depth with respect to goods, it is no wonder that there is some argument about the goods specific to that tradition. MacIntyre urges us to begin in a place where we acknowledge traditions in order to understand the depth of the tradition. Without this recognition, we lose the historical importance of a practice, and a practice is reliant on history. This links practices and traditions because practices contain significant historical background. To engage in a practice "is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point" (MacIntyre 194). By engaging in practices, we continue trends that

have started long before us. In doing so, we take on the social, political, and cultural background associated with the practice, making ethics part of these social traditions as well.

A problem with the picture that MacIntyre paints using practice, narrative, and traditions is that he relies heavily on the prior history of each topic in talking about ethics. However, in Gerald Mara's essay on the *Culture of Democracy*, Mara quotes John Rawls when talking about the democracy of today and how we should shy away from using a pluralistic view:

A modern democratic society is characterized not simply by pluralism of comprehensive religious, philosophical and moral doctrines, but by a pluralism of incompatible yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines. No one of these doctrines is affirmed by citizens generally. Nor should one expect that in the foreseeable future one of them, or some other reasonable doctrine will be affirmed by all, or nearly all, citizens (Tessitore 307).

Even with the ideas of practice, narrative, and tradition, Mara agrees with Rawls that we will not share the same morality because of the conceptual incommensurability of our moral doctrines. Today's society is too complex and, coupled with the influence of emotivism, we cannot communicate with each other on polemical issues such as abortion, euthanasia, and drug use.

At first, it seems that MacIntyre agrees with Rawls' view that today's society "cannot hope to achieve moral consensus" (MacIntyre 252). MacIntyre introduces Karl Marx, a philosopher who argued against the English trade

unionists during the 1860s and their appeal to justice. Marx claims that the trade unionists' appeal to justice was "pointless, since there are rival conceptions of justice formed by and informing the life of rival groups" (MacIntyre 252).

MacIntyre argues that this idea is similar to Marx's emotivist argument in that there is a moral miscommunication due to the lack of a consistent moral language use. MacIntyre deepens these issues when he argues that "it is not just that we live too much by a variety and multiplicity of fragmented concepts; it is that these are used at one and the same time to express rival and incompatible social ideals and policies and to furnish us with a pluralistic political rhetoric whose function is to conceal the depth of our conflicts" (MacIntyre 253). In other words, today's society as a whole has a different way of using moral language, most of the time using the same moral terms in different contexts. It follows that this incommensurable incompatibility to use one universal moral language makes it difficult to discuss moral issues, and this needs to be addressed.

To further illustrate this inability to communicate effectively, MacIntyre introduces a modern example of our inability to achieve a moral consensus. In the Supreme Court Bakke case, two members of the Court held two incompatible views. According to MacIntyre's argument, the Supreme Court must institute a fair principle that would maintain peace between the two rival groups. Instead, the Supreme Court decided to "both forbade precise ethnic quotas for admission to colleges and universities, but allowed discrimination in favor of previously deprived minority groups" (MacIntyre 253). While the Court seemed to resolve

the issue, MacIntyre critiques the manner in which the Court arrived at their decision. They did not “[invoke] our shared first moral principles” but instead “played the role of a peacemaking [...] body by negotiating its way through an impasse of conflict” (MacIntyre 253). Here MacIntyre contends that the Supreme Court did not resolve the issue, but instead navigated past the issue to try and ease tensions. But it is not as if the members of the Supreme Court could have invoked shared moral principles in the first place, because our society lacks this shared conception (MacIntyre 253). This leads MacIntyre to conclude that modern politics and moral consensus cannot coexist.

However (and here is where MacIntyre disagrees with Rawls), he does maintain that it is *possible* to achieve a moral consensus: in order to do so, “it involves a rejection of the modern political order” (MacIntyre 255). To preserve Aristotle’s conception of the virtues in our modern society, we must eliminate the modern political structure to allow the virtuous life as the moral consensus. Since this solution is highly unlikely to occur, MacIntyre believes that a moral consensus cannot occur within the current political structure. In another sense, Aristotle’s moral picture does not seem to fit into a modern conception in the way that he describes slavery, so now I will show how Aristotle’s treatment of slavery does not fit into today’s society.

As mentioned before, during this time period many ancient slaves were foreigners, which means that most of the slaves obtained for the Athenians were gained by conquering other polities. Therefore it is arrogant for Aristotle to consider all slaves in

the same light regardless of whether the slaves were slaves by nature or conquered from another estate. Aristotle's preference for the Athenians might stem from the way climate was used as a factor of determining how virtuous a society could be. Athenians thought quite highly of themselves because of their favorable climate and thought less of others in surrounding environments because the people who lived there allegedly demonstrated slavish qualities due to unfavorable weather conditions (Kraut 291).

In opposition to this view, it is likely that some of those citizens from other polities possessed the capability to acquire virtues, or even worse – they already demonstrate them. Such a situation occurs if war is declared unjustly “[by a bad ruler, or for a bad purpose], [for] no one would say that he who does not deserve to be a slave should be a slave; otherwise, those who come from the most noble families but happen to be taken prisoners and sold into slavery should be regarded as slaves or descendants of slaves” (*Politics*, 1255a25-28). Considering the large number of slaves the Athenians owned, it is likely that the Athenians could have declared war unfairly, thus leading to an unjust enslavement. I say this only to show that, as mighty as the Athenians held themselves, and as highly as Aristotle thought of them as well, it is probable that their polis could be thought of as an unjust political association since they probably enslaved those who did not deserve such treatment. Aristotle said it himself: “it is not just to be a slave since one is forced to do so” (*Politics*, 1253b24), and in order to avoid committing an unjust act, the Athenians label other people in societies as those who demonstrate slavish qualities.

Aristotle believes that there is a distinct difference between those who are slaves and those who are free, and they differ through virtue and vice. But why does Aristotle have such a distorted view about slaves? Aristotle does not think that a slave has the capability to demonstrate the same types of virtues that citizens have. In fact, Aristotle says that slaves do not even have the deliberative part of the soul that allows for the cultivation of such virtues (*Politics*, 1260a13). Slaves *can* exhibit some virtues, such as bravery, but it is different from the bravery that Aristotle mentions in the *Ethics*. The bravery discussed in the *Ethics* focused on the specific actions of how a person acts with respect to fear and courage (*Ethics*, 1115a8). However, Aristotle distinguishes this bravery from the “serving” bravery that slaves exude – meaning that slaves are brave with respect to how they serve the master and how they carry out their function in the household. Perhaps slaves must be brave enough to fight off any animals that may harm the crops necessary for survival, but it does not go much deeper than that.

Considering how prominent the slave population was during this time period, possessing slaves was normal, so it does not seem as if Aristotle is arguing something outlandish. In fact, Aristotle notes that slaves are essential to any given household association. There are three types household associations: the “master-slave association, the marital association [...] and thirdly the parent-child association” (*Politics*, 1253b9-11). Aristotle wants us to see the household described in this fashion in order to compare how natural the master-slave relationship is to the household. But is a slave necessary for today’s households? Wealthier people may have maids, butlers, gardeners, etc. to help take care of the household while the parents work, but as a majority most families get by

very well without a need for caretakers. Further, while some people may not regard these employed caretakers as intellectual equals, many would not disregard them as actual people. Caretakers can have families who teach their kids right from wrong and attend school to become educated, and by that the children could pursue a virtuous life. More importantly, caretakers could live a full, happy, and virtuous life too. It may not be exactly as Aristotle argues, but if they grew up demonstrating generosity, high-mindedness, bravery, and generally treating people well, then they can achieve somewhat of an Aristotelian virtuous life.

Unlike the previous view seen in the earlier paragraph, according to Aristotle, slaves need little virtue because the tasks they set out to complete do not require much ethical or intellectual virtue. In other words, slaves cannot hope to pursue the best life because they are naturally incapable of doing so and the tasks set before them do not require it. Furthermore, slaves are seen as animate possessions, not as people. He objectifies the slave as a mere instrument which is used only to help the master become a more virtuous person. Remember that Aristotle also believed that slaves lack the deliberative part of the soul, or the ability to deliberate “about the things which he can do by himself [...] things (a) which are possible or occur [...] whose outcome is not clear [...] there is something indeterminate” (*Politics*, 1112a34). Slaves appear as fairly incapable beings who could not do much more than the tasks set before them.

In chapter two, I discussed Aristotle’s views about women as inferior to men. I articulated Aristotle’s argument in that man “is by nature superior to the female, and [it is better for] the male to rule and the female to be ruled” (*Politics*, 1254b13-14), showing

that women were incapable of ruling and talking about their lack of authority. The women's movement undercuts the Aristotelian masculine preference as a leader, as there are many women who participate in leadership positions. At one point, Hillary Clinton ran for president, a woman who garnered much of the support from voters across the United States. Additionally, we have female senators, governors, leaders in the military, judges, principals in the education system, college presidents, and other types of leadership positions. Since Aristotle's epoch, women have made substantial strides towards equality.⁴¹ While men still dominate much of the leadership throughout today's society, women continue to strive and attain top positions within many prestigious corporations and politics. If Aristotle's ethical and political theory relates to our current society, then alterations must be made in regards to seeing women as equal to men, not lacking in reason or the ability to rule as effectively as a man.

Farmers⁴² and artisans do not fit into Aristotle's conception of the ideal polis as citizens, but they are necessary to the existence of the polis, as we also saw in chapter 2 of this thesis. Again, Aristotle argues that "a citizen should not lead the life of a [vulgar] artisan or a tradesman; for such life is degrading and inconsistent with virtue" (*Politics*, 1328bb39-29a1). A major critique of this view comes from the influence of advanced technology. Farmers who can afford to purchase machinery do not have to work as long

⁴¹ We are certainly far better in how we treat women than how we described women since Aristotle's time period. In this sense, we have progressed from that kind of treatment towards women. However, women continue to remain unequal today, so the fight for a true equality remains an ongoing battle, and the same applies to slavery.

⁴² As mentioned before, Aristotle held a very critical view towards manual labor, especially the trades of farmers and artisans. In today's society, we would recognize that their trades could be considered "practices" in the sense that MacIntyre argues – that it comes from a long history of traditions.

or as hard to plant and harvest crops, so they have more time to devote to other activities such as pursuing the virtuous life. Artisans have the ability to mass produce products or if they wish, they can still make objects by hand. Considering MacIntyre's idea of practice would allow farming and goods of the artisan to pursue a virtuous life, as both of these trades require virtue in order to make the right kinds of crops to produce the best harvest and the best artifacts.

Moreover, the influence of computers and the internet open up the opportunity for people to obtain massive amounts of information in a short amount of time. People can use inventions such as iPods and other similar electronic equipment that give them access to information while performing daily tasks. Other devices include the radio, television, newspapers and similar means of communication that inform people about what goes on in the world. In mentioning this, I argue that people have the ability to be more informed about the world around them and thus they do not have to be a citizen "at leisure" in order to formulate an opinion based on years of virtuous activity. All we have to do is pick up newspapers, watch television, or log on to the internet to learn about politics. But it is more than just reading the given information and forming opinions based upon them. In thinking about the information we read, we must also be able to deliberate well about the given topics. We must be like the prudent person seen in chapter 1 who "is thought to be one who is able to deliberate well concerning what is good and expedient for [the person...and the kinds of things which are good and expedient for living well" (*Ethics*, 1140a26-28). We must acquire the ability to deliberate about the literature we read which in turn will help us to live better lives. Even with these facts, Aristotle still maintains that

pursuing the virtuous life in some sense must remain a priority – can we still achieve this in today’s society?

In order to see the possible effectiveness of Aristotle’s conception, take a look at the following passage about virtue, paying particular attention to how one acquires ethical and intellectual virtue: “since virtues are of two kinds, intellectual and ethical, an intellectual virtue *originates and grows mostly by teaching, and in view of this it requires experience and time*, whereas an ethical virtue *is acquired by habituation*” (*Ethics*, 1103a14-16). Aristotle never clearly defines how much time it takes for a person to acquire virtues. We can infer that he means that people must cultivate them over a complete life insofar as cultivating the good for any given person (*Ethics*, 1098a18), but I do not think that is a necessary requirement. While I do hold the view that someone who is about to die suddenly has an impulse to live virtuously surely falls short of that goal, I also think that someone who lives out more than half of his or her life devoted to learning and practicing virtue ought to be considered a virtuous person. Aristotle sums up his position with phrases that seem to resonate well with the point I am making:

In short, it is by similar activities that habits are developed in men; and in view of this, the activities in which men are engaged should be of [the right] quality, for the kinds of habits which develop follow the corresponding differences in those activities. So in acquiring a habit it makes no small difference whether we are acting in one way or in the contrary way right from our early youth; it makes a great difference (*Ethics*, 1103b20-26).

Habits may take a complete life to perfect and become as ideal as Aristotle envisions them to be, but it is perfectly logical for people to begin learning these ethical habits well past childhood *and* not only develop good ethical habits, but also acquire intellectual virtues as well. If a person can acquire these habits and learn to use them consistently in the right ways with right reason, then it should be possible for people to pursue and achieve some kind of ethical life. The tone of Aristotle's work exudes the sense that pursuing the best virtuous life is an all-or-nothing affair. Not everyone has the capability to reach this virtuous zenith because they might be using those virtues to better the world around them. Some people would rather spend their time learning the important take-away messages to virtue and then practice them by helping others, but this does not lead to the complete virtuous life that Aristotle acknowledges.

Considering all of the criticisms against Aristotle's theory suggests that his philosophy fails to fit our society, but I disagree. Certainly we will never come to an agreement about every detail no matter how well thought-out or constructive a theory is. Arguably one of the biggest differences between Aristotle's world and our own is the treatment of religion. Aristotle believed that "science, philosophy, and religion—can be brought together" (Kraut 78), and to an extent MacIntyre believed that religion and the virtues could coexist; this can be seen in his posit that "there are today both black and white Protestant communities in the United States, especially perhaps those in or from the South, who will recognize in the tradition of the virtues a key part of their own cultural inheritance" (MacIntyre 252). Today we maintain the "separation of church and state" mentality within the majority of public institutions. For Aristotle, contemplative activity

– the best kind of life there is – sits right up there with a god’s perfect activity whereas in our society we have a variety of religious backgrounds, some of which conflict with others (*Ethics*, 1177b28-33). Again, we do not share a moral language, and until that occurs, we will continue to speak from our own moral spheres and issues such as abortion, euthanasia, sexuality, and many other polemical issues will either remain in the same state or will take longer than it should to resolve them.⁴³ MacIntyre holds the view that we must either reject the current modern political system to enact a moral consensus or maintain the current political system. I propose the position to discover another way to implement a type of moral language that everyone could learn about and use when discussing morality. I believe that some kind of neo-Aristotelian mindset in which the virtuous life is more accessible to a greater number of people, because then the society would benefit from the virtues not simply from the adult male citizens, but from a collective whole. But in Aristotle’s defense, he does construct a picture of an ideal ethical life and names a number of different lives to pursue in different polities to give us an idea of how to live our lives in the best possible manner.

⁴³ I do not propose a specific timeline in which the virtuous life can be attained because it differs per person.

Conclusion **Where do we go from here?**

While it is unlikely that we will stop using the current political system in order to try and create and maintain a common moral conception and the unlikelihood that the populations of our current society will decrease, Aristotle should still remain an important thinker for today. Aristotle demonstrates the importance of sharing a common moral conception and discusses the benefits that we receive out of that. MacIntyre notes the difference between Aristotle's time period and ours in that our current society does not use a moral language that is consistent throughout all situations. Instead, we offer our own evaluative judgments on various situations, asserting them as moral judgments. But if MacIntyre is right to claim that the current political system is structured in a way that prevents a common moral language to be used, then the situation does not seem promising, at least from a moral standpoint.

As mentioned before, Aristotle shows that education ought to be a task that is charged to the polis, but what does that mean for us? Recall that Aristotle charges the polis with the task of educating children, specifically the ruler. Since it is the ruler's job to educate the children, it would make sense to have various places (schools) for children to attend and to learn the same subjects. Therefore it can be inferred that Aristotle would be in favor of the public school system (*Politics*, 1137a24). However, our schools today are certainly not the same. We have various kinds of schools, such as private, religious, public, home-schooling, etc. These institutions certainly differ from a moral aspect, and it is even more probable to assume that they too engage in the emotivism that MacIntyre

proposed. We cannot eradicate the school systems completely and only have public schools, at least from an American society standpoint. It would be too costly and many of the richer families would likely rebel because they want the best they can afford for their children.

Even regarding these factors, is it possible to find a common ground among these varying institutions? In order to do so, we must ask ourselves the following question: whose responsibility is it to teach morals to the kids – is it the primary caretakers, or is it the public school system? If it is the parents, then we might as well retain our status quo and try to determine another path to pursue. But if society as a whole believes that our educators are capable of teaching morals to children (and parents can do whatever they want at home), then we need to reconsider how we can approach this matter on a nationwide scale. But is it not true that teachers already teach their students some conception of morality? Children’s literature is certainly filled with all types of moral stories. Teachers often instruct their students to be respectful, to be kind, the famous doggerel “treat others the way you want to be treated,” and other associated ideas. If we want to begin to resolve some of the bigger polemical issues such as the moral states of abortion, euthanasia, gun control, illicit drugs, etc., then we need to begin brainstorming ideas about how to teach everyone a consistent moral language.

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