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# *Natural Right and the Problem of Aristotle's Defense of Slavery*

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Many social theorists, appalled at the moral enormities made possible by the modern scientific conquest of nature, now look to a restoration of classic natural right as a standard for human affairs. But the key role of slavery in Aristotle's magisterial exposition of natural right is typically overlooked. Commentators on Aristotle's account of natural slavery add to the perplexity, charging that this account is culturally biased and logically inconsistent. Such charges play into the hands of the opponents of natural right, whose common theme is the inability of reason to overcome such biases in its search for what is right by nature. Lacking a defense of the moral and theoretical respectability of Aristotle's account of slavery, the restorationists' cause must remain unpersuasive. To provide this defense, I suggest that Aristotle's teleology implies that the natural slave, generally speaking, is made not born. Child-rearing and other cultural practices, which ordinarily promote the natural destiny of mankind, may instead subvert this *telos* by inculcating a dysfunctional, slavish second nature. Despotism may be said to be natural in such cases, and only insofar as it aids the slave in better realizing the *telos* proper to a human being. Aristotle quite consistently condemns all employments of the slave that are uncongenial to the reformation of slavishness and allows for emancipation in the event of this achievement.

Classic natural right is rooted in a teleological account of human nature and nature as a whole (Strauss 1953, 7–8; 126–33). There are, of course, several variations on this classic theme, but each characteristically grounds its moral and political judgments in an objective and ontologically prior account of the distinctively human vocation. The exponent of classic natural right attempts, then, to describe the quality and operations characteristic of mature human nature and to prescribe how—given our individual circumstances—I, you, or the next person can get there from here. Natural right neither requires nor furnishes a guaranty that any particular being will attain this goal of perfect maturity; on the contrary, it entails the possibility of developmental failure. In fact, natural right recognizes the complete spectrum of diversity as to the manner and the extent to which a given person, at any given time, may fall short of the finality of perfect maturity. The precise adjustment necessary to bring a particular individual into a condition of objective maturity is necessarily, then, a matter of prudential judgment. One may say that a natural right prescription exists for every circumstance, even though all such prescriptions are mutable. But the prudential excellence, as distinguished from the mere cleverness, of such prescriptions is rendered all but invisible to us by modern science. For modern science vilifies any consideration of final

cause as irrelevant to the primary business of humanity, which it takes to be the quest for power over the natural world.

Modern science, however, no longer possesses the irrefragable authority that it once enjoyed. Many social theorists, appalled at the moral enormities made possible by the modern scientific conquest of nature, now suggest a serious consideration of the restoration of natural right as a standard for human affairs (see, e.g., Maritain 1943; Lewis 1947; Rommen 1947, 135–58; Strauss 1953, chaps. 4–5; Murray 1960, 275–36; Veatch 1971, 106–38; MacIntyre 1984, 51–78, 146–203; Kass 1985, chap. 10; Budziszewski 1986, chaps. 1–4; Masters 1990, 204–7; and Rhodes 1991, among others). Although natural right's honor roll is impressive, its prospects are by no means assured. For a significant obstacle blocks the path of its restoration: namely, our own misgivings with respect to its hierarchical political implications, most scandalously represented by Aristotle's defense of natural slavery. The restorationists for their part have accepted the burden of making classic natural right safe for liberal democracy. Jacques Maritain, one of the earliest heralds of restoration, attempted to bring about the reconciliation of natural right and liberal democracy by divorcing Aristotle's defense of slavery from the whole of his classic natural right teaching. In his seminal work, *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, Maritain (1943) claimed to present an account of political society recognizable as "Aristotle's own conception, but freed of its slavery-condoning dregs . . ." (Maritain 1943, 45). Maritain's gambit, as one might call it, remains a popular strategy with restorationists today.<sup>1</sup>

But I maintain that the problem posed by Aristotle's subtle and complex treatment of slavery cannot be resolved in so neat a fashion. For in Aristotle's view the partnership of master and slave stands as the community in which a specific developmental inadequacy may be addressed in harmony with the human *telos*. Thus, we are compelled to acknowledge that Aristotle's defense of natural slavery originates in the same teleological considerations as the whole of his teaching concerning natural right. Any attempt to detach the specifically despotic component from the balance of Aristotle's political philosophy threatens to undermine the integrity of the teleology upon which the whole of his natural right teaching depends.<sup>2</sup> So

<sup>1</sup> Consider MacIntyre (1984), who dissociates his own contribution to the restoration of classic natural right from what he describes as "Aristotle's indefensible defense of slavery" (162). MacIntyre nowhere substantiates this charge of indefensibility, other than to account for Aristotle's position as a symptom of a kind of blindness that "was not of course private to Aristotle; it was part of the general, though not universal blindness of his culture" (1984, 159). By thus declaring the cultural bias card trump, however, MacIntyre invites a similar reply to *any* controversial or unconventional element of natural right.

<sup>2</sup> This by no means implies that we should accept Aristotle as infallible. We may surmise, however, that Aristotle would be the first to correct the judgments of sedimented Aristotelianism in light of the best contemporary evidence, in many cases without serious consequences for the fundamental principles of his analysis. There is no telling what theoretical contributions Aristotle would have made if only he had access to the data available to modern embryology, astronomy, and paleontology; but it can be predicted that the result in many cases would be recognizably Aristotelian. We may well expect, for

one must resist the dislocation of Aristotle's defense of slavery for the sake of the theoretical tenability of natural right itself. If anything, it is the relocation and adequate elaboration of this defense within the philosopher's teleological understanding of human affairs that poses the most pressing challenge to contemporary proponents of natural right. Only on the basis of such an elaboration will it be worthwhile to speculate as to the compatibility of natural right and liberal democracy.

#### THE NEED FOR A FRESH LOOK AT ARISTOTLE ON SLAVERY

The current polarization of expert scholarly opinion presents one with equally unpalatable alternative readings of Aristotle's account of slavery. On one side, Aristotle's account is deemed to be logically flawed; the enslavement of no one whatsoever could be justified on the basis of such weak arguments. On the other side, Aristotle is regarded as an uncannily shrewd observer of political realities who obliquely endorses the enslavement even of those who are *not* slaves by nature. Underlying this polarization of opinion, however, there is a general consensus that the formulation of Aristotle's account of slavery is riddled with inconsistency and incoherence.

The existence of such exegetical difficulties should of course stimulate further study on the part of the reader. Instead, alleged inconsistencies are either catalogued as evidence of the mind-smashing force of cultural bias or stipulated as esoteric signals of Aristotle's subterranean motives. Schlaifer (1936), for example, finds Aristotle "inconsistent [even] in the limits of one sentence" and concludes that such logical blemishes in the philosopher's presentation merely reflect the irrationality of ethnocentrism; he maintains that Aristotle's "only argument is the simple assertion that all barbarians are natural slaves" (198). One finds the same approach to the difficulties of interpreting Aristotle in Mulgan (1977, 43–44), Lloyd (1968, 251), and Wood and Wood (1978, 209–57). Barker (1959, 259–373) and Smith (1983, 119) accept the premise of incoherence but commendably struggle to reject the charge of ethnocentrism embedded in this interpretation. To them, the supposed non sequiturs in Aristotle's account of the natural slave more likely imply that such a creature cannot possibly exist. (For this conclusion, despite other interesting differences, see also the thoughtful account of Fortenbaugh 1977.) Bluhm (1980) offers the most thorough elaboration of this thesis; he maintains that Aristotle covertly intends to indicate the injustice of all slavery, precisely by indicating "between the lines" that the natural slave is a contradiction in terms.

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example, that newly discovered evidence of sensitivity in the human fetus prior to quickening would move Aristotle today toward a more nearly absolute condemnation of abortion. But this movement on what is perhaps the most controversial of contemporary political issues would not require the slightest alteration in his teleological principle that in this question "what is holy and what is not is determined by the presence of sensation and, thus, of life" (1335b22–26; also *Nicomachean Ethics* 1170a16–17 and *Generation of Animals* 778b32–33).

The conclusiveness of Bluhm's conjecture is somewhat unsettled, however, by the discovery that others have been led by the same mode of analysis to infer that Aristotle would countenance the enslavement even of those who are *not* slaves by nature (see Strauss 1953, 158–60; Strauss 1964, 22–23; Arendt 1958, 84; Nichols 1983, 171, 176, 182; and Ambler 1987, 405). Because the slave provides his master with leisure, which is essential to the realization of a human being's distinctive *telos*, these scholars suppose that Aristotle regards as defensible the use of others as slaves, wherever they alone can provide such leisure. But this view, too, is problematic. Although studious leisure (*scholê*) is indeed the chief good that slave provides to master, it never suffices to justify slavery. Aristotle leaves no doubt as to his position in this matter. Condemning those who seek unjust domination, expressly including those who contemplate enslaving the undeserving, the philosopher declares that “nothing this transgression would bring about in the future could compensate for the departure from virtue the transgressor has thus already committed” (*Politics* 1325b5–7; see also *Nicomachean Ethics* 1142b24–26).<sup>3</sup> For Aristotle, the proper destination of human nature is inaccessible via the shortcut of wrongly enslaving others.

The divergent speculations concerning Aristotle's covert intention just cited, like the imputations of racism or ethnocentrism mentioned earlier, take for granted that the difficulties posed by Aristotle's account of natural slavery are the result of inconsistencies in the author's presentation. But it is my contention that once the context of Aristotle's natural teleology is recalled, these alleged inconsistencies will disappear. All the commentators currently assume, for example, that Aristotle's notion of the natural slave (*physei doulos*) refers to a genetic or congenital condition. That is, they read Aristotle's term “natural” in an exclusively primitive sense, as if it meant “native.” I will show how this construction fails to seize the full teleological significance of Aristotle's term *physei*, “by nature.” It is as a consequence of this failure—not Aristotle's failure but that of his readers—that inconsistencies appear in the text. Similarly, the commentators read the terms “property” and “preservation” in Aristotle's *Politics* as if they had just put down Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* and now fail to notice that it is a different volume they hold in their hands. But I would suggest that the meaning of “property” and “preservation” in these works will differ in a manner corresponding to the way their authors differ in their conception of the ends of government. The failure to consider the bearing of Aristotle's teleology on the intentionality of key concepts in his text—again, a failure not of Aristotle but of his readers—is bound to result in the appearance of further inconsistencies.

Once Aristotle's defense of natural slavery is returned to its teleological context and the full significance of his term *physei* is again apprehended, we shall discover that natural slaves, generally speaking, are made not born. (Certain congenital deficiencies may be implicated in Aristotle's analysis; but, as we shall see, such cases

<sup>3</sup>The translations in this essay are my own.

do not comprise the full range of symptoms Aristotle assigns to the natural slave and so cannot count as its typical instance). The pervasive and unrelenting influence of a dysfunctional culture can inculcate a slavishness so ingrained by habit as to become a second nature. This second nature forecloses all independent access to the human *telos*. Consequently, the preservation of the slave's capacity for sharing in this *telos* depends wholly upon his membership in the despotic partnership. At the same time, for Aristotle, the identification of the slave as property is intelligible only if the humanity of the slave is respected and the slave is never mistaken as an instrument of production. The due elaboration of these discoveries will demonstrate that Aristotle's account of natural slavery is coherently formulated, and that it incorporates a reasonable standard for justice in the conduct of despotic government and thus provides a solid basis upon which we can condemn the actual practice of slavery wherever it involves abuse and injustice.

#### THE NATURAL BASIS FOR DIVERSITY IN GOVERNMENT

We must begin our consideration of Aristotle's defense of natural slavery at the beginning of his account of politics. Aristotle opens his work by exposing the misconception of certain of his predecessors concerning the nature of government. He observes that "those who believe that the same person is fit to be statesman, king, household manager, and slave-master do not reason beautifully" (1252a7–9, also 1253b18–20). We note that Aristotle does not say that his predecessors believe falsely, only that they fail to reason in a beautiful way. The reasoning in question is lacking in beauty, we may surmise, because it is inelegant; the distinctions it stresses fail to correspond to the most important distinctions among the modes of government. Above all, this reasoning treats the quantity of subjects typical of each mode of rule as definitive and fails to make qualitative distinctions among the characters of the subjects fitted to each mode of rule. As Aristotle puts it, "they do not reason beautifully because they accept that each of these [modes of government] differs by quantity of numbers rather than by form (*eidei*) . . . as if there were no difference between a small city and a large household" (1252a9–13). Indifference to the kind of subject fit for each mode of government blurs the boundaries between these modes and invites the transgression of their proper limits. Homogenizing statesmanship and mastery, by claiming that the number rather than the character of subjects is definitive, produces something altogether different from either statesmanship or mastery: namely, tyranny. For the tyrant is one who mistreats his subjects precisely by ruling those who are fit to be free *as if* they were slaves. By ignoring the capacities that entitle his subjects to liberty, the tyrant stands at odds with the principles that properly circumscribe and thus define the validity of the master's rule.

In response to this danger, Aristotle insists—literally as his first lesson in the study of politics—that we must acknowledge a fundamental diversity among rightful modes of government. Contrary to the impression left by textbook summaries of

Aristotle's political thought, this diversity does not correspond to the number of rulers (one, few, or many). Nor does it correspond to the number of the ruler's subjects, or even to his character—for in all rightful modes of government the best ruler has the same character; it is in this sense that Aristotle's opponents are correct in holding that the same character is fit to rule in the several modes of government. Such a ruler is *spoudaios*, i.e., someone who “judges particulars rightly and to whom the truth in particulars presents itself,” “who rejoices in actions conforming to excellence and is grieved by those stemming from vice” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1113a29–30, 1170a8–10). Instead, it is the *character of the ruled* that determines for Aristotle the fundamental diversity in modes of government. The justness of any of the modes of government depends upon that mode of government's goodness of fit with respect to the character of its subjects. The justness of the master's rule, and thus its distinctiveness from tyranny, depends upon the proper identification of and respect for the distinctive character of its fitting subject, the natural slave. Before the distinctive character of the natural slave can be identified, however, Aristotle must first consider what is meant by and included within the term “natural.”

Aristotle suggests that one can attain the “most beautiful view”—exactly the perspective that is lacking among those who fail to distinguish a large household and a small city—by considering the way that human communities “naturally grow out of their origin” (1252a24–26). The village, he observes, grows naturally out of a number of primitive households; the political community (*polis*) in turn grows out of several villages. The spontaneity of these eruptions suggests that the same natural impulse responsible for the existence of the primitive household also exposes the limits of this partnership by pushing beyond the primitive household for its more complete realization. Aristotle accordingly infers that (1) the original impulse, (2) the process of growth, and (3) the end toward which this growth is directed, all deserve a share in what is meant by the term “natural.” Virtually everyone agrees in regarding nature as inclusive of a being's native impulse and process of growth. But Aristotle goes further here, recognizing in the mature specimen the best explanation for the movement of the developmental operation as a whole. In the most definitive sense, then, nature is not so much that which is manifest at nativity but “that which each thing is when its coming into being is perfected” (1252b32–33).

The developmental perfection of a being obviously implicates other factors, in addition to those which a being possesses innately. Chance environmental circumstances and even cultural artifacts are thus subsumed and appropriated by nature as Aristotle understands it. Just as the grape will not flourish if deprived of viticulture, neither will a human being achieve full command of his potential for reason (*logos*) if he is not taught English, Greek, or some such language. Specialists in linguistics refer to these as “natural languages.” The usage is telling. In this usage, the phrase “natural language” refers to a culturally distinct set of signs and symbols rather than to the spontaneous babbling that infants produce always and

everywhere. No natural language is included as part of the innate tool kit with which infants are equipped. Yet feral children, who pass a certain age without the benefit of the nurture of such a mother tongue, turn out to be permanently and profoundly disabled. Clearly, it is the lack of necessary cultivation, as distinguished from a simple congenital deficiency, that accounts for this disability. With a view, then, to the critical role of language in facilitating the developmental maturity of reason, we deem natural something we know to be a cultural artifact.

Moreover, when we use phrases like *mother tongue* or *fatherland* to describe such cultural artifacts, we uncover the interpenetration of nature (*physis*) and convention or law (*nomos*). With this discovery, it becomes clear that to be "in accord with nature" one must harmonize with *physis* as it is found subsisting within the *nomoi* of a particular political community. "Just as mankind is the best of animals when he has attained maturity (*teleôtheis*), so too is he the worst of all when separated from *nomos* and the justice of political order" (1253a31–33). A human being who miraculously had been purged of all political contamination would not be the normative "natural man" but merely a monster. Though we may distinguish nature and convention in speech, we may not separate them in practice. Aristotle goes so far as to declare that natural right subsists in political right (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1134b18–19). We may say that natural right is manifest in the rule of law, not in the law of the jungle.

Aristotle concludes that mankind is a political animal by nature (*physei*, 1253a2–3). "He who is without a country on account of nature rather than chance is either . . . a beast or a god" (1253a3–29). The political community is the first human partnership to be self-sufficient for fostering virtue and, thereby, for facilitating the realization of mankind's *telos*. It exists not merely for the sake of self-preservation, or even for economic prosperity, common defense and commodious living; it exists above all to enable its citizens to become capable performers of noble deeds (*kalôn praxeôn*, 1281a2–4; also *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b29–32). "Although the city arises for the sake of living, it exists for living well" (1252b29–30; also 1280b6–1281a4). In light of its critical contribution to this end, we recognize the political community as natural, notwithstanding the indisputable role of *nomos* in its emergence and continued existence. So the naturalness of the *polis* is perfectly compatible with the fact that the deliberate contrivances of some founder are prerequisite to its constitution, to say nothing of the fact that the laws of political constitutions vary from place to place. In fact, the status of *nomos* is considerably and necessarily elevated by this argument for the naturalness of the political community.

A challenge to this appreciation of *nomos* calls forth a response from Aristotle. He chastises certain opponents of slavery—we may call them absolutists—for doing more to undermine the status of *nomos* than to demonstrate the injustice of slavery. According to them, "the exercise of mastery is contrary to nature because it is *nomos* that makes one person a slave and another free, although by nature there is no difference between them; it follows that [mastery] is not at all just,



inasmuch as it is forced" (1253b20–23). Aristotle knows, of course, that an unjust slavery may be wrongly clothed in the venerable robes of *nomos*. But he maintains that the quarrel over the justice of slavery can only be joined if one first acknowledges that even superiority in force necessarily involves a distinguishing excellence (*aretê*) of some sort (1255a15–17). One cannot ignore the presence of excellence and maintain a credible claim to have judiciously considered the justice or injustice of any particular instance of slave-holding. Thus, one must be willing to examine the precise character of the master and slave's inequality in virtue before pronouncing on the justice of their partnership. Surely not every such inequality justifies despotic rule; but an inequality of a certain sort just might. Moreover, an understanding of this sort of inequality might help to define and thus to limit despotic government. But the absolutist refuses even to consider the character of the slave's inferiority in excellence. He holds that *no* inequality in excellence whatever can justify slavery; any examination of relative excellence is invidious and beside the point.

The absolutist's case is weak and unpersuasive, as Aristotle explains, because anyone who would dismiss all consideration of *aretê* undermines his own credentials as a credible judge of justice; this applies equally, whether one holds for the unqualified injustice of slavery or for the justice of the unqualified right of conquest (1255a19–21). The absolutist maintains that there are no slaves by nature, only slaves by reason of legally sanctioned force; hence, that which distinguishes master and slave has no natural support. But if this were true, it would follow that whatever superiority of excellence the master might possess would be purely a function of convention. This is the aspect of the absolutist opposition to slavery that strikes Aristotle as most dangerous. It might appear that the status of *nomos* would be enhanced if human excellence were found to be its creature rather than its measure. For the evacuation of all superconventional norms would certainly permit the lawmaker a freer hand. But this evacuation would also imply that the exercise of such latitude in lawmaking is unconstrained by objective norms. On this basis, all forms of rule would be equally arbitrary. Law would cease to be anything more than tautologically just. Nothing much would remain to differentiate justice and tyranny, except the culturally relative criterion of conventional precedent. But if one is interested in the critical evaluation of a conventionally accepted institution, as slavery so often and in so many places has been, such a criterion is obviously useless.

The root cause of the inadequacies of the absolutist's position may be traced to a misunderstanding of the relationship of *physis* and *nomos*. In contrast to Aristotle's account of the interpenetration of *physis* and *nomos*, the absolutist view of slavery presupposes their utter divorce. Absolutists conceive of nature in an exclusively primitive sense, as spontaneous and self-sufficient growth. When understood in accordance with nature conceived in this way, justice tends to be identified with the unimpeded exercise of will. Law, which surely involves the use or threat of force to limit such exercise, is consequently understood as orthogonal to justice

and as resting completely upon force. From this train of reasoning there derives the theoretical peculiarity of absolutism: namely, its acceptance of the conventionalist account of law even as it rejects convention in favor of a *physis* purified of all political contamination as a standard of right. Once the absolutist has thus surrendered the field of politics, he can do little to prevent the triumph of the evil he claims to abhor. As a practical matter, the absolutist may scold supporters of slavery by "right of conquest," but he cannot instruct them. The fruit of this identification of justice with an impoverished conception of nature is not natural right but merely self-righteousness.

It is clear now why Aristotle takes the trouble to address the absolutist opponents of slavery. His motive is not to curry favor with a slave-owning elite; neither is it to rationalize cultural prejudice, nor to signal covertly his agreement with the opponents of slavery. His reason for treating this view so seriously is that the absolutist's implicit antinomianism precludes any satisfactory account of the human *telos* and the essential role of *nomos* and political order in its achievement. Aristotle's criticism of absolutism thus initiates the articulation of a natural standard that is not antithetical to *nomos* or to the practice of politics and so is all the more effective in the opposition to unjust slavery.

An appreciation of the importance of law and the polity to the human good is indispensable, if, as Aristotle suggests, human beings achieve autarky with regard to their natural destiny only in the *polis*. This achievement, in turn, implies that the polity enjoys a natural priority over the chronologically prior partnerships out of which it grows (1253a18–19). Yet it is important to note that the emergence of the political community also fortifies and enhances the capacities of these more elementary partnerships. Thus, Aristotle speaks of the household as having matured or having reached its finality only *after* the rise of the *polis* (1253b4). Aristotle notes that prior to the rise of the *polis*, and thus apart from the tempering experience of being ruled and ruling in the political mode, the head of household resembles a brutal cyclops, "each living as he lists, laying down the law to children and to bedmate[s]" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1180a27–29 and *Politics* 1252b22–23). With the rise of the political community, the household is hardly made obsolete. On the contrary, its role is magnified and the standard of success in its task in education is elevated. Whereas preparation for procreation and survival exhaust the educational aims of the primitive household, the mature household is constituted by a partnership in right and wrong as well as in the advantageous and the harmful (1253a14–18). The task of providing the best education for a human being cannot be undertaken by the *polis* alone; the mature household plays a unique and essential part in this collaborative effort (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1180a29–b28).

So it would be mistaken to suppose that the elementary partnerships of the household outlive their usefulness with the coming into being of more comprehensive communities. These subsidiary partnerships play a critical part in the pursuit of the human good, a part that is magnified and elevated rather than diminished by the emergence of the political community. Even the partnership of

master and slave, which arises “on account of preservation” (1252a31), truly comes into its own only in the bosom of the political community. For with the rise of the *polis*, “preservation” comes to mean more than survival. The *polis* “comes into being for the sake of life, but exists for living well” (1252b29–30). The despotic partnership, when ensconced within the civilizing confines of the *polis*, likewise exists for the sake of something more than the mere saving of one’s skin. Within a *polis*, where living well eclipses life as the focus of motivation, corruption—that is, the spoilage of human capacities for living well—eclipses extinction as the focal opposite of preservation (consider, e.g., 1254a36–37). The mature despotic partnership accordingly aims not merely at avoiding extinction simply but at avoiding the extinction of its members’ capacities for living well.

In sum, Aristotle shows in the opening pages of the *Politics* that the full significance of the primitive human partnerships and the modes of government they rightfully manifest is best understood in the penetrating light of their natural destination rather than in the dim glow of their aboriginal traits. It is in the light provided by Aristotle’s teleology, then, that we must attempt to understand his account of the relationship between master and slave.

## SECOND NATURE AND THE DISABILITY OF THE NATURAL SLAVE

Aristotle recognizes that nature’s reach exceeds her grasp. The primitive motions of nature point to an outcome or *telos* beyond the scope of nature’s own spontaneous capacity, which may or may not be achieved depending upon the cooperation of other factors. The cooperation of these extrinsic influences is thus subsumed and appropriated by the *telos*. As a consequence, they are rightly understood as natural, even though they may appear to be merely conventional when considered in abstraction from a creature’s *telos*. Disparagement of the *telos* leads to an artificial segregation of *physis* and *nomos*, which in turn prevents a serious consideration of natural right.

But, if nature is fully present only in the mature being, what shall we say when the extrinsic factors necessary to the full maturation of a being fail to coalesce, or do so only inadequately? What if antagonistic influences distort the natural curve of a being’s development? Or what if nature’s misfiring, in Prospero’s words, produces a “nature on which nurture will not stick”? In such cases it is quite sensible to join Aristotle in saying that nature is “unable to achieve what she intends.” Such failures manifest themselves in arrested development, which admittedly bears a certain resemblance to completed development; for both may be said to define a being’s settled disposition. The identification of a being’s settled disposition is an important part of the answer to the question, “what is that?” Thus, whenever a person’s innate resources are exhaustively invested in any settled habit or disposition, that disposition turns out to be natural to him—though this disposition is by no means a sufficient indication of his natural destiny. Aristotle accordingly commends Euenus’s verse on the significance of habit: “I say it’s

long-term practice, my friend, / that is a man's nature in the end" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1152a29–33). What one learns in the course of life "must needs be joined to one's nature" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1147a22). While nature most properly denotes the operations and quality characteristic of a mature being, it also denotes (albeit in a secondary sense) any settled disposition of a being, even where this disposition falls short of maturity. It is in the latter sense that Aristotle identifies certain people as natural slaves.

Slavery, then, is clearly contrary to nature for all human beings, where nature is understood as descriptive of the condition of human maturity. Yet there are certain people, Aristotle maintains, whose disposition can only be accurately described as slavish. Such people, he suggests, benefit from membership in a despotic partnership, provided the operation of this mode of government is itself "governed by a rule in accord with the status of their natural development" (1255b6–8). But what is the status of the natural development of the slave? What is the characteristic disability that marks the disposition of a natural slave?

Aristotle identifies a certain deficiency in deliberative capacity as the quality distinctive of the natural slave (1260a12). It might seem that this deficiency would stem from some kind of cerebral shortcoming, so it is not surprising that many readers identify Aristotle's natural despotic partnership with the wise government of the mentally incompetent. Nature admittedly misfires on occasion and produces a child so slow-witted as to be permanently incapable of directing his own life. Such a child might indeed benefit from despotic rule as Aristotle understands it. But it remains unclear whether more than a handful of the mentally incompetent are capable of fulfilling the function of a natural slave within the despotic partnership. After all, this partnership operates in the order of justice, not in the order of charity. The slave must be able to tend to his business with sufficient competence to provide his master with leisure, rather than imposing a greater burden of supervision. Even if we grant that there are some retarded people capable of this level of service, there are other factors that must be taken into consideration before accepting any congenitalist account of the natural slave.

The interpretation of the natural slave as mental incompetent overlooks the fact that Aristotle acknowledges the existence of a considerable intelligence in certain natural slaves; moreover, it leaves no room for the influence of national character, which plays an important part in the philosopher's assessment of slavishness. Aristotle insists that slavishness is found in divergent concentrations from culture to culture. Yet he does not ascribe this difference to some deficiency of intelligence in the gene pools of particular races, but finds instead that it is "on account of their customs being more slavish by nature" that barbarians turn out to be less fit for liberty than are the Greeks (1285a19–22). Nor can any congenitalist account of the natural slave illuminate Aristotle's recommendation that in the best polity freedom will be tendered as a prize to all slaves (1330a32–33). Were it truly some form of congenital retardation that justified the enslavement of particular individuals, it is very difficult to see how their subsequent behavior could ever

warrant emancipation. Finally, the congenitalist view is incompatible with Aristotle's endorsement of slave-raiding. The philosopher finds that "war is right by nature" when it is waged against "human beings whose nature, as it has developed (*pephykotes*), is to be ruled but who are yet unwilling" (1256b23–26). Wars, as we know, are not waged against particular individuals; they are fought one country against another. But the misfiring of nature responsible for congenital disabilities is idiosyncratic. Retarded children are known to have perfectly normal siblings. So a war conducted for the express purpose of acquiring slaves could hardly be called "right by nature," if natural slaves were produced exclusively (or even generally) by the misfiring of nature. Nor should this surprise us. For the concept of congenital disability does not fully comprehend the elements assembled by Aristotle's teleological analysis of slavishness, which of necessity subsumes more than what is merely native to the slave. There must be some other etiology of the natural slave, as Aristotle understands him; for the misfiring of nature will not suffice. It is time to renew our search from the beginning.

Let us start again with Aristotle's most definitive statement of the disability particular to the natural slave. Searching for the underlying, psychological basis of the natural slave's inferiority, Aristotle explains that the slave "does not possess wholly the deliberative capacity" (*holôs ouk echei to bouleutikon*, 1260a12). This passage is ordinarily interpreted as asserting that the natural slave "lacks entirely" the capacity for deliberation; this, too, is a permissible construction of the Greek. But "lacks entirely" does not mean quite the same thing as "does not possess wholly." The former stipulates a much more absolute incapacity than is suggested by the latter. Yet in other passages Aristotle is hardly absolute in his assessment of the slave's intellectual deficiency. Aristotle finds the development of a considerable sophistication of technical thought to be perfectly compatible with slavishness (1327b27–29). Moreover, he expressly warns against exaggerating the intellectual shortcomings of the slave. One should not deny slaves a share in reason "by claiming that commands alone are to be used; for one should set forth what he has in mind (*nouthetêteon*) more to slaves than to children" (1260b5–7). A properly circumspect reading of the phrase *holôs ouk echei to bouleutikon* would conclude that the natural slave possesses the deliberative capacity *at best* in some partial or one-sided fashion, i.e., "not wholly." But in what sense is the deliberative capacity given to such one-sidedness? In what, by contrast, does *wholly* sound deliberation consist?

Now, Aristotle defines deliberation as a search for the manner and means whereby one's objective may be achieved "in the most expedient and noblest way" (*rhasta kai kallista*, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1112b17). A concern for the noble or beautiful (*kalon*), the philosopher repeats, characterizes all excellently performed human actions (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1115b12–13; 1142b24–26; 1120a23–24; 1122b6–7). Two criteria, then, jointly orient the course of sound deliberation. Where attention to one of these criteria is lacking, there naturally results a certain diminished capacity for deliberation. More simplistic accounts of deliberation posit a single

criterion of expediency and so conceal this diminished capacity. Because what counts as expedient is a matter settled in reference to a *posited* end, these accounts admit the imperium of an imperative that is merely hypothetical and uphold the reasonableness of a rationality that is merely instrumental. Of course, such concepts as the hypothetical imperative and instrumental rationality permit a much lower threshold for the demonstration of deliberative capacity. But if Aristotle were to conceive of deliberation merely on the model of the hypothetical imperative, he could by no means provide an intelligible account of moral development. For this reason, it is no exaggeration to say that the success of Aristotle's political philosophy depends upon his analysis of deliberation. Despite these clear indications of Aristotle's intent, readers have virtually ignored his requirement that our counsels attend not only to the expedient but also to the *kalon*.

Admittedly, it is not a simple matter to follow Aristotle here. For one thing, the significance of this word *kalon* is notoriously elusive in English translation. It is impossible to render *kalon* adequately with any single English term; in fact, the *kalon* designates a triune ideal comprising visible beauty, refined virtuosity, and moral nobility. Like a beautiful work of art, an action that partakes of the *kalon* is complete in the sense that it is "just right." You cannot add to or take from it without diminishing its worth. This, of course, is the insight at the heart of Aristotle's famous doctrine of the golden mean (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1106b9–12). Because it obviates supplement as well as deprivation, the *kalon* may be said to possess its excellence sufficiently in itself; though nothing prevents its serving to promote a further end as well. It seems to be the special preserve of mankind to select as instrumentalities things not merely useful but also *kala*. What other creature that is subject to the instinctive movements of hunger bothers to distinguish between feeding off the ground and dining from elegantly set tables? As Aristotle knows, a concern for precisely this distinction moves Glaucon to express contempt for Adeimantus's "city of pigs" (Plato's *Republic*, 372d4–5). In association with Socrates, Adeimantus had neglected the *kalon* in favor of establishing a market economy in which the necessities of life would be efficiently produced and distributed. Aristotle seconds Glaucon's objection to this procedure and the underlying conception of politics that it represents; Aristotle notes that

what is said in the *Republic*, though very neat, is inadequate. For Socrates says that a city is composed of the four most necessary [occupations], and he reasons that these are weaver, farmer, shoemaker, and builder; then again—on the grounds that these are not self-sufficient—he adds to them smiths and herdsmen over the necessary cattle, and still further, both retailer and wholesaler. All of these compose the complement of the first city, as if every city were constituted for the sake of the necessary things and not rather for the sake of the *kalon* . . . (1291a11–19)

According to Aristotle, economics can never provide an adequate account of the *polis*, nor of mankind's political nature (1280b6–1281a4). The economic theory of the polity collapses expedience and nobility into the simple concept of utility. Those who buy into the notion of instrumental rationality in this way fail to

understand the developmental dynamism inherent in Aristotle's account of deliberation. A merely instrumental rationality cannot account for the continuity and elevation of taste that accompanies the development of a child into mature adulthood. The shortcoming of the instrumentalist perspective stems from its neglect of the independent role that the *kalon* plays in human deliberation. If reason were to operate *only* instrumentally, as a calculator of the most expedient means to a given end, it would follow that the ends we pursue must lack rational foundation. For these ends would fall to one in a manner completely exogenous to the solely rational activity of instrumental deliberation. Of course, such ends may change over time; but this change does not occur as a result of any rational process, nor is such change more reasonable than its opposite.

According to Aristotle, too, the determination of ends *initially* originates outside of deliberation. Deliberation operates only in the search for means; one's ends are determined by one's social context, tastes, and character. But the determination of ends is ultimately open to the influence of rational deliberation, in Aristotle's view, even in the search for means. The mere consideration of expedience cannot open our ends to the light of reason, for expedience is wholly a function of a posited end. So instrumental rationality is trapped in a vicious circle. But it is characteristic of the *kalon*, even as it inheres in a particular instrumentality, to adumbrate in some measure the natural end or motive of all excellent human activity (1115b12–13; 1122b6–7). The splendor of our human finality penetrates even our workaday world in the form of the *kalon*. By virtue of its presence in an available instrumentality, the *kalon* is open to deliberative reason; and insofar as it is the *kalon* that is thus open to deliberation, we may say that our end is accessible to reason. So the influence of rational insight into the human *telos* is at work in one's life and character, even as one is selecting instrumentalities to achieve otherwise immature objectives. Aristotle supposes that as one chooses the most *kalon* means even to juvenile ends, these ends themselves will gradually mature and become more *kala*. The philosopher suggests that an ambition for distinction, for example, might be most easily facilitated by mere eccentricity in personal grooming or dress (1267b22–28). But this identical ambition is more nobly facilitated by performing the honorable services that establish one's reputation as a good citizen. But honor, Aristotle says, is only very nearly (*schodon*) the final motive of the political life. As we become trained in the habits of the political life, we divine (*mantuometha*) that honor is not quite good enough to be our final end. We grow indifferent to the regard of the ignorant and wish to gain the respect of competent judges, who pay homage only to true excellence. Eventually, in other words, the desire for mere distinction yields to something more discriminating, self-sufficient and elevated, namely the desire for *phronêsis* or virtue in its entirety (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1095b22–31). This movement from the mere ambition for distinction to a desire for excellence possesses continuity and marks an advance in reasonableness—it represents a genuine development from callowness to maturity. Thus, immaturity in itself is no dead end; one can get to a desire for excellence from a

desire for distinction, provided the latter is pursued in the most *kalon* as well as expeditious manner. Even a tyrant's desire to perpetuate his rule, if pursued in a *kalon* manner, will develop into something more like the solicitous rule of a good king (1314a29–1315b10).

Inasmuch as the presence of the *kalon* adumbrates the finality of human destiny, it provides an earnest or promissory pledge for the very existence of such a destiny. So receptivity to the *kalon* naturally fosters a proper confidence in the human heart, which may be shaped by the right choices into the mature virtue of courage. When receptivity to the *kalon* is blunted, as by a deforming nurture, the soul's *thymos* or heart is damaged. Hence, the obsequiousness of the natural slave may be traced back to its origin in a lack of fortitude, rather than merely a lack of force. An unspoiled child differs from a slave precisely in the integrity of his deliberative capacity, and thus also in his capacity for courage even at a stage of immaturity (1260a10–14). It is for this reason that “one should set forth what he has in mind” more when governing slaves than when directing nonslavish children (1260b5–7). For the healthy child's receptivity to the *kalon* sets him apart from the slave; such a child possesses a tacit insight into the reasonableness of what a good parent expects of him and therefore possesses the confidence to conform to this vision even when it is not explicitly elaborated or justified. Unlike the natural slave, the nonslavish child progresses toward maturity as he makes his own choices in the noblest and most efficient way, and thereby comes to acknowledge with increasing clarity which ends are reasonable and worth pursuing.

Sound deliberation, Aristotle teaches, is marked by due consideration of the *kalon* as well as the expedient. Such deliberation aims at the selection of an action the eligibility of which is not exhaustively accounted for by its promotion of some extrinsic end. The slave lacks the capacity to integrate a consideration of the *kalon* into his practical calculations. We may say that he “shares in reason so far as to perceive it, but not so much as to possess it” (1254b22–23). For the slave has no difficulty with the formulation of hypothetical imperatives, as we have seen. He shares with others a capacity to perceive an efficient path to a given end. But he does not fully grasp the reasonableness of this decision because he lacks rational insight into the end that it serves. Being efficient is not quite the same thing as being reasonable. It is for this reason, we surmise, that Aristotle finds that bodily service is “the best thing that comes from [natural slaves] themselves” (1254b18–19). Bodily service is by no means the only service within the competence of a natural slave. (Aristotle's judgment implies a comparison, not a description of solitary competence.) But on the scale of goods, Aristotle ranks honest physical labor higher than merely hypothetical, “value-free” calculation.

It is clear that one can be born with a disability that precludes the natural unfolding of the deliberative capacity. But even in cases of normal congenital development the emergence of this capacity requires the collaboration of nurture in the form of political culture, which is particularly occupied with the consideration of what is noble and beautiful (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b14–15). Inadequate or



counterproductive nurture can undermine the capacity for deliberation and produce a society of slaves. The intellectual and emotional capacities of the members of such societies are not so much congenitally limited as they are culturally deformed. Such culturally pervasive instances of slavishness are both more prevalent and more comprehensive of the teleological considerations essential to human flourishing than are the instances of slavishness caused simply by the occasional misfiring of nature. Moreover, by suggesting that culturally induced slavishness is natural, Aristotle reinforces his teleological account of politics against those who would respond to the existence of dysfunctional cultures by becoming haters of culture or civilization simply. (We have already taken note of his warnings concerning the dangers of this potential antinomianism.) Hence, Aristotle's assessment of the slavish character of entire cultures must be reckoned as integral to his analysis; it cannot be dismissed as some cultural bias that somehow slipped the leash of the philosopher's rational control.

Moreover, culturally pervasive slavishness is perfectly compatible with certain refinements of intellect, provided these are technical in character (1327b27–29). The intellectual formation of slavish societies is bent toward conquering chance, for this is what most distinguishes the technical side of human accomplishment (1258b35–36). But excellence in *technê* is possible quite apart from any search for noble and beautiful instrumentalities. The exclusive concern of *technê* is the end result; the product of *technê* possesses its value quite apart from the process from which it comes (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1094a3–6, 1139b1–3, 1140a1–16). The slave is disinclined to take the *kalon* into consideration in his selection of means to achieve particular artistic objectives; and because such consideration is not required by *technê*, nothing hinders the natural slave in his quest for technical distinction.

The natural slave stands at quite a distance from “the human being whose disposition is best both in body and in soul” (1254a37–39). Aristotle suggests that we consider this human being, in order to see what it is, that is “by nature” (1254a36–39). In this person, “the soul rules the body by a despotic rule, while the relation of intelligence (*nous*) to appetite (*orexeôs*) is that of a statesman and a king” (1254b4–6). Some have suggested, in light of these remarks, that inasmuch as the natural slave possesses an appetitive soul, it must be right by nature that he be ruled in a statesmanly or royal manner rather than despotically. But this argument ignores the point of Aristotle's citing the *best-disposed* human being as the standard for such judgments of natural right. The statesmanly and royal relationship of *orexis* and *nous* is warranted only where appetite, and the soul as a whole, is in a condition that accords with nature—as in the case of the best-disposed human being. Because the slave's appetitive soul is not properly disposed, we should not expect the slave to be ruled in the manner represented by the relationship of *orexis* and *nous* in the best human being. (Thus, as we noted at the outset, prudent judgment involves more than a recommendation based solely on the properties of a perfected being. Natural right describes the quality and operations of the mature human being, but it prescribes how—given individual circumstances—I, you or

the next person may get there from here.) Aristotle's joining of the statesmanly and royal in his description of the relationship of *orexis* and *nous* suggests why such a relationship is possible only where the soul is well-disposed.

On Aristotle's account, *orexis* enjoys a temporary priority over *nous*; for it is more important that youngsters be brought to like the right things than that they understand or can explain why these things are right. "We perform base deeds on account of pleasure, and we hold back from noble ones on account of pain. Hence, as Plato says, it is necessary to have been led immediately from childhood so as both to rejoice and to experience pain at the proper things. For this is right education" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1104b9–13; see also *Politics* 1340a16–18). Aristotle thus endorses the notion

that by rejoicing and feeling disgust in the right way, a child will praise what is noble; being receptive to noble things, he will take them into his soul and take sustenance from them and become noble and good. He will rightly blame and hate what is ignoble, despite being a mere youth as yet unable to grasp reason (*logos*). But he who is thus nurtured will welcome *logos* when it does come, recognizing it above all on account of its kinship. (*Republic* 401e3–402a4; see also *Laws* 653a5–c4)

For his part, Aristotle maintains that the "kinship" between true understanding and right tastes is so close that the ruling principle (*archê*) in the soul may be termed either appetitive intelligence (*orektikos nous*) or thoughtful appetite (*orexis dianoêtikê*) (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b4–5; see also 1139a29–31). This rotation of terms, each serving now as governing adjective and again as governed noun, is the grammatical representation of the process of human maturation, in which *orexis* rules and then is ruled in turn. Aristotle regards this kind of rotation as a hallmark of statesmanly or political rule (1259b4–5; 1277a25–27). Of course, this in no way alters the fact that right *orexis* is ultimately subordinate to mature *nous*; but this subordination has the form of the submission that is characteristic of subjects of kingly or royal rule: namely, a recognition of the king's surpassing virtue, yet fundamental kinship (1259b14–15).

We must note in this account that the natural (albeit temporary) hegemony of *orexis*, as well as the kinship of *orexis* with *nous*, depend upon a youth's openness to the *kalon*. Aristotle and Plato agree that it is impossible for appetite to be rightly formed, i.e., for it to develop naturally, where there is a lack of responsiveness to what is noble and beautiful. Now, the slave's soul, though unquestionably appetitive, is unable to attend to the *kalon* in its decision making. It would be inappropriate, therefore, for a person in such a condition to be ruled in either of the ways that the intellect and the appetite of the best-disposed human being are related. Those who are unresponsive to the *kalon* should not follow their appetites, nor do their appetites bear a foreshadowing kinship with reason; their souls are not yet up to the level of statesmanly or kingly rule. In this regard, the natural slave stands as far apart from the best-disposed human being as soul stands from body. For the body is naturally ruled by the soul despotically, rather than in a statesmanly or royal manner. At the same time, the natural slave lacks *nous*;

whatever his skill at hypothetical deliberations, the natural slave has no insight into what is fundamental—the reasonableness of the first principles, so to speak. It follows that the natural slave stands as far apart from the best-disposed human being, whose soul possesses *nous*, as mankind stands from beast. For the beast does not naturally possess *nous*, and so too is rightly ruled despotically rather than either in a statesmanly or royal manner.

#### PROPERTY AND PROPER USE OF SLAVES

Although the condition of the natural slave has become second nature, it is not objectively unalterable. In Aristotle's teleological conception, the leaden hand of determinism is not laid upon the natural slave; nature always preserves her intention, regardless of the way uncongenial circumstances may work against its realization. We have seen that the natural slave is unable to integrate an end-influencing concern for the *kalon* into his instrumental calculations; as a consequence, he is held perpetually in the thrall of exogenously determined ends. Such a person truly is not his own man but someone else's. Aristotle explains that the natural slave "is not his own by nature but another's, inasmuch as and despite the fact that he is a human being" (*anthrôpos ôn*, 1254a14–15). I thus make a point of translating the circumstantial participle, *ôn*, both causally and adversatively. This grammatical ambiguity perfectly reflects the duality of Aristotle's judgment of natural slavery. For the slave is another's both by virtue of and despite his humanity. Slavery can exist in accordance with nature only because slavishness exists contrary to nature. Although slavishness is a condition contrary to nature for a human being, despotic rule is justified precisely in view of the humanity of the natural slave. The despotic relationship is right by nature only insofar as the master's proprietorship in the slave derives from and duly respects the nature of the slave *qua* human being. To understand better what Aristotle means by this remarkable assertion of proprietorship, we must first clarify what he means, and does not mean, by the word property (*ktêma*).

The word property has certain connotations today that are simply not present in Aristotle's usage. Aristotle's understanding of *ktêma* is easily misconstrued when rendered in the Lockean categories of modern political thought. But the term *ktêma* has a much more circumscribed usage in Aristotle than "property" has in Locke. For Aristotle, "an article of property is an instrument for use in conduct (*organon praktikon*)" (1254b16–17). Conduct (*praxis*) is understood in opposition to *poiêsis* or making. Though they resemble one another in being distinguished from science (*epistêmê*), inasmuch as neither is concerned with things that exist of necessity, *praxis* and *poiêsis* are themselves generically different. The end pursued by *poiêsis* stands outside the productive process; while the end pursued by *praxis* resides in good performance of this *praxis* itself (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1140a1–6, 1140b2–7). If *ktêma* is an instrument for use in *praxis*, then property as Aristotle intends the word cannot designate an instrument of production. In fact, the philosopher emphatically prohibits the use of slaves in production (1254a5–8). An

instrument of production, as opposed to property, is employed strictly with a view to the achievement of an extrinsic product. One cares for an instrument of production in order to sustain or increase the instrument's marginal productivity. In Aristotle's estimation even a carpenter's tools benefit when used appropriately. But because property is an *organon praktikon*, the manner in which an item of property is employed matters at least as much as any further purpose that it serves. Thus, the manner in which a master uses slaves matters, and not just for the reason of maximizing the slave's output. It is a master's personal responsibility to bring out such virtue as the slave can achieve (1260b3–5). This remark entails more than enlightened self-interest, as we may now conclude from even this brief consideration of what Aristotle means by a *kiêma*. Concern for the excellence of one's property is not merely advantageous, it is right by nature.

Once our preconceived notions of property are adjusted to allow a fresh consideration of Aristotle's account, it is possible to see that membership in a natural despotic partnership in no way involves the dehumanization of the slave. The naturalness of this partnership is predicated on its value to both the master and the slave as human beings. (This is not to suggest any minimization of the abuses that have occurred in mankind's long experience with the institution of slavery. Aristotle might well hold that such abuses are invited by the denial of the existence of a common human *telos* and could be hindered by its affirmation.) Aristotle never suggests any compromise in his teleology of human affairs. Mankind's *telos* provides a standard against which any abuse of power—whether despotic or political—can be identified. Despotic rule, when exercised in accord with nature, is never exploitative. The natural despotic partnership is a mutually beneficial association wherein a master gains studious leisure (*scholê*) by procuring in a noble way some of the necessities of life through his slave; the slave is both property and partner (*koinônos*, 1260a40) of his master, in a life directed toward and by means of the *kalon*. While despotic rule aims at the master's advantage as at a target, the slave benefits along the way as a partner in the master's life (1278b32–36). The life that can thus accommodate the natural incorporation of the slave is already a whole, even if some enhancements remain possible. The master is in no sense a part of the slave. But the natural slave, who enjoys a share in this distinctively human way of life only by virtue of his relationship to his master, may be said to belong, as a part or partner, wholly to him (1254a9–13). Thus, Aristotle declares that in a naturally constituted despotic partnership there can be friendship between master and slave (1255b12–15; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1161b5–6). We may infer that Aristotle would deny that the slave belongs to his master by virtue of divine right or racial superiority, or by noble birth or market exchange, or by mere force of the master, or even by consent of the slave. Ultimately, for Aristotle, property in a natural slave derives from the fact that all human beings *belong* in a life partaking in the distinctively human *telos*.

We may surmise from Aristotle's account of property that the use of a slave qua slave terminates with the reformation of slavishness, should such a reformation occur; the possibility of such a reformation is implied by the role of dysfunctional

culture in the formation of the natural slave. If a dysfunctional culture has engendered slavishness, then perhaps a restorative culture could correct this condition. I would suggest that it is with a view to this possibility—and not on the Machiavellian grounds alleged by many commentators—that Aristotle recommends that in the best *polis* citizens should “tender freedom as a prize to all slaves” rather than holding their slaves without condition or limit (1330a31–33). Whether the slave is reformed or not, however, it remains the case that the rightfulness of a master’s dominion is conditioned upon the subordination of his own conduct to the natural order. Despotic rule is right by nature only where the parts played by master and slave are themselves “governed by a rule in accord with the status of their natural development” (1255b5–8). The acknowledgement of this limitation and its corresponding responsibilities is essential to what Aristotle means by speaking of the master’s property in natural slaves. Absent these conditions, natural slaves would still exist though natural slavery could not.

As we have noted, certain occupations must be deemed inappropriate for the employment of slaves. Other occupations are more congenial. Aristotle thus distinguishes the rightful employment of a slave from the illiberal exercise of the mechanical arts. The slave is essentially a partner in the life of his master (1260a39–40); “and inasmuch as life is conduct (*praxis*) not production (*poiēsis*), the slave takes part as a subordinate in matters dealing with *praxis*” (1254a5–8). The circumlocution “matters dealing with *praxis*” embraces the possibility that slaves may be employed in domestic service—say in the preparation of meals—insofar as this employment plays a part in the natural function of the household, for example, the master’s extension of hospitality to friends. This form of employment is opposed to serving as a means for the manufacture of products for the marketplace (1255b25–27, 1337b8–21). Although all manner of natural domestic service is thus embraced by Aristotle, he explicitly cites one mode of employment as especially appropriate for the slave: namely, agriculture. In the best case, Aristotle suggests, it is the farming especially that should be done by slaves (1330a25–26).

In the *Politics* as it has come down to us, Aristotle offers precious little elaboration of this suggestion concerning agriculture. But a clear understanding of the principles of his account of the natural slave provides a basis for speculation. I shall complete my analysis of Aristotle’s defense of slavery accordingly, by suggesting that the practice of agriculture provides the natural slave a potentially restorative culture, capable of refitting the slave for liberty. I stress that agriculture offers an opportunity, not a guaranty. Yet even if the practice of agriculture fails in the particular case to be restorative, it is never exploitative of the slave. The practice of agriculture conforms to the limitations placed by natural right upon the employment of slaves. Thus, one misses the thrust of Aristotle’s suggestion concerning agriculture, if it is treated as evidence of Aristotle’s blessing of a compromise between natural right and *Realpolitik*. If for no other reason than to counter this interpretation, we must consider more carefully the bearing of agriculture on the condition of the natural slave.

We must note, first of all, that farming is a mode of employment to which even a *spoudaios* would willingly and honorably submit his own body, if his circumstances required him to work to earn his own living. Aristotle finds that such an enterprise is "in accordance with nature for everyone" (1258a37–38). But tilling, planting, weeding, pruning and harvesting are very time-consuming activities. In the best case the task of farming should be relegated to those unfit to serve in political offices, thereby freeing citizens for a more active part in the affairs of their polity. This will be the arrangement, Aristotle says, "if the polity is to be constituted in accord with our prayers" (1330a25–26). Owing to a misunderstanding of agriculture, however, it has proven difficult for many readers to appreciate the full significance of Aristotle's "prayer."

Above all, Aristotle's distinction between the illiberal arts and the conduct of agriculture needs better appreciation. This distinction rests upon a difference between tasks that are flatly antagonistic to virtue and those that are to be avoided, if possible, merely because they are time-consuming. Aristotle maintains that "citizens should live neither an illiberal (*banauson*) nor a commercial way of life, for such a life is base and antagonistic to virtue" (1328b39–41). Proceeding on a different note, however, he goes on to say that "neither should the ones who are going to be doing the farming be [citizens], for there is need of leisure both with respect to the rise of virtue and to the conduct of political activities" (1328b39–1329a2). We must note the profound difference between the two kinds of disqualification Aristotle presents here. Unlike farming, illiberal or banausic employment actually cripples the capacity for excellence, both physically and intellectually. Aristotle defines as banausic any employment that "brings about the uselessness of the body, the soul, or the mind relative to the service and conduct pertaining to virtue" (1337b8–11). While he identifies the most slavish jobs as those "that most rely upon the use of the body," he contrasts these employments with those that are "most banausic, which are those that do most damage to the body" (1258b37–38). What distinguishes a slave's proper work is precisely that it does not diminish the slave's capacity for virtue and hence for freedom. It is better to practice agriculture, even as a slave, than to work at the illiberal or banausic arts by one's own consent. Farming is difficult physical labor and time-consuming, but Aristotle consistently distinguishes it from the banausic arts.

It is clear that the overspecialized physical exertion required by the banausic arts will over time despoil the body of the flexibility needed to meet the diverse challenges of martial and political exercise. But worse, the routine of the banausic arts tends to deform the intellect; the *banausos* is drilled in a false doctrine of human autonomy with respect to nature. "Every *technê* is concerned with . . . things whose first principle (*archê*) lies in the producer and not in the thing produced. For art is not concerned with things that . . . exist in accordance with nature—for these have their *archê* within themselves" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1140a10–16). From the point of view of *technê*, everything is essentially raw material. Trading on the imposition of form by extrinsic agency, the *banausos* has

nothing to remind him that it is the nature of beings themselves—especially in the case of human beings—that determines the shape into which they are best formed. The danger of technocracy, as Aristotle could see, is that the efficacy of *technê* may charm us into a forgetfulness of the significance of our own being. This forgetfulness is a measure of the remoteness of the *banausos* from the noble life of the *spoudaios*, in which the slave has at least a share. Aristotle accordingly maintains that it is better to be a real slave, i.e., the subordinate member of a natural despotic partnership, than to be a wage-slave (1260a40–41). The wage-slave suffers a bondage distinct from the natural despotic relationship, to be sure. But it is the worse bondage for being endured in isolation from fellowship with good men (*aphôrismenên*, 1260b1).

The practice of agriculture is quite different from employment in the illiberal arts. Of course, this is initially difficult to see. For in the modern era of genetic engineering, we tend to approach agriculture as just another *technê*. But it must be remembered, as we have just seen, that no *technê*, according to Aristotle, has for its object a natural being. The farmer, therefore, is by no means a fabricator or maker, regardless of the sophistication of the machinery at his disposal. Agricultural “produce” is not an artifact; it is the fruition of a natural being. In a natural being, Aristotle says, the first principle and ruling source of movement or growth is the nature of that being itself (*Physics* 192b13–23; see also *Nicomachean Ethics* 1140a15–16). Thus, the agent responsible for the growth and fruition of a vine remains the nature of the vine itself—even when this growth is perfected through a viticulture provided by the farmer. While the best grapes may not be a spontaneous product of nature, it remains the nature of a vine to yield excellent grapes when it is properly trained. The same point applies to the cultivation of human excellence. For neither are the virtues a spontaneous product of nature; “yet it is our nature to receive them when our natural growth arrives at its perfection through habituation” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1103a24–26). Just as medicine reinforces the animate body’s natural capacity to heal itself, so too the farmer tills, fertilizes and irrigates to reinforce nature’s own fruitfulness. We may say that the conduct of agriculture is not so much a “making” (*poiêsis*) as a “making stronger.” Strictly speaking, then, agriculture is no more a *technê* than is physical culture (i.e., gymnastics and medicine) or political culture (*politikê*). In fact, it now appears that these three activities, or modes of cultivation, are mutually analogous and in some sense correspond to the modes of being of soul (*psychê*) itself.

The earth and the multitude of plants it supports already indicate, where they do not yet fully embody, the perfection of their own natural forms. In this respect, the practice of agriculture is less challenging to one’s eye for *physis* than is the practice of *politikê*. Thus, farming is well suited to the limited capacities of the natural slave. The slave, though blind for the time being to the *kalon telos* in his own case, might be led by even a cursory examination to choose means of cultivation that harmonize with and reflect the *kalon telos* of the earth’s nature (see Xenophon’s *Oikonomikos*, noting certain formal parallels to Plato’s *Meno*

82a7–85b7). Thus, in diametric opposition to the *banausos*, the farmer is trained in the habit of bringing his own deliberate choices into harmony with the endogenous agency and *telos* of the plants he cultivates.

If the farming life does not fully inculcate virtue, Aristotle suggests, it at least mitigates the ordinary human vices. The philosopher's reasoning here is compact but important. Aristotle observes that

farmers are busy on account of not having much substance on hand (*ousia*), so that they are unable to hold frequent assemblies. Because they do not have what is required for that, they spend their time at work and do not covet what belongs to others; instead, working is more pleasant (*hédion*) to them than politicking and governing, provided there is not a great deal to be gotten from office. (1318b11–16)

Farmers, while not possessing any great wealth, will nearly always have on hand something more than a subsistence level of the necessities of life; urban dwellers, by contrast, are the first, the most desperately pressed, and often the exclusive victims of agricultural shortage. This stability of provision breeds a sense of hardy self-confidence in farmers. At the same time, the stores on hand are never as great on a family farm as in the urban marketplace. Two mutually reinforcing consequences follow from this. First, farmers have not the leisure to involve themselves in ongoing political affairs, “so wherever a farming people . . . sets the tone of political culture, the law rules rather than men” (1292b25–27). Apart from the offer of a truly remarkable bribe, farmers find it more pleasant to work their land than to get involved in politicking. “Politicking” (*tou politeuesthai*, 1318b15) is not to be identified with *politikê*, the natural mode of cultivation essential to the realization of the human *telos*. For Aristotle links politicking and covetousness in this passage. Politicking evidently refers here to the low but familiar art through which one seeks office by appealing to the greed of some and the envy of others. Now, farmers are uninterested in politicking, as Aristotle says, because they “take more pleasure” in working their land. This pleasure, to be sure, is indicative of character (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1104b3–5). So it is as a matter of character, inculcated by the agricultural life, that farmers enjoy a certain resistance to envy and covetousness—even if this character has not fully ripened so as to include the full-blown virtues of justice and liberality. Secondly, the absence of great wealth characteristic of agrarian life shelters the farmer from the fabulous and desire-inflaming opulence of finished goods, which one finds in abundance in centers of commerce. This feature of the farming life again inclines toward virtue, even if it does not provide for the final harvest of moderation (*sôphrosynê*). Aristotle thus suggests how the culture of agraria tends to better the character of her denizens. Farmers are confident enough in their own livelihood to be unmoved by jealousy, but they do not have so much at any one time as to be corrupted by luxury. Whatever their other shortcomings, those who farm—whether slave or free—would seem to enjoy a life remarkably adverse to gluttony, sloth, envy, and covetousness.

While there is no guaranty, the habits of agriculture may carry over to the consideration of other choices the slave has occasion to make. As the agricultural life



comes to influence the slave's perspective, he will tend to think in terms of natural metaphors. Rather than likening himself to raw material, to be shaped at the will of external agency, he may begin to understand himself (no less than the plants and livestock in his care) as a being with a natural *telos*, which properly bears upon his conduct. Moreover, the farmer learns from experience that despite his best efforts there will sometimes be poor harvests. The practice of agriculture thus tends to reward and fortify one's efficacy, but also to chasten one's pride in his own autonomy. In other words, the *farmer* grows precisely as he learns that he cannot *make* plants grow. By taking the nature of things more seriously, the farmer will be less inclined to disparage his own activity as merely a process of production. He will be more attentive to the *kalon* in the course of his instrumental calculations. And, as we have seen, even an initially exogenously determined end—the completion of the task set by a master—will eventually, if pursued in a *kalon* manner, yield to the internalization of something more like the true *kalon telos* of human nature. If this happens, the former slave becomes his own man and will deserve the freedom Aristotle would tender to all slaves as a prize.

But we must acknowledge, even if such a reform of the slave is not achieved, that farming remains a suitable occupation for the natural slave, whose best employment is physical and whose human *telos* is to be respected. One who is already fit for the exercises of freedom will of course prefer studious leisure to the time-consuming practice of agriculture. But it is precisely the busyness of agriculture, which brooks no distraction from its central lesson of the telic agency of *physis* and the collaborative role of human cultivation, that makes agriculture a particularly well-suited employment for the slavish character, as Aristotle suggests.

#### CONCLUSION

I have presented an interpretation of Aristotle's account of natural slavery that is intended to reconcile certain difficulties of interpretation and to address other concerns of a broader character concerning the decency and democratic tenability of classic natural right. Aristotle's natural slave has appeared even to his sympathetic readers as a racist tar-baby from which proponents of natural right had somehow to unglue themselves. On the basis of the interpretation offered in this article, I believe that we have been liberated from this misconception. Any teleological account of the human good implies the possibility of developmental failures; and it properly belongs to such an account to indicate ways of addressing these failures in a manner consistent with the human *telos*. The natural slave is an example of such a developmental failure, and the despotic partnership is offered by Aristotle as the most natural means for its redress. Thus, I have argued that Aristotle's defense of natural slavery must be understood as intrinsic to his teleological account of the human good and his teaching of natural right.

But is the cause of natural right tenable today in the face of its linkage with slavery? The great appeal of natural right today resides in its combination of respect for the diversity of individual circumstances and recognition of a transmoral,

ontological standard of human excellence—in other words, in its moderation with respect to the extremes of a purely formal universalism and relativistic situationalism. Just this combination seems to be essential if the spiraling heterogeneity of our citizenry is not to hurl us all into a nihilistic abyss. We must honor diversity in today's pluralistic democracies and yet recognize at the same time that indifference to what is objectively good or just provides a precarious basis for tolerance of others. The classic understanding of natural right thus provides the theoretical underpinnings essential to the maintenance of liberal democracy; it maps the detour around Weimar. Yet natural right is held in ill-repute because of its linkage with controversial practices such as slavery. But the political status of natural right ought to depend upon the moral integrity and theoretical respectability of the exact account of slavery that natural right embraces and that Aristotle offers. I have offered evidence to support a new appreciation of this account, which can now be seen as reasonable and just. Aristotle's defense of slavery ought no longer to be damned as an ethnocentric rationalization for the unjust dominion of tyrannical slaveholders, nor should it be excused as a covert attempt to undermine the practice of slavery always and everywhere. Instead, we must conclude that Aristotle's defense of slavery incorporates a reasonable standard for justice in the conduct of despotic government and thus provides a solid basis upon which we can condemn the actual practice of slavery wherever it involves abuse and injustice.

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