The Meaning of Aristocracy
In Aristotle’s Political Thought

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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To my family
Abstract

The Meaning of Aristocracy in Aristotle's Political Thought
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What is the relationship between Aristotle's concern for the best regime and virtue and his concern for practical political matters? This is one of the most perplexing interpretative questions of the Politics. By investigating the meaning of aristocracy in the Politics, we get a much better understanding of this relationship than currently exists. We learn that there are actually two best regimes in the Politics. There is the regime discussed in books VII and VIII, which Aristotle explicitly presents as the best regime. It is an aristocratic regime and it functions as an aristocratic standard for commonly existing regimes. Aristotle's concern for it and the virtue that defines it is part of his concern for practical political matters. But Aristotle also quietly presents another regime as the best regime in the Politics. It is aristocracy in the strict sense of the term or the simply best regime. Aristotle discusses it in book III of the Politics and it turns out to be the same as the best regime in logos of Plato's Republic, the regime ruled by philosopher-kings. The simply best regime is not any sort of standard for existing regimes. Aristotle's concern for it and the virtue that defines it is not directly related to his concern for practical political matters. The investigation of aristocracy reveals that the concern for the best regime and virtue in the Politics is both part of and separate from the concern for practical political
matters. But since Aristotle only quietly presents the teaching on the simply best regime, the investigation also elucidates the peculiar character of his political thought. of how it aims primarily yet not exclusively at practical political matters.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

It is hardly necessary to justify the study of Aristotle's *Politics* today, when numerous articles and books are being published on the subject. Contemporary political theorists obviously find it relevant to their concerns. But why study what the *Politics* has to say about aristocracy? Is this not a mode of government that has long been superseded? The subject does not even seem to play a very prominent role in the *Politics*. Different reasons could be given for studying Aristotle's teaching on aristocracy. But I am going to justify its study here by showing that it solves one of the most perplexing interpretative questions concerning the *Politics*—the question of the relationship between Aristotle's concern for the best regime, virtue, and practical political matters.

The best regime is the subject of books VII and VIII of the *Politics*. It aims at
the cultivation of virtue. But Aristotle's discussion of it seems unconnected to his discussion of practical political matters, which is most evidently the subject of books IV to VI of the *Politics*. This is in fact the prevailing nineteenth and early twentieth century interpretation of the relationship—that the concern for the best regime and virtue in the *Politics* is separate from the concern for practical political matters.¹ According to one commentator, "The tradition of Aristotelian scholarship has always distinguished in the *Politics* two different, independent, and even discordant theoretical concerns—a theory of the ideal, or best state, and a theory of actual states" (Bluhm 1962, 743).

This, however, is not Machiavelli's and Hobbes's view. For according to them, Aristotle's concern for the best regime and virtue makes his political thought useless.² What appear to be down to earth political issues in the *Politics* are in fact hopelessly impractical because they are set within a larger context that takes its bearings from what is high in men instead of how they really behave. For Machiavelli and Hobbes, then, the concern for the best regime, virtue, and practical political matters in the *Politics* are all connected, but detrimentally so. (The following investigation will point to a very different conclusion.)

What makes the issue even more curious is that at one point in the *Politics* Aristot-

¹I discuss this perspective in chapter 6.
tle himself suggests that the concern for the best regime is separate from the concern for practical political matters. At the beginning of book IV he criticizes his predecessors, who have previously spoken about regimes, for being so concerned with the best regime and other ideal regimes that they have had nothing to say about practical politics (1288b35–89a1). Aristotle’s criticism is reminiscent of Machiavelli’s criticism of the ancient and medieval political thinkers who preceded him in chapter 13 of the *Prince.* Is Aristotle, then, actually akin to the moderns (contrary to Machiavelli’s and Hobbes’s portrayal of him)? Does he too think that the best regime and virtue have very little to do with actual politics? But why, then, is so much of the *Politics* devoted to these themes?

Contemporary interpretations of Aristotle’s political thought have not resolved the issue. According to some present-day commentators, Aristotle’s concern for the best regime and virtue in the *Politics* is more or less separate from his concern for practical political matters. According to others, these concerns are all connected and part of the same enterprise. (I discuss a variety of these interpretations in chapter 6.) What is clear is that any comprehensive study of Aristotle’s political thought will either directly address the question of how his concern for the best regime, virtue,

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*3Aristotle, Politics, Lord 1984. Bekker numbers are usually approximate; for example, a reference to 1252a1 means that the relevant text could be found from 1252a1–4. In the above case, then, the relevant text will be found between 1288b35 and 1289a4. Where it is necessary to locate the text precisely, Bekker numbers are followed by “Ross,” in reference to the Ross edition (1957) of the Greek text. References following sentences refer to more than the immediately preceding sentence. I have occasionally made changes to Lord’s translation.*
and practical political matters are related, or presuppose a particular answer to it. For apart from the fact that the structure of the Politics so prominently raises it, the question concerns such matters as the meaning of virtue, its role in human life, whether and how existing regimes can be reformed, and the aim of Aristotle's political thought.

By studying the meaning of aristocracy in the Politics we will arrive at a novel resolution of this question. We will see that the relationship is more complex than hitherto understood. The concern for the best regime and virtue in the Politics can neither be separated from nor conflated with the concern for practical political matters. These concerns cannot be separated because the best regime of books VII and VIII, which aims at virtue according to Aristotle, is meant to serve as an aristocratic standard for existing regimes. But neither can they be conflated because there is another best regime in the Politics. It is the simply best regime according to Aristotle, and it is very different from the best regime of books VII and VIII. The simply best regime is also defined by virtue, but it does not act as any sort of standard for existing regimes, since it is neither a desirable nor a feasible regime for actual cities. Aristotle only quietly makes us aware of the teaching on the simply best regime in the Politics. But the fact that he includes it in the work reveals that his concern for the best regime and virtue is not limited by, or the same as, his concern for practical political matters.
The teaching on aristocracy in the *Politics* allows us to decipher the relationship between three of its most important concerns. But it is not something that is easy of access. Aristotle's remarks on aristocracy are brief and occur in various places in the *Politics*. If one puts these remarks together systematically, however, a complex yet coherent picture emerges.

I will begin the investigation, in chapter 2, by showing that there are different types of aristocratic regimes according to Aristotle. What they have in common is the presence of virtue. We will see that Aristotle distinguishes one of these regimes from the rest as aristocracy in the strict sense of the term and that he calls it the best regime. It is made up of those who are best simply on the basis of virtue. I will then investigate what Aristotle means by aristocracy in the strict sense. By doing so I will establish that there are two best regimes in the *Politics*. Aristocracy in the strict sense is the simply best regime, and it is discussed in book III of the *Politics*. It is a very different regime from the regime of books VII and VIII, which is explicitly presented as the best regime in the *Politics*. At this point I will investigate what Aristotle says about the simply best regime in book III. We will see that it is a regime that is neither desirable nor feasible for cities. It can also be understood in some sense as the definitive form of kingship. And it is ruled by philosophers, by those who are outstanding on the basis of virtue. Our analysis will also reveal, however, that the teaching on the simply best regime in the *Politics* is muted.
Subsequently, in chapter 2, I will examine the reason for the complex presentation of the best regime in the *Politics*. We will see that it has to do with the peculiar character of Aristotle’s political thought. At the beginning of book IV, Aristotle argues that the science of the regimes is incomplete with respect to practical political matters. We will see that the primary aim of the *Politics* is to complete this deficiency by addressing what is useful for reforming existing regimes. In this context, a regime that cannot exist as the regime of a city is not what is best. In fact, Aristotle implies that the science of the regimes cannot be completed by focusing on the simply best regime. In the context of addressing practical political matters the regime that is best is the best possible regime that a city can actually have. This is the best regime of books VII and VIII. But at the same time, the *Politics* is not silent about the simply best regime. It is not silent about it because Aristotle’s political thought is not solely concerned with practical political matters. It is also concerned with the identity of the simply best way of life for human beings, a way of life that, in its true manifestation, exists apart from the day-to-day affairs of the city.

In chapter 3 of the dissertation I will review the “lesser aristocracies” that are discussed in chapter 7 of book IV. I will show how Aristotle presents one of these regimes as the most aristocratic regime among the lesser aristocracies. The identity of this regime is revealed in chapter 11 of book IV. It is a regime based on human beings who are ethically virtuous, or gentlemen. As such, it is equivalent to the best
regime of books VII and VIII, which makes ethical virtue the end in common of its citizens. In relation to aristocracy in the strict sense, the regime of books VII and VIII is a lesser aristocracy; but it is the lesser aristocracy that is presented by Aristotle as the most aristocratic of the lesser aristocracies. The regime of books VII and VIII is the best possible regime that a city can have. But it is not a regime that many cities could achieve or want to achieve. It is not a practical regime. Yet it still functions as an aristocratic standard for existing regimes. We shall see how it does by further investigating Aristotle's teaching on aristocracy in the *Politics*.

In discussing aristocracy in chapter 7 of book IV, Aristotle presents the Spartan and Carthaginian regimes as examples of lesser aristocracies. In chapter 4 of the dissertation I will examine Aristotle's discussion of these two regimes in the *Politics*. We shall see that they are not really aristocratic regimes. Yet Aristotle's discussion of them, as well as his discussion of various aristocratic "modes" in books IV and VI, reveals the existence of an aristocratic regime that is a more feasible regime for cities than the best regime of books VII and VIII. It does not make virtue the end in common of all its citizens as does the latter, but it is an aristocratic regime because virtue is part of it. And virtue is part of it because a substantial number of its rulers are gentlemen.

The more feasible aristocratic regime turns out to be similar to the regime Aristotle calls "polity," which is a regime that combines oligarchic and democratic character-
istics. The similarity implies that polities are potentially aristocratic regimes. Most existing regimes of cities, however, are not polities but democracies and oligarchies according to Aristotle. In order for the more feasible aristocratic regime to be feasible for most cities, then, democracies and oligarchies too must have the potential to be aristocratic regimes. We see that they do by taking a closer look at the regimes that are called "democracies" and "oligarchies" in the Politics. The investigation reveals that many of these regimes are in fact, if not in name, polities. Even regimes that are actually democracies and oligarchies may be made into polities, then, without destroying the governing democratic or oligarchic presupposition of the regime. Ascertaining these things reveals that the more feasible aristocratic regime is a regime that is feasible for most cities—it is a practical aristocratic regime. And we understand thereby exactly how virtue can play a role in existing regimes according to Aristotle.

The aristocratic regime that is feasible for most cities is aristocratic because ethical or gentlemanly virtue is part of it; and it is feasible for most cities because ethical virtue is not the end of the regime as a whole, as it is for the regime of books VII and VIII. Since the virtue that characterizes the former regime is the same as that which characterizes the latter, the best regime of books VII and VIII functions as an aristocratic standard for existing regimes. The investigation of aristocracy in the Politics reveals, therefore, that Aristotle's concern for the best regime and virtue in
the *Politics* is part of his concern for practical political matters. But, at the same time, the investigation also shows that his concern for the best regime and virtue is separate from his concern for practical political matters, by revealing the existence of another best regime in the *Politics*, the simply best regime discussed in book III.

By investigating the meaning of aristocracy in the *Politics*, then, we will elucidate one of the most perplexing and important questions of the work, that of the relationship between the best regime, virtue, and practical political matters. We will see thereby that the *Politics* is a coherent whole, and we will better understand the relationship of Aristotle’s political thought both to that of his predecessors and to that of the modern political philosophers. Aristotle’s teaching on aristocracy may, with further reflection then, allow us to more accurately diagnose some of the ills facing liberal democracies today.
Chapter 2

The Best Regimes of the Politics

2.1 Introduction

The subject of aristocracy does not appear to be a prominent theme of the Politics. There is a definition of aristocracy in chapter 7 of book III, a short discussion of aristocratic regimes in chapter 7 of book IV, and some references to aristocracy in other parts of the work. When we examine what Aristotle says about aristocracy in these places we find that he thinks that there are different types of aristocratic regimes. He distinguishes one, however, from the rest. It fully merits the name "aristocracy" and is, therefore, aristocracy in the strict sense of the term. It is also called the best regime. The best regime is clearly one of the prominent themes of the Politics. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is the subject of books VII and
VIII. But Aristotle also discusses various other views on the best regime in book II. And he refers to it in book III and occasionally in book IV as well.

In this chapter\(^1\) we shall see that the best regime that is discussed in books VII and VIII is not the same as the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense, which is also called the best regime. This means that there are two best regimes in the *Politics*. The regime discussed in books VII and VIII is openly presented as the best regime. But Aristotle leaves its status as an aristocratic regime ambiguous. He makes no direct reference to it in his discussions of aristocracy in books III and IV.\(^2\) nor does he call it aristocracy in books VII and VIII. Yet the fact that Aristotle presents the regime of books VII and VIII as the best regime makes it easy to infer that it is the definitive form of aristocracy. It is only by systematically investigating the meaning of aristocracy in the *Politics* that one ascertains that this regime is not aristocracy in the strict sense of the term and that there is another regime which is, the simply best regime.

Aristotle makes neither the existence nor the identity of the simply best regime

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\(^1\) A condensed version of this chapter, entitled “The Best Regimes of Aristotle’s *Politics*,” was presented at the Midwest Political Science Association annual meeting in Chicago, April 18-20, 1996.

\(^2\) The discussion of whether “vulgar” persons can be citizens, in chapter 5 of book III, implies that the regime of books VII and VIII is aristocratic. Aristotle says there that if there are aristocratic regimes in which prerogatives are distributed according to virtue and desert, the vulgar and labourers cannot be citizens of these regimes (1278a15–20). The regime of books VII and VIII excludes such human beings from citizenship (see 1328b35–29a1 & 1329a15–25). But Aristotle does not refer to it in chapter 5 of book III, and he moreover speaks hypothetically of the existence of aristocratic regimes in this context.
obvious. We will understand the reasons for this strange procedure by ascertaining its identity and by considering Aristotle's purpose in writing the *Politics*.

I will begin the analysis, in section 2.2, by showing that there are different types of aristocratic regimes according to Aristotle, and that one of these regimes is distinguished from the rest as aristocracy in the strict sense of the term and that it is called the best regime. In the next section I will show that aristocracy in the strict sense is not the same as the best regime discussed in books VII and VIII of the *Politics* and that there are actually two best regimes in the *Politics*. We will see that this teaching is not something that Aristotle emphasizes. I will then investigate, in section 2.4, the nature of the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense, the simply best regime. It is discussed, quietly, in book III of the *Politics*. The discussion initially raises questions about the desirability of the simply best regime for actual cities, and subsequently reveals that it is not a feasible regime for actual cities. The impracticality of the simply best regime of the *Politics*, along with its presentation as a type of kingship in book III, raises the following question: is it the same as the most famous imagined regime in political thought prior to Aristotle, namely the best regime in *logos* of the *Republic*, the regime ruled by philosopher-kings? We see that it is by considering something Aristotle says about the character of its rulers.

At this point in the chapter we will have ascertained that there are two best regimes in the *Politics*. We will have learned that Aristotle explicitly presents one
of these regimes, the regime of books VII and VIII, as the best regime, whereas he only obliquely points to the existence and the identity of the other, the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense. In section 2.5, I will explain the reasons for the complex teaching regarding the best regime in the Politics by examining the peculiar character of Aristotle’s political thought.

2.2 The Multiplicity of Aristocracy

The subject of different types of regimes is brought to the fore in book III of the Politics. In chapter 7 of book III Aristotle distinguishes six different types of regimes on the basis of the number of rulers and whether the rulers rule with a view to the common advantage or not (1279a25–30). The regimes are kingship, aristocracy, polity, tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy. The first three are said to be correct regimes and the last three deviations from these. With respect to kingship, Aristotle says that we are accustomed to call the type of monarchy that looks to the common advantage kingship (1279a30). The deviation, tyranny, “is monarchy with a view to the advantage of the monarch” (1279b5). With respect to aristocracy, he initially says that it is made up of the few but of more than one (1279a30). He further explains

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3 In chapter 6 of book III Aristotle defines correct regimes as those which look to the common advantage. Regimes looking to the advantage of the rulers are “errant and are all deviations from the correct regimes” (1279a5–20).
it as being either the rule of the best or rule⁴ “with a view to what is best for the city and for those who participate in it” (1279a34–37—Ross). The two definitions are separated by “either … or” (ἡ … ή) (1279a35–36—Ross). Aristocracy’s deviation is oligarchy, which looks to the advantage of the wealthy (1279b5). With respect to polity, Aristotle says that it is the name given to the regime where “the multitude governs with a view to the common advantage” (1279a35). Its deviation is democracy, which looks to the advantage of the poor (1279b5).

Among the explanations of these regimes, Aristotle’s definition of aristocracy stands out. It does so mainly because he provides more than one definition of it, something he does not do for any of the other regimes. Aristotle thereby raises the possibility that there is more than one type of aristocratic regime. The definitions themselves do not provide specific information as to who exactly will rule in aristocratic regimes. The first definition identifies the rulers as “the best.” The term “aristocracy” literally means the rule of the best. But the precise identity of the best is left unclear in chapter 7, although there is a hint about it. After describing polity Aristotle says, “It is possible for one or a few to be outstanding in virtue, but where more are concerned it is difficult for them to be proficient with a view to virtue as a whole ...” (1279a35–b1). Aristocracy is initially said to be made up of the few. We shall see, below, that the regime that fully merits being called “aristocracy” is made

⁴The Greek does not necessarily mean “or they are ruling with a view ...” as Lord translates it. Cf. Walford 1853, 95.
up of those who are best simply on the basis of virtue. But to reiterate, the most significant aspect of the definition of aristocracy in chapter 7 of book III is that Aristotle provides more than one definition of it, thus raising the possibility that there is more than one type of aristocratic regime. In what is the longest explicit discussion of aristocracy in the *Politics*, in chapter 7 of book IV, Aristotle confirms that there are different types of aristocratic regimes.

Aristotle begins chapter 7 of book IV by reminding us that there are other types of regimes besides democracy and oligarchy, which he has just been discussing in chapters 4 to 6 of book IV. These are monarchy, the regime called aristocracy, and polity.\(^5\) (1293a35) In the chapter Aristotle goes on to distinguish one type of regime as aristocracy in the strict sense of the term. He says that the regime that is rightly called “aristocracy” is the one dealt with in the “first discourses” (τοῖς πρῶτοις λόγοις) (1293b1). According to Aristotle it is right to call it aristocracy because “only the regime made up of those who are best simply on the basis of virtue, and not of men who are good in relation to some presupposition, is it just to name aristocracy.” He also says that only the citizens of this regime are good men *per se*, whereas those who are identified as being good in other regimes are so in relation to their regime. (1293b1–5) For Aristotle, then, the good simply are those who are best on the basis of virtue. And the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense is defined as the regime

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\(^5\) According to Aristotle, because of its rarity polity is not included with the other four regimes by those enumerating the forms of regimes, e.g., by Plato. (1293a35–b1)
made up of such men. In chapter 7 Aristotle also calls this regime "the first and best regime" (1293b15).

Although Aristotle distinguishes one regime as aristocracy in the strict sense of the term in chapter 7, he also says that there are certain other regimes that are termed aristocracies. He initially says that there are regimes that differ "from those that are oligarchically run and from so-called polity, and are called aristocracies." One regime of this type exists when office holders are elected according to merit (ἀριστίνη) as well as wealth. The existence of this regime seems connected with the fact that there are human beings who are of good reputation and who are held to be reasonable or fair (ἐμιστεῖς) even in regimes that do not make virtue a common concern. Aristotle concludes these observations by saying that a regime that looks both to wealth and to virtue as well as to the people is an aristocratic regime, as are those regimes that look only to virtue and the people. As an example of the former, he mentions the Carthaginian regime. As an example of the latter, the Spartan regime. Aristotle ends the chapter by saying, "There are, therefore, these two forms of aristocracy besides the first and the best regime," and by mentioning what he says is a third type. The latter consists of polities "which incline more toward oligarchy." (1293b5–20) There are, then, three types of regimes that are called aristocracies, apart from the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense. They are: the regime that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people; the regime that looks to virtue and the people; and
regimes that are oligarchic polities. The regime that Aristotle initially mentions as an aristocratic regime, the one in which office holders are elected according to merit as well as wealth, must itself be, then, an example of one of these three types.

The discussion of different types of aristocratic regimes in chapter 7 raises the following question: since one regime is distinguished as aristocracy in the strict sense of the term, are the three other types of aristocratic regimes discussed in the chapter really aristocratic or are they merely called such? There are two reasons for thinking that the first two are in fact aristocratic regimes. One is that both of these regimes look to virtue. This is what makes them different from oligarchies, democracies, and polities. They have something in common, then, with the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense, since it is defined as the regime made up of those who are best on the basis of virtue. The third type of regime that is called an aristocratic regime, the oligarchic polity, is not said to look to virtue. Another reason for thinking that the first two types are in fact aristocratic is that Aristotle quite emphatically describes them as aristocratic regimes. He says of the regime that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people that "it is aristocratic" (αὕτη ἀριστοκρατικὴ ἐστιν). And after discussing them he says, "There are... these two forms of aristocracy [ἀριστοκρατίας] besides the first and the best regime." (1293b15–16 & 18–19—Ross) The emphatic description of these two regimes as aristocratic regimes contrasts with how Aristotle presents the third type of regime. He does not directly term this regime an "aristocracy" or
“aristocratic.” The third regime, then, does seem to be only conventionally aristocratic. In chapter 3 of the dissertation I will show how, in chapter 8 of book IV, Aristotle reveals that this third type of regime is not really aristocratic. But the first two types of lesser aristocracies discussed in chapter 7 are actually aristocratic.

Aristotle’s discussion of aristocracy in chapter 7 of book IV, then, confirms the possibility raised by the definition of aristocracy in chapter 7 of book III. that there are different types of aristocratic regimes. In chapter 7 of book IV Aristotle distinguishes one type of aristocracy from the rest as aristocracy in the strict sense of the term, and calls this regime the first and the best regime. But he also presents at least two other types of regimes as aristocratic regimes in the chapter.

In addition to the evidence in chapter 7, there is evidence in chapter 2 of book IV that according to Aristotle there are different types of aristocratic regimes. At the beginning of chapter 2 Aristotle lists the six different types of regimes he distinguishes in chapter 7 of book III and says that two of these, aristocracy and kingship, have already been discussed in the Politics. They were discussed when the best regime was discussed, since they are both somehow equivalent to the best regime. The regimes that remain to be discussed are polity, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny. (1289a26-35) Subsequently in chapter 2, Aristotle provides a different account of the subjects he will be considering next. These subjects include the regime that he describes
as the most attainable and the most choiceworthy next to the best regime, and another regime he describes as aristocratic and finely constituted but also fitting for most cities (1289b10–15). The way Aristotle describes the latter regime reveals that the former is also aristocratic, although he does not specifically call it aristocratic. Immediately after including the most attainable and the most choiceworthy regime next to the best regime for study, Aristotle says he will also investigate “if there is some other [τίς ἄλλα] that is aristocratic and finely constituted but fitting for most cities” (1289b15–17—Ross). I take the use of “some other” to mean that the adjectives following this term also apply to the regime that has just been mentioned. In chapter 2, then, at least three different types of aristocratic regimes are distinguished. The first is the aristocracy that is similar to kingship and equivalent to the best regime, which has already been discussed in the Politics. (It would be equivalent to the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense in chapter 7, since both of these regimes are called the best regime by Aristotle, and both are said to have been discussed previously.) Secondly, there is the regime next to the best regime in choiceworthiness and attainability. And thirdly, there is the aristocratic regime that is fitting for most cities.

We can conclude that there are different types of aristocratic regimes according to

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6It is possible that Aristotle means more than one regime here, since what he says exactly is: “which [τίς] is the most attainable and which [τίς] the most choiceworthy after the best regime” (1289b10).
Aristotle, although he distinguishes one from the rest as aristocracy in the strict sense of the term. None of these regimes are defined as aristocratic regimes on the basis of rule by a hereditary nobility. The defining characteristic of an aristocratic regime is the presence of virtue. The regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense is made up of those who are best simply on the basis of virtue. Aristotle calls this regime the "first and the best regime." Virtue is also part of the two other aristocratic regimes discussed in chapter 7 of book IV, but they are not defined solely by virtue. They also look to the people, or to both wealth and the people. In chapter 2 of book IV Aristotle raises the possibility that there is an aristocratic regime that is suitable for most cities. I will show that there is such a regime in chapter 4 of the dissertation. But the task at hand is to ascertain the nature of the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense.

2.3 The Two Best Regimes

Aristotle terms the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense "the first and the best regime." The best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense is not, however, the regime discussed in books VII and VIII of the Politics. One might think that it is because Aristotle explicitly presents the regime of books VII and VIII as the best regime. In book IV, however, Aristotle provides evidence that the simply best regime is discussed in book III of the Politics. There is no extended discussion of the best
regime in book III. But we will see that the simply best regime is in fact examined in book III, and that it is a very different regime from the best regime of books VII and VIII.

There are good reasons for interpreting the regime of books VII and VIII as the best regime of the *Politics*. For example, at the end of book III Aristotle tells us that the best regime remains to be discussed; and he begins book VII by implying that the subsequent investigation will be about the best regime. He confirms that it is by frequently referring to the regime discussed in book VII as the best regime: in chapter 4 he identifies the city according to prayer with the best regime, and proceeds to discuss its requirements (1325b35); in chapter 9 he says that he is discussing the best regime which is the regime “in accordance with which the city would be happy above all” (1328b30-35); and in chapter 13 he says that “our object is to see the best regime, and this is one in accordance with which a city would be best governed” (1332a1-5).

Nevertheless, despite these indications that the regime of books VII and VIII is the best regime of the *Politics*, the discussion in book IV reveals that the best regime understood as aristocracy in the strict sense is discussed in book III. As we have seen, Aristotle tells us in chapter 7 of book IV that the best regime is discussed in the “first discourses” (τοὶς πρῶτοις λόγοις) (1293b1). What does he mean by this term? One might think that he means the discussion of the origins of the city in
book I of the *Politics*. In chapter 6 of book III, Aristotle does term the discussion of household management and mastery the "first discourses" (1278b15). These subjects are discussed in book I. But there is no discussion of aristocracy in book I. The differing types of regimes, including aristocracy, are first discussed in book III. By the "first discourses," then, Aristotle seems to mean particularly book III. This is confirmed by a subsequent use of the term in book IV. In chapter 10 of book IV Aristotle tells us that kingship is discussed in the "first discourses" (1295a5). Kingship is mentioned in book I but it is not discussed there; whereas it is extensively discussed in book III. The discussion of kingship in book III makes up the last quarter of the book.

In chapter 2 of book IV we learn that the best regime can be called both aristocracy and kingship. Aristotle begins the chapter by referring to "the first inquiry [μεθόδος] concerning regimes" in book III, where he distinguished six different types of regimes. He goes on to say that aristocracy and kingship have already been discussed in the *Politics*. The way he conveys this information draws our attention to the fact that he equates these regimes with the best regime: "aristocracy and kingship have been spoken of—for to study the best regime is the same as to speak about these names as well." (1289a26–30) When Aristotle tells us, then, in chapter 7 of book IV, that the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense is spoken about in the "first discourses," he is telling us that it is examined in the discussion of aristocracy and
kingship in book III of the *Politics*. He is also telling us that it is a different regime from the best regime discussed in books VII and VIII.

Certainly, aristocracy and kingship are not discussed as different types of regimes in books VII and VIII. And Aristotle never terms the best regime of books VII and VIII aristocracy and kingship. In book VII, moreover, Aristotle twice repeats the term the “first discourses” in reference to book III. In chapter 3 of book VII Aristotle says that the distinction between rule over free persons and rule over slaves was “sufficiently discussed in the first discourses” (1325a25–30). While this distinction is first stated in book I, Aristotle returns to it in chapters 4 and 6 of book III. In chapter 14 of book VII Aristotle similarly says that it was said in the “first discourses” that rule is for the sake of the ruler on the one hand, and for the sake of the ruled on the other (1333a1). This too is said not in book I but in chapter 6 of book III, with respect to the rule of the master on the one hand, and rule over children and wife on the other (1278b30–79a5). The references in book VII provide additional evidence that by the “first discourses” Aristotle means book III. They are also proof that the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense is not the best regime of books VII and VIII, since, as we have learned in chapter 7 of book IV, this regime is discussed in the “first discourses.”

Some commentators on the *Politics* have tried to use the references in book IV, to the best regime having been previously discussed, as evidence that the traditional
order of the books of the *Politics* is wrong. They think that books VII and VIII should come before books IV, V, and VI. But certain key aspects of these references pose problems for this interpretation. For Aristotle says that the best regime has been discussed where aristocracy and kingship have been discussed, and he says that the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense has been discussed in the "first discourses." Putting books VII and VIII before book IV does not change the fact that these things apply only to book III of the *Politics*, as the analysis above demonstrates. The willingness to change the order of the books of the *Politics*, in order to accommodate the references to the best regime in book IV, is understandable, given Aristotle's explicit presentation of the regime of books VII and VIII as the best regime and his restrained manner in telling us about the existence of another best regime. For the most part his intention seems to be that the regime of books VII and VIII be interpreted as the best regime of the *Politics*. Yet, as I have begun to show, the final teaching of the *Politics* regarding the best regime is much more complex. The regime of books VII and VIII is not aristocracy in the strict sense; it is not, therefore, the best regime simply. I will now examine another reason why this is not the case.

As discussed in section 2.2, the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense is defined, in chapter 7 of book IV, by the presence of those who are preeminent in virtue and who are therefore good men simply. The virtue of these men is not

\footnote{For example, Newman 1973 and Lord 1984.}
dependent on any regime. In contrast, Aristotle says that in the other regimes "the good ... are so in relation to their regime." (1293b1-5) In book VII Aristotle says that the citizens of the regime of books VII and VIII are to be excellent and virtuous. Yet we find that their virtue is ultimately not independent of their regime.

In chapter 13 of book VII Aristotle connects the best regime with the complete practice of virtue (1332a1-10). He also says that the citizens of this regime are to be excellent (1332a30-35), and he defines the excellent person in relation to virtue (1332a20). Subsequently, in chapters 14 and 15, Aristotle even implies that the citizens of this regime are to be good simply and that the end of their regime is to be the same as that for the best men. In chapter 14, he says that "... the legislator would have to make it his affair to determine how men can become good and through what pursuits, and what the end of the best life is" (1333a10-15). And in chapter 15, in arguing that virtues aimed at leisure should be present in the best city, he sets forth the following premise: that "the end is evidently the same for human beings both in common and privately, and there must necessarily be the same defining principle for the best man and the best regime" (1334a11). The fact that Aristotle implies that the citizens of the regime of books VII and VIII are to be unqualifiedly good is consonant with the explicit presentation of this regime as the best regime of the Politics. But, at the same time, there is evidence in book VII that the citizens of this regime, as citizens, are not unqualifiedly good in the sense that the good men of
the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense are good. The goodness of the latter is not dependent on any regime. But the goodness of the citizens of the best regime of books VII and VIII is dependent on their regime, or more specifically, on the legislator of their regime.

The reference from chapter 14 makes the dependence of the goodness of the citizens on the legislator clear, since it is up to the legislator "to determine how men can become good and through what pursuits, and what the end of the best life is" (1333a10-15). In addition, in chapter 7 of book VII Aristotle defines the citizens as those who are capable of being "readily guided to virtue by the legislator" (1327b35). And in chapter 13, he refers to them as those “who are going to be readily taken in hand by the legislator” (1332b5). Whatever the precise character of the completely independent virtue and goodness of those making up the simply best regime, the virtue of the citizens of the best regime of books VII and VIII is not it.

There are, then, several reasons why the simply best regime of the Politics, the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense, cannot be identified as the best regime of books VII and VIII. We have seen that the simply best regime is discussed in the “first discourses,” that this term applies to book III, and that it definitely does not apply to books VII and VIII. We have also learned that the best regime is discussed in the discussion of aristocracy and kingship in book III. And we have seen that the character of the citizens of the best regime of books VII and VIII does not match
that of the men making up the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense. I will now show that the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense is indeed discussed in book III of the *Politics*.

The best regime is discussed in book III but not obviously so. Without the references in book IV to the best regime being discussed in book III, one might notice that the latter contains scattered references to the best regime, but not a coherent teaching. This last emerges from a canvass of Aristotle's remarks on aristocracy, the best regime, and the rule of the best in book III. The resulting portrait of the best regime matches the description of the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense in book IV.

As we have seen, in book IV Aristotle says that the best regime, discussed in the "first discourses," is aristocracy in the strict sense because only it is justly called aristocracy. He also says that it is made up of those who are best simply according to virtue, and that it can be understood as kingship as well as aristocracy. In chapter 7 of book III we find that the first definition of aristocracy is the regime ruled by the few best (1279a30-35). We are justified in identifying this regime as the best regime in light of Aristotle's statement at the end of book III, that the regime "managed by the best persons" is the best regime (1288a32). The first definition of aristocracy in book III, then, matches the description of the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense in book IV. I will now consider the character of the virtue of those making up
the best regime of book III.

In contrast to the virtue of the citizens of the best regime of books VII and VIII, the virtue of those making up the best regime of book III is not dependent on any regime. In chapter 13 of book III, Aristotle associates the best regime with the rule of those outstanding on the basis of virtue. Initially in the chapter, he identifies the citizen in the best regime as "one who is capable of and intentionally chooses being ruled and ruling with a view to the life in accordance with virtue" (1284a1). By the end of the chapter, however, such a citizen is indistinguishable from the rulers of the best regime. For by this point the best regime is associated with the permanent rule of those who are outstanding on the basis of virtue (1284b25-30). (Those "making up" the simply best regime, then, are the same as the rulers in the regime.) At the end of book III, as well, Aristotle identifies the best on the basis of preeminent virtue (1288a32-35). He does not qualify the virtue of the best, who make up the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense, in any way. There is no indication that they are not unqualifiedly good. And in chapter 13 we learn that their virtue is not dependent on any regime. Aristotle tells us there that for those who are outstanding on the basis of virtue "there is no law—they themselves are law" and that "it would be ridiculous if one attempted to legislate for them" (1284a10-15).

The remaining criterion that needs to be met, from book IV, is that book III

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8Cf. the conclusion to the discussion of whether the good citizen and the good man can be the same in chapter 4 of book III.
present the best regime as a type of kingship. It does. In chapter 13 Aristotle characterizes the rule of those who are outstanding on the basis of virtue as a type of permanent kingship (1284b25-30). Subsequently we learn that this type of kingship obtains “when one person has authority over all matters, with an arrangement that resembles household management. For just as rule of the household manager is a kind of kingship over the house, so kingship is household management for a city and one nation or more.” (1285b25-30) We see that this type of kingship is equivalent to the best regime from the fact that Aristotle equates the rule of the king as household manager with the rule of the best man (1286a5). We see it as well from the fact that he concludes, after undertaking the discussion of this kingship, “… that the best regime is not one based on written [rules] and laws” (1286a10-15). We have already seen that the best regime is defined in book III as the regime ruled by the best and that for them “there is no law—they themselves are law” (1284a10). At the end of book III, Aristotle also presents the rule of those outstanding on the basis of virtue as a type of absolute kingship (1288a15).

We can conclude that the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense is discussed in book III of the Politics and that it is not equivalent to the best regime discussed in books VII and VIII. There are, then, two best regimes in the Politics,\(^9\)

\(^9\)One other commentator, Thomas Lindsay (1991), also distinguishes two best regimes in the Politics, but without directly investigating the subject. Lindsay’s analysis also differs from mine in that he sees Aristotle’s inclusion of the teaching on the simply best regime as suggesting something of a link between the two best regimes, rather than as evidence that the Politics does not aim solely
one that is explicitly presented as such, that of books VII and VIII. and one that is quietly, that of book III. Since the latter is aristocracy in the strict sense, according to Aristotle, it is also the simply best regime.

In the Politics, then, Aristotle mutes the teaching regarding the regime that he considers simply best. We will begin to understand why he does so in the subsequent sections of the chapter. In section 2.4 I will ascertain in more detail the nature of the simply best regime discussed in book III. We shall see that it is not exactly a practical regime. In section 2.5 I will demonstrate that what is innovative about Aristotle’s political thought is that it addresses practical political matters; that is to say, it addresses what is useful for reforming existing regimes. I will then discuss how this accounts for the complex presentation of the best regime in the Politics.

2.4 The Simply Best Regime Explained

When we consider more closely various aspects of Aristotle’s presentation of the best regime in book III, we not only find questions about its desirability as a regime for actual cities, we find that it is not a feasible regime for cities. The rulers of this regime, those who are the best simply on the basis of virtue, turn out to be philosophers. The best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense, then, is the regime ruled by philosopher-kings.

at practical political matters as I will argue.
Aristotle's initial definition of aristocracy in the *Politics*, in chapter 7 of book III, raises questions about the desirability of the simply best regime. It does so because Aristotle provides two definitions of aristocracy, and the definition that matches the simply best regime is contrasted with the definition of aristocracy as the regime in which rule takes place in accordance with what is best for the city and its participants.

The two definitions of aristocracy are: where either the few who are best rule or where there is rule by the few "with a view to what is best for the city and for those who participate in it" (1279a34-37—Ross). As discussed in section 2.3, at the end of book III Aristotle says that the regime managed by the best persons is the best regime (1288a32). It is, therefore, the first definition of aristocracy in chapter 7, the regime defined by the rule of the few best, that applies to the simply best regime. But this definition of aristocracy is contrasted with the definition of aristocracy as the regime in which there is rule that looks to what is best for the city and its participants. The rule of the few best, then, is not identical to rule by the few in the interest of the city as a whole. The possibility is raised, therefore, that the rule of the best human beings would not be rule that looks to the interest of the city as a whole.

The desirability of the simply best regime as a regime for cities, then, is a question. But even if the simply best regime were a desirable regime, the discussion of it as absolute kingship in book III reveals that it is not feasible for cities. This is first

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10 As discussed in section 2.2, the two definitions are separated by "either ... or" (ἕα ... ἢ) (1279a35–36—Ross).
apparent in the consideration in chapter 13 of what it is that justifies the rule of one person over all others.

Chapter 13 of book III continues the discussion (which began in chapter 10) of what the authoritative element of the city should be. In this chapter Aristotle distinguishes the basis of rule in the best regime from those in other regimes. He says that in regimes other than the best regime, a human being who is preeminent in something that is used to justify rule—wealth in an oligarchy for example—is not entitled to rule. In fact it is justifiable to ostracize such a person. (1283b10-25 & 1284b1-20) Even superior virtue does not justify absolute rule (see 1283a23-25 & 1283b25-40), except when it occurs in a particular manner.\(^\text{11}\) This is when someone is so outstanding by his “excess of virtue” that “the virtue of all the others and their political capacity [or art]” is incommensurable with his (1284a1-5). In this case Aristotle says, “it seems the natural course ... for everyone to obey such a person gladly, so that persons of this sort will be permanent kings in the cities” (1284b20-30).

Aristotle speaks of cities in general in this sentence. Permanent kingships of this sort are according to nature and justified everywhere.\(^\text{12}\) Yet cities are unlikely to be ruled by such kingships. For those who are outstanding on the basis of virtue would

\(^1\text{11}\)In chapter 17 of book III Aristotle says that “among similar and equal persons it is neither advantageous nor just for one person to have authority over all, regardless of whether there are laws or not and he acts as law himself, whether he and they are good or not, and even whether he is better in respect to virtue—unless it is in a certain manner (1287b40-88a5; cf. 1260a14-20—Ross).

\(^1\text{12}\)In chapter 17 of book III Aristotle says that when there is a whole family (γένος) or one person who is “so outstanding in virtue that this virtue is more preeminent than that of all the rest” absolute kingship by the family and by the one individual is just (1288a15-25).
not be accepted as permanent kings by those who are politically strong in cities.\textsuperscript{13} Human beings disagree about who should rule in cities and on what basis. (That they do disagree and over what is discussed in chapters 9 to 13 of book III.) In chapter 13, Aristotle gives examples of various generally agreed upon political strengths: wealth, abundance of friends, and strength (ισχίος) (1284a20, 1284b15, \& 1284b25).\textsuperscript{14} To be outstanding on the basis of virtue is not one of these. Even if it were one of them, that would not lead to the absolute rule of one who is outstanding on the basis of virtue. Such rule would result only if human beings agreed that this were the sole qualification for political rule.

To put things differently, the rule of one outstanding on the basis of virtue over a city would be conceivable only if the inhabitants of the city in which he arose were completely devoted to virtue, and were convinced that their own pursuit of virtue would be greatly furthered by their submission to his rule. For example, one can imagine a group of human beings completely devoted to playing and hearing the best flute music acceding to the authority of one among them who is a hundred times better at flute playing than all the rest, and who is willing to teach and play for them.\textsuperscript{15} But if such a flute player came to be among human beings obsessed by such

\textsuperscript{13}This is to say nothing about the question of the willingness of the former to rule cities (cf. Craig 1994, 267); although the contrast between the two definitions of aristocracy in chapter 7 of book III may have something to do with it.

\textsuperscript{14}Cf. Lindsay 1991, 495.

\textsuperscript{15}This would also hold if there were a number who were markedly superior. Their rule would be an aristocracy with respect to the rule of flute players. And it would be a rule that could be shared
things as ruling over others or money-making they would think it ridiculous to be ruled by him.

Whether the simply best regime is desirable for cities or not, insofar as all those who are politically strong in cities cannot or will not completely dedicate their lives to the pursuit and attainment of preeminent virtue, and therefore will not accept the rule of the best. the simply best regime is not feasible for cities. This would account for the fact that in what is the most extended discussion of the simply best regime in book III, in the discussion of absolute kingship that is, we learn a lot more about why it is not likely to exist than about what it is.

After concluding, in chapter 13, that it is in some sense according to nature for those preeminent in virtue to rule as permanent kings, Aristotle undertakes a discussion of kingship in general. He initially identifies five different types of kingship in chapter 14. (1284b35–85b30) The fifth is “when one person has authority over all matters, with an arrangement that resembles household management. For just as rule of the household manager is a kind of kingship over the house, so kingship is household management for a city and one nation or more.” (1285b25–30) We have already seen, in section 2.3, that this absolute kingship is equivalent to the simply best regime.

There are different types of kingship; yet, in some sense, the fifth type of kingship
is the true form of kingship. After having identified the five types of kingship in chapter 14, Aristotle implies, at the beginning of chapter 15, that there are two main types—absolute kingship and the type of kingship that exists at Sparta (1285b34). According to Aristotle, in Sparta the kings have “leadership in matters related to war” when outside Spartan territory, and in things connected with the gods (1285a1–5). The Spartan kingship is more a generalship than a kingship (1285b34–86a1). Because it is based on law and is limited in authority it can arise in all regimes; and it is not really a regime (1286a1) or a form of kingship (1287a1). This leaves absolute kingship as the main type of kingship.

The discussion of kingship in chapter 15 reveals that kingships, in general, are no longer very likely to exist. Aristotle gives a historical account of regimes in chapter 15. In it he says that democracies arose when multitudes became stronger and concludes that as cities are even larger nowadays, “it is perhaps no longer easy for any regime

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16 Aristotle dismisses the Spartan type of kingship as a subject for investigation at the beginning of chapter 15 (1286a1–5). Yet perhaps it is considered in chapter 15. The initial discussion in chapter 15, which confirms that the best do not rule according to law, also implies that the source of the law in other regimes may be, at times, those capable of ruling as absolute kings. Aristotle says that the “universal account” that law addresses must be available to rulers (1286a15). Since the rulers of the best regime do not need to follow laws, the rulers needing the universal account that law addresses would be the rulers of regimes other than the best regime. We see that the source of this account may be those capable of ruling as absolute kings by considering the following: after expressing the viewpoint that the best man may “deliberate in finer fashion concerning particulars,” Aristotle says that “he must necessarily be a legislator” (1286a20; cf. 1284a10–15). Whether or not the indirect rule of a legislator is the type of rule Aristotle has in mind by the “Spartan” type of kingship, this indirect type of rule is clearly different from the direct rule of a city by an absolute king. The possibility that the Spartan type of kingship is discussed in chapter 15 may explain why Aristotle says, at the beginning of chapter 16, that “The argument has now come around to the king who acts in all things according to his own will.”
to arise other than a democracy” (1286b15–20). Certainly, Aristotle’s examination of absolute kingship in chapter 16 provides no reason for thinking that it is ever likely to exist as the regime of a city. At the beginning of the chapter Aristotle says that “The argument has now come around to the king who acts in all things according to his own will, and this must be investigated” (1287a1). Yet the entire chapter comprises an account of the arguments of “those who dispute against kingship” (1287b35). The most prominent argument against kingship is the position that “it is not even in accordance with nature for one person to be authoritative over all the citizens, where the city is constituted out of similar persons.” In this situation what is just, what is law in fact, is for rule to take place by turns. The rule of law, accordingly, is better than the rule of one. And those who rule “must be established as law-guardians and as servants of the laws” since certain offices will be required. (1287a10–20) The position, however, begs the question of whether cities are in fact made up of similar persons. But in presenting it in this way, Aristotle may be alerting us to the fact that this is one of the fundamental obstacles to absolute kingship—the belief in the essential similarity of human beings.

The discussion of the best regime as kingship does reveal that the rule of those outstanding on the basis of virtue is not restricted to the rule of one. The simply best regime can be understood as either kingship or aristocracy. The arguments regarding

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17 Cf. 1282b15–20.
the rule of the one preeminent in virtue apply as much, or more, to the rule of the few who are such. In chapter 13 Aristotle says, "If there is one person so outstanding by his excess of virtue—or a number of persons ... that the virtue of all the others and their political capacity is not commensurable with their own (if there are a number) or his alone (if there is one), such persons can no longer be regarded as a part of the city." In the rest of this section, in describing the nature of these individuals, he variously uses the singular and the plural. (1284a1-15) In chapter 15, after broaching the subject of the ability of the multitude to rule, Aristotle turns the discussion to a consideration of the rule of the one who is good versus a number who are good, and concludes that "If ... the rule of a number of persons who are all good men is to be regarded as aristocracy, and the rule of a single person as kingship, aristocracy would be more choiceworthy for cities than kingship ... provided it is possible to find a number of persons who are similar" (1286b1-5). In chapter 17 kingship over all matters is justified whether it is a family (γένος) or one person who is preeminent in virtue (1288a15). And in chapter 18 Aristotle says that the best regime is one in which one person, an entire family (γένος), or a multitude is preeminent in virtue (1288a32-35).¹⁸ There is, then, no essential difference between kingship as the simply best regime and aristocracy as the simply best regime. In the best regime of book III, whether the best are one or more, they will rule for the same end and in the same

¹⁸This last is unlikely given what Aristotle says in chapter 7 of book III regarding the capacity of the multitude to be virtuous (1279a35–79b1).
manner. It is in this sense that the simply best regime can be named both aristocracy and kingship, as it is in chapter 2 of book IV.

The preceding investigation of aristocracy and kingship in book III has raised questions regarding the desirability of the simply best regime. It has also revealed its lack of feasibility as a realizable regime for cities. When these things are put together with the fact that the simply best regime is ruled by those who are outstanding on the basis of virtue and the fact that Aristotle presents this regime as kingship, the question arises whether by the simply best regime Aristotle means the regime ruled by philosopher-kings. That he does can be seen by considering something he says regarding the preeminence of the best.

The best are preeminent in virtue. But Aristotle also speaks twice of their preeminence in the political capacity or art (1284a5–10). In chapter 12 of book III Aristotle says that the political capacity or art is the most authoritative of the sciences and arts. And that the political good is justice, which is the common advantage. Justice involves examining questions of equality and inequality, something which has been done in “the discourses based on philosophy in which ethics has been discussed,” and which requires political philosophy. (1282b15–20) Expertise in the political capacity

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19The term is πολιτικήν δύναμιν. Δύναμις can mean “art” as well as “capacity” or “faculty” and “power.” Cf. what Aristotle says in chapter 17, that a multitude that is suited for kingship is able to support a family (γήνος) that is “preeminent in virtue relative to political leadership” (1288a5–20).
20This is not necessarily equal to the “greatest and primary” good (see 1282b14–16—Ross). The greatest and primary good would be whatever is the end of the political capacity or art.
or art, then, requires expertise in philosophy and political philosophy. The best who are preeminent in virtue, then, are experts in philosophy and political philosophy. This means that the best regime, the regime where the best rule, is the regime ruled by philosopher-kings.

The best regime or aristocracy in the strict sense according to Aristotle, then, is equivalent to the best regime in *logos of the Republic*. This is why in chapter 12 of book V Aristotle twice refers to the best regime of the *Republic* as the “first and best” regime (1316a1 & 1316a25). As we have seen, in chapter 7 of book IV Aristotle calls the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense the “first and best regime.” At bottom, then, Aristotle is in agreement with Plato regarding the identity of the simply best regime, the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense. Yet he does not make this agreement explicit in the *Politics*. As we have seen, he only quietly reveals the identity of the simply best regime. And in book II of the *Politics* we find him criticizing the best regime of the *Republic* for its impracticality, finding its provisions to be at odds with the nature of the city (see 1261a10 ff., 1262b1–15, 1263b25–64a10).

Aristotle does not specifically criticize the third “wave” that Socrates says is required to bring the best regime into being—that philosophers become kings or that those who are kings philosophize. He focusses on two other key features in his critique—having property in common and having women and children in common.

But at the end of the critique of the *Republic*, Aristotle says that it is hazardous to have the same persons always ruling (1264b5). He also implies that the education Socrates proposes for the guardians, which is ultimately an education in philosophy, is not much use with respect to a city being excellent (cf. 1263b35–40 & 1264b39–65a1—Ross). Aristotle's criticisms of the *Republic* reveal that philosophy will not be the end of the best regime that is also a feasible regime for cities. And when we examine the discussion of the regime that he explicitly presents as the best regime in the *Politics*, the regime of books VII and VIII, we see that it does not make philosophy its end, although philosophy does play a role in the regime.

In chapters 1 to 3 of book VII, for example, Aristotle discusses what the most choiceworthy life for human beings is (which must be understood in order to understand the best regime according to him) and whether the same way of life is choiceworthy for human beings in common. At the end of the discussion he says that it is evident that the "same way of life must necessarily be best both for each human being individually and for cities and human beings in common" (1325b25–30). Yet what is most apparent from chapters 1 to 3 is that the most choiceworthy life is the life according to virtue, and that this is a way of life that human beings can partake

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23He says that "This can become a cause of factional conflict even in the case of those possessing no worth [δύναμιν], not to speak of spirited and warlike men." (But he also says that it was necessary for Socrates to make the same persons rulers.) (1264b5–10; cf. Lindsay 1991, 506) As the preceding analysis has revealed, human beings do not agree as to who should rule. They will not accept the perpetual rule of others who appear to be like themselves. The very dissimilarity of human beings in their capacity to recognize, let alone practice, preeminent virtue necessitates that the city recognize some level of equality among them.
in both separately and in common. What is not evident from the discussion is that the end of the regime of books VII and VIII is philosophy, although Aristotle does point to the possibility that some sort of philosophic life is the best life in the course of the discussion. In order to make these things clear I will go through the arguments of these chapters in some detail.

Aristotle begins book VII by saying that in order to discuss the best regime suitably the question of the most choiceworthy way of life must be discussed first. He initially discusses how it is that happiness is to be found in “virtue and prudence and action in accordance with these” (1323b20). He then turns to the question of the happiness of the best city. Aristotle connects the happiness of the best city with noble actions and says that “there is no noble deed either of a man or a city that is separate from virtue and prudence.” And the individual virtues of a city are apparently no different from those possessed by a single human being. At this point in chapter 1 Aristotle says that the preceding “may stand as a preface to our discourse.” In the present context it is not appropriate to discuss these matters thoroughly: that being a task for a different kind of leisure. Aristotle proposes, therefore, that the following be presupposed: that the best life for each individually and in common for cities is that accompanied by virtue of such a sort that they can share in actions according to virtue. This position is apparently not without its detractors. (1323b30-24a1)

Aristotle begins the next chapter, chapter 2, by saying that the question of whether
the happiness of one human being and of a city is the same remains to be addressed. He says that all agree it is the same. (1324a5) But two questions need investigation: one, whether participating in the city or a life free of the political partnership is the more choiceworthy life; and two, which regime and which state of a city is best. whether it is better for all to participate in the city or not (1324a10–15). Aristotle now says that it is the latter question and not what concerns the individual that is a subject for political thought and study. What concerns the individual is subordinate in the present study to what concerns the city. Despite this caveat Aristotle says that it is clear that the best regime must be of such a sort that its arrangement might allow anyone to act best and live blessedly. (1324a20–25)

While what the best regime needs to be may be evident, there is a dispute among those who agree that the most choiceworthy life is that accompanied by virtue about what exactly the most choiceworthy way of life consists in. Is it the political and active life or a life free from everything external, such as a theoretical life, which according to some is the only philosophic life? (1324a25) Aristotle seems to be returning to the question raised at 1324a15 regarding the most choiceworthy life for the individual, but the caveat he raises at 1324a20–25 implies that the question of the most choiceworthy life will be examined from the perspective of what the best regime is for the city. This may explain why, in the remainder of chapter 2, Aristotle discusses, for the most part, the view that mastery over neighbours should be the aim of the regime. He
does not directly discuss whether the political life or the life free from all external things is most choiceworthy. Aristotle ends the chapter by saying that the excellent legislator should consider "how a city, a family of human beings, and every other sort of partnership will share in the good life and in the happiness that is possible for them." But he defers the question of what end the best regime should be directed toward. (1325a5-15)

In chapter 3 Aristotle more directly addresses those who agree that the most choiceworthy life is the life according to virtue but who disagree about what virtue consists in. He agrees that the life of a free person is better than a life of mastery, but points out to those who hold this view that rule over free persons is different from mastery and says that he has sufficiently discussed this issue in the "first discourses" (1325a20-30). Aristotle also says that praising inactivity more than activity is not true. Happiness consists in activity but this does not mean that the best life consists in ruling over all human beings. Attempting to subjugate others is ignoble if one does not differ from those who are potentially ruled, and even then there are different types of rule. When people are similar they should take turns ruling. But when there is someone who is superior (χρείτων) on the basis of virtue and of power it is noble and just to be ruled by him. Aristotle tentatively concludes that "the best way of life both in common for every city and for the individual would be the active one." (1325a30-b15) But he ends the chapter with an argument that activity is not only
what occurs in relation to others, or in the case of thoughts what is in relation to
certain ends, but particularly has to do with study and thought that is for its own
sake. He then draws a somewhat strange parallel between an individual human being
and an isolated city which is active because it contains many different partnerships.
He expands the analogy to the god and the entire universe and concludes that it is
evident that "the same way of life must necessarily be the best both for each human
being individually and for cities and human beings in common." (1325a15–30)

The arguments in chapters 1 to 3 of book VII do not indicate that philosophy is to
be the end of the best city. Although in the course of the discussion Aristotle points
to the possibility that the philosophic life is the best life for human beings, he does
not argue for it systematically. He does not even conclusively answer the question
with which he begins the discussion. the question of what the most choiceworthy life
is, except insofar as it is the life according to virtue. The discussion further reveals
that the city's activity does not include study and thought for its own sake; it consists
rather in the various relationships that exist between its parts and in the relations it
has with neighbouring peoples.

Furthermore, there is no discussion of an education in philosophy in books VII
and VIII of the Politics. Aristotle stresses the importance of education throughout
his discussion of the best city. But he speaks at length only of the education of the
young (in book VIII). At the beginning of this discussion he points out how there is a
great deal of disagreement as to what the end of education should be (1337a35-b1). Aristotle himself includes the following among the subjects of education: useful things that are necessary and that will not make one vulgar (1337b1-5: see also 1338a35-b1), gymnastic (1338b4 ff.), and most importantly music (which is the subject of chapters 3, 5, 6, & 7). Music serves different purposes: play and rest, the pastime that is in leisure, the development of character or virtue, and purification (see, e.g., 1338a20, 1339b10 ff., 1339a15-25, 1341b35-42a15). Nowhere in the course of this discussion does Aristotle speak of educating the young (either when young or subsequently) in philosophy. Instead we find him speaking of virtue as the development of character (1339a21-24—Ross) and saying that it has to do with “enjoying in correct fashion and feeling affection and hatred” (1340a10-15: cf. 1340a23-25—Ross; see also 1339a20).

We have already seen that the citizens of this regime are to be virtuous (in section 2.3 and the discussion above). It now appears that the virtue that the citizens are to be educated in, and that is the end of their regime, is ethical virtue. In chapter 3 of the dissertation (section 3.3.4) we will see more evidence for this position.

It is clear, however, that philosophy is not the end of the best regime of books VII and VIII. This is not to say that philosophy plays no role in the regime. In arguing that the most choiceworthy life must be understood in order to properly discuss the best regime, and in raising the possibility that the philosophic life is this way of life, Aristotle opens a place for philosophy in the regime of books VII and VIII. As well, in
chapter 15 of book VII, Aristotle presents "philosophy" as one of the virtues required for those at leisure (1334a15–30). Finally, in discussing what harmonies and rhythms are suitable for the education of the young Aristotle refers to the authority of some of those pursuing philosophy (1340b5, 1341b25–30, & 1342a30). It would seem, then, that some of the citizens of the regime of books VII and VIII will pursue philosophy privately; but however this may be, and whatever the precise public role of philosophy in the regime, philosophy is not the end in common of the citizens of the regime.

We turned to the arguments of books VII and VIII in order to show that Aristotle does not make philosophy the end of this regime. We have seen that Aristotle explicitly presents it as the best regime of the Politics. But we have also seen that he quietly teaches that the simply best regime is not the best regime of books VII and VIII but the regime ruled by philosopher-kings discussed in book III. The teaching on the best regime in the Politics, then, is much more complex than generally understood hitherto. In the next section I will discuss why the Politics contains such a complex account of the best regime. We shall see that the complex teaching results from the peculiar character of Aristotle’s political thought.

2.5 Aristotle’s Innovation

We learn most clearly about the peculiar character of Aristotle’s political thought at the beginning of book IV of the Politics. At the end of book III Aristotle says that the
best regime should be considered next (although he also suggests that something else must be considered before it can be discussed). What he turns to at the beginning of book IV, however, is a discussion of what the proper subjects are for various sciences and arts, and in particular, for the science that deals with regimes.

According to Aristotle, in order for an art or science to adequately address its subject matter, it must study all the relevant types of that subject (1288b10–20). The science of the regimes, accordingly, must study different types of regimes. In chapter 1 Aristotle twice discusses what these are. Initially he says that the science should study the best regime; the regime that is “best in the circumstances” (because the best may be out of reach for many); various given regimes “based on a presupposition” that are inferior to the best regime and to the one “possible among existing ones”; and finally the regime that is “most fitting for all cities” (1288b20–30). In his second account he says that “not only the best, but also the possible, and similarly also the easier and more attainable for all” should be studied (1288b35).24 In this case Aristotle stresses that practical regimes should be studied. He does so because he has just criticized most of those who have previously discoursed on regimes for not adequately addressing what is useful with respect to regimes (1288b35).

Aristotle’s predecessors focus on two other subjects, rather than on what is useful. Some of them pursue the best regime, “the one that is highest and requires much

24Cf. his discussion of what gymnastic expertise should study (1288b10–15).
equipment.” Others concern themselves with what appears to be an idealized version of some actual regime, the Spartan for example. What is missing is the investigation of regimes that are useful for improving existing regimes. According to Aristotle, “to reform a regime is no less a task than to institute one from the beginning” and “the political expert should be able to assist existing regimes.”

Aristotle himself makes the practical regimes the subject of his subsequent investigations. In chapter 2 of book IV he says that he is going to examine the following topics: “the number of varieties of regimes” (“if indeed there are several kinds both of democracy and oligarchy”); the most attainable and choiceworthy regime next to the best regime; the aristocratic and well-constituted regime that is fitting for most cities, if there is such a one; other regimes (specifically types of democracy and oligarchy) suitable for particular cities: how the various democracies and oligarchies are to be established; and how regimes are destroyed and preserved. The best regime is not on the list.

Books IV to VI deal with most of the subjects listed in chapter 2. If one interprets the regime of books VII and VIII as the best regime of the Politics, it would appear that for some reason or other Aristotle puts off the discussion of the best regime in

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25 These “though speaking of an attainable sort, do away with the existing regimes, and praise the Spartan or some other” (1288b40–89a1). With respect to the translation cf. Newman 1973, Vol IV, p. 139.

26 As discussed in chapter 1, Aristotle’s criticism of his predecessors here is reminiscent of Machiavelli’s in chapter 15 of the Prince.

27 Earlier in the chapter Aristotle also includes polity and tyranny as part of his subsequent investigations (1289a35).
order to discuss what is directly useful with respect to reforming existing regimes. As we have seen, however, there is another best regime in the Politics, the simply best regime discussed in book III. It is immediately after discussing how the science of the regimes is incomplete, in chapter 1 of book IV, that Aristotle tells us, in chapter 2, that he has already discussed the best regime in the discussion of aristocracy and kingship in book III. This means that the best regime that he says, in chapter 1, should be studied by the science concerning regimes, and which some of his predecessors have in fact studied, is the regime ruled by philosopher-kings. It also means that the best regime of books VII and VIII is actually part of the subjects that are useful for reforming the condition of existing regimes.

It is possible to identify the best regime of books VII and VIII more precisely. If we put together the two lists of what the science of the regimes should study in chapter 1, we get the following categories of regimes: the best regime; the regime that is the best in the circumstances or the best possible; existing regimes based on a presupposition; and the regime that is most fitting for all cities, which may or may not be equivalent to the one that is "easier and more attainable for all." According to this scheme, the best regime discussed in books VII and VIII would be the regime that is "best in the circumstances" or the "best possible." It would be, in other words, the best realizable regime for cities.

28 These are not mentioned at 1288b37–39—Ross, but are subsequently discussed in chapter 1 as different types of democracies and oligarchies (1289a1 ff.).
As discussed above, however, the regime of books VII and VIII is explicitly presented as the best regime of the *Politics*. The regime ruled by philosopher-kings is only very quietly presented as the best regime; and it is not discussed in any detail. It is without a doubt very much in the background of the main subjects of the *Politics*. At the beginning of book IV Aristotle tells us that what is useful with respect to regimes has not been adequately addressed hitherto. He implies that it has not been because those who have previously discoursed on regimes have almost all concerned themselves with the simply best regime or other idealized regimes. Aristotle does not dispute that the best regime should be studied by the science concerning regimes. Yet he chooses to present his teaching regarding this regime quietly. If what is useful for reforming existing regimes could be adequately addressed by just appending it to a study of the simply best regime, the hidden character of the teaching regarding the simply best regime in the *Politics* becomes rather inexplicable. The hidden character in fact implies that practical political matters cannot be adequately addressed unless the identity and nature of the simply best regime remain very much in the background. This interpretation explains why the regime of books VII and VIII is explicitly presented as the best regime of the *Politics* and not as the best possible or the best practical regime.

But the interpretation that practical political matters cannot be adequately addressed without obscuring the identity and nature of the simply best regime does not
explain why Aristotle chooses to convey the teaching regarding the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense in the *Politics* at all. Why is the simply best regime a necessary, although muted, part of Aristotle's political thought?

In chapter 8 of book III, Aristotle says that "it belongs to one philosophizing in connection with each sort of inquiry and not merely looking toward action not to overlook or omit anything, but to make clear the truth concerning each thing" (1279b11-15). This reminds us of what Aristotle says at the beginning of book IV about arts and sciences that are complete. There we learn that the best regime is properly a subject of the science concerning regimes. Here we learn one reason why it is part of the *Politics*. It is part of the *Politics* because when it comes to the political things, the truth about the best regime that can be conceived is that it is the regime ruled by philosopher-kings. Aristotle's political thought, unlike Machiavelli's and Hobbes's, is not aimed solely at what is useful in the realm of existing regimes. The regime ruled by philosopher-kings is the simply best regime because it is made up of those who are outstanding on the basis of virtue. It is sensible to conceive of this regime, however, only if human beings of preeminent virtue exist. By revealing his agreement with Plato regarding the identity of the simply best regime in the

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29 Even after the discussion of the simply best regime as absolute kingship—which illustrates its lack of feasibility—Aristotle still maintains, in chapter 17 of book III, that when there is one or a family (γένος) that is "so outstanding in virtue that this virtue is more preeminent than that of all the rest," kingship over all matters by these is just (1288a15).

30 He says this in a chapter in which he raises the question whether there are regimes in which the few and poor (οἱ ἄρροι) have authority.
Politics. Aristotle reveals that he is in agreement with him regarding what is highest in man and in agreement with him that the city cannot attain this. The distinctive character of Aristotle's political thought accounts not only for the fact that the regime of books VII and VIII is explicitly presented as the best regime of the Politics, but also for the fact that the regime ruled by philosopher-kings is quietly presented as aristocracy in the strict sense or the simply best regime.

The teaching regarding the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense serves at least one other purpose in the Politics. Some of Aristotle's readers will read the Politics already convinced that the philosophic life is the best life for human beings. As seen in the previous section. Aristotle himself points to this possibility in book VII. If these readers understand the teaching of the Politics regarding the nature of the best regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense and understand why this teaching is presented in such muted fashion, they will not be tempted to apply too strict a standard in analyzing the merits of the best regime of books VII and VIII.

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31 See Strauss 1978, 49.
32 As for why Aristotle does this, apart from wanting to attract those who are suited for it to philosophy, consider what he says in chapter 15 of book VII. He twice says there that philosophy is required for those at leisure (1334a20 & 30). It may be that presenting the philosophic life as a viable candidate for the best life will benefit the condition of existing regimes. There may be a connection, then, between some of the ills facing liberal democracies today and the fact that the modern political philosophers, unlike Aristotle, made no attempt to present the philosophic life as the best life for human beings.
33 In this context, consider how in the very first chapter of the Politics Aristotle argues that there are different kinds of rule. Consider also his argument at the end of book I that there are different virtues and that they differ for different human beings. In the course of the argument Aristotle criticizes Socrates' apparent position, that the moderation, courage, and justice of a woman are the same as for a man.
They will be better able, then, to understand why the other aristocratic regimes discussed in the *Politics* are lesser aristocracies and accept them as such.

### 2.6 Conclusion

The preceding analysis has shown that the *Politics* contains a very complex teaching regarding the best regime. We have seen that there are actually two best regimes in the *Politics*. For Aristotle, the regime ruled by philosopher-kings is the simply best regime or aristocracy in the strict sense. Yet, the teaching regarding this regime is not explicit. It is easy to overlook the references to it in book IV: and there is no explicit discussion of the best regime in book III. The regime that is explicitly presented as the best regime in the *Politics* is the regime of books VII and VIII. It is presented as such because Aristotle’s primary intention in the *Politics* is to complete the science of the regimes by addressing what is useful for improving existing regimes.\(^{34}\) In the context of addressing practical political matters, a regime that cannot exist as the regime of an actual city is not what is best.\(^{35}\)

As previously discussed, Aristotle ends book III by saying that the best regime should be considered next. But he also suggests that something must be taken into

\(^{34}\)Cf. Strauss’s comment that Aristotle’s philosophy is the “completion of philosophy” (Strauss 1978, 37).

\(^{35}\)To put these things somewhat differently, on the one hand, Aristotle “too is concerned above all with the truth of religion,” but on the other, “Aristotle’s cosmology, as distinguished from Plato’s, is unqualifiedly separable from the quest for the best political order” (Strauss 1978, 34, 21).
account before it can be properly investigated. Our analysis suggests that what must be taken into account is the problem Aristotle raises at the beginning of book IV, i.e., the question of what the best regime means simply and what it means with respect to the regimes of actual cities. In the course of the investigation of the lesser aristocracies in chapter 3, we will better understand the nature of the best regime that is discussed in books VII and VIII.
Chapter 3

The Middle Realm

3.1 Introduction

We have seen that there are different types of aristocratic regimes according to Aristotle. The regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense, the simply best regime, is not equivalent to the best regime discussed in books VII and VIII of the Politics. We have seen, instead, that it is discussed in book III; and we have identified it as the regime ruled by philosopher-kings. It is not a feasible regime for cities. Aristotle’s discussion of it is not part of those subjects that are useful for reforming existing regimes. The concern for the simply best regime and the virtue that defines it is separate from the concern for practical political matters. But Aristotle only quietly discusses the simply best regime in the Politics.
The regime he explicitly presents as the best regime in the *Politics* is the regime discussed in books VII and VIII. The preceding analysis has placed it among the subjects that are useful for reforming existing regimes. According to the classification of regimes in chapter 1 of book IV, it is the regime that is "best in the circumstances" or the "best possible." In this chapter, I will elucidate the aristocratic status of the best regime of books VII and VIII. We will see that it is the definitive version of the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people, that is discussed in chapter 7 of book IV. And it is the same as the aristocratic regime next to the best regime in choiceworthiness and attainability listed in chapter 2 of book IV. The regime of books VII and VIII is the most aristocratic regime that is a feasible regime for cities according to Aristotle. It is such because the regime as a whole makes virtue its end and it has the best rulers that a practicable regime can have.

I will begin the analysis, in section 3.2, by reviewing the regimes (apart from the simply best regime) that are called aristocracies in chapter 7 of book IV. There are three such regimes. I will discuss how Aristotle confirms, in chapter 8 of book IV, that the third of these regimes is not really aristocratic. I will also discuss how he presents one of the remaining two types of lesser aristocracies, the one that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people, as the most aristocratic regime next to the simply best regime. Finally in section 3.2, I will discuss the reasons for thinking that Aristotle discusses this regime in chapter 11 of book IV.
In section 3.3 I will examine the regimes discussed in chapter 11 of book IV. At first sight it seems as though only one regime is discussed in the chapter—a regime based on the middle class defined on the basis of wealth. This regime, however, is not an aristocratic regime. But Aristotle also discusses a very different type of “middling” regime in the chapter, that can be identified as the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people. In the final part of this section I will show that the best regime of books VII and VIII is the definitive version of this lesser aristocracy.

In section 3.4 I will discuss how the regime of books VII and VIII, although a feasible regime for cities, is not a feasible regime for most cities. This seems to raise a difficulty regarding the interpretation that Aristotle’s discussion of it is part of those subjects that are useful for ameliorating the condition of existing regimes. But we will see that there are indications in chapters 11 and 12 of book IV that the best possible regime functions as an aristocratic standard for existing regimes. The implication is that regimes that are feasible regimes for most cities can share in the aristocratic features of the regime of books VII and VIII. This points to the existence of an aristocratic regime that is a feasible regime for most cities, or a practical aristocratic regime. In chapter 2 of book IV Aristotle makes such a regime a tentative part of the remaining subjects of the Politics. The characteristics of this regime and the evidence for its existence will be discussed in chapter 4 of the dissertation.
3.2 The Lesser Aristocracies

To review what I discussed in chapter 2, the three types of regimes, apart from aristocracy in the strict sense, that Aristotle says are called aristocratic regimes in chapter 7 of book IV are: regimes that look to wealth, to virtue, and to the people; regimes that look to virtue and to the people; and polities that are more oligarchic than democratic. Aristotle mentions the Carthaginian regime as an example of the first type of lesser aristocracy, and the Spartan regime as an example of the second. (1293b10-20)

As discussed in chapter 2, the third type of regime that is called aristocracy—the oligarchic polity—does not seem to be really aristocratic. It does not because this type of regime does not look to virtue (which would give it something in common with the regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense); and because Aristotle himself does not directly term it an aristocracy or an aristocratic regime in the chapter, as he does the first two regimes he mentions. In chapter 8 of book IV we learn that to call oligarchic polities aristocracies, is to speak customarily. It is customary to do so because education and good birth particularly accompany those who are wealthier. (1293b30-35) Insofar as there is a connection between education and virtue—which is what defines aristocracy in the strict sense—the conventional practice may have some merit to it. But Aristotle quickly calls the customary practice into question. He does so by providing a further reason for it: he says that the wealthy are addressed
as "gentlemen and notables" because they seem to have those things that the unjust are seeking when they commit injustice. And "Since aristocracy wishes to assign preeminence to the best of the citizens, they assert that oligarchies too are made up particularly of gentlemen." (1293b35–40) What exactly do the unjust seek? It is not to become virtuous through education. What they seek is wealth, power, and honour. It is not because the wealthy are educated and virtuous, then, that most oligarchic polities are called aristocracies. In most cities the so-called aristocracies are in fact polities, regimes that are a mixture of the well off and the poor (or the people). for nearly everywhere "the well off are held to occupy the place of gentlemen." According to Aristotle such regimes should properly be termed polities. They are not aristocratic regimes because they do not look to virtue. (1294a10–20) Oligarchic polities, then, are not really aristocratic regimes. This leaves two types of lesser aristocracies in chapter 7. the regime that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people. and the regime

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1Still another reason is the tendency to equate good management with aristocratic regimes, the implication being that oligarchic regimes are better managed than democratic ones since oligarchic polities are customarily called aristocracies. Aristotle points out that the fact that a regime is well managed does not necessarily mean that its laws are well made. (1293b40–94a5)

2The question of the role of good birth in a regime is summarily dismissed by Aristotle, because it is a combination of old wealth and virtue (see 1294a20). Since Aristotle discredits the notion that the wealthy are necessarily virtuous, we see that the type of regime that is usually defined as an aristocracy, i.e., the rule of a hereditary "nobility," will not necessarily be an aristocratic regime according to him. Consider also how Aristotle distinguishes, in chapter I of book V, between those who are outstanding on the basis of virtue and certain persons who are preeminent on the basis of family. He says that the latter "are held [δοκεωσιν] to be well-born persons, to whom belong the virtue and wealth of their ancestors." (1301a35–b1; emphasis added) Aristotle is not an apologist for the Greek upper class as Ellen and Neal Wood (1978) argue in *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory*.
that looks to virtue and the people.\(^3\)

At the end of the discussion of the difference between polities and aristocracies in chapter 8, Aristotle says that one type of aristocratic regime among the others is particularly to be spoken of as aristocracy, apart from the “genuine and first” one (1294a20–25). He is presenting it, then, as the most aristocratic regime next to the simply best regime, since the genuine and first aristocracy refers to the simply best regime (see, e.g., 1293b15). The lesser aristocracy he distinguishes is a mixture of the well off, the poor, and virtue. Of the aristocratic regimes discussed in chapter 7, it would be the regime that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people.\(^4\) (The status of the lesser aristocracy that looks to virtue and the people is left unclear.)

So what do we learn about the lesser aristocracy that Aristotle distinguishes in chapter 8? Does he discuss it at length at this point? It would seem to be a subject compelling his attention. Yet the immediate subject that Aristotle turns to is polity, which he discusses in chapter 9. Then he discusses tyranny in chapter 10. At the beginning of chapter 8 Aristotle says that it is reasonable to speak of tyranny last after polity (1293b25). But the discussion of tyranny in chapter 10 does not end Aristotle’s

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\(^3\)In chapter 7 of book III Aristotle links polities with what he implies is a part of virtue—the art of war (\(\tau \eta \nu \pi o\lambda e\mu i\kappa \eta \nu \)) (1279a35–b1). Lord translates this as “military virtue.” The distinction that Aristotle draws between polities and aristocratic regimes in chapter 8 of book IV reveals that, whatever the relationship between \(\tau \eta \nu \pi o\lambda e\mu i\kappa \eta \nu \) and virtue, the presence of the former is not sufficient to make a regime aristocratic. The relationship between \(\tau \eta \nu \pi o\lambda e\mu i\kappa \eta \nu \) and virtue is discussed in section 4.2, in chapter 4.

\(^4\)In chapter 8 of book IV the people and the poor refer to the same part of the city (cf., for example, 1294a10–11 & 16–17—Ross).
discussion of different types of regimes in book IV. He returns to the subject of polity in chapter 11, saying that he will now speak of polity together with the aristocracies bordering it (1295a30). He does not say that he will speak of aristocracy in any other of the remaining chapters of book IV. If the most aristocratic regime of the lesser aristocracies is discussed anywhere in book IV, then, it is discussed in chapter 11.\(^5\) We can ascertain that it is by considering precisely what Aristotle says in chapter 11 about the regimes that he is going to discuss next.

Aristotle begins chapter 11 by asking: “What regime is best and what way of life is best for most cities and most human beings, judging with a view neither to virtue of the sort that is beyond private persons, nor with a view to education, in respect to those things requiring nature and an equipment dependent on chance, nor with a view to the regime that one would pray for, but a way of life which it is possible for most to participate in, and a regime in which most cities can share?” (1295a25-30) This limits the ensuing topic. According to Aristotle, the aristocracies he has just been discussing are either outside the realm of most cities or border on what is called polity, so he will now discuss the lesser aristocracies bordering polity and polity as one or together.\(^6\) The implication of the opening statements of chapter 11 is that one

\(^5\)And perhaps also in chapters 12 and 13 insofar as they continue the discussion of chapter 11. In chapters 14 to 16 of book IV Aristotle discusses certain parts that all regimes have in common.

\(^6\)"For in fact those which they name aristocracies—about which we were just speaking—they either fall outside for most of the cities, or they border on so-called polity; hence about both it is necessary to speak as one" (1295a31-34—Ross).
of the lesser aristocracies bordering polity or polity is the regime that is best for most cities.

Aristotle has just been discussing, in chapter 7, aristocracy in the strict sense and three other regimes that are called aristocracies. We have seen that one of the three latter types of regimes, i.e., the oligarchic polity, is not really an aristocratic regime. Therefore, Aristotle has just been discussing the three following aristocracies: aristocracy in the strict sense; the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people; and the lesser aristocracy that looks to virtue and the people. Some of these fall outside the realm of most cities and some border on polity. We know that aristocracy in the strict sense is not a feasible regime for cities. This leaves the two lesser aristocracies as candidates for aristocratic regimes bordering polity.

As discussed above, polity combines wealth and the people (or oligarchy and democracy as Aristotle says in chapter 9 of book IV). One of the two lesser aristocracies mentioned in chapter 7, the one that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people, has both components of polity in addition to virtue. The other only has the people in common with polity. The former can be interpreted, therefore, as bordering polity, whereas it is difficult to conceive of the latter as doing so. This would mean that the types of regime discussed in chapter 11 are polity and the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue and the people, i.e., the regime that is presented as the most

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7 When Aristotle speaks of certain regimes “falling outside” most cities, he seems to mean, then, that they are not feasible or practical regimes for cities. Cf. Walford 1853, 148.
aristocratic regime next to the simply best regime in chapter 8. And one of these regimes may be the regime that is best for most cities.

Before examining the regimes discussed in chapter 11 we must consider whether Aristotle's statement, that it is necessary to speak of polity and the aristocracies bordering it as one, means that there is no essential difference between the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people, and polity. It does not for the following reasons. Firstly, there is the argument Aristotle makes in chapter 8 distinguishing between polity and aristocratic regimes. Secondly, Aristotle has already discussed polity in chapter 9. Would a subsequent discussion be necessary if there is no difference between polity and the lesser aristocracy bordering it? Thirdly, we will see that Aristotle in fact discusses two different regimes in chapter 11, although this is not initially apparent.

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8 According to this analysis, the lesser aristocracy that looks to virtue and the people would fall outside the realm of most cities, along with aristocracy in the strict sense. This would make it a regime that is not feasible for cities. Recall that Aristotle's predecessors, who have inadequately addressed practical political matters, concern themselves with the best regime or certain other types of regimes having nothing to do with existing regimes.
3.3 The Best Possible Regime

3.3.1 The Middle Class Regime

On an initial reading, it seems as though Aristotle discusses only one regime in chapter 11. and this regime appears to be one based on the middle class, i.e., on human beings who are neither poor nor wealthy but possess a moderate amount of wealth.

After asking what regime is best for most cities and saying that he will speak of polity and the lesser aristocracy bordering it. Aristotle says that “Judgment in all these matters rests on the same elements” (1295a30). These elements have something to do with Aristotle’s Ethics. For he immediately refers to the definition of the happy life in the Ethics as “one in accordance with virtue and unimpeded” and the teaching there that virtue is a mean (μεσότητα). According to Aristotle if these things are well said the “middling” (τὸν μέσον) life is what is best for an individual. Aristotle applies the same principles to the city and to the regime: “These same boundaries of virtue and vice must also exist in the case of a city and of a regime” (1295a39–40—Ross). What is in the middle of a continuum with respect to something that is part of a city, then, is what is best for the city and the regime. In the case of the city,

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9The Ethics must refer to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics (N.E.), and perhaps also to the Eudemian Ethics. In the N.E., the meaning of the teaching that virtue is a mean is that the state of character that is a virtue is to be found at the intermediate point between what is an excess in relation to it and what is a deficiency—both of which are vices (Ross 1941, 1106a25 ff.). For example, in the realm of honour and dishonour, the mean that is the virtue is “proper pride,” while the vice that is the excess is “a sort of empty vanity” and the vice that is the deficiency is “undue humility” (1107b20).
there are always three parts with respect to wealth: "the very well off, the very poor, and third, those in the middle between these." (1295a35–b1) The implication is that the middle class—defined according to wealth—is the best part of the city and that the regime based on the middle class is best. But Aristotle does not immediately say this. He first goes through an argument as to why a middling possession of the goods of fortune, in general, and not just wealth, is best. Initially he says that “Since... it is agreed that what is moderate and middling is best, it is evident that in the case of the goods of fortune as well a middling possession is the best of all.” But he provides a further reason why the middling possession of the goods of fortune is best (in addition to it having been agreed that what is moderate and middling is best). It is best because “it is readiest to obey reason.” (1295b1–5)

The goods of fortune include looks, strength, good birth, friends, as well as wealth. Those who have these things to excess or who in contrast are severely lacking in them, find it hard to obey reason, leading to all sorts of problems. The ones who are preeminent are unable to be ruled and rule only as masters, while the others are unable to rule and are ruled only despotically.10 Both groups will commit acts of injustice, on account of arrogance and of malice respectively. A city based on such human beings is a city comprised of slaves and of masters, of the envious and of the

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10 Aristotle also says that members of both groups are least likely to be cavalry commanders and heads of council (1295b12—Ross; see Ross’s comments on this line; see also Lord 1984, 258: note 37 & Walford 1853, 149).
contemptuous. (1295b1–20) The implication is that those with a middling possession of the goods of fortune find it easy to follow reason, are able to rule and be ruled in cities, and are just. However, Aristotle does not say this. At the end of this section he brings the argument back to those who have a middling amount of wealth (as opposed to the goods of fortune in general). And he now says that “the middling elements” (τοὶς μέσοις) particularly preserve themselves in cities because unlike the poor they do not desire what belongs to others, and unlike the position of the wealthy, others do not desire what belongs to them. As a result, “not being plotted against or plotting against others” they live their lives without danger. (1295b20–30) The picture one gets is of human beings who find little reason to engage in acts of injustice and political sedition; of human beings who seem to be moderate and just because they are satisfied with their relatively comfortable lot in life.\footnote{Cf. Strauss 1978, 28.} After referring to a prayer in favour of his argument that the middling element is best, Aristotle concludes that it is clear that the political partnership based on the middling element is best (1295b30–35).

Aristotle’s initial statement that three parts of every city are the very well off, the very poor, and those in the middle between these, and his argument that the middling citizens of cities, unlike the poor and the wealthy, particularly preserve themselves, both imply that by the middling element in cities Aristotle means those who have a
middling amount of wealth—the “middle class” in general terms. He says this more directly after concluding that the political partnership based on the middling element is best. Aristotle says that it is “the greatest good fortune for those living as free citizens [πολιτευομένους] to have a middling and sufficient property” (1295b35–40). He also refers a little later to the middle part of cities being the part between the poor and the well off (1296a10: see also 1296a20–25). By the political partnership based on the middling element, then, Aristotle seems to mean a regime based on the middle class. The answer to the question raised at the beginning of the chapter, the question of the regime that is best for most cities, appears to be, then, the middle class regime. And since, at first sight, the middle class regime seems to be the only regime discussed in the chapter it may also be the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people. But we shall see presently that there are serious difficulties with the interpretation of the middle class regime as the regime that is best for most cities. difficulties that belie this interpretation.

3.3.2 Difficulties with the Middle Class Regime

The first argument that Aristotle makes in favour of the middling element—its relationship with the teaching in the Ethics that virtue is a mean—implies that the middle class is best because it too is a mean. But if Aristotle is actually saying that the middle class is best on this basis alone he is making a very odd argument. For
it is something like saying that because virtue is a mean the best city is one based on human beings of medium height, since every city is made up of tall, medium, and short human beings. To be sure, the implication of the initial argument may be that the middle class is virtuous but Aristotle does not say this. As I discussed above, when Aristotle subsequently argues that a middling possession of the goods of fortune is best, he implies that those with a middling possession of the goods of fortune are more able to follow reason, are willing to rule and be ruled in cities, and are just. But again Aristotle does not directly say this. The closest he comes to saying that the middle class is virtuous is at the end of this section when he says that they neither initiate nor are the object of political strife. The middle class, then, seems to be moderate and just. But the actual reason that Aristotle gives for its superiority at this point is that it best preserves itself in the city. (As seen in the previous section, Aristotle goes on to conclude that the regime based on the middling element is best.) This reason stands out when we consider the subsequent reasons that Aristotle gives in chapter 11 for the superiority of the middle class regime, for these also have to do with its apparent superior stability.

Aristotle gives two additional reasons for the superiority of the middle class regime. One reason is that it prevents extreme types of democracy and oligarchy or tyranny from coming into being, since these arise when “some possess very many things and others nothing” (1295b40–96a1). In cities where most of the citizens have a moderate
amount of property, there will not be great disparities in wealth. Another reason is that factional conflicts are least frequent in regimes with a large middling element. This is why smaller cities have more factional conflicts than larger ones because in the former the population is more easily split into two, with almost everyone either poor or well off. (1296a5–10) In regimes with large middle classes the population is not divided into two parts that can easily turn against each other. The clearest reason why the middle class regime might be the best regime for most cities, then, is its stability. It is not a little surprising, therefore, to find Aristotle making a very different argument elsewhere in the Politics. an argument that refutes the view that arranging for a large middle class in a city will lead to a stable regime. The argument against this view is found in chapter 7 of book II.

In chapter 7 of book II Aristotle criticizes the political proposals of a certain Phaleas, who was the first to introduce the view that all factional conflicts arise from disputes over property. He asserted that the possessions of citizens should be equal. (1266a35) Aristotle acknowledges that regimes can be affected by the distribution of property and that it plays a role in political strife (1266b10–15, 1267a35). But it is not the decisive factor in factional conflict that Phaleas thinks that it is. Aristotle points out that if the citizens are not adequately educated by the laws, equality in property means little: "even if one were to arrange a moderate level of property for

12Nothing is known about Phaleas except what Aristotle says of him (Lord 1984, 250: note 41).
all, it would not help. For one ought to level desires sooner than property; but this is impossible for those not adequately educated by the laws.”¹³ (1266b25–30; see also 1267a35) The education required must have something to do with moderating the desires of those with desires beyond the necessary things. According to Aristotle, desires beyond the necessary things are the cause of the greatest injustices (1267a1–5 & 1267a10). This means that Phaleas's regime is of use only with respect to minor injustices (1267a10–15). A (or the) key desire that has to be dealt with in this regard is the desire on the part of the “refined” (οἱ χαρίεντες) to be honoured above others (1266b35–67a1; 1267a35–40). In order to rule the refined, there must be provisions that ensure “that those who are reasonable [or fair] [ἔσεισι] by nature will be the sort who have no wish to aggrandize themselves” (1267b5).

Aristotle's critique of Phaleas's political proposals reveals that he does not think that arranging for a large middle class in a city will lead to a stable regime. The main reason given in chapter 11 of book IV for the middle class regime being the best regime for most cities—i.e., its stability—is therefore brought into question. In speaking of the middle class regime in book IV Aristotle does not discuss either education or the political problem posed by human beings with desires beyond the necessary things. The middle class way of life may be best for most human beings, but a regime will be unable to secure this way of life for its citizens unless it deals adequately with the

¹³Phaleas apparently proposed equal education for the citizens as well, but Aristotle points out the utter inadequacy of such a general proposal (1266b30–35).
“refined.” According to Aristotle’s critique of Phaleas, if the refined are not properly educated, they will engage in divisive battles over honour, power, and wealth (which is often pursued as a means to the former). The middle class regime, as it is depicted in chapter 11 of book IV, will not be a stable regime. Aristotle does not really think, then, that the best regime for most cities is a regime defined by its citizens possessing a moderate amount of wealth, a regime defined, in other words, by property.

There is another difficulty with interpreting the middle class regime as the regime that is best for most cities. And that is the fact that it is a very rare type of regime. Aristotle discusses several reasons why it has either never existed or only very rarely. One reason is that the scarcity of the middling element has led to most regimes being either democratic or oligarchic: “as a result of the fact that the middling element is often few in them, whichever is preeminent, whether those owning property or the people, oversteps the middle and conducts the regime to suit itself.” A second reason is that due to the conflicts between the people and the well off, when either of the two groups becomes dominant they have no interest in creating a regime in which both groups share. In addition to these reasons, Aristotle says that those coming into leadership in Greece, having their own interest in mind and not that of the cities in question, establish either democracies or oligarchies.\(^{14}\) (1296a20-35)

Of course, the fact that the middle class regime has been rare in the past does not

\(^{14}\)There is one apparent exception (see 1296a35).
necessarily mean that it will continue to be so. Perhaps the middle class regime has been rare because no one before Aristotle has argued for its merits.\textsuperscript{15} and insofar as legislators and others are convinced by his argument it will become more common. But, then, one would expect extensive discussions in the \textit{Politics} of how to create large middle classes in cities, especially in the sections that deal explicitly with what is useful for ameliorating existing regimes. We do not find this. Instead books IV to VI contain much more on polity as a mixture of democracy and oligarchy, and on democracy and oligarchy themselves. The fact that Aristotle does not discuss how to bring the middle class regime into being is underlined in chapter 11 of book IV when he speaks of it being the “greatest good fortune” if the citizens have a middling and sufficient amount of property (1295b39–40—Ross). The scarcity of the middle class regime provides further evidence that Aristotle does not really think that it is the best regime for most cities.

So what is going on? Why does Aristotle make it seem as though the middle class regime is the regime that is best for most cities when it actually is not? He does so in part because the teaching that the middle class regime is best for most cities can have an ameliorating effect on existing regimes. We have seen that the primary aim of Aristotle’s political thought is to improve the condition of existing regimes. As Aristotle says in chapter 11 most existing regimes are democracies and

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Cf.} 1329b20–25.
oligarchies (1296a20), and are divided into factions made up of the poor and of the wealthy. When he presents a regime that is neither a democracy nor an oligarchy as the best regime for most cities, then, Aristotle questions the claims of both democrats and oligarchs to rule. He also reveals the dangers posed to cities by extreme poverty and by the rule of those who are both wealthy and arrogant. I will discuss another positive reason why Aristotle presents the middle class regime as the regime best for most cities in chapter 4 of the dissertation (section 4.5).

But Aristotle’s presentation of the partnership based on the “middling sort” as best also serves a very different purpose. It points to a different sort of middling regime, a regime that clearly aims at virtue, and is, therefore, the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people. As noted above, Aristotle never directly says that the middle class is virtuous, although he implies that it is moderate and just. To be moderate and just because one is satisfied with a relatively comfortable life is to be virtuous in some sense. Yet what is clear is that the virtue that the middle class may possess by implication, is not ethical or gentlemanly virtue as it is depicted in the Nicomachean Ethics (N.E.). In the N.E., achieving virtue as a mean is not something easy, and therefore not something easily accomplished by most human beings. Aristotle says there that

... it is no easy task to be good [σπουδαίον]. For in everything it is no easy task to find the middle [τὸ μέσον], e.g. to find the middle of a circle
is not easy for every one but for him who knows; so, too, any one can get angry—that is easy—or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for every one, nor is it easy; wherefore goodness [τὸ εὖ] is both rare and laudable and noble. (1109a20–25)

One will not be virtuous, in the sense depicted in the *N.E.*, then, merely by possessing a middling amount of wealth.

To be sure, at the beginning of chapter 11 Aristotle strongly suggests that the regime that is best for most cities will not aim at a superior type of virtue. Yet, as discussed above, he also says that “Judgment in all these matters rests on the same elements,” and immediately refers to the definition of the happy life in the *Ethics* as “one in accordance with virtue and unimpeded” and to the teaching there that virtue is a mean (1295a30–35). The virtues that are means in the *Ethics* are the ethical or moral virtues. Those who practice these virtues are “*kalos k’agathos.*” The term means “noble and good” but is usually translated “gentleman.” Because gentlemen are defined by their practice of ethical virtue, a regime based on gentlemen would be one in which virtue clearly has a role. It would, therefore, be an aristocratic regime. This is one of the assumptions underlying the argument in chapter 8, in which Aristotle distinguishes between oligarchic polities, which are conventionally called aristocracies, and regimes that really are aristocratic. For example, he says
there that “Since aristocracy wishes to assign preeminence to the best of the citizens, they assert that oligarchies too are made up particularly of gentlemen” (1293b40; see also 1294a15). We ascertained above that the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people is discussed in chapter 11 of book IV. The question naturally arises, then, whether by the middling sort of human beings Aristotle means not especially those with a middling amount of wealth but, in particular, gentlemen or those who practice the ethical virtues, the virtues that are means. We shall see that he does.

3.3.3 Gentlemen and the Best Possible Regime

Evidence for the interpretation of the middling human beings as gentlemen is found in Aristotle’s argument that the best legislators are from the middling type of citizens. He says this should be recognized as a sign (σημεῖον) that the political partnership based on the middling sort is best. As examples of these legislators, Aristotle mentions Solon, Lycurgus, and Charondas: “Solon was one of these, as is clear from his poems, and Lycurgus (for he was not king), Charondas, and most of the others.” (1296a15–20) If these men are of the middling human beings in terms of their wealth, one would expect Aristotle’s remarks elsewhere regarding them to confirm or at least not to raise questions about their possessing a middling amount of wealth. Aristotle’s remarks, however, are problematic in this regard.
We learn something of the character of Charondas's legislation a little later in book IV. (This is one of only four references to him in the Politics.) In chapter 13 Aristotle tells us that Charondas's method of fining citizens for not attending the courts is an example of the devices used to limit the political power of the people (1297a14 & 1297a20). Aristotle specifically terms these devices "oligarchic" (1297a35). It is more than a little odd that just after seeming to present Charondas as a member of the middle class, Aristotle should present him as having oligarchic sympathies.

The ostensible evidence of Solon's membership in the middle class is even more peculiar. Aristotle says that the fact that Solon is from the middling class of citizens is clear from his poems. But the only verse of Solon's that Aristotle chooses to quote in the Politics does not indicate that Solon was of the middling citizens with respect to wealth or that he thought this condition was anything good. In fact, the verse implies precisely the opposite, particularly since Aristotle uses it in the context of criticizing Solon's position regarding how much wealth is necessary for a good life. Aristotle says, "... self-sufficiency in possessions of this sort with a view to a good life is not limitless, as Solon asserts it to be in his poem: 'of wealth no boundary lies revealed to men.'"\(^{16}\) (1256b30) These problematic aspects of Aristotle's presentation of Charondas and Solon as ostensible members of the middle class raise the following question: are we meant to consider whether they are of the middling human beings

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\(^{16}\) Aristotle does, elsewhere, credit Solon with moderating oligarchic aspects of the Athenian regime (1266b15, 1274a1 & 15, 1281b20–30).
on some other basis than wealth?

Are these legislators of the middling human beings on the basis of their capacity to practice ethical virtue? Aristotle's explanatory note on Lycurgus, the central example among the legislators named, explains how gentlemen can be conceived of as middling human beings on this basis.

Aristotle says that Lycurgus was of the middling human beings because he was not king (1296a15–20). This is traditionally interpreted as meaning that he was not wealthy,¹⁷ but a very different interpretation is possible. Just prior to the examination of the middle class regime in chapter 11, Aristotle discusses tyranny, in chapter 10. As I pointed out in section 3.2, the discussion of tyranny is out of place according to his original plan. In the discussion of tyranny in chapter 10 Aristotle refers at some length to the discussion of kingship in the "first discourses," i.e., in book III, and he makes a further reference to the absolute kingship discussed in book III (1295a1–15). As seen in chapter 2 of the dissertation, Aristotle uses the discussion of the absolute king to quietly indicate the nature of the simply best regime. It is ruled by those who are the best with respect to virtue entire¹⁸ and not to virtue as a mean. In relation to those who are outstanding on the basis of virtue, to philosophers that is, and in relation to those who are moderate and just because they are satisfied with their relatively comfortable lot in life, to the middle class as depicted in chapter 11

¹⁸Aristotle calls it an "excess of virtue" at 1284a1.
that is, those who practice the ethical virtues, or gentlemen, can be seen as falling into a middle realm of virtue.\textsuperscript{19} The ethical or moral virtues represent the peak of human virtue in the \textit{N.E.}, apart from philosophic virtue.\textsuperscript{20} Thus gentlemen (or those who are potentially gentlemen) can be regarded as the “middling element” of chapter 11. They practice the virtues that are means. When Aristotle says, then, that the political partnership based on the middling element is best, he does not really mean by this the middle class regime, but a regime based on gentlemen. By educating its citizens in ethical virtue, such a regime, unlike the middle class regime, would deal with the political problem posed by those with desires beyond the necessary things.

The lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people (which we have ascertained is discussed in chapter 11 of book IV) is the regime based on the middling element conceived as gentlemen. It is not the middle class regime. The former clearly


Consider also chapter 7 of book II where Aristotle seems to divide human beings into three categories on the basis of their desires. For the third type, those who desire pleasures without pains, the only cure is philosophy. (1267a5–10)

And consider what Aristotle says at 1284a10. Those characterized by an excess of virtue do not require the benefit of legislation, as other human beings do: for them “there is no law—they themselves are law.”

\textsuperscript{20}My interpretation of the relationship between theoretical or philosophic virtue and ethical or moral virtue in the \textit{N.E.} follows that of Aristide Tessitore, in “Aristotle’s Ambiguous Account of the Best Life” (1992). Tessitore argues that Aristotle both presents the life of moral virtue as an end in itself and constituting human happiness, and presents the philosophic life as superior to the life of moral virtue and as furnishing a more complete happiness. On the one hand, the two ways of life can be reconciled (209–10). But Tessitore also argues that Aristotle quietly raises questions that point to a radical distinction between the philosophic life and the life of moral virtue (210–13). He therefore finds in the \textit{N.E.} a teaching similar, in both content and manner of presentation, to my conclusion that in the \textit{Politics} Aristotle quietly presents the philosophic life as the highest life for human beings and as a way of life that exists apart from the city. Neither interpretation, however, leads to the conclusion that philosophers will not also be ethically virtuous.
looks to virtue, as defined in the *Ethics*, whereas the middle class regime does not. We have seen that Aristotle presents the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people as the most aristocratic regime next to the simply best regime. The latter is ruled by the best simply, i.e., by philosophers. But we have seen that their rule is not feasible for cities. The best rulers that a practicable regime can have are gentlemen. Thus the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people can be said to be ruled by the best. As stated in the previous chapter, "aristocracy" literally means the rule of the best. In the next part of the chapter I will show that the best regime of books VII and VIII is equivalent to the regime based on gentlemen that makes ethical virtue its end. As such it is the definitive version of the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people.

### 3.3.4 The Best Possible Regime

I will begin this part of the chapter by showing that the best regime of books VII and VIII is concerned with virtue, as already indicated in chapter 2. I will then argue that the virtue that is its end is ethical virtue as discussed in the *N.E.*. Finally I will discuss how the regime of books VII and VIII looks to wealth and the people in addition to virtue. This will involve a consideration of how rule is distributed in the regime.

It is clear that the regime of books VII and VIII, unlike the middle class regime,
is concerned with virtue. In chapter 7 of book VII we learn that the citizens of this
regime are to be guided to virtue by the legislator (1327b35). In chapter 9 Aristotle
tells us that the citizens of the best regime are not to live “a vulgar or a merchant’s
way of life, for this sort of way of life is ignoble and contrary to virtue.” Neither
should the citizens be farmers. “for there is a need for leisure both with a view to
the creation of virtue and with a view to political activities.” (1328b35–29a1) And
Aristotle reiterates that “the vulgar element does not share in the city, nor any other
type that is not a ‘craftsman of virtue’” (1329a15–20). The lesser aristocracies defined
in Aristotle’s discussion of aristocracy in chapter 7 of book IV look to virtue. The
best regime of books VII and VIII, then, is a type of lesser aristocracy. We have
already seen, in chapter 2 of the dissertation, that it is not aristocracy in the strict
sense or the simply best regime. It is not ruled by those who are outstanding on the
basis of virtue—by philosophers. We have also seen (in the same chapter) that the
regime of books VII and VIII does not make philosophy its end. Our examination
of the education of the young indicated that it looks to ethical virtue instead. We
shall now see more evidence for the position that the virtue that it aims at is ethical
virtue.

As previously discussed, the definition of happiness and of virtue as a mean in
the Ethics grounds the discussion of the middling regime in chapter 11 of book IV.
The Ethics and its account of virtue is also authoritative in the discussion of the best
regime of books VII and VIII, the regime "in accordance with which a city would be best governed," which means "in accordance with one that would make it possible for the city to be happy most of all" (1332a1–5). In discussing what constitutes happiness in chapter 13 of book VII Aristotle uses two definitions from the *Ethics*. He begins the discussion by saying that he has defined happiness in the *Ethics* as the "actualization and complete practice of virtue . . ." (1332a5). Subsequently, he refers to the definition of the excellent person in the *Ethics* as "one of a sort for whom on account of his virtue the things that are good unqualifiedly are good" (1332a20). And we learn that the citizens of the best city are to be excellent (1332a30–35). They are to be excellent, then, according to the teaching of the *Ethics*. And according to its teaching on ethical or moral virtue, since the best city does not aim at philosophy. We find further evidence for this interpretation when Aristotle discusses the end to which the citizens should be educated in chapters 14 and 15 of book VII. It requires the presence of various virtues of both occupation and of leisure (1334a11–15). The virtues of occupation are moderation, courage, endurance, and justice. The virtues required with a view to leisure are philosophy, moderation, and justice. (1334a20–30) There is no systematic investigation of these virtues in the *Politics*, but there

21 Although "war must be for the sake of peace, occupation for the sake of leisure, [and] necessary and useful things for the sake of noble things," Aristotle points out that the virtues of occupation are required in order for there to be leisure (1333a35 & 1334a15–20).

22 Since the best city does not aim at philosophy, the "virtue" of philosophy referred to here probably means something different from philosophy in the precise sense. Cf. note 32 in section 2.5 of chapter 2.
is in Aristotle's *Ethics*. In order to understand the virtue aimed at in the best city, then, one must understand Aristotle's account of ethical virtue, of the virtues that are means.

We can conclude that the regime of books VII and VIII aims at virtue, and that the virtue that it aims at is ethical virtue. It is made up, more or less, of the middling element conceived as gentlemen. Aristotle does not directly identify the citizens of the best possible regime as the middling sort in books VII and VIII. He does not because he explicitly presents this regime as the best regime of the *Politics*. As discussed above and in chapter 2 (section 2.3), Aristotle says that its citizens are to be excellent and virtuous and even implies that they are simply good. It is only in relation to the simply best regime and to those ruling it, i.e., philosophers, that we know that the best regime of books VII and VIII is not simply best and that we can conceive of its citizens (or the best of them) as the middling sort. But, as we have seen, Aristotle mutes the teaching regarding the simply best regime in the *Politics*. The hidden character of the teaching that gentlemen can be conceived as the middling sort, in both book IV and in books VII and VIII, is part of the same strategy. Nevertheless, Aristotle does provide some confirmation of this interpretation in the discussion of the best possible regime, specifically in the discussion of the role of music in education. At the end of book VIII we find him recommending the Dorian type of harmony for education because it is one of the harmonies having to do with character
Aristotle goes on to criticize Socrates for including the Phrygian harmony along with the Dorian, and discusses why the Phrygian is not appropriate for the purpose of education. He then concludes that "since we praise the middle \([\tau\delta\ \mu\varepsilon\sigma\nu]\) between extremes and assert it ought to be pursued, and since the Dorian has this nature relative to the other harmonies, it is evident that it is appropriate for younger persons to be educated particularly in Dorian tunes." (1342a25–b15; see also 1340b1–5) He ends the book, and the *Politics*, by saying that "It is clear that these three are to be made defining principles for purposes of education—the middle \([\tau\delta\ \mu\varepsilon\sigma\nu],\ the\ possible,\ and\ the\ appropriate\)" (1342b33–34—Ross).

Having shown that the regime of books VII and VIII looks to virtue, I will now examine how it can be said to look to wealth and the people as well. The citizens of the regime of books VII and VIII need to have leisure, "both with a view to the creation of virtue and with a view to political activities" (1329a1). This means that they need to be wealthy. In chapter 9 of book VII Aristotle tells us that the citizens are to have a "ready supply" of possessions (1329a15). But no one will be allowed to become a citizen of this regime on the basis of wealth, by being a wealthy merchant for example. According to Aristotle, a merchant's way of life is ignoble and contrary to virtue (1328b35–40). Because its citizens and its rulers (who are chosen from the citizens) are wealthy, the regime of books VII and VIII can be said to look

\footnote{\textsuperscript{23}Cf. the reference to someone called Philoxenus (Φιλοξενος) in this section (1342b5–10).}
to wealth (cf. 1307a34–35—Ross). But how can it be said to look to the people? For not only are merchants excluded from being citizens but also anyone involved in “vulgar” occupations, e.g., artisans and labourers, as well as farmers (1328b35–29a1). Aristotelian often identifies the “people” with the poor and in this regime no citizens are poor. We shall see, however, that the regime can be interpreted as looking to the people in the way that rule is distributed in it.

The regime of books VII and VIII as a whole aims at virtue. But the rulers of the regime are still distinguished by their superior virtue. We see this from the fact that offices in the regime are distributed according to desert (1326b10–15); as well as from the fact that some offices are more authoritative than others (see 1331a20–25 & 1331b5–15). In chapter 12 of book VII we also learn that the common messes of the most authoritative official boards are to be conspicuous relative to the position of virtue (1331a20–25). The implication is that the most authoritative officials are to set the standard for virtue. This is apparent from the subsequent provision for the intermingling of the officials with other citizens in the “free” market and the reason for it: “being before the eyes of officials most of all engenders respect and the fear that belongs to free persons” (1331a30–40). The citizens of the regime of books VII

24 Farmers (and artisans and labourers it would seem) are excluded from citizenship in the most extreme way: they are either slaves or equivalent to slaves (1329a15–25 & 1330a25). Since merchants will have property, a logical way of excluding them from citizenship would be to make them metics (see Strauss 1978, 37).

25 Regarding the translation see Lord 1984, 268: note 48.
and VIII, then, do not all share in rule merely by being citizens. They do not all, for example, take turns ruling. In chapter 2 of book VI we learn that democratic regimes aim at freedom, and that “One aspect of freedom is being ruled and ruling in turn.” Aristotle adds that “The justice that is characteristically popular is to have equality on the basis of number and not according to desert . . .” (1317a40–b1) Because the rulers of the regime of books VII and VIII are distinguished by superior virtue, they are not chosen on a popular or democratic basis. Yet the rulers of the regime are not chosen entirely on the basis of superior virtue. There is an element of arbitrariness in the way they are chosen, which supports the belief that the citizens of this regime are all equal.

Even where a regime as a whole aims at virtue, the citizens of the regime will not be equally virtuous and therefore will not actually be equal. If the citizens were all equally virtuous it would matter little which of them ruled. The rulers could be chosen as well by random choice, e.g., by lot, as by any other means.26 But those who are citizens in the regime of books VII and VIII will think that they are equal in some substantial sense precisely because they are citizens, unlike the farmers and others living in the city (cf. 1332b20–30). The element of arbitrariness in the way the rulers of the best city are chosen, which reinforces this belief in equality, is found in the fact that they are to come from the older citizens who were warriors when young.

26 Choosing officials by lot is particularly a democratic mode (see, e.g., 1317b15–20).
They are not to be chosen strictly according to their own merit. Aristotle does say that this method of choosing the rulers is according to desert (ἀξία) because it is natural for power to be found among the younger and prudence among the older (1329a10–15); but this is not always the case. And what seems as or more important is that age is a distinction which human beings are inclined to accept (see 1332b35–40). All the rulers will come from the older citizens even if there are some younger citizens who are as capable of ruling. In the fact, then, that rule in the regime of books VII and VIII is not distributed solely according to superior virtue but includes an element of arbitrariness that supports the belief that the citizens of the regime are all equal, we can say that it also looks to the people.

In making ethical virtue its end, and in looking to wealth and the people, the

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27Cf. Bartlett 1994b, 391. For Bartlett age being a criterion for rule in the best regime of books VII and VIII makes it questionable that ethical or moral virtue is in fact the end of this regime. My position is very different. Aristotle's teaching on aristocracy in the Politics makes it clear that the best possible regime is not defined solely by ethical virtue (but also by wealth and the people). But ethical virtue is still the end in common of the regime.

28This does not mean that the older citizens (who were warriors) will all share in rule equally, apart from considerations of merit. The actual rulers of the regime can still be distinguished by superior virtue because there are many kinds of offices in the regime, with widely differing authority, which different older citizens can fill.

29There is another element of arbitrariness in the regime which reveals that it is not defined solely by virtue. This is found in the fact that citizenship in the regime depends on the class into which one is born and not on one's own potential merit. (Cf. Bartlett, 1994b, 384–86.) Whether one will get the education in virtue which citizenship in the regime requires depends on being born into the citizen class. But this does not mean that the children of farmers or artisans could not be similarly educated. As Aristotle says elsewhere, nature does not reproduce according to type: "they claim that from the good should come someone good .... But while nature often wishes to do this, it is unable to" (1255b1). There is, then, a certain arbitrariness to citizenship in the regime, but an arbitrariness stemming from the naturalness of human families. In the Republic children can be assigned to different classes depending on their nature, but in the Republic there are no families among the guardians and the rulers. The need for the eradication of families in the simply best regime is another reason why it is not a feasible regime for cities.
The best regime of books VII and VIII is equivalent to the middling regime based on gentlemen which, as I have argued above, is discussed in chapter 11 of book IV. It is, therefore, the definitive example of the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people, the regime presented by Aristotle in chapter 8 of book IV as the most aristocratic regime next to the simply best regime. It is also the same, then, as one of the two aristocratic regimes that Aristotle says, in chapter 2 of book IV, that he will subsequently examine in the *Politics*—the aristocratic regime next to the best regime in choiceworthiness and attainability.

### 3.4 The Best Regime for Most Cities

The best regime of books VII and VIII, unlike the simply best regime, is a feasible regime for cities. It is, most precisely defined, the best possible regime. But it is not a regime that very many cities could attain, or want to attain. Most existing regimes are oligarchies and democracies (1296a20; see also and compare 1289a5–10, 20–25, & 1289b10–15). Whereas we have seen that the regime of books VII and VIII excludes merchants, farmers, artisans, and labourers from citizenship.\(^\text{30}\) It cannot be interpreted, then, as the regime that is best for most cities. Aristotle begins chapter 11 by asking what regime is best for most cities. At the end of the chapter he seems

\(^{30}\)There are other reasons as well why the best city is a city that “one would pray for,” including its small size (see 1326b10–25).
to acknowledge that the regime based on the middling conceived of as gentlemen is not the best regime for most cities. For he concludes that "What the best regime is, then, and for what reason, is evident from these things" (1296b1). He does not say that what the best regime is for most cities is now clear. We have already seen that the middle class regime cannot be interpreted as the regime that is best for most cities. We can now conclude that neither of the two "middling" regimes that Aristotle discusses in chapter 11 can be interpreted as the regime that is best for most cities. Does this mean that there is no single type of regime that is best for most cities according to Aristotle? Or perhaps the answer to this question is polity, since Aristotle also says that he will be discussing polity in chapter 11, as well as the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people.

We have seen that the lesser aristocracy discussed in chapter 11 looks to ethical virtue. The middle class regime does not. The latter can be identified, therefore, as a type of polity, since it is a sort of mean between democracy and oligarchy. As discussed in section 3.2, polity combines oligarchic and democratic elements but does not also look to virtue. In chapter 9 of book IV we learn that there are different ways of creating polity. One way, which would include the middle class polity, is to use what is in between or the mean between oligarchic and democratic arrangements. Another is to use both the oligarchic and democratic laws with respect to some practice, such as adjudication. A third is to use some aspects of oligarchic law and some of democratic
law in creating a new arrangement. (1294a30-b5) Since the middle class regime is a type of polity, perhaps the answer to the question of the regime that is best for most cities is whatever type of polity can be established in the particular circumstances that various cities find themselves in. There are different ways of achieving polity, so it is a more easily attained alternative to existing regimes than the middle class regime.

Polity is also a better regime than most existing regimes which are either democracies or oligarchies. In looking to the people and to the wealthy, it looks to the interests of more of the necessary parts of the city (cf. 1283a15-20). But insofar as polity is limited to these two ends, to democracy and oligarchy, and does not look to virtue as well, it is not an aristocratic regime. So if polity, understood as a combination of democracy and oligarchy, is the answer to the question of the regime that is best for most cities, there would not be an aristocratic regime that is feasible for most cities. As previously discussed, Aristotle tentatively includes this type of aristocratic regime, in chapter 2 of book IV, in the list of subjects that he will be studying subsequently in the Politics. The possibility that there is no aristocratic regime that is suitable for most cities has far-reaching implications.

The definitive example of the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people, i.e., the regime of books VII and VIII, clearly aims at virtue. But it is not a feasible regime for most cities. If there is no other aristocratic regime that is also a
suitable regime for most cities, it would mean that virtue cannot be part of the regimes of most cities. And it would mean that the aristocratic features of the regime of books VII and VIII have little or no relevance for existing regimes. The concern in the Politics for the best regime of books VII and VIII and the virtue that defines it would be separate, then, from the concern for what is useful for reforming existing regimes or practical political matters. If this were the case, Aristotle's political thought could be interpreted as divided into three rather distinct areas: that which concerns the simply best regime, that which concerns the best possible regime for cities, and that which concerns practical political matters. And the preceding analysis of aristocracy in the Politics would have confirmed that the concern for the best regime and virtue is separate from the concern for practical political matters, but with the complication that the former has two distinct objects, the simply best regime and the best possible regime.

But to interpret the Politics in this manner is to not fully comprehend the teaching of the Politics and to not understand the work as a coherent whole. The concern for the best regime and virtue is not separate from the concern for practical political matters. For there is an aristocratic regime that is feasible for most cities. The best regime of books VII and VIII functions as an aristocratic standard for it, and thereby for existing regimes. That it does so is intimated by the following.

At the end of chapter 11 Aristotle says that "the best regime" provides the ulti-
mate standard by which existing regimes can be judged: "The one that is closest to this must of necessity always be better, the one that is more removed from the middle, worse ..." (1296b1–5). If our interpretation of the dual identity of the middling human beings in this chapter is correct, the "best regime" referred to here would not be the middle class polity but the aristocratic regime based on gentlemen, the best regime of books VII and VIII. The description of how the best regime is to be a standard for other regimes, then, applies to how the regime of books VII and VIII is to be such, and not to how the middle class polity is to be such a standard.

According to Aristotle, the fact that the best regime is the standard does not make the regimes that are closest to it always better for particular cities. Where a city is governed according to a particular presupposition, e.g., freedom and equality, less choiceworthy regimes may be "more advantageous." (1296b1–10) But Aristotle tells us, in chapter 12, that the legislator should always take as his helpers human beings of the middling sort (προσλαμβάνειν τοὺς μέσους) and aim at these whether he is enacting oligarchic or democratic laws (1296b35). The legislator should always aim, then, at having as allies (and therefore as rulers in the regime) those who practice ethical virtue, or gentlemen. Some suggestion of how this may be done is indicated by the fact that while there is no mention of virtue in the discussion of the things that make up quality in cities in chapter 12, education is mentioned (1296b15).
3.5 Conclusion

By carefully examining Aristotle's discussion of aristocracy in book IV we have elucidated the aristocratic status of the best regime of books VII and VIII. It is not aristocracy in the strict sense which is the simply best regime. It is instead one of the "lesser aristocracies" discussed in chapter 7 of book IV. Specifically, it is the definitive example of the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people. Aristotle presents this lesser aristocracy as the most aristocratic regime next to the simply best regime. Unlike the simply best regime, the best regime of books VII and VIII is a practicable regime that aims at virtue.

The regime of books VII and VIII, however, is not a feasible regime for most cities. It is not the answer to the question raised at the beginning of chapter 11 of book IV, the question of the regime that is best for most cities. If there is no other aristocratic regime that is feasible for most cities the concern for the best regime and virtue in the Politics would be separate from the concern for what is useful for reforming existing regimes or practical political matters. We must, therefore, continue our investigation of Aristotle's teaching on aristocracy in the Politics, and examine the evidence for the existence of an aristocratic regime that is feasible for most cities.
Chapter 4

Virtue and the City

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, in book IV Aristotle intimates that the best regime of books VII and VIII functions as an aristocratic standard for existing regimes. Regimes closer to this regime are better. And Aristotle says that the legislator should always take gentlemen as his allies whether enacting oligarchic or democratic laws. By sharing in rule in regimes that do not make ethical virtue a common concern, gentlemen may yet make virtue a part of these regimes, thereby making them aristocratic. We will see that this is indeed Aristotle's teaching. There is a type of aristocratic regime that is feasible for most cities—a practical aristocratic regime. We have seen that Aristotle says, in chapter 2 of book IV, that if there is
such a regime it will be part of the subjects that he will be studying subsequently in the *Politics*. It is Aristotle's teaching regarding this regime that ultimately shows us how his concern for the best regime and virtue in the *Politics* is connected to his concern for practical political matters.

There are two stages to the argument that establishes that there is a practical aristocratic regime. I will first ascertain that there is an aristocratic regime that is a more feasible regime for cities than the regime of books VII and VIII. I will do so by examining two existing regimes that Aristotle presents as examples of lesser aristocracies in chapter 7 of book IV, and by noting how Aristotle identifies certain aspects of regimes as aristocratic features in the central books of the *Politics*. We will see that the more feasible aristocratic regime is similar to polity. Yet most existing regimes are democracies and oligarchies. Unless the teaching regarding the more feasible aristocratic regime is applicable to most existing regimes, we would not have proved that Aristotle thinks there is an aristocratic regime that is feasible for most cities. In the second stage of the argument I will show how the teaching applies to democracies and oligarchies.

The two regimes that Aristotle presents as examples of lesser aristocracies in chapter 7 of book IV are the Carthaginian and Spartan regimes. He says that the Carthaginian regime is an example of the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people, and that the Spartan regime is an example of the lesser
aristocracy that looks to virtue and the people. These are two regimes that have actually existed. Aristotle discusses both regimes at length in book II of the Politics, and also discusses Sparta elsewhere in the work. When we examine what Aristotle says about these regimes, however, we learn that they are not truly aristocratic. This is not surprising given what he says at the beginning of book II. He says there that he is going to investigate various well-thought-of regimes so that whatever positive features these regimes may have will be elucidated and so that the need for his own proposals will be made clear by their deficiencies. Despite the deficiencies of the Spartan and Carthaginian regimes, however, Aristotle’s discussion of them reveals that there is an aristocratic regime that is a more feasible regime for cities than the best regime of books VII and VIII. He presents them as examples of lesser aristocracies. Then, in order to lead us to this teaching.

In section 4.2 of the chapter I will investigate whether the Spartan regime is really an aristocratic regime. We will learn that it is not, that it is in fact a type of polity. But by undertaking the investigation we learn a great deal more about aristocratic regimes and their characteristics. The investigation, however, does not clearly reveal the features of the more feasible aristocratic regime. It does not because a Sparta that was truly aristocratic would be similar to the regime of books VII and VIII. The key features of the more feasible aristocratic regime become clear by examining Aristotle’s discussion of the Carthaginian regime, which will be the subject of section 4.3. After
having identified the features of the more feasible aristocratic regime, I will provide more evidence for this teaching, in section 4.4, by examining certain references to aristocracy and aristocratic features in the central books of the *Politics*.

At this point I will summarize the characteristics of the more feasible aristocratic regime in section 4.5. We will see that this regime is similar to polity and I will discuss how polities are potentially aristocratic regimes. I will then discuss why the teaching regarding the more feasible aristocratic regime needs to be applicable to democracies and oligarchies in order for us to conclude that there is an aristocratic regime that is feasible for most cities, or a practical aristocratic regime. In section 4.6, I will show that the teaching is indeed applicable to democracies and oligarchies; and I will discuss how our investigation puts book VI of the *Politics* in a new and important light.

### 4.2 The Spartan Regime

There are numerous references to Sparta throughout the *Politics* and extended discussions of it in books II, III (of Spartan kingship), IV, and VII and VIII. In book II Aristotle says that the Spartan regime, along with the Cretan and Carthaginian regimes, is justly held in high repute (1273b25). In chapter 7 of book IV Aristotle presents the Spartan regime as an example of the lesser aristocracy that looks to virtue and the people (1293b10–15). He also presents it as an aristocracy in his
discussion of factional conflicts in book V (1306b21-7a5; but cf. 1307a5-25). Unlike many others,\(^1\) however, Aristotle is not exactly an admirer of the Spartan regime.

Aristotle finds many things to criticize about the Spartan regime when he discusses it in chapter 9 of book II. His criticisms include the Spartans' lax treatment of their women (1269b10 ff.), the way property is distributed in the regime (1270a10 ff.), and various aspects of three different Spartan offices—that of the overseers, the senators, and the kings (1270b5 ff.). He also criticizes the way the common messes of the regime are arranged and the fact that the "entire organization of the laws is with a view to a part of virtue—the art of war [τὴν πολέμικήν]" (1271a25-35, 1271a40-b10).

Aristotle makes various criticisms of the Spartan offices. He is critical of the fact that the office of the overseers is filled only from the people because it often results in very poor men, who can be bought, entering the office (1270b5-10). He agrees with the Spartan system of electing to the office from all, but criticizes the actual election process, without explaining it. Aristotle also criticizes the extent of the overseers' authority since they are of "an average sort" and says that they should judge according to what is written and the laws, not their own discretion. (1270b25-30) Apparently, because even the kings court the overseers on account of their power, the regime has changed from an aristocracy to a democracy (1270b10-15). Finally, Aristotle says that the behaviour of the overseers, which is "overly lax," conflicts

\(^{1}\)See 1333b10-20.
with the tendency of the city (1270b30). Aristotle is also critical of the office of the senators, which I will discuss later in the section. And he is critical of the Spartan kings, pointing out that they are not even trusted by their legislator as being good men. He also says that it would be better if kingship were not a hereditary office, as at Sparta, but that each king were judged according to his own life. (1271a15–25)

In book VII Aristotle engages in extended criticism of the Spartan regime’s orientation toward war. We learn in chapter 14 that it is because the Spartan regime aims at domination and war that it has so many admirers (1333b10–20). But according to Aristotle when a regime makes domination and war the end, serious problems result. One problem is that it makes it difficult to distinguish between despotic and other types of rule. And little prevents the aim of victory over and domination of neighbouring peoples from being applied within the regime itself. According to Aristotle, in such regimes “it is clear that any citizen who is capable of doing so must attempt to pursue the capability to rule his own city.” (1333b25–34a1) Another problem is that the part of virtue that the Spartans pursue—the art of war—is not really practiced for its own sake but for the sake of the good things that can be obtained by victory over and domination of others (1271b1–10 & 1334a35–b1; cf. 1333b15). Regimes

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2 Cf. what Aristotle says in chapter 2 of book VII, that “if the laws anywhere look to one thing, it is domination that all of them aim at” and that “among all nations that are capable of aggrandizing themselves, power of this sort is honoured” (1324b1–10).

3 In these regimes it would be difficult to avoid the view of justice that Thrasyvlas initially promotes in the Republic, that it is the rule of the stronger.
that make domination and war the end, then, are not long-lasting. Once victory is achieved they generally self-destruct. The citizens of such regimes do not know how to be at leisure and peace. (1271b1–5, 1333b20, & 1334a5–10)

These criticisms indicate that a regime will not be aristocratic by looking solely to the art of war even though it is a part of virtue according to Aristotle (1271b1). When Aristotle presents the Spartan regime as an example of a lesser aristocracy, then, he is not doing so in order to present an alternate type of aristocratic regime that is a feasible regime for cities, one that makes domination and war its end instead of ethical virtue. Aristocratic regimes are defined by virtue. The analysis of the “middling” regime in the previous chapter revealed that aristocratic regimes that are feasible regimes for cities are defined by ethical virtue. They are “lesser aristocracies” that look to wealth and the people in addition to ethical virtue. In the last chapter we identified the regime of books VII and VIII as the definitive example of this type of lesser aristocracy. The Spartan regime, in contrast, clearly does not make ethical virtue its end. Its rulers are not kalos k'agathos, they are not gentlemen (see 1270b35–71a5, 1271a20–25). This fact, plus Aristotle's criticism of the regime's orientation toward war, leads to the conclusion that the Spartan regime is not really aristocratic. We will see presently that it is actually a type of polity.

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4In book II we also find Aristotle saying that once the Spartans “had leisure they could place themselves in the hands of the legislator having been well prepared by the soldiering life—for it involves many of the parts of virtue” (1270a1–5).
As discussed above, the "part of virtue" that is pursued in the Spartan regime is not pursued for its own sake but for the sake of various other goods, including, it turns out, wealth. Wealth is actually a surreptitious end of the Spartan regime. A significant reason why, according to Aristotle, is because the Spartan women have not been properly educated. (1269b20) Mismanagement of the payment of taxes has also led to Spartan greediness (1271b10–15). There are in fact great disparities in wealth among the Spartans, the immediate cause of which is poorly handled succession laws. The disparities in wealth affect citizenship in the regime. (1270a15 ff. & 1271a25–35)

Questions arise, then, regarding the extent to which the Spartan regime is an oligarchic regime. But the people share in the regime through the office of the overseers. As discussed above, it is filled from the people, and Aristotle says that it makes them satisfied with the regime. (1270b5. 15–25) The Spartan regime, then, could be said to look to wealth and the people. We have seen that it does not look to ethical virtue. It could, therefore, be said to be a type of polity. And in fact Aristotle presents it as a polity in chapter 9 of book IV. He presents it specifically as an example of a well-mixed polity, i.e., a polity that can be spoken of as either a democracy or an oligarchy (1294b10–15). When Aristotle initially defines polity in the Politics he says that those possessing arms share in the regime and that the warrior element is most authoritative in it (1279a35–b5). The Spartan regime, then, seems to be an example of the type of polity that is based on those possessing arms.

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But if the Spartan regime is actually a polity why does Aristotle also present it as an example of an aristocratic regime in chapter 7 of book IV (and in chapter 7 of book V)? For at least two reasons. One is that it alerts us to the important role played by the art of war in aristocratic regimes. Although Aristotle is very critical of the Spartan regime aiming solely at war and domination, he nonetheless presents the art of war as a part of virtue, as we have seen (1271b1; see also 1324b13—Ross & 1325a5). He also says that the "soldiering life ... involves many of the parts of virtue" (1270a1–5). Aristocratic regimes are defined by the presence of virtue. Aristotle's use of the term "virtue" in relation to the art of war, then, implies that it—in a properly subordinate role—is an important part of aristocratic regimes that are feasible regimes for cities. Military considerations certainly play an important role in the aristocratic regime of books VII and VIII (see e.g., 1330b18 ff.). They do so most significantly in the fact that the rulers of the regime come from those who have been warriors (1329a5–15 & 1332b35–40). This may be at least partly the case because "one who is going to rule finely should first have been ruled" (1333a1; cf. 1277a16–18—Ross). A different reason why the rulers come from those who have been warriors is to prevent factional conflict and revolution (1329a5–10 & 1332b25–40). The military has a prominent role in the regime of books VII and VIII, then, not only for the purpose of dealing with neighbouring peoples (1333b38–34a1) and the subject inhabitants of the city, but also for the purpose of governing relations
between citizens (cf. 1322a34–37—Ross & 1283a15–20).

Another, and related, reason why Aristotle presents the Spartan regime as an example of an aristocratic regime is that the regime allows those who are potentially the best possible rulers access to rule. As discussed in chapter 3, they would be human beings with desires beyond the necessary things, human beings who have the potential to be educated in ethical virtue, to be gentlemen. We see that this type of human being shares in rule at Sparta from Aristotle’s discussion of the office of the senate. For he says that the “gentlemen” are satisfied with the Spartan regime because the office of the senate is “a prize [δῆλον] of virtue” (1270b20–25).

Yet while the serious teaching regarding the reference to the senators as gentlemen is that the regime allows those who are potentially the best possible rulers access to rule, the reference is also something of a joke at the Spartans’ expense. For soon after Aristotle makes it clear that the Spartan senators are not exactly gentlemen: “Now if these were reasonable [or fair] [ἐπεισοδον] persons adequately educated with a view to the qualities of a good man, one would probably say [the senate] is advantageous to the city . . . [y]et when their education is such that even the legislator himself lacks trust in them as not being good men, it is not safe” (1270b35-71a1). Aristotle also criticizes the fact that those claiming to merit the office ask for it themselves. He says that the Spartan legislator has instituted this with the intention of making the citizens ambitious (literally “lovers of honours”), “for no one would ask for office unless he
were ambitious.” 5 This intention has apparently governed the Spartan legislator’s ordering of the regime as a whole. But Aristotle points out that most voluntary injustices result from ambition or greed. (1271a5–15) Encouraging citizens generally to be ambitious, then, is at least questionable. Aristotle’s criticism of the senators asking for office themselves does not mean, however, that the naturally ambitious should not rule, because it is from the “lovers of honours” that gentlemen come. 6 But they should rule only if they have been properly educated. And they are not in Sparta, so that their rule threatens the regime.

The problem is not that the Spartans neglect the education of their children. At the beginning of his discussion of education in the best possible regime in book VIII, Aristotle says that the Spartans might be praised for earnestly looking to the education of their children and for doing so in common (1337a30). But he certainly does not praise them for the content of their education. Since the aim of their regime is war and domination, the Spartans educate their young with one intent in mind—to make them courageous. And as Aristotle is critical of the Spartans’ pursuit of war and domination so he is critical of their single-minded pursuit of courage or “manliness.”

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5 In the Republic, Socrates presents the Spartan regime as one of two examples of the timocratic regime, the regime directed toward honour (544c & 545a). That Aristotle agrees with this assessment of the Spartan regime is seen by his use of “Spartan regime” to represent the timocratic regime in the discussion of Socrates’ account of revolution at the end of book V (1316a15–20).

6 The relationship between honour and virtue is complex, but that there is a relationship is clear. Consider, for example, what Aristotle says in chapter 13 of book VIII. He connects virtue with noble actions, and says that “actions directed to honours and to what makes one well off [τὰς εὐπορίας] are most noble in an unqualified sense” (1332a5–15).
Aristotle not only criticizes the end of Spartan education but also points out that they even fail to achieve their end. He says that the Spartans produce "children resembling beasts," and goes on to say that courage accompanies not the most savage but "those with tamer and lionlike characters." (1338b9-35) And he points out that many nations "are ready to engage in killing and cannibalism" (1338b20), thereby implicitly equating the Spartans with various uncivilized peoples. In chapter 15 of book VII we learn that courage is one of the virtues of occupation (1334a20). But occupation is for the sake of leisure and the virtues of leisure do not include courage. They are, instead, philosophy, moderation, and justice. (1334a9-25) The Spartans are to be faulted, not for neglecting the education of their children, but for educating them incorrectly.

Our investigation of Aristotle's discussion of the Spartan regime has revealed that aristocratic regimes will be martial societies to some extent, but that they will not aim at war and domination. It has also revealed that aristocratic regimes need to properly educate the naturally ambitious, in ethical virtue, and allow them access to rule. Aristotle's praise of the Spartans for educating their children in common also suggests that aristocratic regimes need to have public education for all the citizens (including the female citizens, since he criticizes the character of the Spartan women in book II). But were the Spartans to pursue ethical virtue as rigorously as they do the art of war, the public education in question would be education in ethical virtue.
Thus ethical virtue would be the end of the regime as a whole, just as it is in the best regime of books VII and VIII. A reformed Sparta, then, would be akin to the latter, and not a regime that many cities could achieve. Like the regime of books VII and VIII, Sparta also has a subject farming population. And as we have seen, Aristotle engages in extensive criticism of Sparta in books VII and VIII.

Because a reformed Sparta would be like the regime of books VII and VIII we do not yet understand how the aristocratic characteristics identified above would apply to an aristocratic regime that would be a more feasible regime for cities than the best possible regime. The Spartan regime, however, is not the only regime presented as an example of a lesser aristocracy in chapter 7 of book IV. Aristotle also presents the Carthaginian regime as an example of a lesser aristocracy. It is Aristotle's discussion of the Carthaginian regime that provides the key to understanding the features of an aristocratic regime that is more feasible for cities than the best regime of books VII and VIII.

4.3 The Carthaginian Regime

In his discussion of various types of aristocratic regimes in chapter 7 of book IV, Aristotle presents the Carthaginian regime as an example of the lesser aristocracy that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people. In book II Aristotle discusses the Carthaginian regime as one of three well reputed existing regimes. The other two are
the Spartan and Cretan regimes. Unlike Sparta and Crete, however, which are Greek cities, Carthage is a barbarian city.

Aristotle's discussion of the Carthaginian regime reveals the characteristics of an aristocratic regime that is more feasible for cities than the best regime of books VII and VIII. The Carthaginian regime itself is not an example of this type of aristocratic regime, because it deviates from its aristocratic presuppositions. But in examining these presuppositions we understand the characteristics of the more feasible aristocratic regime. It is a regime that is very different from the regime of books VII and VIII. For as we will see, even if the Carthaginian regime did not deviate from its aristocratic presuppositions, it would still differ from the regime of books VII and VIII. The latter, therefore, is not the only aristocratic regime discussed in the Politics that is a feasible regime for cities. We will see that a regime can be aristocratic by looking to ethical virtue without making it the common end of the city, as the best regime of books VII and VIII does.

According to Aristotle, the Carthaginian regime is similar to the Spartan and Cretan regimes (1272b25). He says that most of its deviations are common to all these regimes. Those he chooses to discuss, however, concern the regime's deviations from the presuppositions of aristocracy and polity. These are deviations toward the people (or democracy) or toward oligarchy. (1273a1–5)

The Carthaginian regime deviates toward the people in that the people have au-
authority to approve and to change legislation, which diminishes the authority of the kings and the senators (1273a5–10). This does not mean, however, that having kings and senators is in itself an aristocratic presupposition. As we have seen, the presence of these offices in the Spartan regime did not make it aristocratic according to Aristotle. What may make the Carthaginian offices aristocratic is the way that they are chosen, or intended to be chosen. Prior to discussing the regime's deviations, Aristotle says that the kings are elected from those who are outstanding in some way, pointing out how this is better than the Spartan practice (1272b35–40).  

The Carthaginian regime deviates toward oligarchy concerning the authority of an office called the Committees of Five. Its oligarchic features are: that those on the committee elect themselves, that they elect to the office of the Hundred, and that their authority extends for a longer period of time than that of the other rulers (1273a10–15). The implication is that diminishing the authority of this office would make the regime more aristocratic, but Aristotle does not specify how this would be achieved. 

After discussing these deviations from the presuppositions of aristocracy and polity, Aristotle identifies some aristocratic features of the Carthaginian regime: that the overseers (or perhaps officials generally) are unpaid and not chosen by lot, and

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7 He also says that election to the office of the Hundred and Four, which is like the office of the overseers at Sparta, is according to merit (1272b30–35).  
8 Regarding the translation, cf. Walford, p. 76.  
9 This seems to be the same as the office of the Hundred and Four mentioned earlier (1272b30–35).
that all cases are tried by the same official bodies and not different cases by different ones (1273a15–20). But he goes on to specify how the Carthaginian regime particularly deviates from aristocracy to oligarchy. He says that it does so "in relation to a certain thought about which many agree, for they suppose that the rulers ought not be elected according to merit alone but also according to wealth, for it is impossible for one who is poor to rule finely and be at leisure." (1273a20–25) In saying that the Carthaginian regime particularly deviates from aristocracy, in not looking to merit alone in electing rulers, Aristotle identifies election according to merit (ἀρετή) as an aristocratic presupposition. (Aristotle initially says that the Hundred and Four are elected according to merit. [1272b30–35])

The Carthaginians make both merit and wealth criteria for election to office. Aristotle initially says that if election according to wealth is oligarchic and election according to virtue (ἀρετή) is aristocratic, the Carthaginian arrangement would be of a third sort (1273a25). But it turns out that making wealth a criterion for holding office subverts the aristocratic presupposition of the Carthaginian regime, making it essentially oligarchic (cf. 1273a25 & 1273b15). The greatest offices in Carthage, kingship and generalship, can be bought. Wealth is more honoured than virtue, and the city as a whole loves money. According to Aristotle, "whatever the authoritative element conceives to be honourable will necessarily be followed by the opinion of the

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10 Regarding this interpretation of who tries the cases see Walford 1853, p. 76; see also 1275b10.
other citizens." And he points out that when someone has bought an office, he will attempt to profit from it.11 (1273a35-b1)

In attempting to combine merit and wealth as criteria for election to office, the Carthaginians have ended up with an oligarchic regime. In the discussion of aristocracy in chapter 7 of book IV, Aristotle says that where election takes place not only according to wealth but also according to merit (αριστερόνδη), the regime is called aristocratic (1293b5-10). The Carthaginian example reveals that if such regimes are called aristocracies they would be so in name only and not in fact.

The Carthaginians make wealth a criterion for election to office because they think that it is impossible for the poor to be at leisure and rule finely. We have seen that Aristotle thinks that leisure is a requirement for virtue, in the discussion of the regime of books VII and VIII in chapter 3. But he does not agree with the Carthaginian arrangement. He criticizes this deviation from aristocracy as "an error of the legislator" and proposes something different to deal with the problem. He says that "from the beginning this is among the most necessary things to see, how the best are able to be at leisure and do nothing disgraceful, not only while ruling but also as private individuals." (1273a30) In speaking of the best human beings

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11 In chapter 8 of book V Aristotle says that the only way for democracy and aristocracy to exist together is for a regime to be arranged in such a way that it is impossible to profit from the offices (1308b30 ff.). Making the transfer of funds public and keeping good records are some of the arrangements required, but these are not sufficient. Aristotle also says that "to ensure profitless rule, there should be legislation assigning honours to those of good reputation." (1309a5-10)
as potentially engaging in disgraceful conduct, Aristotle means those who have the capacity to be the best human beings. In order to fulfill this capacity or potential at least three things are required. They need to be properly educated, they need to be able to support themselves, and they need to be able to satisfy certain desires for honour and recognition (see. e.g., 1309a10). The Carthaginians, in making wealth a criterion for election to office, remind us of those who think oligarchic polities are aristocracies because they mistake the wealthy for gentlemen.\footnote{This is discussed in section 3.2 in chapter 3.} The Carthaginians end up with rulers who honour wealth instead of virtue, and who do not truly merit ruling. They are not those who are “capable of ruling in the best way,”\footnote{\textit{Διὸ δεῖ τοὺς δυναμένους ἀρισταρχεῖν, τούτους ἀρχεῖν} (1273b5—Ross, see note to line 5).} nor those who are “reasonable [or fair]” (τῶν ἐπαινόων) (1273b5), as Aristotle clearly thinks they should be.

Aristotle’s criticisms of the Carthaginian regime’s deviations from aristocracy reveal that he thinks that a regime can be aristocratic if its rulers are elected according to merit and are those who actually deserve to rule. So far, the only clearly aristocratic regime of the \textit{Politics} that we have identified, apart from the simply best regime, is the best regime of books VII and VIII. We have seen that the rulers of this regime are chosen according to how well they exemplify the end of the regime,\footnote{Subject to the constraints discussed in chapter 3.} which is ethical virtue. We have also seen that such human beings are the best possible rulers of
cities according to Aristotle. So they clearly deserve to rule. And Aristotle presents desert (ἄξιον) as the criterion for distributing offices in the regime of books VII and VIII in chapter 4 of book VII (1326b10–15). But he does not say anything about the rulers of this regime being elected. This means that even if the Carthaginian regime did not deviate from the aristocratic presupposition of electing rulers according to merit, it would not be the same as the regime of books VII and VIII. There are other differences between the two regimes as well. Aristotle does not say that the “vulgar” are excluded from citizenship in Carthage or that the Carthaginians have slaves or subject inhabitants in Carthage itself. Neither does he say that the aristocratic presupposition of the regime is that virtue is the end in common of all the citizens. The aristocratic presuppositions of the Carthaginian regime, instead, concern the rulers—how they are selected and their fitness for rule. We have seen that Aristotle also criticizes at length various aspects of the ruling offices at Sparta, but in particular how the rulers are selected and their character.15 A regime can be aristocratic, then, if it is has the right kind of rulers. The best regime of books VII and VIII is not the only type of aristocratic regime that is a feasible regime for cities. Regimes that do not make virtue the end of the regime as a whole may also be aristocratic.

A regime will not be aristocratic by means of its rulers, however, merely through the provision that the rulers be elected according to merit. For if merit were defined

15See also Aristotle’s criticism of the office of the orderers in Crete in chapter 10 of book II (1272a25 ff.).
in terms of some sort of technical expertise, for example, one could end up with
efficient but vicious rulers (cf. 1309a32 ff.). What is required, in addition, is that
the potential rulers of the regime be educated in ethical virtue (and that the citizens
generally recognize this, to some degree, as part of what makes someone fit to rule).
The analysis in the previous chapter of the middle class regime revealed that it is
only by looking to ethical virtue, as defined in Aristotle’s *Ethics*, that a regime can
be aristocratic.

Aristotle’s discussion of the Carthaginian regime confirms that he thinks that its
rulers, or a substantial number of them, should be virtuous. In chapter 11 of book
II we find Aristotle not only saying that election according to merit (ARGIN) is
aristocratic, but also that election on the basis of virtue (AREV) is aristocratic. After
pointing out that the Carthaginian regime deviates from aristocracy in electing rulers
on the basis of wealth as well as merit, Aristotle says that if election according to
wealth is oligarchic and election according to virtue is aristocratic the arrangement
among the Carthaginians is of a third sort, because they look to both things in electing

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16 Consider, in this regard, Aristotle’s distinction between two types of good management (Eυνομία) in the examination of the nature of aristocracy in chapter 8 of book IV. Aristotle says there that good management is taken as a sign of aristocratic rule. But he criticizes this as insufficient because there are two types of good management: when the established laws of a particular regime are obeyed, and when the laws adhered to are finely enacted. As laws can be finely enacted in two ways—they are “the best of those possible” or they are the best simply—the presence of finely enacted laws does not necessarily settle the question of whether a regime is aristocratic. (1293b40–94a5)

17 Education in ethical virtue would be required not only to have rulers who are self-controlled and well-disposed to the regime, but also to have true leaders. For example, part of the reason why the virtue of magnanimity is praiseworthy is “because the city needs men who are born to command and who know that they are born to command” (Strauss 1978, 27).
rulers (1273a25). In this second reference to an aristocratic mode of election, virtue (ἀρετή) replaces merit (ἀρετινδή). Aristotle thus points to the fact that the rulers, or a substantial number of them, need to be virtuous in order for the regime to be aristocratic. But his use of virtue in the second case does not mean that Aristotle thinks that the actual criterion for election should be virtue per se. If he did think this there would be no point to saying that election according to merit is aristocratic.\textsuperscript{18}

In addition, Aristotle qualifies the statement that election on the basis of virtue is aristocratic by introducing it with "if." There is clearly a big difference between saying that we are going to elect those who will make the best rulers and saying that we are going to elect the most virtuous citizens as rulers. The former allows for a latitude in the election of the rulers that the latter does not, a latitude required in regimes where citizenship is not as restricted and the citizens not as strictly educated as in the regime of books VII and VIII.\textsuperscript{19}

Aristotle also points to the fact that the rulers need to be virtuous when he says that the law that rulers be elected according to wealth as well as merit, makes wealth something more honoured than virtue (1273a35). The law does this because the wealthy, and therefore the rulers, will tend to be those who honour wealth. And

\textsuperscript{18}Since the broadest meaning of virtue (ἀρετή) in Greek is "excellence" the difference between it and ἀρετινδή (merit), whose root is ἄρετος or "best," may not initially be all that clear. It becomes clear by considering the connection, in Aristotle's political thought, between virtue and the ethical or moral virtues (cf. 1260a25).

\textsuperscript{19}Cf. Aristotle's discussion in chapter 9 of book V of the qualities that rulers should possess, which include virtue, and how they are more or less important according to the requirements of particular offices (1309a32-b10).
what the rulers honour will affect the entire city: "whatever the authoritative element conceives to be honourable will necessarily be followed by the opinion of the other citizens" (1273a35–40). Aristotle concludes that "where virtue is not honoured above all, there cannot be a securely aristocratic regime" (1273a40–b1). His discussion reveals, however, that it is the rulers who need to honour virtue above all in an aristocratic regime that is more feasible for cities than the best regime of books VII and VIII.

When Aristotle says, then, that electing rulers according to merit is an aristocratic presupposition, he means that it is so if those who are actually elected as rulers (or a significant number of them) are ethically virtuous or gentlemen. In order to obtain gentlemen as rulers, a regime would need to educate the potential rulers in ethical virtue. And since those with the potential to rule in the best way could come from different classes in the city, the education has to be accessible to all according to merit. The regime would also require public education for the citizens generally, an education which makes the advantages of the regime clear and which allows them to recognize, to some degree, those who would be the best rulers of their city.

We have seen that prior to discussing how the Carthaginian regime particularly deviates from its aristocratic presupposition Aristotle identifies two aristocratic features of the regime. These are that the overseers (or perhaps officials generally) are unpaid and not chosen by lot, and that all cases are tried by the same official bodies.
(1273a15). The latter feature implies that it is only the elected rulers who should have authority in the regime. In chapter 1 of book III, Aristotle presents the Carthaginian regime as an example of regimes without popular assemblies and juries (1275b5-15). Aristotle's identification of unpaid overseers as an aristocratic feature needs to be reconciled with his criticism of how the Carthaginians ensure their rulers have leisure, i.e., by electing only the wealthy as rulers. By identifying the lack of pay as an aristocratic feature, Aristotle implies that providing pay will lead to the unfit trying to become rulers. Yet, rulers do need leisure. So providing pay for the rulers seems to be a requirement if the criterion for election to ruling office is to be merit alone. And there are likely to be many different ways of ensuring that the rulers have leisure, without making the financial remuneration of ruling too attractive to the unscrupulous. For example, one could require that the rulers be chosen only from those who have established themselves in some other career, and who would be remunerated to the same amount while ruling. Or one could create some sort of hierarchical system of offices, including military ones, which would provide support, and require that the potential rulers occupy the subordinate offices before being considered for election to the authoritative offices.20 And since education in the regime is public, perhaps service as teachers could serve a similar function. In addition to these aristocratic features, Aristotle's criticisms of the Committees of Five in Carthage—that they elect

20Cf. 1273b15, where Aristotle says that "in military and maritime matters ... ruling and being ruled extends through practically everything."
themselves to office and elect to the office of the Hundred—imply that the electors in an aristocratic regime cannot be restricted to some few.

To conclude, Aristotle's presentation of the Carthaginian regime as an example of a lesser aristocracy and his discussion of it in book II reveals that it is not necessary for a regime as a whole to aim at virtue in order for it to be aristocratic. A regime can be aristocratic without making virtue the end of the regime as a whole if it has rulers who are capable of ruling in the best way. if it has gentleman as rulers that is. In the discussion of the lesser aristocracies in chapter 7 of book IV Aristotle says that in cities that "do not make virtue a common concern there are still certain persons who are of good reputation and held to be reasonable [or fair] [ἔπαινεῖζε]" (1293b10). If good reputation is based on wealth and citizens chosen for political office on that basis. one is not going to get an aristocratic regime. But if those of good reputation in the regime are virtuous, one can have an aristocratic regime that is a more feasible regime for cities than the best regime of books VII and VIII. The most important means of achieving it is to choose rulers by election according to merit and to educate the potential rulers of the regime in ethical virtue.

4.4 Aristocratic Modes

There are other references to aristocracy in books IV and VI of the Politics that connect education and election with aristocracy, and show that aristocratic regimes
that are more feasible for cities than the best regime of books VII and VIII are mixed regimes closely related to polity. In chapter 15 of book IV Aristotle associates aristocracy with the rule of the educated (rather than the virtuous) (1299b20–25). We have seen that the more feasible aristocratic regime needs to educate potential rulers in ethical virtue, but that the rulers will not be elected to office on the basis of virtue but rather according to the more general criterion of merit. Education is also connected with aristocracy in a different way in chapter 15. For Aristotle says that offices responsible for the management of children and of women are aristocratic ones (1300a1–5; cf. 1260b10–15).

At the end of book VI the same offices appear in a list of offices that Aristotle says are peculiar to cities that “enjoy greater leisure and are more prosperous, and which in addition take thought for orderliness [εὐχοσμίας].” The implication is that such cities are aristocratic. Aristotle confirms that they are by subsequently saying that another office peculiar to these cities, that of the “law guardian,” is aristocratic. In addition to offices for the management of women and of children and the office of the law guardian, these cities have an exercise official and offices connected with gymnastic and Dionysiac contests and other such spectacles. (1322b35–a5) Excepting matters connected with exercise and gymnastic contests in relation to military training, the

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21 He does so in a discussion of whether offices vary according to regimes. He asks whether different regimes need the same offices (differing on account of the nature of the office holders), or whether different regimes have different types of offices. (1299b20–30)
offices just mentioned have to do with things associated with leisure. They are also activities in which citizens can participate in two ways: as actual participants or as spectators. The implication is that aristocratic regimes need to organize such events for their citizens.

Aristotle connects election with aristocracy in several places in book IV. In chapter 9 of book IV Aristotle discusses how to create polity. And he says that "It is aristocratic and political [πολιτικὸν] ... to take an element from each—from oligarchy making offices elected, from democracy not on the basis of an assessment" (1294b10). The combination would be election where the field of candidates is not restricted on the basis of assessments, i.e., of certain property qualifications. In chapter 9 Aristotle presents the Spartan regime as an example of a well-mixed polity, i.e., a polity that can be spoken of as either a democracy or an oligarchy (1294b10-15). The role of election in the regime is used as evidence by both those who argue that the regime is a democracy and by those who argue that it is an oligarchy. The former interpret popular election of the Spartan senators as a democratic feature of the regime. The latter see as oligarchic the fact that all the offices are chosen by election and none by lot. (1294b25-30) Since Aristotle does not say elsewhere that Spartan elections were

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22In the discussion of Sparta in book II, Aristotle says that the senators ask for office themselves (1271a5-10). This is not incompatible with the people electing them. In liberal democracies, for example, political leaders put themselves forward for office, while the people ultimately determine whether they will actually rule, by election. In book II, however, Aristotle criticizes the fact that the senators ask for office themselves, saying that "the one worthy [τὸν ἀξίον] of the office should rule whether he wishes to or not" (1271a10).
based on assessments, those who see election as oligarchic are not doing so on that basis. Perhaps, then, election can satisfy those with both democratic and oligarchic sympathies, while actually being an aristocratic feature of a regime (so long as it is based on merit).23 The discussion of Sparta in chapter 9 also reveals that public education is considered to be a democratic feature of regimes (1294b20–25). If it is the right kind of education, this would be an example of an aristocratic feature that satisfies democrats.

Aristotle also connects election with aristocracy at the end of book IV, where he discusses the authoritative parts of the city and various modes of deciding who will hold these positions. The authoritative parts include not only the offices but also the part that “deliberate[s] about common matters” and the adjudicative part (1297b35–98a1). The various modes have to do with whether the rulers are chosen by election or by lot, the extent of their authority, and who chooses them and who they are chosen from. Aristotle’s description of these modes has a dry and somewhat unreal quality. To really understand what the discussion means, one would have to think about why he presents it in this manner. For our immediate purpose, however, it is sufficient to identify the modes that he connects with aristocracy.

Aristotle discusses the deliberative element in chapter 14. With respect to it he

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23The other oligarchic example that Aristotle mentions, “a few [having] authority over cases of death and exile” (1294b30), is akin to an aristocratic feature of the Carthaginian regime, that all cases are tried by the same official bodies.
says that for all to have authority in some matters and officials in others, with the
latter being chosen by election or by lot is characteristic of aristocracy or of polity
(1298b1–5). He also says that for persons chosen by election to have authority in some
matters and persons by lot in others is characteristic of an aristocratic regime (or of
an aristocratic polity; the term is πολιτείας ἀριστοκρατίας) (1298b5–10). In chapter
15 Aristotle discusses offices, and he says that some selecting from all, and at times all
from some, by means of election is aristocratic (1300b1). (Aristotle also discusses some
modes concerning offices that are characteristic of an aristocratic polity: some offices
being selected from all and others from some, and some being chosen by election and
others by lot [1300a40–b1].)24 Aristotle discusses the adjudicative part of the regime
in chapter 16. He says regarding it that for those judging to be chosen partly from
all and partly from some is characteristic of aristocracy and of polity (1301a10–15).

In discussing the deliberative element, Aristotle links the election of officials with
aristocracy, although one might interpret him as linking election and lot with both
aristocracy and polity. But when he discusses offices specifically, in chapter 15, what
is unambiguously aristocratic is to choose them by election alone.

The modes Aristotle identifies as aristocratic divide authority between “some” and
“all.”25 Aristotle does not specify who the some and all are. In discussing the deliber-

24 “Aristocratic polity” is the translation of πολιτείαν ἀριστοκρατίας. Mansfield (1984), translates
it as “political aristocratically” (186).

25 In the case of the offices the authority of all in aristocratic regimes may be limited to playing a
role in choosing the rulers. With respect to the adjudicative part of the regime “all” may not even
ative element, however, he says that "all [deciding] concerning all is characteristically popular" (1298a10; see also 1298b30, 1300a30, 1301a10). And he says that "having some [decide] in all matters is oligarchic" (1298a30; see also 1300b1, 1301a10). The people will share in rule in regimes with aristocratic modes. And the "some" who share in rule may include the wealthy. Regimes with aristocratic modes of governance may be similar to polities. But if the wealthy do share in rule on the basis of wealth alone in an aristocratic regime, it will not be because the regime makes wealth a criterion for election to office, as our discussion of the Carthaginian regime has revealed. The "some" sharing in rule cannot be dominated by those whose sole claim to rule is wealth, if the modes discussed are to be truly aristocratic. We have seen that in order for a regime (that is a feasible regime for cities) to be aristocratic it must look to virtue in addition to wealth and the people. It must do so either by making virtue the end of the regime as a whole or by having the virtuous among its rulers. Some significant portion of the "some" who have authority according to aristocratic modes, then, must be the virtuous. Aristotle implies as much by connecting aristocracies with the rule of the educated and by referring to the virtuous as an example of the "some" from whom officials can be selected in chapter 15 (1299b20–25 & 1300a15).

The preceding references in books IV and VI, which connect education and election with aristocracy, provide more evidence for the conclusion we arrived at by examining play a role in choosing the judges, since Aristotle does not discuss who chooses them.
the Spartan and Carthaginian regimes, that there is an aristocratic regime that is a more feasible regime for cities than the best regime of books VII and VIII. In the next section I will summarize what we have learned about this regime, and begin to discuss an apparent problem with interpreting it as the aristocratic regime that is fitting for most cities.

4.5 The More Feasible Aristocratic Regime

The more feasible aristocratic regime does not make virtue the end of the city as a whole as does the best regime of books VII and VIII. Its citizens, therefore, can pursue different ways of life, unlike the citizens of the latter regime. And those who are not educated to ethical virtue can still share in rule as part of the people and perhaps also on the basis of wealth. Because the people and the wealthy will be citizens, apart from considerations of their virtue, and will share in rule to some extent, wealth and the people will play a more obvious role in this regime than in the regime of books VII and VIII. But the more feasible aristocratic regime, unlike the middle class regime, does look to virtue. It would not be an aristocratic regime if it did not. It looks to virtue by means of its rulers, a substantial number of whom will be practitioners of ethical virtue, or gentlemen. And although the regime does not make ethical virtue the end of all its citizens, the character of the rulers will affect what the other citizens look up to.
We understand more about the way of life of most of the citizens of the more feasible aristocratic regime by considering Aristotle's depiction of the middle class in chapter 11 of book IV. At the beginning of the chapter Aristotle not only poses the question of the regime that is best for most cities but also the question of the way of life that most human beings can share in (1295a25–30). As discussed in chapter 3, the middle class regime is not the regime that is best for most cities. In the next section of this chapter we will see that the more feasible aristocratic regime is. But Aristotle's overt presentation, in chapter 11, of the middle class regime as the regime that is best for most cities, reveals some key aspects of the way of life that is feasible and best for most human beings, the way of life that most of the citizens of the more feasible aristocratic regime will lead.26 This is to live in a stable regime with a moderate amount of wealth and some share in rule. And it is to live moderately and justly in a sense, but not in the sense that gentlemen are moderate and just.

Specific characteristics of the more feasible aristocratic regime include education in ethical virtue for the potential rulers of the regime, which is accessible to all according to merit. Public education for the citizens generally is also required, which teaches them the advantages of their regime and allows them to recognize gentlemen, to some degree, as the best possible rulers. The rulers of the regime must be chosen by election according to merit. The criterion for election will not be virtue specifically. The more

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26 Another reason for this presentation is discussed in section 3.3.2 in chapter 3.
feasible aristocratic regime will also be a martial society to some extent, as discussed in section 4.2. And it will be a mixed regime, a regime that looks to virtue, the people, and wealth. The regime looks to virtue by means of its rulers and their influence on the regime. It looks to the people through the people electing the rulers and perhaps sharing to some extent in deliberation. The people also share in the regime by being citizens, unlike the situation in the regime of books VII and VIII. In addition, since the rulers are elected according to merit and the education of the potential rulers is open to all on the same basis, some of the rulers would come from the people. The regime looks to wealth through the wealthy being citizens, and perhaps having some share in rule on the basis of wealth alone. But it also looks to wealth on account of the necessity of leisure for those who are to be educated in ethical virtue and for the rulers while they are ruling. As well, many of the rulers will likely come from wealthy families. The more feasible aristocratic regime, then, is also an example of the lesser aristocracy discussed in chapter 7 of book IV that looks to wealth, virtue, and the people. But it is not the definitive example, which is the best regime of books VII and VIII.

The fact that the people and the wealthy are citizens and share in the regime means that the more feasible aristocratic regime will be similar to, and perhaps even look like, a polity. Consider what Aristotle says at the end of chapter 8 of book IV in this regard. Despite arguing in the chapter that oligarchic polities are not aristocratic
regimes, he concludes it by saying that aristocracies and polities "are not far from one another" (1294a25). In regimes that are already polities it may not be too difficult to introduce changes that would make the regime aristocratic. There would already be some recognition, for example, of the questionableness of both the wealthy's and the people's claim to rule. The potential of polities to be transformed into aristocratic regimes would explain Aristotle terming some of the modes he discusses at the end of book IV. aristocratic and characteristic of polity. It would also explain his saying at the end of chapter 9. after ostensibly discussing how to create polity, that he has now discussed how polity and the regimes named aristocracies should be established (1294b40). Most existing regimes, however, are not polities but democracies and oligarchies. If they cannot be easily changed into polities, even though there is a more feasible aristocratic regime than the best regime of books VII and VIII, it would not be an aristocratic regime that is fitting for most cities. There would not be a practical aristocratic regime. And Aristotle's concern for virtue in the Politics would still be more or less separate from his concern for practical political matters.
4.6 Democracies, Oligarchies, and the Practical Aristocratic Regime

In book IV we see that most existing regimes of cities are democracies and oligarchies according to Aristotle. At the beginning of the book he tells us that when it comes to assisting existing regimes, one must know how many kinds of democracies and oligarchies there are (1289a5. 20. & 1289b10). And in chapter 11 of book IV Aristotle says that "... most regimes are either democratic or oligarchic" (1296a20). As we have seen, Aristotle thinks that those speaking about regimes should be able to assist existing regimes: "one ought to introduce an arrangement of such a sort that they will easily be persuaded and be able to participate in it ... out of those that exist" (1289a1). In the previous chapter I discussed how Aristotle intimates, in chapters 11 and 12 of book IV, that the best regime of books VII and VIII is to be an aristocratic standard for existing regimes. It is clearly the standard for the more feasible aristocratic regime identified in this chapter, since the latter is defined by having gentlemen among its rulers. If the regime of books VII and VIII is also the standard for existing regimes, i.e., for what are mostly democracies and oligarchies, the more feasible aristocratic regime would be a feasible regime for most cities. With this in mind, I shall now examine Aristotle's discussion in chapters 12 and 13 of book IV more closely.
In chapter 11 of book IV Aristotle argues that the regime based on the middling human beings is the best regime. We have identified this regime as the regime that is based on and ruled by gentlemen, the definitive example of which is the best regime of books VII and VIII. In chapter 11 Aristotle says that regarding the other regimes, i.e., the different types of democracies and oligarchies, those that are closer to the best regime are better than those that are not. The exception is when one is judging “with a view to a presupposition,” in which case a regime that is closer to the “middle” may not be what is advantageous for a particular city:27 (1296b1-10) Aristotle goes on to discuss which regimes are advantageous for which cities in chapter 12. He says that every city is made up of both “quality” and “quantity.” The former includes freedom, wealth, education, and good birth. The latter refers to “the preeminence belonging to the multitude.” (1296b13-15) Whether a city should be an oligarchy or a democracy depends on whether the quality of the well off and the notables is greater than the preeminence in quantity of the poor:28 (1296b20-30)

But regardless of whether an oligarchy or a democracy is the most advantageous regime for a particular city, Aristotle says that the legislator should always take the middling human beings as his allies (προσλαμβάνειν τοὺς μέσους). He adds that if the

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27 Regimes based on a presupposition form one category of regimes that the science of the regimes should study (1288b25-30). By a “presupposition” Aristotle seems to mean something like the oligarchic view that those who contribute more money to the city should have more authority (see, e.g., 1280a25-30).

28 And the type of oligarchy or democracy that a city should be is determined by the type of group that predominates among the well off and notables or among the people (see 1296b25-30).
legislator "enacts oligarchic laws, he ought to aim at the middling sort; if democratic ones, he ought to attach these to the laws." (1296b35) Since we have ascertained that by the middling human beings Aristotle particularly means gentlemen, his advice to the legislator implies that an oligarchic or democratic regime could have gentlemen among its rulers. Thus it may be possible for a regime that appears to be an oligarchy or a democracy to actually be an aristocratic regime. And the more feasible aristocratic regime would be a feasible regime for most cities since most existing regimes are democracies and oligarchies.

The possibility of an oligarchy or a democracy actually being an aristocratic regime would explain why the discussion in chapter 12, which begins by examining what types of regimes are advantageous for particular cities, ends up considering the regime in which the middling human beings predominate. After advising the legislator to take the middling human beings as his allies, Aristotle discusses why a regime in which they predominate is lasting (1296b35–a5). And in chapter 13 of book IV, Aristotle continues to discuss a mixed regime and not different types of oligarchies and democracies as one might expect from the beginning of chapter 12. After considering various sophistic devices used in democracies and oligarchies, Aristotle speaks of the wish to have a just mixture (1297a35), and turns to a discussion of polity.29 He ends chapter 13 by listing the subjects he has discussed in book IV, including the

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29 In the course of this discussion he refers to the Malians, who elected those serving as soldiers to their offices (1297b10–15).
regime that is best for most cases (1297b25–30). By doing so, he seems to confirm that a regime in which the middling human beings predominate but do not rule exclusively—the more feasible aristocratic regime in other words—is a feasible regime for most cities. The more feasible aristocratic regime, then, appears to be a model for different types of oligarchies and democracies and not just for polities.

We see how the more feasible aristocratic regime can serve as a model for existing regimes by examining the nature of the regimes that are known as democracies and oligarchies. For it turns out that they exhibit an amazing variety when it comes to how rule is actually distributed in the regime. We learn, for example, that there are democracies with offices “filled on the basis of assessments” (1291b35, see also 1292b25–30); that a lack of revenues restricts the number of those who share in certain types of democracies (1292b30–40); and that a type of oligarchy has such a low assessment that there is “a multitude of persons in the governing body” (1293a10–15). Regimes based on a presupposition of democracy or oligarchy, then, may actually be polities or very close to polity; or, they may be made more like polities without destroying the governing presupposition of the regime (cf. 1292b10–15). We have seen that polities are potentially aristocratic regimes. Democracies and oligarchies too, then, are potentially aristocratic regimes. This means that the teaching regarding the more feasible aristocratic regime is as applicable to democracies and oligarchies, to most existing regimes that is, as it is to polities. We can conclude that the more
feasible aristocratic regime is a regime that is feasible for most cities. It is, therefore, the answer to the question raised at the beginning of chapter 11 of book IV. of what regime is best for most cities. There is a practical aristocratic regime according to Aristotle. By ascertaining the existence of this type of aristocratic regime we see that Aristotle's concern for the best regime and virtue in the *Politics* is not separate from its most practical concerns. And we can say that Aristotle's political thought is concerned with the improvement and reform of existing regimes from an aristocratic perspective.

The preceding analysis, that polities are potentially aristocratic and that oligarchies and democracies can actually be polities while appearing otherwise, puts book VI of the *Politics* in a new and important light. For its subjects are: first, the different types of democracy and the regime “opposite” it (1316b35 & 1317a10–15); and second, how various modes can be mixed to obtain hybrid regimes. According to Aristotle, the “aggregates of all the modes that have been spoken of must also be investigated.” Mixing the modes leads to hybrid regimes, such as oligarchic aristocracies and polities that are more democratic. Aristotle explains that there are

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30 It also explains why, in chapter 9 of book III, we find Aristotle connecting the city *per se* with virtue (1280b5).

31 An indication of the questionable status of book VI in the literature is Lord’s view that the book may be incomplete (Lord 1984, 15). In an introductory text on the *Politics*, R.G. Mulgan points out that books V and VI of the *Politics* have often been unjustifiably neglected. Yet almost the entirety of his subsequent analysis concerns book V. When he does discuss book VI, it is to point out that Aristotle’s advice on ameliorating democracies and oligarchies is “unreal and unconvincing” because the regimes will be different as a result (Mulgan 1977, 134).
conjunctions which should be investigated, but at present have not been investigated." He provides two examples of how oligarchic and aristocratic modes can be combined with respect to the authoritative parts of the city. (1316b35-17a5) The second subject of book VI, hybrid regimes, reminds us of Aristotle’s discussion at the end of book IV, which concerns various ways of arranging the authoritative parts of the city. If democracies and oligarchies can be made into aristocratic regimes, the subject of hybrid regimes needs to be addressed somewhere in the Politics.

It is not obvious that Aristotle addresses the question of how various modes can be combined to form hybrid regimes in book VI.32 But if we examine the type of democracy that is presented as the best and other parts of Aristotle’s discussion, we see that he does indeed address this question. The regimes that are presented, while based on a presupposition of democracy or oligarchy, are in fact mixed or hybrid regimes. For example, in discussing how equality should be achieved in a democracy, Aristotle proposes a method whereby the poor will not automatically dominate the rich because they are the majority (1318a1-40). This is to produce in essence a polity.

In the best democracy, which is based on farming or herding peoples (1318b6-10), Aristotle advises that office-holders be elected according to assessments or the capacity to rule (1318b25-30).33 In this way “The offices will always be in the hands

32 Lord, for example, thinks that Aristotle does not (Lord 1984, 265).
33 "... or else to elect none on the basis of assessments, but rather capable persons [άλλα τούς δυναμένους]" (1318b30).
of the best persons, the people being willing and not envious of the respectable [or reasonable] \( \tau οι \zeta \rho επ\text{π}α\zeta\varepsilon\sigma\varepsilon\nu \), while the arrangement is satisfactory for the respectable [or reasonable] and notable. For these will not be ruled by others who are their inferiors, and they will rule justly by the fact that others have authority over the audits.” (1318b30–35) The example of the Carthaginian regime revealed that in order for the rulers to be the best, assessments. insofar as they restrict offices to the wealthy, cannot be the basis of selecting officials. Farming and herding multitudes are willing to have others rule because, not having much property and lacking necessary things, they would rather work than rule. For them, “working is more pleasant ... than engaging in politics and ruling, where there are not great gains to be gotten from office.” (1318b10–15) According to Aristotle, “the many strive more for profit than for honour” (1318b15). The crucial thing with respect to the character of the people in the best democracy seems to be not so much that they are actual farmers or herdsmen but the way of life that they follow—whether they are industrious and find the pursuit of their own economic well being sufficiently satisfying to make them uninterested in ruling. Of course they would not be satisfied with this if they thought the rulers were corrupt, which points to the necessity of having the rulers audited by others. This is necessary not only for satisfying the ruled (see 1318b15–20), but also to serve as a check on the rulers, since complete license is too great a temptation for human beings (1318b35–19a1). The best democracy, then, is a mixed regime, and in
the recommendation that its rulers be elected on the basis of individual capacity, it is similar to the practical aristocratic regime.

More evidence that mixed regimes are discussed in book VI is found in chapter 5. Aristotle makes many suggestions in this chapter for making the wealthy more satisfied with democracy, as well as to ensure that there is not extreme poverty among the multitude. He refers to Carthage as an example here; and lists approvingly the practices of the Tarentines, which include having offices chosen by election "so that they would be better governed." (1320a1–20b10) Aristotle, by means of both examples, points to the practical aristocratic regime.

Aristotle is particularly concerned with democracy in book VI. Is this because it is the most common regime?34 He does briefly discuss three types of oligarchy in chapter 6. The first is said to be "very close to so-called polity," and Aristotle advises that some of the better among the people always be brought into this regime (1320b20–25). This is again an example of a regime that is actually a mixed regime but which is under a particular presupposition, in this case oligarchy. Aristotle also discusses, in some detail, a different type of oligarchy in chapter 7. He begins by applying a different standard than the usual oligarchic one of assessments, namely, the type of arms.35 So that an oligarchy based on those possessing horses is one type—he calls

34Cf. Strauss 1978, 36.
35Aristotle does connect the type of arms to the wealthy and the poor, however. Horse-rearing, and therefore cavalry, is the preserve of the wealthy; the heavy-armed forces are "made up of the well off more than the poor"; whereas "[l]ight-armed and naval forces ... are wholly popular" (1321a10).
it a “strong oligarchy”—and one on the heavy-armed element, i.e., on the hoplites, is another. But in discussing how oligarchs can defend themselves against popular forces—those who are light-armed and those who make up the navy—he seems to speak of one oligarchy based on both the cavalry and the heavy-armed.\(^{36}\) (1321a5–25) In this case as well Aristotle speaks of how the multitude can be given a share in the governing body. One way is by choosing those who deserve (τῶν ἀξιῶν) sharing, as is done in Massilia, whether from within the citizen body or outside of it (or the city).\(^{37}\) (1321a25–30) The criterion of desert points both to the regime of books VII and VIII (see 1326b10–15), and to the practical aristocratic regime in which rulers are elected according to merit. And once again, we have an example of a regime that appears to be one thing, an oligarchy, while actually being a mixed regime, either a type of polity or an aristocratic regime.

Aristotle goes on to discuss how the people can also be reconciled to the regime in a less direct fashion, although this is not currently done. Aristotle says that nowadays those connected with oligarchies do not perform useful public services or “magnificent sacrifices” which reconcile the people to the rule of the few. The reason is because “they are in search of gain no less than honour,” so that “it is well to speak of

\(^{36}\)This implies a connection between this regime and aristocratic regimes, since in the discussion of the middling element in chapter 11 of book IV, Aristotle says that those who have to excess the goods of fortune or are overly deficient in them will least be commanders of a tribe or cavalry (see 1295b12—Ross & Walford 1853, 149).

\(^{37}\)Some manuscripts have this variant (see Ross 1957, 204; see also Walford 1853, 225).
them as small democracies.” (1321a30–b1) This is a strange way of conceiving of the rule of oligarchs—that they ought to pursue honour more than gain or profit: but it is not such a strange way of understanding the rule of the few (as various parts of the preceding investigation of aristocracy in the Politics have already implied).

“Oligarchy” literally means rule by the few. We have seen that those who are the best possible rulers of cities are few and come from the ranks of the lovers of honour.\(^3\)

In order to make aristocratic rule possible, such human beings, who have the desire and capacity to rule others, must be educated properly. Their understanding of what will satisfy them and bring them honour must be changed from what it is in most regimes. Instead of desiring to dominate and to rule as masters they must want to rule politically, and instead of wanting to pursue only war and its fruits, including wealth, they must want to be ethically virtuous. The oligarchy discussed in chapter 7 actually seems to be an aristocratic regime.

In book VI of the Politics, then, Aristotle not only shows that democracies and oligarchies can actually be hybrid regimes, but that they can be aristocratic regimes. The theme of explaining hybrid aristocratic regimes in book VI may be why in the last chapter of the book Aristotle discusses offices in greater detail (he previously discussed them in chapter 15 of book IV), since the practical aristocratic regime is defined by having virtuous rulers. In the chapter Aristotle distinguishes offices that

\(^3\)Aristotle’s discussion of the “oligarchy” of chapter 7 may also be intended to get us to think about possible connections between lovers of honour and lovers of wealth. Cf. Craig 1994, 78.
are most necessary, others that are also necessary but “higher in rank arrangement.” and ends by discussing offices peculiar to aristocratic regimes and the offices “under the direction of which election to the authoritative offices is made” (1322a30, 1322b35–23a5; emphasis added).

By understanding that regimes called democracies and oligarchies may actually be polities and, therefore, potentially aristocratic regimes, we have been able to see book VI of the Politics in a new light. We see that it is indeed concerned with hybrid regimes, and with hybrid regimes that are similar to the practical aristocratic regime.

4.7 Conclusion

By examining Aristotle’s discussion of the Spartan and Carthaginian regimes, along with references to aristocracy in books IV and VI, we ascertained that there is an aristocratic regime that is a more feasible regime for cities than the best regime of books VII and VIII. By seeing the similarities between it and polities and by understanding that regimes called democracies and oligarchies may actually be polities, we have ascertained that the more feasible aristocratic regime is a regime that is feasible for most cities. It is a practical aristocratic regime. There is a regime, therefore, that is “aristocratic and finely constituted but fitting for most cities,” which Aristotle tentatively makes part of the subjects he will be studying subsequently in the Politics, in chapter 2 of book IV.
The best regime of books VII and VIII sets the standard for the practical aristocratic regime. As discussed in chapter 2, Aristotle explicitly presents the former as the best regime of the Politics. It sets the standard because the regime as a whole aims at producing and being ruled by the type of human being who must rule, to some meaningful degree, in the practical aristocratic regime. The latter regime, accordingly, must have education in ethical virtue for the potential rulers of the regime. The connection between Aristotle's concern for the best regime and virtue and his concern for practical political matters in the Politics is now clear. Understanding the existence and character of the practical aristocratic regime reveals that the teaching on the best regime and virtue in the Politics is not just meant to show what is possible in ideal circumstances or to apply to human beings privately. It is meant to affect the condition of existing regimes by showing legislators and others that the rulers of their regimes should be, as much as is possible, those who are ethically virtuous or gentlemen (cf. 1280b40–81a5).
Chapter 5

Conclusion

The preceding investigation has revealed that there are different types of aristocratic regimes according to Aristotle. What they have in common, what makes them all aristocratic, is virtue.

One of these regimes is aristocracy in the strict sense of the term. It is a very different regime from the best regime discussed in books VII and VIII of the Politics. The regime that is aristocracy in the strict sense is ruled by those who are best simply on the basis of virtue, by philosophers in other words. According to Aristotle it is the simply best regime. But it is neither a desirable nor a feasible regime for actual cities. Cities will not be ruled by philosophers nor can they make philosophy their aim. Aristotle's discussion of the simply best regime and the virtue that defines it is separate from his discussion of practical political matters. But he only quietly
presents the teaching on the simply best regime in the *Politics*.

Aristotle explicitly presents the regime of books VII and VIII as the best regime of the *Politics*. His teaching on aristocracy reveals that it is not aristocracy *per se*. It is not ruled by those who are outstanding on the basis of virtue, nor does it make philosophy its aim. (Although philosophy in some sense does play a role in the regime.) But the best regime of books VII and VIII is still an aristocratic regime according to Aristotle. He in fact presents it as the most aristocratic regime next to the simply best regime. It is such because it makes ethical virtue the end in common of its citizens and it is ruled by those who exemplify this virtue, i.e., by gentlemen. It has the best rulers that a practicable regime can have. The best regime of books VII and VIII, unlike the simply best regime, is a feasible regime for cities. (It is most precisely defined as the best possible regime.) But it is not a regime that many cities could achieve or want to achieve. Ethical virtue is not easily attained. A regime can make it the end of all its citizens only by excluding many inhabitants of the city from citizenship. The best regime of books VII and VIII excludes farmers, artisans, labourers, and merchants from citizenship. It is not a practical regime.

If this were the extent of Aristotle's teaching on aristocracy in the *Politics*, the discussion of the best regime of books VII and VIII and the virtue that defines it, could still be interpreted as being separate from the discussion of practical political matters or what is useful for reforming existing regimes. But it is not. Aristotle intimates that
the best possible regime functions as an aristocratic standard for existing regimes. We see that it does by ascertaining the existence of another type of aristocratic regime in the Politics. It too is aristocratic because ethical virtue is part of the regime. But ethical virtue is part of it differently than in the best regime of books VII and VIII. Unlike the latter, it does not make virtue the end in common of all its citizens. Virtue is part of it, instead, by means of its rulers, a substantial number of whom are gentlemen. Having gentlemen as rulers will affect what the citizens in general look up to, and it will allow them to lead lives that are moderate and just in a sense. But most of the citizens will not and need not be ethically virtuous. Citizenship in the regime, then, need not be restricted to those who have the leisure to be educated in ethical virtue. This aristocratic regime is a regime that is feasible for most cities—it is a practical aristocratic regime. According to Aristotle, it is the best regime for most cities.

Aristotle’s discussion of the best regime of books VII and VIII and the virtue that defines it is, therefore, part of his discussion of practical political matters. The Politics is a coherent whole.¹ In calling the regime of books VII and VIII the best regime, Aristotle teaches that the end of human life should be virtue. We see how exactly he thinks that virtue can be part of commonly existing regimes by ascertaining the teaching on the practical aristocratic regime in the Politics.

¹Our investigation has also provided new evidence for the traditional order of the books of the Politics, and illuminated the role of book VI.
It is clear, then, that the teaching on aristocracy in the *Politics* provides a novel resolution of the question of the relationship between Aristotle’s concern for the best regime, virtue, and practical political matters. It thus reveals that existing regimes can be reformed according to Aristotle, and shows what the most important factors are in doing so. Aristotle’s political thought aims primarily at practical political matters. But we have also seen, through the teaching on the simply best regime, that it is not restricted to this end. The preceding investigation has also elucidated the meaning of virtue for Aristotle. He uses “virtue” in different ways in the *Politics*, and often in reference to individual virtues such as moderation and courage. But our analysis of the simply best regime and the middle class regime has shown that virtue, in any comprehensive sense, has only two meanings for Aristotle—ethical virtue or philosophic virtue. We have seen that their relationship with the city varies.

Ascertaining the meaning of aristocracy in the *Politics*, then, is not just some obscure scholarly exercise. It is of great significance for understanding both the work and Aristotle’s political thought in general. Yet the teaching on aristocracy is not something that Aristotle stresses. For example, he does not make it clear that he discusses two best regimes in the *Politics*, one of which is aristocracy in the strict sense and the other a lesser aristocracy. Nor does he clearly and methodically delineate the characteristics of the practical aristocratic regime. Why does Aristotle

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\[2\text{Cf. 1279a35–79b1.}\]
not make the teaching on aristocracy explicit?

The primary reason that he does not is in order to present the regime of books VII and VIII as the best regime of the Politics. An explicit discussion of aristocracy would make it clear that this regime is not the simply best regime. It would turn the focus of the Politics to the simply best regime ruled by philosopher-kings, and necessitate discussions that “are a task for a different kind of leisure.” The focus instead is on the regime of books VII and VIII as the best regime. Readers of the Politics must, therefore, take into account why this regime is the best regime. By doing so they will understand that for Aristotle, living well, which he makes the end of the city in chapter 9 of book III, ultimately consists in living according to virtue. His discussion of matters dealing with existing regimes, in books IV to VI of the Politics, all take place within this context. Inhabitants of democracies and oligarchies who are aware of Aristotle’s political teaching will know that their regimes are not the best possible regimes. If the legislators and rulers of these regimes are convinced by Aristotle’s account in both the Politics and the Ethics of what it is to live well and happily, their regimes will be improved. Furthermore, because Aristotle does not present the practical aristocratic regime as the definitive model for existing regimes, oligarchies and democracies can be improved without the necessity of changing their governing presuppositions.

By investigating Aristotle’s teaching on aristocracy in the Politics we understand
the significance of his concern for the best regime, virtue, and practical political matters, and the relationship between them. The primary aim of Aristotle’s political thought, unlike that of most of his predecessors, is to address practical political matters or what is useful for reforming existing regimes. Unlike the modern political philosophers, however, Aristotle does not abandon the question of what the best life is for human beings. The best way of life is the life in accordance with virtue. In the best case this means living as a philosopher and apart from the city, in this capacity. But unlike some of his predecessors Aristotle only quietly presents this teaching in the Politics. The virtuous life on which he focusses in the Politics is the life of ethical virtue. This is a way of life that can be part of the city. And Aristotle teaches that the best possible rulers of cities are those who are ethically virtuous or gentlemen. In refusing to abandon the question of the best life while addressing what is useful for reforming existing regimes, Aristotle’s political thought points to the following conclusion. The path to making the city as “one and common” as possible is to be found, not by restricting a regime’s aims to that which is clearly common to all human beings, such as the bodily passions, but by ensuring that those human beings who have the capacity and desire to live the best lives that are humanly possible are able to develop their potential and become an integral part of the city.
Chapter 6

Other Interpretations

6.1 Introduction

The preceding investigation of aristocracy in the Politics provides a novel interpretation of the relationship between Aristotle's concern for the best regime, virtue, and practical political matters in the Politics. In this chapter I will discuss how some influential or otherwise important commentators on Aristotle's political thought interpret this relationship and I will contrast their views with mine.¹

Their views fall into two broad categories. Some view Aristotle’s concern for the best regime and virtue in the Politics as separate from his concern for practical political matters. Others regard the concerns as all interconnected. The prevailing

¹I will not discuss how their work might otherwise illuminate his thought.
nineteenth and early twentieth century interpretation of the relationship between the concerns is that they are separate. I will begin by examining two influential exponents of this perspective, Werner Jaeger and Ernest Barker. I will then consider some contemporary analyses of Aristotle's political thought, by Robert C. Bartlett and Judith Swanson, that reflect it. At this point I will turn to interpretations that view the concern for the best regime, virtue, and practical political matters in the *Politics* as interconnected. I will first discuss the views of two different commentators on Aristotle who take direct issue with the Jaeger type of interpretation—William T. Bluhm and Mary P. Nichols. I will then show how two influential works, that do not directly address the question, present the concern for the best regime and virtue in the *Politics* as connected to the concern for practical political matters. These are *The Machiavellian Moment* by J.G.A. Pocock and *After Virtue* by Alasdair MacIntyre. Finally, I will discuss a recent work on Aristotle's political thought—*The Problems of a Political Animal* by Bernard Yack—that attempts to integrate the discussion of the best regime, virtue, and practical political matters in the *Politics*, but in fact ends up returning to the nineteenth and early twentieth century perspective that sees these concerns as separate.
6.2 The Interpretations

Werner Jaeger and Ernest Barker

According to the preceding investigation, Aristotle’s concern for the best regime of books VII and VIII and the virtue that defines it is part of his concern for practical political matters. The *Politics* forms a coherent whole. But this is not the view of the work that once prevailed. Nineteenth and early twentieth century scholarship on the *Politics* tends to see it as divided into two disparate parts, one consisting of the best regime and matters relating to it, including virtue, and the other consisting of matters relating to actual or existing regimes.²

An extreme exponent of this point of view is Werner Jaeger. He not only thinks that the *Politics* is divided into two very different parts, but that they could not have been written by the same man at the same point in time. He claims that “for centuries, ever since the *Politics* has been systematically studied, close critical examination has revealed difficulties that make it improbable, and in fact impossible, that the treatise as we have it was ever planned as a whole or sprung from a single creative act of the mind” (Jaeger 1948,³ 263). Jaeger argues that the discussion of the best regime in books VII and VIII, along with books II and III, belongs to an

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²As discussed in chapter 1, Machiavelli and Hobbes, in contrast, see the concern for the best regime, virtue, and practical political matters in the *Politics* as all interconnected; but detrimentally so. The preceding investigation points to a very different conclusion, as indicated at the end of the previous chapter.

³The work was originally published by Jaeger in German in 1923.
early Platonic and idealistic phase of Aristotle's development as a thinker (267-69, 273-75).\(^4\) Whereas books IV to VI of the *Politics*, in sharp contrast with the idealistic books, are empirical and have to do with *Realpolitik* (120, 263, 269, 271).\(^5\) They are a product of Aristotle's later development as a thinker, "[showing] no trace of the old Platonic spirit of constructions and ideal outlines" (269). Books IV to VI of the *Politics* have to do with the many different types of actual regimes and their disorders or "diseases" (263-64). The best regime is not any sort of standard in the discussion of regimes in these books according to Jaeger (270-71). It is a utopia, without practical political relevance, which "shows all too clearly that along this road the most one can attain to is a mere educational institution" (399). For Jaeger, Aristotle's attitude towards political reform is that of resignation—the most the philosopher can do is "contribute his superior knowledge of the conditions of each particular constitution to the correct treatment of political disorders as they arise" (400). In his interpretation of the *Politics*, Aristotle's concern for the best regime is separate from his concern for practical political matters.

Whatever concern there may be for virtue in the *Politics* is also separate from practical political matters. According to Jaeger, the *Politics* teaches that "civil society" is no longer a political force but "part of the permanent ethical make-up of

\(^4\)Jaeger thinks that these books were actually written as part of a complete work at this early stage (268-69).

\(^5\)Jaeger thinks book I was written as a general introduction to the *Politics* after books IV to VI were added to the pre-existing work (269, 271).
personality.” “Civil society” includes virtuous behaviour, since Jaeger means by it a society with “firm notions of education, demeanour, and urbanity.” (400) It henceforth exists in what we may call the private realm. Earlier in the work Jaeger more directly relates the discussion of the best regime to virtue (see pp. 275–82). And he says that in Aristotle’s later period, i.e., when books IV to VI of the Politics are written, “the ethics of the individual” is “practically completely separated” from politics (275: see also p. 276). To conclude, for Jaeger, Aristotle’s discussion of the best regime and virtue in the Politics is not connected to his discussion of practical political matters. He not only finds the subjects unrelated but thinks that they represent very different historical stages in Aristotle’s thought.

Jaeger represents the extreme case in this type of thinking, since he thinks that the Politics could not have been written as a complete work. But other traditionally influential scholars such as Ernest Barker also see the Politics as divided into two diverse parts. Barker disputes Jaeger’s argument that the Politics was written at different stages of Aristotle’s development; although prior to spending five years

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6 This is the case despite the fact that at the end of his analysis of the Politics Jaeger tries to argue that it is in the synthesis of the normative thought (of the supposedly older parts of the Politics) with the “sense of form capable of mastering and organizing the multiplicity of actual political facts” (of books IV to VI) that the “great, the new and comprehensive feature in Aristotle’s work” is to be found. Given his previous arguments, the case for this supposed new-found coherence of the Politics is extremely weak; not to mention that we find Jaeger basically arguing here that Aristotle’s early views were influenced by views that, according to him, only developed much later. (291–92)

7 Mary Nichols, in Citizens and Statesmen, mentions John Randall, Sabine, and W.L. Newman as other examples of this type of thinking (Nichols 1992, 87, 201: note 6).
translating the *Politics* he too thought similarly (Barker 1946, xli-xlvi).\(^8\) And he sees some connection between the discussion of the “ideal state” and Aristotle’s discussion of actual states (lili-llii). Yet he still distinguishes between the “idealistic” part of the *Politics*, i.e., books VII and VIII, and the “realistic” part, i.e., books IV to VI which deal with actual states and “political realities” (xliiv, xlivi, see also p. 157: note 2).

The preceding investigation provides a very different picture of the *Politics*. It does not consist of two incongruous parts, an early Platonic and idealistic part and a later empirical part, but is rather a coherent whole. We have seen that the best regime of books VII and VIII functions as an aristocratic standard for existing regimes, and that the virtue that defines it, i.e., ethical virtue, can be part of practical regimes. In fact, the best regime for most cities according to Aristotle is a regime that looks to virtue in this sense. Ethical virtue should not be merely a private matter. The discussion of the best regime and of virtue in the *Politics* cannot be separated from Aristotle’s discussion of practical political matters. Or to put it another way, the “idealistic” sections of the *Politics* are part of it precisely because of Aristotle’s “realistic” concerns. Aristotle’s attitude toward political reform is not that of resignation.

The preceding investigation also reveals a crucial point of agreement between Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle’s views on the character and rank of the philosophic life are the same as Plato’s. The teaching on the simply best regime in the *Politics*
reveals this point of agreement. But in marked contrast to Jaeger's views on where the "Platonic" sections of the *Politics* are to be found, we have seen that Aristotle leads us to this teaching in book IV of the *Politics*. According to Jaeger, book IV is part of the "empirical" non-Platonic section of the work. The conclusions arrived at in the preceding analysis, then, are very much at odds with the prevailing nineteenth and early twentieth century view of the *Politics* as divided into two incongruous parts.

**Robert Bartlett and Judith Swanson**

Something of the once dominant interpretation is reflected in some recent studies of the *Politics*, in that they separate Aristotle's concern for virtue from his concern for practical political matters. They separate these concerns because they make the argument that the teaching on virtue in the *Politics* is meant to apply to the private realm of human life. For example, Robert Bartlett argues that the concern for the best regime and virtue in the *Politics* really has to do with demonstrating the superiority of the philosophic life as the best life for human beings, and that this way of life exists in the private realm, having little or nothing to do with existing regimes (Bartlett 1994a, 151–52; Bartlett 1994b, 394, 400–1; Bartlett 1995, 159).

The preceding analysis, in contrast, makes the argument that virtue for Aristotle does not refer only to the virtue of philosophers, but also to ethical virtue. We have seen that in the *Politics* Aristotle teaches that philosophic virtue is the highest form
of virtue that man is capable of and that it exists apart from the city. But he only quietly reveals this teaching. Aristotle explicitly teaches that the best regime of books VII and VIII makes virtue the end in common of all its citizens. Upon analysis, this virtue turns out to be ethical virtue.\(^9\) We have seen that it can be a part of regimes that are more practical than the regime of books VII and VIII. It can be part of them not by existing in the private realm but by a substantial number of the rulers of these regimes being ethically virtuous or gentlemen.

This interpretation of the role of virtue in practical political life also contrasts with that argued by Judith Swanson in *The Public and the Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy*. Swanson presents the private realm as the true locus of virtuous activity according to Aristotle (Swanson 1992, 2). She interprets Aristotelian virtue as including both moral or ethical virtue and intellectual or philosophic virtue (133 ff.; 161–63, 193–99, 204–6). Swanson thinks that virtuous private activity can have a salutary effect on the public realm (3). Her work thus points to a connection between Aristotle's teaching on virtue, the best regime, and practical political matters. But this relationship is far from clear. Swanson's analysis does not clarify even the relationship between the best regime of books VII and VIII and virtue. For example, at one point she argues that in the best regime "civic virtue" is the same as moral virtue (134), but we find her arguing elsewhere that the household "promotes an as-

\(^9\)For a further comparison of Bartlett's interpretation with mine see section 3.3.4, note 27.
pect of unadulterated virtue which a regime cannot promote” (16). According to the preceding analysis, in contrast, the best regime as a whole cultivates ethical or moral virtue. Its households would vary in how well they achieve this standard, but they would not achieve a level of virtue superior to that promoted in the regime.

William Bluhm and Mary Nichols

Whereas Bartlett's and Swanson's works reflect the prevailing nineteenth and early twentieth century interpretation of the relationship between the best regime, virtue, and practical political matters in the Politics, other contemporary studies directly dispute this interpretation. In a short but significant article, William Bluhm takes direct issue with the view that the concern for the best regime and virtue in the Politics is separate from the concern for actual states (Bluhm 1962, 743-44). He argues that there is no dichotomy between Aristotle's discussion of the best regime and virtue on the one hand and his discussion of actual states, or practical political matters, on the other. Bluhm takes this position because he sees the best regime of books VII and VIII as only a more fully developed version of the polity discussed in book IV by Aristotle (744, 749, 750). Bluhm defines polity as a regime that combines oligarchy and democracy but that is dominated by the middle class (747).10 The aim of both the best regime and polity, according to Bluhm, is moral or ethical virtue

10Bluhm's "polity" is equivalent to the middle class polity in my analysis.
(747-49). Polity, however, is a practical regime. Bluhm describes it as an "actual" and "real" order or constitution (744, 750, 748). His analysis implies that it is actually the best practical regime, and that the best regime of books VII and VIII functions as a standard for it (see also p. 750).

In linking Aristotle's discussion of the best regime to his discussion of practical political matters through ethical or moral virtue, Bluhm's interpretation of how these concerns are connected is similar to mine. But there is a crucial difference. Bluhm thinks that polity aims at ethical virtue because the middle class that dominates it is itself ethically virtuous (747-49). He bases this interpretation on Aristotle's discussion of the middle class in chapter 11 of book IV. The only difference between polity and the best regime, according to Bluhm, is that it still has some inequalities due to the presence of rich and poor minorities; whereas in the best regime all the citizens "lead the middle class life of moral virtue" (749). In opposition to Bluhm's interpretation, I argue that Aristotle in fact only implies that the middle class is virtuous in chapter 11 of book IV, and that whatever "virtues" it may possess are not equivalent to ethical or moral virtue. The discussion in the chapter is meant to lead us, instead, to Aristotle's real teaching on how ethical virtue can be part of practical regimes. We have seen that a practical regime does not look to ethical virtue by having a large middle class but by being ruled by those who are ethically virtuous, or gentlemen. Such human beings will be few. Even an aristocratic polity will have
only a few citizens who are ethically virtuous.

Another similarity between Bluhm's analysis and mine is that he also argues that Aristotle presents the philosophic life as something apart from the city (746, 749, & 750). But Bluhm is not aware of the teaching on the simply best regime in the *Politics*. He does not see, therefore, the relationship between philosophy, virtue, and the best regime in the *Politics*. If he did he would not have to dismiss as "nonsense" (and as possibly consisting of an attack on Plato) two of Aristotle's references to aristocracy and kingship in the *Politics* (751-52). These are Aristotle's suggestion at the end of book III that the best regime is aristocracy or kingship, and his statement at the beginning of book IV that it is aristocracy and kingship and that he has already discussed it in the *Politics*. For as the preceding investigation of aristocracy reveals, the simply best regime is aristocracy and kingship and it is the regime ruled by those who are best simply on the basis of virtue, i.e., by philosophers. Despite some similarities, then, Bluhm's interpretation of the relationship between Aristotle's concern for the best regime, virtue, and practical political matters is very different from mine.

In a more recent work, *Citizens and Statemen*, Mary Nichols also argues that the *Politics* presents a unified teaching. She characterizes contemporary interpretations as falling into two camps. Nichols calls one the democratic and the other the aristocratic interpretation. She includes many, and perhaps incongruous, scholarly
interpretations in each group. But what she seems to mean by the democratic interpretation is the view that the *Politics* teaches that human fulfilment is to be found in political participation or citizenship that is egalitarian. Whereas in her view the aristocratic interpreters of the *Politics* limit whatever fulfilment that is to be found in politics to the few and, ultimately, do not even think that human fulfilment is to be found in politics but in philosophy. Nichols claims that her own interpretation of Aristotle brings together the "partial truths" that are found in these two perspectives.

According to Nichols, Aristotle gives the many a role in political rule because of their moral and intellectual virtue (Nichols 1992, 53, 65-66). This is one aspect of the "democratic" character of her interpretation. Another is that she thinks Aristotle views all human beings as fundamentally similar (79, 83). There is no exceptional individual who possesses an excess of virtue and exists apart from the city in this capacity (170, 83-84). She connects the true philosophic life with both citizenship and statesmanship, and argues that there is an intellectual dependence between the philosopher and those who are less virtuous (134-35, 166-67).\(^\text{11}\)

Nichols does not think, however, that human beings can be equally virtuous. For example the many need the immediate guidance of statesmen (66-67). And she associates the latter with superior and even outstanding virtue (5, 50, 83, 88). The teacher of statesmen is the philosopher-statesman (135). This is the "aristocratic"

\[^{11}\text{In Nichols' reading of Aristotle, there is apparently no realm outside of the cave. Cf. Strauss 1978, 29.}\]
side of Nichols’ interpretation, which may also be called the “oligarchic” side.\(^\text{12}\)

The regime in which the many, those of superior virtue, and the rich can all participate is polity. According to Nichols it is Aristotle’s best regime (88, see also p. 200: note 44). She does not think the regime of books VII and VIII is the best regime because of the presence of slavery (144–45). Rather than being an ideal regime, a standard to be emulated, it serves only to reveal the limits of politics according to Nichols (164, 136).

In contrast to Nichols, I argue that virtue, comprehensively understood, has two meanings for Aristotle. It refers either to ethical virtue or to philosophic virtue. The former is achievable by few human beings, and the latter by the very few. The “many” cannot attain either type of virtue, although in a good regime they can be moderate and just in a sense. Unlike Nichols, I argue that Aristotle does teach, albeit quietly, that those who are outstanding on the basis of virtue are philosophers, and that their virtue exists apart from the city. As we have seen, at bottom there is no disagreement between Plato and Aristotle regarding the character and rank of the philosophic life. The philosopher does not rule directly in cities and he is not intellectually dependent on those who are less virtuous.

My interpretation bears some similarity to Nichols’ in arguing that Aristotle’s primary aim in the *Politics* is to improve practical political life. He does not intend

\(^{12}\)At one point she equates the contribution of those of outstanding virtue in polities with oligarchic justice (88; see also p. 99).
the teaching on the simply best regime. and on the true character of the philosophic life, to diminish human beings' concern for living fulfilling lives in good regimes. But I differ from Nichols with respect to how Aristotle's political thought improves political practice. She argues that polity is the best regime and the model for existing regimes. whereas I argue that the model for existing regimes is a type of aristocratic regime that is similar to polity, but distinguished from it by the participation in rule of those who practice ethical virtue, or gentlemen. The best regime discussed in books VII and VIII makes ethical virtue the end of all its citizens. It functions, therefore, as an aristocratic standard for existing regimes. Unlike Nichols. I accept Aristotle's characterization of it as the best regime, although it is not the only best regime of the Politics.

According to my interpretation. the Politics teaches that human beings are not naturally equal. Nichols would, therefore, characterize it as an aristocratic interpretation of the Politics. But my analysis does not lead to the conclusion that only philosophers can lead fulfilling lives according to Aristotle and that the primary aim of the Politics is to attract the very few to this way of life. In the Politics Aristotle only hints that philosophy is the highest end of man. His primary concern is rather to reform existing regimes. And he cannot do this without presenting the ways of life that are fulfilling for human beings who cannot be truly philosophic.
J.G.A Pocock and Alasdair MacIntyre

Bluhm and Nichols directly address how the various and apparently diverse themes of the *Politics* fit together. Two very influential works that do not do this, yet present Aristotle’s political thought as consisting of a coherent political teaching are *The Machiavellian Moment* by J.G.A. Pocock and *After Virtue* by Alasdair MacIntyre.

In *The Machiavellian Moment* Pocock attempts to show how Florentine thinkers in Machiavelli’s era rediscovered and adapted to a new age Aristotle’s views on man’s political nature, and to show the influence of this development on later English and American political thought.¹³ Pocock spends very little time discussing Aristotle’s political theory, yet it is the foundation of all the work he undertakes in the book. According to Pocock, the “Aristotelian polity” is the “ultimate paradigm of all civic humanism” (478); “classical republicanism . . . was basically a Renaissance rephrasing of the political science set forth in Aristotle’s *Politics*” (317); and “republican theory is in essence Aristotelian political science . . .” (Pocock 1975, 320).

So what is Pocock’s interpretation of Aristotle’s political theory? The essence of it is that human nature is fulfilled by political participation. There are hints that Pocock is aware of the possibility that the contemplative life is the highest life

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¹³Needless to say this is an odd interpretation of the character of Machiavelli’s thought since, as noted in chapter 1, he directly opposes himself to all preceding political thinkers including Aristotle. For a convincing refutation of Pocock’s thesis of the supposedly Aristotelian ancestry of Machiavelli’s political thought, see Vickie B. Sullivan’s “Machiavelli’s Momentary ‘Machiavellian Moment’” (Sullivan 1992). Sullivan does not argue for Pocock’s interpretation of Aristotle, but she uses it as a given in her critique of his interpretation of Machiavelli.
according to Aristotle (see pp. 63, 66–67, & 67–68). But there is no room for this point of view in Pocock’s interpretation of Aristotle. For he argues that it is in the relationship between virtuous fellow citizens that a human being can be virtuous, moral, and truly good (74–75). And it is by means of such activity that he becomes “a being in relation with the universal” (68). What Aristotelian analysis provides is a theory “which depicted human social life as a universality of participation rather than a universal for contemplation” (75).

But in what does this “universality of participation” consist? Not in any concrete notion of virtue. It is based instead on each citizen’s “individual value-priorities” (68–69). Pocock implies that different citizens will have different roles in the city based on their character (70). But there are few if any standards for judging the worth of someone’s contribution in Pocock’s polis: “Any value to which a man might give priority, or by which he might be judged and evaluated—even the egalitarian value of not giving priority to particular values or using them to distinguish between men and men—might become one mode of his participation in the determination and distribution of general values” (71). “Virtue,” and man’s salvation, is to be found only in the relationship between fellow citizens who participate in politics (73–74, 75). Virtue is henceforth a collective matter—it is not in any individual’s power to be virtuous (76).

The scene of virtuous activity is “polity.” For Pocock it is really the equivalent
of "regime" or even "city." He thinks there can be perverted or despotic types of government. He defines them as governments "in which the good of a particular group was treated as identical with the good of the whole" (71). But there are no further distinctions. According to him, Aristotle's distinction of regimes into those ruled by the one, the few, and the many is largely a bow to traditional usage and ordinary speech, and not based on any sound theoretical basis (69-70). There are practical purposes for distinguishing between aristocracy and democracy, but this "shorthand" is only a "drastically simplified image," necessitated, it would seem, by the "looseness of Aristotelian language" (73). "Polity" has no precise form and is constantly evolving in Pocock's analysis (73).

Pocock sees the Politics as presenting a coherent teaching. Aristotle's concern for virtue is part of his concern for practical political matters. But this perspective is arrived at in Pocock's case only through a relativist reading of the Politics. It is a reading very much at odds with the preceding investigation of aristocracy in the Politics. We have seen that virtue cannot be defined any which way according to Aristotle. Virtue ultimately refers either to ethical virtue, as explicated in his Ethics, or to the virtue of philosophers. The gentleman may need other human

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14Rule by one or monarchy disappears because it "was not an immediate issue for city-state Greeks" (73).
15Cf. how Pocock ends his book. In discussing the idea of the primacy of politics, he says, "To a Greek it would appear ... that every human virtue had its excess, and that civic or political virtue was no exception. There is a freedom to decline moral absolutes; even those of the polis and history, even that of freedom when proposed as an absolute" (552).
16Pocock's interpretation of virtue in the Politics makes one wonder whether he is even aware
beings toward whom to practice his virtue, but his virtue does not depend on his fellow citizens. Instead we have seen that it is by having gentlemen share in rule that practical regimes can look to virtue. Pocock's definition of virtue makes it impossible for there to be good men in bad regimes. This is not to mention the case of the philosopher, whose virtue exists apart from the city. We have seen that the contemplative life is the highest life according to Aristotle, although he only quietly presents this teaching in the *Politics*.

Pocock's relativist interpretation of Aristotelian virtue may explain his complete silence regarding the best regime discussed in books VII and VIII of the *Politics*. For by ignoring it he evades the possibility that virtue has an independent status. We have seen that the regime of books VII and VIII is the best possible regime for cities because it aims at ethical virtue. There is a different regime that is the best practical regime, but the regime of books VII and VIII functions as an aristocratic standard for it. Pocock can present the *Politics* as presenting a coherent teaching, then, only by ignoring much of it.\(^\text{17}\)

Alasdair MacIntyre, too, sees Aristotle's political thought as forming the core of a tradition, but unlike Pocock, it is a tradition that he opposes to modernity.

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\(^{17}\)Perhaps behind Pocock's relativism is to be found an unquestioning allegiance to egalitarian democracy. There can, then, be "trained minds" (71) but no human beings who by their *virtue* are naturally more suited to rule than others. Perhaps Pocock's ambitious project, then, is merely an attempt to justify some of the dominant ideologies of our day by assimilating both Aristotle and Machiavelli to them.
MacIntyre's thesis is that the "Aristotelian" tradition provides an understanding of morality far superior to current views. In fact he argues that human beings no longer possess any coherent theoretical or practical understanding of morality. Instead what exists are insoluble moral disagreements. They reflect the reigning philosophical understanding of moral philosophy today, which is "emotivism." This "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 1981, 11; see also p. 18).

What has led to this state of affairs, according to MacIntyre, are certain events in the history of philosophy, namely the attempt and failure of various Enlightenment thinkers to provide a rational justification for morality. MacIntyre traces this failure back through Kierkegaard, Kant, Diderot, and Hume. These thinkers attempted to provide a rational justification for morality because they had to deal with a historical situation in which the traditional moral injunctions, of which they approved, were deprived of their rational foundation. The historical situation arose from the "secular rejection of both Protestant and Catholic theology and the scientific and philosophical rejection of Aristotelianism." The result was "the elimination of any notion of essential human nature and with it the abandonment of any notion of a telos." (52) And it was the latter that had heretofore provided a rational foundation for morality.

18It is curious that MacIntyre does not discuss Machiavelli's and Hobbes's views on morality, since their thought was crucial in the establishment of modernity.
For MacIntyre, the problems inherent in modern conceptions of morality lead in the end to Nietzsche's moral philosophy. Its essence, according to MacIntyre, consists of the replacement of reason by will: "if there is nothing to morality but expressions of will, my morality can only be what my will creates" (107). MacIntyre, however, opposes Nietzsche's moral philosophy with the Aristotelian tradition. According to him "Aristotelianism is philosophically the most powerful of pre-modern modes of moral thought." and "If a premodern view of morals and politics is to be vindicated against modernity, it will be in something like Aristotelian terms or not at all" (111: see also p. 239).

Despite MacIntyre's claim concerning the philosophic coherence of Aristotelianism, his version of it is not based on close study of the philosopher's political writings (154). In fact, he says that his method in interpreting Aristotle's writings is at odds with the philosopher's own understanding of his work. This is because MacIntyre wants to see him as part of a tradition or, to put it more clearly, "historically"; whereas he thinks that Aristotle himself sees his own work as being simply true. (137-38) MacIntyre's approach necessitates examining "Aristotle's own moral philosophy not merely as it is expressed in key texts in his own writing, but as an attempt to inherit and to sum up a good deal that had gone before and in turn as a source of stimulus to much later thought" (112-13).

For MacIntyre, although the moral tradition that he is concerned with "always
uses the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* as key texts, when it can. . . . it never surrenders itself wholly to Aristotle” (154). Other sources of the tradition according to MacIntyre are Homer, Sophocles, and the Bible—through various medieval thinkers. But it is, crucially, a tradition that MacIntyre himself has to explain and develop, which he does in chapters 14 and 15 of *After Virtue*. Having done so, he maintains that it defeats Nietzsche’s moral philosophy, which in the end is only another face of liberal individualism (239–41). Modern society, however, is apparently too far gone into the dark ages for this victory of the “Aristotelian” tradition to have any effect on government or society as a whole. The only recourse is to try and sustain it for future ages through new and local forms of community.

Obviously, MacIntyre sees important differences between the tradition he defends and Aristotle’s own views. But he sees Aristotle as providing a relatively coherent teaching on the relationship between virtue and the city in his political writings. According to MacIntyre, the virtues, as Aristotle delineates them in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, provide “one complex measure” “by which to judge the goodness of a particular individual.” But he also interprets Aristotle as saying that political communities can aim at the same conception of the human good. This presupposes agreement within a given community regarding “goods and virtues.” According to MacIntyre, “it is this agreement which makes possible the bond between citizens which, on Aristotle’s view, constitutes a *polis*.” For Aristotle, “. . . the *polis* is concerned, with the
whole of life, not with this or that good, but with man's good as such." (146)

According to this analysis, not only does the city aim at ethical or moral virtue, but man's good is to be found in the city and in his relationship or, more precisely, in his friendship with his fellow citizens (see pp. 146-47). But MacIntyre also recognizes that for Aristotle "contemplation is the ultimate human telos." As a result, "there is a certain tension between Aristotle's views of man as essentially political and his view of man as essentially metaphysical." But it is apparently not an insoluble tension since MacIntyre argues that the best kind of city must enable its citizens to pursue the contemplative life. (148)

MacIntyre's interpretation of the relationship between virtue and the city in Aristotle's political thought is at odds with the conclusions arrived at in the preceding analysis of aristocracy. We have seen that only the best regime of books VII and VIII makes ethical virtue the end of the city as a whole. But this regime is not a very practical regime. There are other more practical regimes that can aim at virtue, but not on the basis of all the citizens being educated to ethical virtue. There are different kinds of good regimes according to Aristotle and different kinds of cities. MacIntyre's analysis, in contrast, leads to the conclusion that the regime of books VII and VIII is the city per se for Aristotle. His analysis does not account for the discussion of practical regimes in the Politics.

This may stem from the fact that MacIntyre wants Aristotle's description regard-
ing the role of virtue in the best regime to apply universally. Yet, he is not unaware that there is an inegalitarian aspect to Aristotle’s teaching on virtue. He says that according to Aristotle “only the affluent and those of high status can achieve certain key virtues, those of munificence and of magnanimity; craftsmen and tradesmen constitute an inferior class.” He links this with Aristotle’s supposed “writing off of non-Greeks, barbarians and slaves” because they are incapable of political relationships and therefore of virtue. (149) MacIntyre’s recognition (however inaccurately derived) of the fact that Aristotle does not think that ethical virtue is within the reach of all human beings does not make him question his identification of the best regime as the city per se for Aristotle. Instead, he attributes such views to Aristotle’s “blindness,” stemming from the “blindness of his culture.” (149)

The preceding analysis of the Politics, then, brings into question MacIntyre’s understanding of the relationship between virtue and the city in Aristotle’s political thought. In essence, he takes Aristotle’s teaching on virtue in the best regime and tries to apply it universally. Questions arise, then, as to how Aristotelian the tradition is that he defends as such in After Virtue. But I cannot do more here in this regard than draw attention to what one may call the “communitarian” character of the

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19 In contrast to what MacIntyre implies, we have seen that Aristotle specifically argues against the identification of the virtuous with the wealthy. Wealth is merely a means for the achievement of ethical virtue according to Aristotle.

20 This is another example of MacIntyre’s historicism. For him not even an Aristotle can break free from the limitations of his culture.
tradition that MacIntyre ends up with. In addition to what has already been said, consider the argument that MacIntyre opposes to Nietzsche's moral philosophy in the concluding chapter of After Virtue. He attempts to refute Nietzsche's conception of the great man, who defines his own virtue, by saying that "... goods, and with them the only grounds for the authority of laws and virtues, can only be discovered by entering into those relationships which constitute communities whose central bond is a shared vision of and understanding of goods" (240). This interpretation, that the meaning of virtue is dependent on particular human communities, is at odds with the conclusions arrived at in the preceding analysis of Aristotle's political thought.

Bernard Yack

A more recent work on Aristotle, The Problems of a Political Animal by Bernard Yack, presents a different account of how the major themes of the Politics fit together. Yack thinks that contemporary interpreters have far too idealized a view of Aristotle's political thought, which is based, in part, on a misconstrual of the significance of the best regime as a political standard. Yack argues that certain key concepts in Aristotle's political thought, namely, "community, political community, political teleology, and political friendship," "are geared to explaining the nature of everyday political life rather than, as most commentators assume, the moral achievements of
Aristotle's best regime" (Yack 1993, 4–5). Most of the book is spent explaining these and other key concepts from the perspective of everyday political life.

Yack, however, does not ignore the best regime of books VII and VIII in developing his interpretation of Aristotle's political thought. He thinks that it “represents a sketch of the political conditions in which a good life can best be led” (169). But he does not think that it serves as “a model of justice”: “It offers us no determinate standards for assessing the competing claims about the common good that arise in ordinary political life” (170). The best regime is not a model of justice because it does not accord with Yack's interpretation of the meaning of political justice for Aristotle. Political justice “represents the form of mutual accountability that is appropriate to govern the relations of free and relatively equal individuals” (136; see also pp. 69 & 75–76). Yack identifies these individuals as the male inhabitants of a community who are not so mentally deficient that they are fit to be natural slaves (139–40). It is such human beings who can form “political communities” (see pp. 53–54). Because the best regime excludes many of them from citizenship it is not just, and, therefore,

21 We have seen that Alasdair MacIntyre takes the teaching on virtue in the best regime and applies it universally.

22 But even this regime apparently does not pursue a substantive notion of the good life. According to Yack, the citizens of the best regime “share with each other an interest in promoting the good life of virtuous activity, not virtuous activity itself” (104).

23 Yack says that we, unlike Aristotle, would include women among these individuals because “most of us reject his claim that women are by nature deformed or imperfectly developed males” (139).

24 Yack accurately terms his interpretation a "republican reconstruction of Aristotle's understanding of political community" (87).
is not a standard for existing regimes.

The fact that the regime in which the good life can best be led is not a just regime, does not mean that Aristotle’s political thought is fundamentally incoherent according to Yack. He disputes teleological interpretations that see the best regime as the end of all political communities. Instead, Yack’s interpretation of political community and political justice entails that even imperfect regimes can fulfill the potential of human beings to live the good life. According to Yack, the process by which “our natural needs and capacities drive us to form political communities and to seek stable standards of justice and law to order them” provides the means to lead the good life, because it provides “the training necessary to the development of the ethical virtues.” (170) In Yack’s interpretation, then, Aristotle’s teaching on virtue in the Politics is not separate from his teaching on practical political matters.

The standards of justice and law in political communities, however, are not to be derived from any substantive notion of the human good. The most that knowledge of the human good can provide is limits on our political choices. Yack defines justice rather as “a disposition to seek and promote states of affairs in which citizens will find some common advantage.” (170–71) In practice this means that justice will be defined by various competing groups within a community, and, in particular, by the most powerful of these groups (173–74).

There is only a limited natural standard concerning justice according to Yack’s
interpretation of Aristotle’s political thought. This standard is found in the fact that “nature has equipped the human species with capacities that dispose us to form political communities in which we hold each other accountable to the kind of standards Aristotle calls natural right”; and it is found in the natural criteria that allow us to decide that it is free adult males who should participate in political communities. This natural standard, however, does not provide any “means to measure the justice of the judgments about political justice made by members of political communities (except, perhaps, those judgments that might violate the natural standards of reciprocity governing inclusion in the practice of political justice).” Nature, therefore, “tells Aristotle who can participate in deliberation about political justice but not what they should choose.” (149: see also p. 147)

When it comes to the question of who should rule, the natural standard regarding justice leads only to the conclusion that free adult males should take turns ruling (66, 60–61). Yack does analyze Aristotle’s discussion of various claims to rule in book III. But he concludes from this only that “all the politically relevant claims are partially just, whereas the claims of the virtuous are limited in their political relevance” (165). As Yack interprets the Politics, decisions about who should rule are not to be based on considerations of political merit, but on judgments concerning the

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25 Yack supports this claim with a reference to 1283b27–42 of the Politics. But he leaves out what Aristotle says immediately after, that the identity of the citizen varies with the regime, and that “In the case of the best [regime], he is one who is capable of and intentionally chooses being ruled and ruling with a view to the life according to virtue” (1283b40–84a1).
common advantage of a particular community. He thinks that Aristotle’s depiction of the mixed regimes and middle-class rule reveals precisely this criterion of how to distribute political rule: Aristotle “advocates mixed regimes and middle-class rule not because their distributions of power follow from determinate standards of political desert but because . . . they serve the common advantage by promoting relatively stable and decent standards of justice within the political community.” (165–66) For Yack merit and virtue provide no superior claim to rule. This in accord with the fact that his interpretation cannot account for Aristotle’s inclusion of kingship—which Yack defines as rule by one individual or family of surpassing virtue—among the correct regimes (see pp. 85–87).

Imperfect regimes do not look to virtue by the participation of the virtuous in political rule according to Yack. But the “highest and final” purpose of the political community, according to him, is “to enable us to lead the good life of rational and virtuous behavior” (2; see also p. 102). We have already seen that he thinks that it is the process of forming stable political communities that provides “the training necessary to the development of the ethical virtues” (170). More precisely, the laws of a community provide the groundwork for ethical virtue. Yack defines laws as “written or unwritten general rules embodying judgments of practical reason” (99; see also p.

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\(^{26}\)Even the principle that free adult males should take turns ruling, then, appears to be mutable. \(^{27}\)Cf. Yack’s statement that “Aristotle . . . denies that the authority of a captain is an appropriate model for political authority because he denies that there is an art and knowledge of what is good for members of a political community comparable to the captain’s art” (60).
199). And it is these general rules that are "the best means that nature provides us for establishing the regular habits that are necessary to promote virtuous dispositions" (99). Human beings "tend to internalize laws after they become familiar, turning them into the habits that anchor moral dispositions" (204).

It is law in general that has this educative effect according to Yack. Therefore he sees "indirect and unintentional moral training" going on in all political communities (105; see also pp. 248-50). Yack explains the educative effect of law in oligarchies and democracies as follows.

The laws established by oligarchies and democracies will inevitably promote character-forming habits, even if they are not designed to do so. These habits will not necessarily be the best to establish the dispositions of virtuous individuals; they will, nevertheless, promote them to some extent, for every regime wants its citizens to be moderate, lawful, and courageous in at least some circumstances. (106)

This type of indirect and unintentional training is practically the best that can be aimed at according to Yack's interpretation of Aristotle's political thought. For he thinks that Aristotle "raises no body of laws to the status of a supreme and intrinsically moral code."28 What the rule of law represents is instead "a moral disposition, the disposition to follow and apply general rules." (201)

28In reading this we should remember that Yack includes unwritten general rules among laws.
Throughout his book Yack equates Aristotle’s conception of the human good and the good life with virtue and virtuous behaviour (see e.g., pp. 2, 97–98, 104, 169, 242, & 269). But by the end of it we are not sure what exactly Aristotle means by virtue and virtuous behaviour. Yack’s various references to the “ethical” and “moral” virtues and to the *Nicomachean Ethics* imply that what he means by Aristotelian virtue is the account of the ethical virtues contained in that work. But Yack never spells this out. Furthermore, his teaching that law in general can educate to virtue bars us from drawing this conclusion. The vagueness of Yack’s depiction of Aristotelian virtue is on a par with his denial that Aristotle’s understanding of virtue provides any standard for ordering political life. It is not entirely surprising, therefore, to find him concluding at the end of his study of Aristotle’s political thought, that it “… does not give us a foundation from which we can deduce our moral and political commitments” (283).29

Before pointing out how the preceding analysis differs from Yack’s interpretation, we should note that Yack recognizes that Aristotle also provides another answer to the question of what the good life is for man, i.e., the contemplative life. But Yack does not equate this way of life with virtue in any sense. It is clearer in this discussion (chapter 9) than anywhere else in the book that Yack equates the virtuous life with

29Cf. Yack’s account of his interpretative method: “It is far wiser, in my opinion, to admit openly the need for imaginative reconstruction of Aristotle’s arguments than to pretend that his texts provide final, explicit standards against which to measure his meanings” (23).
some notion of ethical virtue. Unlike the life of ethical virtue, the contemplative life is "wholly desirable in itself" and is, therefore, the happiest life for human beings (275). Yet it cannot be fully attained. And it is inextricably linked to the practical life of ethical virtue, and, therefore, to the community in which it comes into being (276–77). Because of its dependence on political communities, the contemplative life is not clearly the most choiceworthy life for human beings. According to Yack, "Conflicts between contemplative and practical lives are no more resolvable for Aristotle than are ... cases of moral conflict ..." (278).

In contrast with Yack's interpretation, the preceding analysis makes a very different claim regarding the status of the philosophic life for Aristotle. It is clearly the most choiceworthy way of life for those human beings who have the capacity to pursue it. Although Aristotle only quietly presents this teaching in the Politics. We have also seen that the philosophic life is a life of virtue. It is one of two virtuous ways of life according to the Politics. The other is the life of ethical virtue. Unlike Yack, I restrict the latter to the practice of the ethical virtues as Aristotle defines them in his Ethics.

We have seen that the best regime of books VII and VIII of the Politics aims at ethical or gentlemanly virtue. As such it is the most aristocratic regime that is also a feasible regime for cities. It is not defined solely by virtue, but also by wealth and the people. The only regime that is defined solely by virtue is the simply best
regime ruled by philosopher-kings. It is absolute kingship. We have seen that Yack’s interpretation cannot account for Aristotle’s inclusion of kingship among the correct regimes. He thinks that this regime is at odds with political justice. Yet Aristotle maintains that absolute kingship is in accordance with justice if there are individuals who are outstanding on the basis of virtue (1288a15-25). He also says that it is just (δίκαιον) to call this regime alone aristocracy (1293b1-5), which makes it aristocracy in the strict sense of the term. It would seem, then, that Yack’s account of political justice begs the question of how equal human beings really are. This is not to deny, however, that the simply best regime is not a feasible regime for cities. The virtue that defines it cannot play a direct role in cities. Cities, however, can make ethical virtue their aim. But they cannot aim exclusively at virtue in this sense: they must also look to wealth and the people.

The regime that best looks to ethical virtue is the best regime of books VII and VIII of the Politics. According to Yack this regime is not any sort of standard for existing regimes because it violates his understanding of Aristotelian justice. But the preceding investigation has shown that the best regime does function as a standard for existing regimes. It has done so by revealing the existence of a practical aristocratic

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30 The teaching on the simply best regime in the Politics calls into question the contrast Yack draws between Plato and Aristotle concerning the merits of the rule of law (see pp. 196–98). Yack also distinguishes between Plato and Aristotle regarding the relationship of the philosopher to practical political life (see p. 275: note 15). We have seen, in contrast, that for Aristotle, as for Plato, the virtue of the philosopher is something apart from the city.
regime, a regime that looks to ethical virtue and is the best regime for most cities according to Aristotle. And contrary to Yack’s argument, the characteristics of this regime reveal that virtue, through the more general criterion of merit, is a standard in the distribution of offices, and thereby a standard for judging regimes. The fact that the best regime of books VII and VIII is a standard for existing regimes calls into question Yack’s interpretation of what justice means in Aristotle’s political thought.

We have seen that practical regimes will not look to virtue unless a significant number of their rulers are those who practice the ethical virtues, or gentlemen. An aristocratic regime must have education in ethical virtue for those citizens who are capable of achieving it, and it must have the means to ensure that those who do achieve it will have the preponderant share in rule. It must not just be governed by laws, then, but by the right laws. In discussing why Aristotle prefers the rule of law, Yack refers to the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle discusses the necessity of law for bringing virtuous human beings into being (204). But Yack does not explain that Aristotle stresses that the right law is necessary for this to take place: in order to be good one must live “according to intellect and an order which is right [τὰξιν δρθήν] and has effective strength” (1180a15–20; see also 1180a35). Indeed, the question of what the best laws are is one of the questions that grounds the transition from the *Nicomachean Ethics* to the *Politics*, which Aristotle says will complete, as
best as he can, "the philosophy concerning human affairs" (1181a10-b20).³¹

Yack attempts to show the significance of Aristotle's political thought for understanding practical political life. But our investigation of aristocracy reveals that he does so without coming to terms with what virtue means for Aristotle and without understanding the function of the best regime in the Politics. In the words of one reviewer of his book, "... Yack has not only cut off Aristotle's study of the ideal city from the rest of his political theory but has also cut off Aristotle's ethical investigations from his political theory."³² Despite Yack's attempt to link Aristotle's teaching on virtue with his discussion of practical political matters, his analysis also harks back to the prevailing nineteenth and early twentieth century interpretation of the Politics that sees these concerns as separate.

³¹Despite arguing for the rule of law, Yack also argues that the preference for it depends on the "moral ethos" of a particular society (202). There appears to be nothing inherently better about the rule of law. So we find him making the following extraordinary statement: "In regimes in which absolutism is appropriate—that is, regimes in which one individual is so superior to all others as to justify absolute power, unconstrained by laws (Pol. 1288a)—Aristotle would consider lawfulness a vice rather than a virtue. In such circumstances he would advise us to be careful to promote the characteristics appropriate to justice in the specific community we are considering." (203) (In contrast to Yack's interpretation, we have seen that absolute kingship is not at all a feasible regime for cities, and that Aristotle includes the teaching regarding it in the Politics to show what the simply best life is for human beings.) Yack's statement is extraordinary given his argument that it is natural for human beings to form political communities, i.e., communities in which "free and relatively equal" human beings take turns ruling and being ruled and which aim at the good life for human beings (6-7, 62, 63, 94-95, 97, 101-2).

6.3 Conclusion

The variety of interpretations that we have seen in this chapter, of the relationship between the concern for the best regime, virtue, and practical political matters in the *Politics*, is indicative of its perplexing character. I have contrasted these interpretations with the conclusions arrived at in the preceding investigation of aristocracy in order to demonstrate its significance for all who would understand Aristotle's political thought better. But considering the interpretative approach taken by some of the commentators considered in this chapter toward Aristotle's political writings, I also hope to have shown that the only way to profit from them is by careful and systematic analysis of the philosopher's own words.
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