

## Incomplete virtues in Aristotle's *Politics*

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I write from the following instinct: The single, overarching aim of Aristotle's ethical and political treatises is to guide potential politicians and lawmakers to shape laws and constitutions to cultivate human excellence. The virtue of Aristotle's ethical treatises is described with a steady eye on its political cultivation in citizens or its impact on a lawgiver or political leader. The political theory of Aristotle's *Politics*, correspondingly, is chiefly occupied with guiding legislators and politicians in cultivating whatever virtue is possible in real-life circumstances. The question about *eudaimonia*, to judge from the opening claim in *NE* 1.1-2, is primarily a question about the end and guiding principle of political and legislative activity.<sup>1</sup> So too, *eudaimonia* and virtue play a key role in the analysis of regime-types in the *Politics*, with an eye to their improvement, as I will explain in the main argument of this essay.

My instinct may sound more like a cliché than a substantive intervention in the literature.<sup>2</sup> After all, it is evident that Aristotle considered the ethical and political treatises to be part of the same project, and that project is primarily political. The *NE* begins with an account of *politikê* as knowledge of human flourishing. It concludes with what seems to be an introduction to the *Politics* or a very similar work on the art of legislation. Yet the united perspective opens up fundamental questions that lie unasked and neglected in the literature, despite ongoing and intense interest in these texts. Does the variety of candidates for *eudaimonia* suggest that regimes, as well as individuals, sometimes get it right and other times wrong? Do different types of regime cultivate different kinds of virtue? If so, to what regime does the central discussion of virtue of character in *Nicomachean Ethics* 2-5 belong? Should we imagine, as is generally assumed, that this account of virtue of character is somehow generic, applying in all sorts of ordinary and contemporary circumstances? Or should we see it as a restricted ideal, more similar to the discussion of virtue in books 2-4 of Plato's *Republic* than a handbook for the modern virtue-seeker?

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<sup>1</sup> The *Nicomachean Ethics* does have a secondary aim, an undercurrent that addresses individuals in the choice of lives. Here the main choice facing an individual is the political life versus the contemplative life. The individualist undercurrent sits uneasily with the single, overarching aim of the treatise, for reasons that should be clear. Am I, the audience member, a potential legislator, or someone who might spend my life as a contemplative metic, teaching and writing about logic, metaphysics and the lives of obscure animals? For my current purposes I would like to set aside the individualist undercurrent and the tension it causes, in order to focus on my instinct and the bold claim implied in it.

<sup>2</sup> See the obligatory inclusion in anthologies of a broad-brush article on the relationship between Aristotle's ethical and political theory, eg. Kamtekar, "The Relationship Between Aristotle's Ethical and Political Discourses (NE X.9), in Polansky ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Frede, "The Political Character of Aristotle's Ethics", in Deslauriers and Destrée eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013.)

There is strong evidence that the character virtue described in *NE* 2-4 is the goal of laws and education only rarely, if ever. Aristotle complains more than once that most lawgivers take no care for the cultivation of virtue. Only the Spartan regime has attempted appropriate public education (*NE* 1102a8-11, 1180a25-30, *Politics* 1337a31-3). That is, full virtue of character is not cultivated in ordinary regimes, and so can be presumed rare among ordinary folk. In addition, throughout the *Politics* and the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle offers trenchant criticisms of the Spartan regime and Spartan moral education in particular (*EE* 8.3, *Pol* 2.9, 7.2, 7.14-15, 8.4). Should we take all of these passages to support a consistent position, we are forced to conclude that full-fledged virtue of character is cultivated nowhere on earth. If so, virtue in its fullest and best sense is not generally cultivated, and might be expected to be very unusual.<sup>3</sup> Aristotle also claims in *NE* 5.1 that in a way, *all* law aims at virtue. If we add this claim to the others and again seek a consistent view, we are left with the prospect that all lawmakers aim in some way at virtue, but that failure is universal.

Of course, it might be possible to cultivate full-fledged virtue privately in a family. (Self-cultivation is ruled out by the necessity of habits instilled from youth.<sup>4</sup>) Yet while private education seems to be widely assumed in the background of current scholarly literature,<sup>5</sup> Aristotle almost never mentions it. When he does, while he praises it for its ability to tailor education to an individual, his praise is muted by concern for the limitations of cultivating humans as an amateur, without proper training in legislation. (1080b3-25, esp 13-15). By contrast, the assumption that law and political arrangements will be central in the cultivation of virtue is ubiquitous.<sup>6</sup>

By contrast with the dark tale of degeneration in conventional regimes described in Plato's *Republic* 8-9, where only a shadow of passively received virtue is possible, Aristotle's attitude to failure is bright.<sup>7</sup> Degenerate regimes are real, but legislators and political actors within them have

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<sup>3</sup> Reeve is virtually alone in arguing for this view (*Practices of Reason*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). By contrast, the ordinariness of Aristotle's virtue is assumed--not even defended--in many seminal articles (eg. Wiggins, "Weakness of Will, Commensurability, and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire" and McDowell, "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics", both in A. Rorty ed. *Essays in Aristotle's Ethics*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) as well as in more recent work (eg. Lorenz, "Virtue of Character in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 2009, and Hampson's recent work on moral development in the *NE* (cited with more discussion below.)

<sup>4</sup> [reference]

<sup>5</sup> This assumption strikes me as the major flaw in Hampson's three recent articles on moral development: "The Learner's Motivation and the Structure of Habituation in Aristotle", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 104 (2022), 415-447; "Aristotle on the Necessity of Habituation: Re-reading *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.4", *Phronesis* 66 (2021) 1-26; "Imitating Virtue", *Phronesis* 64 (2019) 292-320.

<sup>6</sup> Political knowledge (*πολιτική*) and the true politician aim at making citizens good and capable of noble actions (*NE* 1099b29-32, 1102a7-10; *EE* 1234b22-3, 1237a2-3). Accordingly, legislators and writers of constitutions seek to make men good by forming habits in them (*NE* 1103b3-6). But while habits are necessary for any regime, no matter what its goals or principles (*Pol* 1310a12-25), the good legislator seeks to make men good in light of the correct end (*Pol* 1333a14-15, 1333a37-b4). Education and virtue are the criteria for a good constitution (*Pol* 1283a24-6); and so, although every legislator wants to form good habits, the correct way of forming habits 'makes the difference between a good political system and a bad one' (*NE* 1103a31-b6).

<sup>7</sup> On the shadows of virtue in *Republic* 8-9, see my "Degenerate Regimes in Plato's *Republic*", in McPherran ed. *The Cambridge Critical Guide to Plato's Republic*, Cambridge: CUP, 2010.

options even in the worse cases. Improvement, whether gradual or dramatic, is possible. When we look in this way at Aristotle's ethical theory in light of his political theory, its scope expands widely. Virtue is not limited to its rare ideal, with all parts acting in harmony in light of the best life. Rather, it is more general, and more generally found: the good condition of human beings that brings about their common and individual flourishing. Such a condition can take a variety of imperfect or incomplete forms. To put flesh on these claims requires a careful look at the "other" treatise on political virtue, Aristotle's *Politics*.

The neglect of the questions I have raised in the scholarly literature seems to be the straightforward consequence of the way Aristotle's corpus has been arbitrarily carved up by conventional academic disciplines. Philosophers read the *Nicomachean Ethics* and see it in the light of contemporary debates about moral psychology and the roots of moral action in individuals. Political theorists read the *Politics*, and find in it more or less elaborate accounts of democracy, rights, citizenship, and the subjection of women. If nothing else, I hope in this work to shake up this disciplinary divide so that the questions that unite the practical treatises might come to light.

In my 2012 paper, "Aristotle on law and moral education", I make the case that the account of moral education and habituation in the *Nicomachean Ethics* must be put in a political context, and I draw a contrast between the hypothetical best regime that produces the full-fledged virtue familiar to philosophers, and the Spartan regime which produces shame-based virtues such as civic courage.<sup>8</sup>

In this essay, I make the other side of the argument: Aristotle's *Politics* is fundamentally concerned with the cultivation of virtue in various types of regime. The result may surprise philosophers steeped in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: For Aristotle, it turns out, virtue comes in degrees, and imperfect forms of virtue, while less than ideal, are very much worth cultivating. Indeed, the task of the political leader or theorist is to cultivate virtue as best as one can under the circumstances. Imperfect virtues will be the most common goals and outcomes by far. Despite widespread assumptions to the contrary in the literature, the famous features of full-blooded virtue described in the *NE*, including choosing it for its own sake and reciprocity between all the virtues, turn out not to describe necessary or sufficient conditions for human virtue. Rather, they paint the contours of a rarely attained ideal, one that loses some of its splendor when adapted to different circumstances.

My strategy is simple. I first summarize some familiar features of virtue of character from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Secondly, I look at Aristotle's own account of the link between the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* in *NE* 10.9, and argue that we should expect adaptations and compromises in the cultivation of excellence in most cities. Lastly, I give an overview of the role the cultivation of virtue of character plays in the *Politics*.

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<sup>8</sup> Hitz, "Aristotle on Law and Moral Education", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* XLII (2012) 263-305

My particular interest in the second two parts of the paper is where Aristotle describes what I call incomplete or defective virtues. Incomplete virtues are conditions of character which are beneficial to individuals and their communities, and that are worth cultivating when it is not possible to cultivate something better. If the legislator aims at virtue, as Aristotle thinks he should and must do,<sup>9</sup> he ought aim not just at full-fledged virtue of character, but at whatever defective but good conditions are available. I call incomplete virtues 'incomplete', then, because they lack one or more characteristics that we know belong to full virtue of character. I call them 'virtues', not only because they are beneficial or valuable conditions of character, but because Aristotle calls them virtues, albeit usually with qualifications attached such as 'one virtue' (*Pol* 3.7, 1279a37-b4), 'a part of virtue' (*Pol* 1271a41-b10, 1324b5-11); or 'virtue in the regime' (*Pol* 5.9, 1309a33-39, 1310a12-22). I will suggest that the cultivation of incomplete virtues is central to Aristotle's political theory and his account of legislative activity. I am also convinced, although I will not be able to provide a full defense of this thesis here, that the *Nicomachean Ethics* in many subtle and unexpected ways lays the groundwork for politics conceived this way.

## I. Virtues of character

It will be useful, if a bit reductive, simply to outline key features of virtue of character as we find it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, so as to clarify exactly when and how virtues in a variety of political contexts fall short. So we may be able to at least dimly get a sense of how Aristotle sees the virtue of character in *NE* 2-4 as a regulative ideal that can be adapted to a variety of political circumstances.

Virtue of character, according to *NE* 2-6, has the following key features, which I illustrate with the relevant passages from the text:

- A. Virtue of character *brings something into a good condition* (*NE* 2.5).
- B. Virtue of character is *concerned with pleasures and pains* (*NE* 2.3).
- C. It is a *state by which we stand well or badly with respect to the passions* (*NE* 2.5).
- D. Virtue of character is *formed by habits* (*NE* 2.1).
- E. Nonetheless, it is *not a product or a mere behavior* (*NE* 2.4).
- F. Virtue of character *has pleasure in itself*, i.e. it is *chosen for its own sake* (*NE* 1.8).
- G. Virtue of character *lies in a mean or intermediate* (*NE* 2.6).
- H. This mean *is determined by reason and phronesis (practical wisdom)* (*NE* 2.6).

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<sup>9</sup> *NE* 1099b29-32, 1102a7-10, 1103a31-b6, 1180a14-32; *EE* 1234b22-3, 1237a2-3; *Pol* 1283a24-6, 1333a14-15, 1333a37-b4

J. *Practical wisdom reciprocally implies the other virtues* ("the reciprocity of virtue")(NE 6.12-13)

I will outline these features of virtue of character and briefly sketch the connections of the features with one another.

First of all, virtue of character *brings something into a good condition* (NE 2.5). Aristotle defines virtue, famously, not in terms already "moralized", but as the good condition of a human being, where that condition is what permits good functioning, the exercise of the human *ergon* (reasoning), and so human flourishing:

The virtue of a human being will be the state of character which makes a human being good and which makes him able to do his own work well.

καὶ ἡ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀρετὴ εἴη ἃν ἡ ἕξις ἀφ' ἧς ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος γίνεται καὶ ἀφ' ἧς εὖ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἔργον ἀποδώσει.  
(NE 1106a21-24; translations from NE based on Ross.)

While human flourishing consists in reasoning, the good condition of human beings, such that it allows proper functioning and so flourishing, is a condition of a person's *pleasures and pains* (NE 2.3), since pleasures and pains determine what we pursue and what we avoid, and it is by pursuing and avoiding one thing or another that we become better or worse.<sup>10</sup>

Aristotle elaborates that a person "using (*khraomai*)" pleasures or pains well or badly as what makes a person good or bad. Here Aristotle alludes to the role of law in virtue: by means of punishment (as well as, one gathers, certain incentives), the lawgiver or the statesman shapes the pleasures and pains, and so the virtues, of the citizens. Punishment provides pain to "cure" improper pleasures, pleasures in the wrong things.<sup>11</sup>

We might consider the cultivation of pleasures, pains, and passions to be only a part of the cultivation of goodness in others. But Aristotle is emphatic: it is "the whole deal", the central function of law and politics:

The whole concern both of virtue and of political science is with pleasures and pains; for the man who uses these well will be good, he who uses them badly bad.

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<sup>10</sup> "Every state of soul has a nature relative to and concerned with the kind of things by which it tends to be made worse or better; but it is by reason of pleasures and pains that people become bad, by pursuing and avoiding these—either the pleasures and pains they ought not or when they ought not or as they ought not, or by going wrong in one of the other similar ways that may be distinguished." (1104b19-24)

<sup>11</sup> "Again, if the virtues are concerned with actions and passions, and every passion and every action is accompanied by pleasure and pain, for this reason also virtue will be concerned with pleasure and pains. This is indicated also by the fact that punishment is inflicted by these means; for it is a kind of cure, and it is the nature of cures to be effected by contraries." (1104b13-18)

ὥστε καὶ διὰ τοῦτο περὶ ἡδονᾶς καὶ λύπας πᾶσα ἡ πραγματεία καὶ τῆ ἀρετῆ καὶ ἡδονᾶς καὶ λύπας πᾶσα ἡ πραγματεία καὶ τῆ ἀρετῆ καὶ τῆ πολιτικῆ· ὁ μὲν γὰρ εὖ τούτοις χρώμενος ἀγαθὸς ἔσται, ὁ δὲ κακῶς κακός. (1105a10-13)

That virtuous conditions are themselves proper ways of feeling, and not just tools for affecting action, is also suggested by Aristotle's inclusion of the passions, and not simply pleasures and pains, as matter to be shaped by a virtuous condition.<sup>12</sup>

But the proper states of pleasures, pains, and passions, both as valuable in themselves and as drivers of action, must be conditioned; repeated behavior is required. Through repeated action, pain is diminished, and appropriate pleasures developed. But so also, since the end is actions themselves, they must be practiced in order for them to become second nature. Accordingly, Aristotle emphasizes that virtues come to be through habits, and habits through laws:

For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so we too become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts. This is borne witness to by what happens in political communities; for legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator, and those who do not effect it miss their mark, and it is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one. (NE 1103a33-b6)

The emphasis on habitual correct behavior might suggest that virtue of character is a mere behavior, that legislators are meant to train human beings to follow the rules, and that states of proper feeling and passion are instrumental to such rule-following. On this, Aristotle is emphatic: virtue of character is not a product, or a mere behavior, but must run all the way down to a person's deepest motivations and must be integrated with their own thinking and reasoning.<sup>13</sup>

A cabinet-maker must also develop habits, say, of handling wood and tools, but the excellence of his product lies outside of those habits. In this respect Aristotle's virtue of character is not an art: its product doesn't lie outside of the action itself. In this sense, it even differs from music, which might be thought to have an external product in its effect on an audience--that is, after all, what we pay musicians for--whereas virtue not only has its value in itself, but that value must be recognized and chosen by the virtuous agent.

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<sup>12</sup> "By states I mean the things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions, eg. with reference to anger we stand badly if we feel it violently or too weakly, and well if we feel it moderately, and similarly with reference to the other passions." (1105b25-28; virtues are states: 1106a11-12)

<sup>13</sup> "The case of the arts and that of the virtues are not similar; for the products of the arts have their goodness in themselves, so that it is enough that they should have a certain character, but if the acts that are in accordance with the virtues have themselves a certain character it does not follow that they are done justly or temperately. The agent must also be in a certain condition when he does them; in the first place, he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character." (1105a26-34)

What does it mean to choose a virtuous action "for its own sake"? I gather that Aristotle's formulation here in one way appeals to the proper pleasure in an action. We choose a virtuous action for its own sake in that we do not choose it for the sake of something else, like honor, people-pleasing, or to avoid shame or punishment. Aristotle refers elsewhere to the ways in which a virtuous and flourishing life "has its pleasure in itself", and I gather this is what he means.<sup>14</sup>

Aristotle attributes the enjoyment of virtuous action to the love of the noble, or the *kalon*.<sup>15</sup> So, it seems, the proper pleasure of virtuous action is pleasure in the *kalon*, the beautiful order of one's own virtuous action. So the expressions to choose virtue for its own sake, to choose it for the sake of the *kalon*, and to take proper pleasure in it, seem to be either interchangeable or very closely related.

It is widely recognized that the word often translated as 'noble' or 'fine' is *kalon*, and so it also has the sense of both beauty and orderliness.<sup>16</sup> So even mathematical objects are said to be *kalon*. What is the beautiful order of the virtuous action? One possible answer is Aristotle's famous mean or intermediate: a virtue and a virtuous action lie on an intermediate between two forms of excess; virtue is a type of measure.<sup>17</sup> The mean or the intermediate is the measure of proper pleasure, proper pain, and the appropriate experience of the passions, once again suggesting that the good order of the action, its *kalon* character, and its proper pleasure, are deeply interconnected.

The intermediate as the measure of action and the measure of appropriate passion, pleasure, and pain, raises a question that haunts the *Nicomachean Ethics* without obvious resolution. How do we know where the mean lies? What is the standard by which it is measured out? How do we know how much is too much or too little? Aristotle's answer lies in the nature of practical wisdom or *phronesis*; the intermediate is not articulated in units or even in specific examples in each case, but the

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<sup>14</sup> "Their life [sc. of happy people] is also pleasant on its own. For pleasure is a state of soul, and to each man that which he is said to be a lover of is pleasant; eg. not only is a horse pleasant to a lover of horses, and a spectacle to a lover of sights, but also in the same way just acts are pleasant to the lover of justice and in general virtuous acts to the lover of virtue. Now for most men their pleasures are in conflict with one another because these are not by nature pleasant, but the lovers of what is noble find pleasant the things that are by nature pleasant; and virtuous actions are such, so that these are pleasant for such men as well as in their own nature. Their life, therefore, has no further need of pleasure as a sort of adventitious charm, but has its pleasure in itself." (1099a7-16)

<sup>15</sup> See Coope, "Why Does Aristotle Think That Virtue is Required for Practical Wisdom?" *Phronesis* 57 (2):142-163 (2012).

<sup>16</sup> Richardson Lear's discussion is central (*Happy Lives and the Highest Good: An Essay on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, Princeton: PUP, 2004, chapter 6.)

<sup>17</sup> "Virtue must have the quality of aiming at the intermediate. I mean virtue of character; for it is thing that is concerned with passions and actions, and in these there is excess, defect, and the intermediate. For instance, both fear and confidence and appetite and anger and pity and in general pleasure and pain may be felt both too much and too little, and in both cases not well; but to feel them at the right times, with reference to the right objects, toward the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way, is what is intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue. Similarly with actions also there is excess, defect, and intermediate." (1106b15-24)

practically wise person is himself its principle and standard.<sup>18</sup> So, it is suggested, imitation of the practically wise person would be a good way to learn the intermediate, and possession of the virtue of practical wisdom the only way to determine the proper measure for oneself.

In this way, as early as book 2, Aristotle has suggested the culminating thesis of book 6, that practical wisdom implies all of the virtues, and that no virtue of character is possible without it. I refer to this thesis as the 'reciprocity of the virtues' or simply 'reciprocity':

It is clear from what has been said that it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, or practically wise without virtue of character.

δῆλον οὖν ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ὅτι οὐχ οἷόν τε ἀγαθὸν εἶναι κυρίως ἄνευ φρονήσεως, οὐδὲ ὅτι οὐχ οἷόν τε ἀγαθὸν εἶναι κυρίως ἄνευ φρονήσεως, οὐδὲ φρόνιμον ἄνευ τῆς ἠθικῆς ἀρετῆς.  
(1144b30-33)

The reciprocity thesis is usually taken to be absolute, applying to all and every case of what Aristotle will call virtue. Among the consequences of a careful look at the political framing of the *NE* and especially the cultivation of virtue as described in the *Politics* is that this proves implausible. Such is already hinted here in *NE* 6: we have a qualification, virtue "in the strict sense (*kurios*)", suggesting that other forms of virtue may exist which do not meet the reciprocity condition.

However, we can already see some of the strange consequences of this. Practical wisdom was needed to find the mean or intermediate, and the intermediate measured the proper pleasure or the appropriate passion in an action. Furthermore, it is suggested (although not obvious) that the intermediate may itself constitute the *kalon*, the feature of the virtuous action that makes that action choiceworthy in itself. That ought to prepare us to see other characteristics of virtue to vanish when the condition of reciprocity fails. The imperfect virtues cultivated by ordinary regimes will lack reciprocity, that is, they may exist in isolation from the rest of virtue. They will also rely less on internal choices and reasoning, but rather on a good order imposed from the outside, by the lawgiver, the statesman, or the law itself. So while the imperfectly virtuous may maintain an orderly or beautiful character, they will not be chosen for that reason, that is, not for the sake of the *kalon*, and thus virtue in such regimes will not be pursued for its own sake. That will raise a great difficulty, beyond the scope of this paper, as to the way in which imperfect virtues are exercises of *reason*.

I will argue that the other features of virtue of character will remain intact in their imperfect applications: virtue remains a good condition, beneficial to the agent and to others; it is an ordered condition of pleasure, pain, and the passion; it is rooted in habit, and thereby cultivated by law.

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<sup>18</sup> "Virtue then is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it." (1106b36-1107a2)

Furthermore, it seems plausible that imperfect virtue retains the other characteristics, albeit in qualified ways. The imperfect virtue may retain an intermediacy imposed from the outside, and the intermediate may indeed be determined by the man of practical wisdom. That person with practical wisdom, however, will not be the virtuous agent, but the ruler, the statesman, or the lawgiver. It is in this sense, perhaps, that Aristotle identifies practical wisdom with political wisdom in *NE* 6.12. Aristotle's imperfect virtues, in other words, may achieve collectively what they fail to attain for individuals.

## II. Cultivating character: difficulties

When we turn to the *Politics*, as I will argue, we find virtues cultivated by legislators that meet some of the characteristic features of virtue of character as described in the *NE*, but not others. Most especially, the imperfect virtues brought about by law lack *reciprocity* and *being chosen for their own sake*. But before we turn there, we should notice that already in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle suggests that the legislator will face difficulties putting the virtue he has described into practice. The last chapter of the *NE* is an exhortation to put knowledge into practice, by legislation and political activity.<sup>19</sup>

Still, Aristotle makes it clear that virtue in its full-blooded sense will not be practicable for politicians or legislators in many or most cases. "To have and to use virtue" may be possible for the political leaders themselves, but human nature is variable in its receptivity to reason:

Now if arguments were in themselves enough to make men good, they would justly, as Theognis says, have won very great rewards, and such rewards should have been provided; but as things are, while they seem to have power to encourage and stimulate the generous-minded among our youth, and to make a character which is gently born, and a true lover of what is noble, ready to be possessed by virtue, they are not able to encourage the many to nobility and goodness. For these do not by nature obey the sense of shame, but only fear, and do not abstain from bad acts because of their baseness but through fear of punishment; living by passion they pursue their own pleasures and the means to them, and and the opposite pains, and have not even a conception of what is noble and truly pleasant, since they have never tasted it. What argument would remould such people? It is hard, if not impossible, to remove by argument the traits that have long since been incorporated in the character; and perhaps we must be content if, when all the influences by which we are thought to become good are present, we get some share of virtue. (*NE* 1179b4-20)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Surely, as the saying goes, where there are things to be done the end is not to survey and recognize the various things, but rather to do them; with regard to virtue, then, it is not enough to know, but we must try to have and use it, or try any other way there may be of becoming good." (*NE* X.9, 1179a35-b4)

<sup>20</sup> εἰ μὲν οὖν ἦσαν οἱ λόγοι αὐτάρκεις πρὸς τὸ ποιῆσαι ἐπιεικεῖς, πολλοὺς ἂν μισθοὺς καὶ μεγάλους δικαίως ἔφερον κατὰ τὸν θεόγνιν, καὶ ἔδει ἂν τούτους πορίσασθαι· νῦν δὲ φαίνονται προτρέψασθαι μὲν καὶ παρορμησαὶ τῶν νέων τοὺς ἐλευθερίους ἰσχύειν, ἧθὸς τ' εὐγενῆς καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς φιλόκαλον ποιῆσαι ἂν

Arguments and speeches are not enough to make people good-- so much should be obvious already from the situation of Aristotelian virtue in our habits, emotions, feelings and instincts. Here he suggests that "the many", guided by pleasures and pains, may have only "a share of virtue" available to them. Notice: Aristotle does not say that no virtue is available at all to such people, but that our sights must be set lower in their case. The legislator's task of instilling virtue is changed, not canceled.

Still, in a dialectical fashion, Aristotle introduces a counterpoint to his pessimism as to the moral capacities of the many. Some are not born good, but *can* be made good by the right kind of prior cultivation. If the legislator can bring about good habits for proper pleasures and pains in citizens, they will be able to receive reason.

Nature's part evidently does not depend on us, but as a result of some divine causes is present in those who are truly fortunate; while argument and teaching, we may suspect, are not powerful with all men, but the soul of the student must first have been cultivated by means of habits for noble joy and noble hatred, like earth which is to nourish the seed. For he who lives as passion directs will not hear argument that dissuades him, nor understand it if he does; and how can we persuade one in such a state to change his ways?

γίνεσθαι δ' ἀγαθούς οἴονται οἳ μὲν φύσει οἳ δ' ἔθει οἳ δὲ διδαχῇ. τὸ μὲν οὖν τῆς φύσεως δῆλον ὡς οὐκ ἔφ' ἡμῖν ὑπάρχει, ἀλλὰ διὰ τινος θείας αἰτίας τοῖς ὡς ἀληθῶς εὐτυχέσιν ὑπάρχει· ὁ δὲ λόγος καὶ ἡ διδαχὴ μὴ ποτ' οὐκ ἐν ἅπασιν ἰσχύει, ἀλλὰ δεῖ προδιεργάσθαι τοῖς ἔθει τὴν τοῦ ἀκροατοῦ ψυχὴν πρὸς τὸ καλῶς χαίρειν καὶ μισεῖν, ὡς περ γῆν τὴν θρέψουσιν τὸ σπέρμα. οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἀκούσειε λόγου ἀποτρέποντος οὐδ' αὖ συνείη ὁ κατὰ πάθος ζῶν· τὸν δ' οὕτως ἔχοντα πῶς οἴον τε μεταπεῖσαι; ὅλως τ' οὐ δοκεῖ λόγῳ ὑπεῖκειν τὸ πάθος ἀλλὰ βίᾳ. δεῖ δὴ τὸ ἦθος προϋπάρχειν πῶς οἰκεῖον τῆς ἀρετῆς, στέργον τὸ καλὸν καὶ δυσχεραῖνον τὸ αἰσχρόν.

(NE 1179b20-30)

Aristotle explains that because virtuous habits are unpleasant for many and especially for young people, law can function to rebalance the pleasures and pains of behaviors via punishments (and one assumes, incentives such as honors). For many, the habits fixed in youth will no longer be painful, thanks to custom; for others, the punishments and honors must remain in place throughout life.<sup>21</sup>

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κατοκώχιμον ἐκ τῆς ἀρετῆς, τοὺς δὲ πολλοὺς ἀδυνατεῖν πρὸς καλοκαγαθίαν προτρέψασθαι· οὐ γὰρ πεφύκασιν αἰδοῖ πειθαρχεῖν ἀλλὰ φόβῳ, οὐδ' ἀπέχεσθαι τῶν φαύλων διὰ τὸ αἰσχρὸν ἀλλὰ διὰ τὰς τιμωρίας· πάθει γὰρ ζῶντες τὰς οἰκείας ἡδονὰς διώκουσι καὶ δι' ὧν αὐταὶ ἔσονται, φεύγουσι δὲ τὰς ἀντικειμένας λύπας, τοῦ δὲ καλοῦ καὶ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἡδέος οὐδ' ἔννοιαν ἔχουσιν, ἄγευστοι ὄντες. τοὺς δὲ τοιοῦτους τίς ἂν λόγος μεταρρυθμίσει; οὐ γὰρ οἴον τε ἢ οὐ ῥάδιον τὰ ἐκ παλαιοῦ τοῖς ἦθεισι κατελημμένα λόγῳ μεταστῆσαι· ἀγαπητὸν δ' ἴσως ἐστὶν εἰ πάντων ὑπαρχόντων δι' ὧν ἐπιεικεῖς δοκοῦμεν γίνεσθαι, μεταλάβοιμεν τῆς ἀρετῆς.

<sup>21</sup> "But it is difficult to get from youth up a right training for virtue if one has not been brought up under right laws; for to live temperately and hardily is not pleasant to most people, especially when they are young. For this reason their nurture and occupations should be fixed by law; for they will not be painful when they have become customary. But it is

Aristotle seems to suggest that "most" people are like children, requiring punishment and incentive to do the right thing. But his dialectical movements are confusing. We could be forgiven for wondering at this point how many people are actually being formed for virtue by the laws, given that some (as he has said) are naturally formed for virtue. Exactly what percentage of the minority are trained for real virtue \*by the laws\*? One could furthermore wonder whether the tendencies of "most" is a matter of natural ability, as he suggested earlier on, or whether in certain circumstances law is limited, so that as a matter of fact, it ends up being most, but it \*could\* be otherwise.

Aristotle, then, faces a tension between his beliefs about the distribution of natural abilities of virtue, and his belief about the efficacy of law in promoting and instilling virtue. Fortunately, he offers a sort of resolution. He first points to the middle ground presented by the Stranger in Plato's *Laws*, that laws ought to include both punishment *and* exhortation to the noble (*kalon*) (NE 1180a5-14). Law may thus be designed to reach two distinct audiences, the hopelessly pleasure-driven and the unstable lover of the noble. The latter will hear the exhortations (in the *Laws*, the written precludes to the laws themselves) and so will be moved to do the right thing for pleasure rather than pain. So we may imagine (with the Plato of the *Laws*) a community where the *majority* has been shaped for some form of virtue not driven by fear of punishment, even if only a few are disposed for it by nature. But his clearest resolution of the tension follows. Aristotle dials back the requirement that the virtue cultivated by law might require proper pleasures in the *kalon*; rather, citizens may avoid bad actions and live in accordance with reason, even without such pleasures (or so it may seem):

However that may be, if (as we have said) the man who is to be good must be well trained and habituated, and go on to spend his time in worthy occupations and neither willingly nor unwillingly do bad actions, and if this can be brought about if men live in accordance with a sort of reason and right order, provided this has force,-if this be so, the paternal command indeed has not the required force or compulsive power (nor in general has the command of one man, unless he be a king or something similar), but the law has compulsive power, while it is at the same time a rule proceeding from a sort of practical wisdom and reason. And while people hate men who oppose their impulses, even if they oppose them rightly, the law in its ordaining of what is good is not burdensome. (NE 1180a14-24)<sup>22</sup>

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surely not enough that when they are young they should get the right nurture and attention; since they must, even when they are grown up, practise and be habituated to them, we shall need laws for this as well, and generally speaking to cover the whole of life; for most people obey necessity rather than argument, and punishments rather than the sense of what is noble." (NE 1179b30-1180a5)

<sup>22</sup> εἰ δ' οὖν, καθάπερ εἴρηται, τὸν ἐσόμενον ἀγαθὸν τραφεῖν καλῶς δεῖ καὶ ἐθισθῆναι, εἴθ' οὕτως ἐν ἐπιτηδεύμασιν ἐπιεικέσι ζῆν καὶ μήτ' ἄκοντα μήθ' ἐκόντα πράττειν τὰ φαῦλα, ταῦτα δὲ γίνοιτ' ἂν βιουμένοις κατὰ τινὰ νοῦν καὶ τάξιν ὀρθήν, ἔχουσαν ἰσχύν· ἡ μὲν οὖν πατρικὴ πρόσταξις οὐκ ἔχει τὸ ἰσχυρὸν οὐδὲ δὴ τὸ ἀναγκαῖον, οὐδὲ δὴ ὅλως ἢ ἐνὸς ἀνδρός, μὴ βασιλέως ὄντος ἢ τινος τοιούτου· ὁ δὲ νόμος ἀναγκαστικὴν ἔχει δύναμιν, λόγος ὢν ἀπὸ τινος φρονήσεως καὶ νοῦ. καὶ τῶν μὲν ἀνθρώπων ἐχθαίρουσι τοὺς ἐναντιουμένους ταῖς ὀρμαῖς, κἂν ὀρθῶς αὐτὸ δρῶσιν· ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπαχθῆς τάττων τὸ ἐπιεικές.

I take the goal of law described here, that people spend time in worthy pursuits and "neither willingly or unwillingly do bad actions" to be a significant dialing back of the goal we began with, to "cultivate noble joy and hatred", that is, true love and pleasure in the noble or *kalon*. In his discussion of the *Laws* and in this passage, Aristotle points to the possibility that a variety of conditions of character that can fulfill the lesser goal. When we cultivate virtue through law, for Aristotle, the result will not always be the full-fledged virtue of character that meets the conditions he describes earlier in the *NE*.

### III. The task of the statesman

The first three books of the *Politics* lay out general principles of politics, namely, types of rule, the distinction between rule and mastery, the distinction between rule and citizenship, and the distinction between the common benefit and the benefit of the rulers. In book 4 of the *Politics*, Aristotle turns from general exploratory accounts of rule and citizenship to his inquiry into types of regime, and into what virtues and vices are cultivated in them. He begins by outlining what the inquiry entails, and what components it has:

It is clear that it belongs to the same science to study: [1] What the best constitution is, that is to say, what it must be like if it is to be most what one would pray for and if there were no external obstacles. Also [2] which constitution is appropriate for which city-states. For achieving the best constitution is perhaps impossible for many; and so neither the unqualifiedly best constitution nor the one that is best in the circumstances should be neglected by the good legislator and true statesman. Further, [3] which constitution is best given certain assumptions. For a statesman must be able to study how any given constitution might initially come to be, and how, once in existence, it might be preserved for the longest time. I mean, for example, when some city-state happens to be governed neither by the best constitution (not even having the necessary resources) nor by the best one possible in the circumstances, but by a worse one. Besides all these things, a statesman should know [4] which constitution is appropriate for all city-states. (*Pol* IV.1, 1288b21-35; translations from the *Politics* by Reeve with occasional changes)<sup>23</sup>

The activity of political science or political knowledge entails first of all the outlining of an ideal or best constitution, what regime one might adopt without obstacles; secondly, finding the best regime

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<sup>23</sup> ὥστε δῆλον ὅτι καὶ πολιτείαν τῆς αὐτῆς ἐστὶν ἐπιστήμης τὴν ἀρίστην θεωρῆσαι τίς ἐστὶ καὶ ποία τις ἂν οὔσα μάλιστ' εἴη κατ' εὐχὴν μηδενὸς ἐμποδίζοντος τῶν ἐκτός, καὶ τίς τίσιν ἀρμόττουσα (πολλοῖς γὰρ τῆς ἀρίστης τυχεῖν ἴσως ἀδύνατον, ὥστε τὴν κρατίστην τε ἀπλῶς καὶ τὴν ἐκ τῶν ὑποκειμένων ἀρίστην οὐ δεῖ λεληθῆναι τὸν ἀγαθὸν νομοθέτην καὶ τὸν ὡς ἀληθῶς πολιτικόν), ἔτι δὲ τρίτην τὴν ἐξ ὑποθέσεως (δεῖ γὰρ καὶ τὴν δοθεῖσαν δύνασθαι θεωρεῖν, ἐξ ἀρχῆς τε πῶς ἂν γένοιτο, καὶ γενομένη τίνα τρόπον ἂν σώζοιτο πλείστον χρόνον· λέγω δὲ οἷον εἴ τιτι πόλει συμβέβηκε μήτε τὴν ἀρίστην πολιτεύεσθαι πολιτείαν, ἀχωρήγητον δὲ εἶναι καὶ τῶν ἀναγκαίων, μήτε τὴν ἐνδεχομένην ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων, ἀλλὰ τίνα φαυλοτέραν), παρὰ πάντα δὲ ταῦτα τὴν μάλιστα πάσαις ταῖς πόλεσιν ἀρμόττουσαν δεῖ γνωρίζειν.

under the circumstances; thirdly, finding ways to adapt even bad regimes and make them better; and lastly, finding a type of regime that might work in all circumstances.

It can be difficult to see what the distinction is between the second task: finding the best regime under the circumstances, and the fourth: finding the best regime for all circumstances. I gather that Aristotle may be suggesting that there is a "good enough" regime adaptable to all circumstances, but that there might well be a better one possible under certain, narrower circumstances. It is difficult to see what this might mean without specific examples; for my purposes, I will treat both endeavors at once by looking at the two regime-types called "polity" in light of the adaptations of full virtue they require.

The book 4 passage raises one of the central questions of Aristotle's political theory, whether a regime is designed for virtue only or whether stability is an independent goal--here "how the regime might be preserved for the longest time".<sup>24</sup> I intend here to make an indirect argument for the view that virtue alone is the proper goal of the politician and the legislator, and that stability follows from virtue. In other words, stability or preservation of regimes is not an independent goal, but is a consequence of the cultivation of imperfect virtues. To see this I think requires a close look at the details of bad regimes, that I will undertake further on. But it is worth putting some general evidence in the mix now, so that my initial claim that the work of the legislator is *always* to cultivate virtue and *eudaimonia* seems less outlandish.

Aristotle explains further on, in book 5, that each type of constitution has its own virtue or justice, and that those who hold "the offices with supreme authority" need to have that type of virtue or justice.

Those who are to hold the offices with supreme authority should possess three qualities: first, friendship for the established constitution; next, the greatest possible capacity for the tasks of office; third, in each constitution the sort of virtue or justice that is suited to the constitution (for if what is just is not the same in all constitutions, there must be differences in the virtue of justice as well.)

Τρία δέ τινα χρή ἔχειν τοὺς μέλλοντας ἄρξειν τὰς κυρίας ἀρχάς, πρῶτον μὲν φιλίαν πρὸς τὴν καθεστῶσαν πολιτείαν, ἔπειτα δύναμιν μεγίστην τῶν ἔργων τῆς ἀρχῆς, τρίτον δ' ἀρετὴν καὶ δικαιοσύνην ἐν ἐκάστη πολιτείᾳ τὴν πρὸς τὴν πολιτείαν (εἰ γὰρ μὴ ταῦτ' ὅν τὸ δίκαιον κατὰ πάσας τὰς πολιτείας, ἀνάγκη καὶ τῆς δικαιοσύνης εἶναι διαφορὰς).  
(*Pol.* V.9, 1309a33-39)

More crucially, just below, Aristotle explains the importance of an affinity between the political leadership and the regime. He explicitly argues that what makes a regime last (that is, its stability) is

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<sup>24</sup> See, most recently, Destrée vs. Schütrumpf in Lockwood and Samaras edd. *Aristotle's Politics: A Critical Guide*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2015) and my review in Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews (<https://ndpr.nd.edu/news/aristotles-politics-a-critical-guide/>)

education "in the regime", where that is understood not as what pleases the leadership, but which makes governing in the regime possible. Once we look at the details of what this education is and the improvements in governance and stability it makes possible, it will be evident I think that forms of virtue (albeit imperfect) are what Aristotle has in mind as its goal.

But of all the ways that are mentioned to make a constitution last, the most important one, which everyone now despises, is for citizens to be educated in a way that suits their constitutions. For the most beneficial laws, even when ratified by all who are engaged in politics, are of no use if the people are not habituated and educated in accordance with the constitution—democratically if the laws are democratic and oligarchically if they are oligarchic. For if weakness of will exists in an individual, it also exists in a city-state. But being educated in a way that suits the constitution does not mean doing whatever pleases the oligarchs or those who want a democracy. Rather, it means doing the things that will enable the former to govern oligarchically and the latter to have a democratic constitution. (*Pol.* V.9, 1310a12-22)<sup>25</sup>

That Aristotle has forms of virtue in mind here as the safeguards of political stability is strongly suggested by his use of virtue-related terms: "habit", "education" and even "weakness of will". These are forms of restraint and discipline that are, as he says "beneficial", that is (as I understand it) contributing to the good life for the citizens, albeit in a limited way.

In his clarification, then, Aristotle says that education in the regime aims at the citizens attaining genuinely good and beneficial conditions of character: they *ought not* be educated in greed, ambition, or license, even if these accurately characterize their regime. Rather, they ought be educated in some kind of constraint that will allow the regime and its residents to function and flourish as best they can within given limitations. These forms of constraint are what I will call imperfect virtues. But of course, more evidence and illustration is needed, not least to show that the imperfect virtues matter not only for an independently valued "stability" but as participation in the human good.

Following Aristotle's outline, I will first look at the regime he calls 'the city of our prayers' in books 7-8, and then treat the two versions of polity as best adaptations to circumstances, or as possible in all circumstances as the case may be. I'll then look at the 'best democracy' and the tyranny as examples of regimes "under a hypothesis", i.e. bad regimes. My question in each case will

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<sup>25</sup> μέγιστον δὲ πάντων τῶν εἰρημένων πρὸς τὸ διαμένειν τὰς πολιτείας, οἷον νῦν ὀλιγωροῦσι πάντες, τὸ παιδεύεσθαι πρὸς τὰς πολιτείας. ὄφελος γὰρ οὐθὲν τῶν ὠφελιμωτάτων νόμων καὶ συνδεδοξαμένων ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν πολιτευομένων, εἰ μὴ ἔσονται εἰθισμένοι καὶ πεπαιδευμένοι ἐν τῇ πολιτείᾳ, εἰ μὲν οἱ νόμοι δημοτικοί, δημοτικῶς, εἰ δ' ὀλιγαρχικοί, ὀλιγαρχικῶς. εἴπερ γὰρ ἔστιν ἐφ' ἑνὸς ἀκρασία, ἔστι καὶ ἐπὶ πόλεως. ἔστι δὲ τὸ πεπαιδεῦσθαι πρὸς τὴν πολιτείαν οὐ τοῦτο, τὸ ποιεῖν οἷς χαίρουσιν οἱ ὀλιγαρχοῦντες ἢ οἱ δημοκρατίαν βουλόμενοι, ἀλλ' οἷς δυνήσονται οἱ μὲν ὀλιγαρχεῖν οἱ δὲ δημοκρατεῖσθαι.

be what sort of virtue or virtues does Aristotle envisage cultivating? And which conditions are met from the full virtue of the *Nicomachean Ethics*?

#### IV. Full-fledged virtue in the *Politics*

Were there any doubt that the *Politics* meant to outline the possibilities for cultivating the virtue found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it ought to be put to rest by the political ideal--which Aristotle calls 'the city of our prayers'-- outlined in books 7-8. In the account of the education in such a city in book 8, Aristotle describes the cultivation of proper pleasures in action, in language echoing both *NE* 10.9 and the earlier treatments of virtuous pleasure in the *NE*.

What sorts of habits and virtues are the laws designed to cultivate in the 'city of our prayers'? Proper pleasures in good actions are cultivated by the right kind of musical education:

Since music happens to be one of the pleasures, and virtue is a matter of enjoying, loving, and hating in the right way, it is clear that nothing is more important than that one should learn to judge correctly and get into the habit of enjoying decent characters and noble actions. (*Pol.* VIII.5, 1340a14-18)

ἐπεὶ δὲ συμβέβηκεν εἶναι τὴν μουσικὴν τῶν ἡδέων, τὴν δ' ἀρετὴν περὶ τὸ χαίρειν ὀρθῶς καὶ φιλεῖν καὶ μισεῖν, δεῖ δηλονότι μαθάνειν καὶ συνεθίζεσθαι μηθὲν οὕτως ὡς τὸ κρίνειν ὀρθῶς καὶ τὸ χαίρειν τοῖς ἐπιεικέσιν ἤθεσι καὶ ταῖς καλαῖς πράξεσιν·

"Enjoying, loving and hating correctly" closely echoes 10.9 [cite1179b25?] "noble joy and hatred"; Aristotle means to cultivate the correct affective condition toward the right things, most especially the proper pleasures of a virtuous action.

Proper pleasures in action and the right modes of affect toward the right objects are cultivated by young people imitating musical representations of fine and noble actions. The music serves as a sort of sweetener that makes some actions pleasant when they wouldn't be otherwise; the suggestion seems to be that when musical enticements are removed (and reason develops), the link between the pleasure and the action-type will remain.

But rhythms and melodies contain the greatest likenesses of the true natures of anger, gentleness, courage, temperance, and their opposites, and of all the other components of character as well. The facts make this clear. For when we listen to such representations our souls are changed. But getting into the habit of being pained and pleased by likenesses is close to being in the same condition where the real things are concerned. For example, if someone enjoys looking at an image of something for no other reason other than its shape or form, he is bound to enjoy looking at the very thing whose image he is looking at. (1314a18-30)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> ἔστι δὲ ὁμοιώματα μάλιστα παρὰ τὰς ἀληθινὰς φύσεις ἐν τοῖς ῥυθμοῖς καὶ τοῖς μέλεσιν ὀργῆς καὶ πραότητος, ἔτι δ' ἀνδρείας καὶ σωφροσύνης καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐναντίων τούτοις καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἡθῶν (δηλον δὲ ἐκτῶν ἔργων· μεταβάλλομεν γὰρ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀκροώμενοι τοιούτων)· ὁ δ' ἐν τοῖς ὁμοίοις ἐθισμὸς τοῦ

The details of the music and its imitations of virtues and proper feelings are hard to imagine in detail, but it is clear enough that the pleasures are trained on musical imitations in a way that is meant to remain once lived realities takes the place of their images.

It is also clear that the virtue cultivated in the 'city of our prayers' is considered to be complete and reciprocal. Aristotle praises leisure (in language echoing *NE* 10.7) and the virtues of philosophy--which however difficult they are to interpret in the *Politics*, seem to correspond to the contemplative life praised at the end of the *NE*:

For, as has been said repeatedly, peace is the end of war, and leisure of work. Some of the virtues useful for leisure and leisured pursuits accomplish their task while one is actually at leisure, but others do so while one is at work. For many necessities must be present in order for leisure to be possible. That is why it is appropriate for our city-state to have temperance, courage, and endurance. For as the proverb says, there is no leisure for slaves, and people who are unable to face danger courageously are the slaves of their attackers. Courage and endurance are required for work, philosophy for leisure, and temperance and justice for both, but particularly for peace and leisure. For war compels people to be just and temperate, but the enjoyment of good luck and the leisure that accompanies peace tend to make them arrogant. (*Pol.* VII. 15, 1334a14-28)<sup>27</sup>

The necessity of work and war implies the necessity of appropriate virtues: here, temperance, courage, and endurance. Philosophy is here named as the virtue of leisure, and justice is introduced as necessary in both conditions. Aristotle here is attacking the exclusive cultivation of courage, endurance, and military virtue by the Spartans (discussed below). For Aristotle, the virtues of military life are not complete unless they are pursued for the higher ends of leisure, peace, and philosophy:

It is clear, therefore, that all military practices are to be regarded as noble, not when they are pursued as the highest end of all, but only when they are pursued for the sake of the highest end.

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λυπεῖσθαι καὶ χαίρειν ἐγγύς ἐστι τῷ πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν τὸν αὐτὸν ἔχειν τρόπον (οἷον εἴ τις χαίρει τὴν εἰκόνα τινὸς θεώμενος μὴ δι' ἄλλην αἰτίαν ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν μορφήν αὐτήν, ἀναγκαῖον τοῦτω καὶ αὐτοῦ ἐκείνου τὴν θεωρίαν, οὗ τὴν εἰκόνα θεωρεῖ, ἠδεῖαν εἶναι).

<sup>27</sup> τέλος γάρ, ὡσπερ εἴρηται πολλάκις, εἰρήνη μὲν πολέμου σχολῆ δ' ἀσχολίας. χρήσιμοι δὲ τῶν ἀρετῶν εἰσι πρὸς τὴν σχολὴν καὶ διαγωγὴν ὧν τε ἐν τῇ σχολῇ τὸ ἔργον καὶ ὧν ἐν τῇ ἀσχολίᾳ. δεῖ γὰρ πολλὰ τῶν ἀναγκαίων ὑπάρχειν ὅπως ἐξῆ σχολάζειν· διὸ σώφρονα τὴν πόλιν εἶναι προσήκει καὶ ἀνδρείαν καὶ καρτερικὴν· κατὰ γὰρ τὴν παροιμίαν, οὐ σχολῆ δούλοις, οἱ δὲ μὴ δυνάμενοι κινδυνεύειν ἀνδρείως δούλοι τῶν ἐπιόντων εἰσίν. ἀνδρείας μὲν οὖν καὶ καρτερίας δεῖ πρὸς τὴν ἀσχολίαν, φιλοσοφίας δὲ πρὸς τὴν σχολὴν, σωφροσύνης δὲ καὶ δικαιοσύνης ἐν ἀμφοτέροις τοῖς χρόνοις, καὶ μᾶλλον εἰρήνην ἄγουσι καὶ σχολάζουσιν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ πόλεμος ἀναγκάζει δικαίους εἶναι καὶ σωφρονεῖν, ἡ δὲ τῆς εὐτυχίας ἀπόλαυσις καὶ τὸ σχολάζειν μετ' εἰρήνης ὑβριστὰς ποιεῖ μᾶλλον.

δῆλον ἄρα ὅτι πάσας τὰς πρὸς τὸν πόλεμον ἐπιμελείας καλὰς μὲν θετέον, οὐχ ὡς τέλος δὲ πάντων ἀκρότατον, ἀλλ' ἐκείνου χάριν ταύτας.  
(*Pol.* VII.2, 1325a5-7)

The best city, then, must pursue full *eudaimonia* or human flourishing, and to do so requires cultivating the whole of virtue, including the virtue most closely associated with reciprocity in the *NE*, *phronesis* or practical wisdom:

The happy city-state is the one that is best and acts nobly. It is impossible for those who do not do noble things to act nobly; and no action, whether a man's or a city-state's is noble when separate from virtue and practical wisdom.

ἐχόμενον δ' ἐστὶ καὶ τῶν αὐτῶν λόγων δεόμενον καὶ πόλιν εὐδαίμονα τὴν ἀρίστην εἶναι καὶ πράττουσαν καλῶς. ἀδύνατον δὲ καλῶς πράττειν τοῖς μὴ τὰ καλὰ πράττουσιν· οὐθὲν δὲ καλὸν ἔργον οὔτ' ἀνδρὸς οὔτε πόλεως χωρὶς ἀρετῆς καὶ φρονήσεως.  
(*Pol.* VII.1, 1323b30-32)

That *phronesis* is especially to be broadly pursued and cultivated in the city of our prayers is very strongly implicit also in the regime's *form of rule*: that is, that the citizens "rule and are ruled in turn" [cite *Pol* 7].

Looking back at Aristotle's discussion of citizenship in *Politics* 1 and 3, we find that *phronesis* is the virtue necessary for ruling, but not for being ruled. In this earlier discussion, meant to be applied to a variety of types of regime, Aristotle is clearly envisaging cases where *phronesis* and thus a full and complete form of virtue *will not* be held by all the citizens:

We must suppose, therefore, that the same necessarily holds of the virtues of character too: all must share in them, but not in the same way; rather, each must have a share sufficient to enable him to perform his own task. Hence a ruler must have virtue of character complete, since his task is unqualifiedly that of a master craftsman, and reason is a master craftsman, but each of the others must have as much as pertains to him. It is evident, then, that all those mentioned have virtue of character, and that temperance, courage, and justice of a man are not the same as those of a woman, as Socrates supposed: the one courage is that of a ruler, the other that of an assistant, and similarly in the case of the other virtues, too. (*Pol.* I.13, 1260a14-24)<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> ὁμοίως τοίνυν ἀναγκαίως ἔχειν καὶ περὶ τὰς ἠθικὰς ἀρετὰς ὑποληπτέον, δεῖν μὲν μετέχειν πάντας, ἀλλ' οὐ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον, ἀλλ' ὅσον <ικανὸν> ἐκάστω πρὸς τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔργον· διὸ τὸν μὲν ἄρχοντα τελέαν ἔχειν δεῖ τὴν ἠθικὴν ἀρετὴν (τὸ γὰρ ἔργον ἐστὶν ἀπλῶς τοῦ ἀρχιτέκτονος, ὁ δὲ λόγος ἀρχιτέκτων), τῶν δ' ἄλλων ἕκαστον ὅσον ἐπιβάλλει αὐτοῖς, ὥστε φανερόν ὅτι ἔστιν ἠθικὴ ἀρετὴ τῶν εἰρημένων πάντων, καὶ οὐχ ἡ αὐτὴ σωφροσύνη γυναικὸς καὶ ἀνδρός, οὐδ' ἀνδρεία καὶ δικαιοσύνη, καθάπερ ᾤετο Σωκράτης, ἀλλ' ἡ μὲν ἀρχικὴ ἀνδρεία ἢ δ' ὑπηρετικὴ, ὁμοίως δ' ἔχει καὶ περὶ τὰς ἄλλας.

Complete virtue of character is only required for those who hold or exercise office, rulers; those in a permanent state of subjection (women) do not require it (and, it is suggested, cannot possess it, lacking full virtue's constituent activities.)

The understanding of virtue as indexed to and exercised within particular social roles or tasks is expanded in Aristotle's discussion of citizenship in book 3. In the reciprocal type of rule that Aristotle calls "political", that is, pertaining to citizens of a city-state, one learns to rule by first being ruled, and so in such cities, as in the city of our prayers, the citizens have the capacity to rule and be ruled in turn:

But there is also a kind of rule exercised over those who are similar in birth and free. This we call "political" rule. A ruler must learn it by being ruled, just as one learns to be a cavalry commander by serving under a cavalry commander, or to be a general by serving under a general, or under a major or a company commander to learn to occupy the office. Hence this too is rightly said, that one cannot rule well without having been ruled. And whereas the virtues of these *are* different, a good citizen must have the knowledge and ability both to be ruled and to rule, and this is the virtue of the citizen, to know the rule of free people from both sides. (*Pol* 1277b7-  
[?])<sup>29</sup>

Aristotle goes on to say, in a passage that shocks readers of the *NE*, that phronesis is peculiar to rulers; it is not a virtue that is appropriate, or as it is suggested, even possible, among those who are under permanent rule by others:

Practical wisdom is the only virtue peculiar to the ruler; for the others, it would seem, must be common to both rulers and ruled. At any rate, practical wisdom is not the virtue of one who is ruled, but true opinion is. For those ruled are like the makers of flutes, whereas rulers are like the flute players who use them.

ἡ δὲ φρόνησις ἄρχοντος ἴδιος ἀρετὴ μόνη. τὰς γὰρ ἄλλας ἔοικεν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι κοινὰς καὶ τῶν ἀρχομένων καὶ τῶν ἀρχόντων, ἀρχομένου δὲ γε οὐκ ἔστιν ἀρετὴ φρόνησις, ἀλλὰ δόξα ἀληθῆς· ὥσπερ αὐλοποιὸς γὰρ ὁ ἀρχόμενος, ὁ δ' ἄρχων αὐλητὴς ὁ χρώμενος.  
(*Pol.* 1277b26-30)

If all the virtues necessarily imply one another, and phronesis, as *NE* 6.12-13 suggests, what Aristotle says here raises serious puzzles. From the perspective of the *NE*, the courage and temperance fitting to the ruled should not exist. One way to reconcile the passages is to suggest, as I have already, that the virtue of character described in the *NE* is an ideal understood to be limited

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<sup>29</sup> ἀλλ' ἔστι τις ἀρχὴ καθ' ἣν ἄρχει τῶν ὁμοίων τῷ γένει καὶ τῶν ἐλευθέρων. ταύτην γὰρ λέγομεν εἶναι τὴν πολιτικὴν ἀρχήν, ἣν δεῖ τὸν ἄρχοντα ἀρχόμενον μαθεῖν, οἷον ἱππαρχεῖν ἱππαρχηθέντα, στρατηγεῖν στρατηγηθέντα καὶ ταξιαρχήσαντα καὶ λοχαγήσαντα. διὸ λέγεται καὶ τοῦτο καλῶς, ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν εὖ ἄρξαι μὴ ἀρχθέντα. τούτων δὲ ἀρετὴ μὲν ἕτερα, δεῖ δὲ τὸν πολίτην τὸν ἀγαθὸν ἐπίστασθαι καὶ δύνασθαι καὶ ἄρχεσθαι καὶ ἄρχειν, καὶ αὕτη ἀρετὴ πολίτου, τὸ τὴν τῶν ἐλευθέρων ἀρχὴν ἐπίστασθαι ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρα.

either to particular political circumstances and to blind luck. We would find, then, in the *Politics*, on the one hand an outline of the conditions under which such virtue can be cultivated, according to the promise set forth in *NE* 10.9. We would also find, however, beneficial conditions of character when those particular political circumstances do not hold.

The sharing of rule in the 'city of our prayers' in book 7, then, implies citizens cultivated and trained in the whole of virtue, but not in the way one might have expected from the discussion of reciprocity in *NE* 6. The reciprocity of virtues is not something, so to speak, eternally present in the virtuous agent as soon as <poof!> virtue is acquired. Rather, it expresses itself over the course of a life, as different virtues are required and as different opportunities to exercise virtue are presented. The city of our prayers involves a division of labor among the citizens (*Pol* 7.9): citizens are soldiers in their youth, which requires courage and endurance; in middle age they take office (so exercising phronesis); and in old age, perhaps, practice philosophy, thus achieving an even fuller sort of completion than phronesis alone might permit.

In our overview of the ultimate ideal for the political cultivation of virtue in the *Politics*, then, we find results broadly consistent with the *Nicomachean Ethics*: the virtue of character cultivated in the best circumstances is both sought for its own sake and enjoyed with appropriate pleasures, and is cultivated in a complete and reciprocal form, albeit over the course of a life, and not all at once as we might have expected from the *NE* 6 discussion.

## **V. First defective virtue: military virtue in the constitution for most**

In *Politics* 7.2, Aristotle takes pains to distinguish the complete or full virtue cultivated in the city of our prayers from the partial, merely military virtue cultivated elsewhere. Elsewhere in the *Politics*, he attributes merely military virtue both to Sparta and to the regime type he calls "polity". It seems that this may be the "best constitution for most" that we saw earlier, but one cannot rule out that it may also be the best attainable under certain circumstances. The polity appears first in book 3, as the regime easiest to attain that is directed toward the common benefit (rather than, like its counterpart democracy, directed toward the benefit of the rulers):

When the multitude governs for the common benefit, it is called by the name common to all constitutions, namely, *politeia*. Moreover, this happens reasonably. For while it is possible for one or a few to be outstandingly virtuous, it is difficult for a larger number to be accomplished in every virtue, but it can be so in military virtue in particular. That is precisely why the class of defensive soldiers, the ones who possess the weapons, has the most authority in this constitution.

ὅταν δὲ τὸ πλῆθος πρὸς τὸ κοινὸν πολιτεύηται συμφέρον, καλεῖται τὸ κοινὸν ὄνομα πασῶν τῶν πολιτειῶν, πολιτεία. (συμβαίνει δ' εὐλόγως· ἓνα μὲν γὰρ διαφέρειν κατ' ἀρετὴν ἢ ὀλίγους ἐνδέχεται, πλείους δ' ἤδη χαλεπὸν ἠκριβῶσθαι πρὸς πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν, ἀλλὰ μάλιστα

τὴν πολεμικὴν· αὕτη γὰρ ἐν πλήθει γίγνεται· διόπερ κατὰ ταύτην τὴν πολιτείαν κυριώτατον τὸ προπολεμοῦν καὶ μετέχουσιν αὐτῆς οἱ κεκτημένοι τὰ ὄπλα.)  
(*Pol* 1279a37-b4)

We see again (as we saw elsewhere in book 3) the possibility of a partial virtue. Every virtue is difficult to cultivate for a multitude, but military virtue is easier. So the Greek city-states where hoplites held citizenship, a part of virtue was cultivated.

It is a funny twist of the plot of the *Politics* that while the regime called polity is extensively described and praised, it is also evident from *Pol* 4.9 that Aristotle identified Sparta as an instance of a polity; and Sparta is criticized with some fierceness in various parts of the text. Spartans are praised for their virtue, such as it is, just as their virtue is criticized for its limitations.

Part of the critique of Sparta-- but we might think from the discussion of polity, also the ground of its praise-- is its pursuit of partial virtue, that is, military virtue exclusively. We have already seen the edge of this critique in the discussion of the city of our prayers of book 7, where the complete and reciprocal virtue of the best city is contrasted with narrower pursuits of war and military virtues alone. These passages echo back to the treatment of Sparta in book 2. The Spartans, he says there and repeatedly, cultivated only military virtue.

One might also criticize the fundamental principle of the legislator [of Sparta] as Plato criticized it in the *Laws*. For the entire system of laws aims at a part of virtue, military virtue, since this is useful for conquest. So, as long as they were at war, they remained safe. But once they ruled supreme, they started to decline, because they did not know how to be at leisure, and they had never undertaken any kind of training with more authority than military training. Another error, no less serious, is that although they think rightly that the good things that people compete for are won by virtue rather than vice, they also suppose (not rightly) that these goods are better than virtue itself. (1271a41-b10; cf. 1324b5-11, 1333b5-11)<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, as he suggests here and in the *Eudemian Ethics*,<sup>31</sup> such virtue is not cultivated for its own sake, but for the sake of external goods: wealth, honor, and rule. Such a charge is also echoed in the book 7 discussions of war being for the sake of leisure; it seems that virtue sought for its own sake and virtue sought for the sake of leisure are being identified in a puzzling way. To untangle that puzzle is outside my scope here; it is enough to notice that Aristotle has repeatedly spoken of "a part

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<sup>30</sup> καὶ ὡδὶ δὲ τῇ ὑποθέσει τοῦ νομοθέτου ἐπιτιμήσειεν ἂν τις, ὅπερ καὶ Πλάτων ἐν τοῖς Νόμοις ἐπιτετίμηκεν· πρὸς γὰρ μέρος ἀρετῆς ἢ πᾶσα σύνταξις τῶν νόμων ἐστὶ, τὴν πολεμικὴν· αὕτη γὰρ χρησίμη πρὸς τὸ κρατεῖν. τοιγαροῦν ἐσώζοντο μὲν πολεμοῦντες, ἀπώλλυντο δὲ ἄρξαντες διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐπίστασθαι σχολάζειν μηδὲ ἡσκηκέναι μηδεμίαν ἄσκησιν ἐτέραν κυριωτέραν τῆς πολεμικῆς. τούτου δὲ ἀμάρτημα οὐκ ἔλαττον· νομίζουσι μὲν γὰρ γίνεσθαι τάγαθὰ τὰ περιμάχητα δι' ἀρετῆς μᾶλλον ἢ κακίας, καὶ τοῦτο μὲν καλῶς, ὅτι μέντοι ταῦτα κρείττω τῆς ἀρετῆς τοῦτο μὲν καλῶς, ὅτι μέντοι ταῦτα κρείττω τῆς ἀρετῆς ὑπολαμβάνουσιν, οὐ καλῶς.

<sup>31</sup> *EE* 8.13; see my discussion in "Aristotle on Law and Moral Education" p. 284-286

of virtue", despite the reciprocity thesis of *NE* 6 and his praise of reciprocity in the best city of book 7.

What else do we know about Spartan virtue? It seems to be at least partially identified with *karteria*, endurance:

The lawgiver wished to make the whole city able to endure (*karterike*); and it is clearly so in the case of the men; but he has neglected the women, who live in every sort of self-indulgence and luxury

ὄλην γὰρ τὴν πόλιν ὁ νομοθέτης εἶναι βουλόμενος καρτερικὴν, κατὰ μὲν τοὺς ἄνδρας φανερός ἐστι τοιοῦτος ὢν, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν γυναικῶν ἐξημέληκεν· ζῶσι γὰρ ἀκολάστως πρὸς ἅπασαν ἀκολασίαν καὶ τρυφερῶς.  
(*Pol.* 1269b19-23).

Endurance or *karteria* is identified positively as one of the virtues of war in the city of our prayers: that is, a genuine part of genuine military virtue, even if it is not sufficient on its own for complete human happiness. That stands as some evidence that Spartan virtue is authentic and beneficial, despite its partiality. Such evidence is strengthened by Aristotle's continued use of virtue terms, "a part of virtue" or simply "virtue" in 2.9; at 1334b2-3, Aristotle describes the achievement of the Spartans as 'a sort of virtue (τις ἀρετή)'.

Why would Aristotle use virtue-terms in this way, given the conditions he puts on virtue of character in the *Nicomachean Ethics*? I think it is because military virtue meets some of the conditions described in the *NE*, albeit not all. Military virtue, as described in the case of polity, brings the multitude into a good condition, one which is beneficial for them and to the common good. Such virtue is formed by habits and education: the habits cultivated by the notorious Spartan *agôge*. Military virtue (especially *karteria*) is the cultivation of certain pleasures and pains: namely, it consists in the endurance of pain, and the enjoyment of honor. However it falls short in not being valued for its own sake--rather, it is valued for the sake of the external goods it attains-- and it is separated from the whole body of reciprocally related virtues.

We have a great deal of evidence from sources outside Aristotle that Spartan education was considered to hold up honor as the highest end. Consider Herodotus' account of the stand of the Spartans at the battle of Thermopylae, where those wounded (through no intention of their own) were ostracized (Herodotus 7.201-233). Or consider the famous story from Plutarch's *Lycurgus*, where a young Spartan man caught stealing a fox let the fox disembowel him under his cloak rather than to reveal the shame of his theft (*Lycurgus* 18). If Aristotle has this sort of reputation in mind, we could think of the contrast between Spartan education and the education in the city of our prayers in the following way: Spartan education offers incentives *outside* the action, namely external goods such as honor. The education in *Pol* 8, by contrast, attempts to draw the young into pleasures

*in the actions themselves*, or in the closest thing to actions, imitations of them. This is possible because of some mysterious inner connection between the pleasures of music and the pleasures in the beautiful order of virtuous action.<sup>32</sup>

## VI. Second-rate justice in the best democracy

The second imperfect virtue I will look at appears in the type of democracy that Aristotle praises as best. While Aristotle treats democracy as distinct from polity in book 3, calling them both rule of the many but distinguishing the democracy as being directed toward the private good of the rulers, his view is complicated in book 6 when he catalogues types of democracy. The best democracy is a mix between oligarchy and democracy; since a polity is defined as such a mix, it is not obvious that the two regimes are distinct from one another. In this way, we ought not to limit particular imperfect virtues to particular types of regime; some types may have a variety of imperfect virtues. Aristotle describes the best democratic regime as one where the rich hold offices and the offices are audited by the poor. He seems to be imagining something like the Spartan regime, again, where ephors from the lower classes had supervisory power over rich officers.

Those who govern themselves this way [when the rich hold the offices and the poor audit them] must necessarily be governed well; the offices will always be in the hands of the best, while the people will agree and not envy the decent; and this arrangement is necessarily satisfactory to the decent and reputable, since they will not be ruled by their inferiors, and they will rule justly because others have authority over the audits. For to be under constraint and unable to do whatever seems good is beneficial. The license to do whatever one wishes cannot defend against what is bad in each human being.

ἀνάγκη δὲ πολιτευομένους οὕτω πολιτεύεσθαι τε καλῶς (αἱ γὰρ ἀρχαὶ αἰεὶ διὰ τῶν βελτίστων ἔσονται, τοῦ δήμου βουλομένου καὶ τοῖς ἐπεικέσιν οὐ φθονοῦντος), καὶ τοῖς ἐπεικέσι καὶ γνωρίμοις ἀρκοῦσαν εἶναι ταύτην τὴν τάξιν· ἄρξονται γὰρ οὐχ ὑπ' ἄλλων χειρόνων, καὶ ἄρξουσι δικαίως διὰ τὸ τῶν εὐθυγῶν εἶναι κυρίους ἐτέρους. τὸ γὰρ ἐπανακρέμασθαι, καὶ μὴ πᾶν ἐξεῖναι ποιεῖν ὃ τι ἂν δόξη, συμφέρον ἐστίν· ἢ γὰρ ἐξουσία τοῦ πράττειν ὃ τι ἂν ἐθέλη τις οὐ δύναται φυλάττειν τὸ ἐν ἐκάστῳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων φαῦλον.  
(*Pol.* 6.4, 1318b33-1319a1)

As Aristotle envisages this regime, the rich are indulged in their love of honor by the privilege of office holding, while the 'people', the majority, will be satisfied because their auditing powers will keep the rich from exploiting them.

The key virtue that Aristotle describes here is justice: the rich will rule "justly" (*dikaiôs*) since they will be audited by the rival class. Justice is of course ambiguous between a virtue of actions or states of affairs and a virtue of character. All the same, Aristotle makes it clear that he is thinking

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<sup>32</sup> I defend this account at more length in "Aristotle on Law and Moral Education."

about the state of character of the rulers, as he goes on to describe the benefits of being under constraint *for an individual*. He could have described the civic conflict or instability that would result from lack of constraint, but while that is implied, it is implied through the condition of the motivations of the rulers. We are meant to imagine the rich officers as subject to appetites and desires that will serve them and their fellow citizens poorly; the constraint provided by the structure of the constitution is beneficial *to them* first; to others second.

Aristotle elsewhere explains the constraining function of law as the rationality of law, the sense in which living under the law implies the rule of reason:

One who asks law to rule, therefore, is held to be asking god and intellect alone to rule, while one who adds man adds the beast. Desire is a thing of this sort, and spiritedness perverts rulers and the best men. Hence law is intellect without appetite.

ὁ μὲν οὖν τὸν νόμον κελεύων ἄρχειν δοκεῖ κελεύειν ἄρχειν τὸν θεὸν καὶ τὸν νοῦν μόνους, ὁ δ' ἄνθρωπον κελεύων προστίθησι καὶ θηρίον· ἢ τε γὰρ ἐπιθυμία τοιοῦτον, καὶ ὁ θυμὸς ἄρχοντας διαστρέφει καὶ τοὺς ἀρίστους ἄνδρας. διόπερ ἄνευ ὀρέξεως νοῦς ὁ νόμος ἐστίν.  
(*Pol.* 3.16, 1287a28-32; cf. 1286a17-20)

How should we evaluate this state of character, a sort of justice in the soul produced by constraint of law? Law-constrained justice is beneficial and seems to bring a person into a good condition and helps them to do their work of ruling well. It is, thanks to being a product of law, formed by habits, and so, we can assume, not painful. It further might count as a form of moderation, as striking an intermediate. In these senses Aristotle is clearly describing the cultivation of a virtue.

However, there is no reason to think that the officers would take any special pleasure in their just actions, nor that they would value them for their own sake. After all, if the auditors disappeared, they would revert to greed and injustice. Justice might be seen as a means to an end; in order to attain the pleasures and benefits of rule, one must subject oneself to the auditor's oversight. Lastly, there is no reason to think that this state of character would imply any other good state of character or the possession of phronesis.

## VII. Virtue under a hypothesis: the case of tyranny

So far our imperfect virtues have appeared in regimes that get moderate praise, such as a polity or a closely related restrained form of democracy. Forms of courage and justice that are directed to imperfect or incomplete forms of *eudaimonia*, military victory or honor, seem to be beneficial, if they fall short of certain features of full virtue, reciprocity and being chosen for their own sake, in light of their proper pleasures. The last case--the virtues of the best tyranny-- might seem to be the furthest reach. However, once we begin to see that an imperfect virtue is any beneficial form of constraint that might be built into habits by law, it becomes clear that it is much more widely available than one might have thought, and can serve to explain the ordinary benefits of ordinary, defective regimes.

Aristotle's discussion of the tyrant in *Pol* 5.11 falls into two parts. In the first, Aristotle gives recommendations to the tyrant to preserve his rule that are so to speak traditional: kill off the good people, keep everyone in fear, and so on. However, it is evident that he prefers his second set of recommendations, which are distinct from the first, and which advise the tyrant to pretend benevolence, and so imitate a kingship:

One way to preserve a tyranny is to make it more like a kingship. One thing must be safeguarded: the tyrant's power, so he can rule not just willing subjects but unwilling ones as well. For if the power is lost, the tyranny is also. But while this must remain a basic principle, the tyrant should do or seem to do everything else by playing the part of the king well.

ὥσπερ γὰρ τῆς βασιλείας εἷς τρόπος τῆς φθορᾶς τὸ ποιεῖν τὴν ἀρχὴν τυραννικωτέραν, οὕτω τῆς τυραννίδος σωτηρία τὸ ποιεῖν αὐτὴν βασιλικωτέραν, ἐν φυλάττοντα μόνον, τὴν δύναμιν, ὅπως ἄρχῃ μὴ μόνον βουλομένων ἀλλὰ καὶ μὴ βουλομένων. προϊέμενος γὰρ καὶ τοῦτο προϊεται καὶ τὸ τυραννεῖν. ἀλλὰ τοῦτο μὲν ὥσπερ ὑπόθεσιν δεῖ μένειν, τὰ δ' ἄλλα τὰ μὲν ποιεῖν τὰ δὲ δοκεῖν ὑποκρινόμενον τὸν βασιλικὸν καλῶς.  
(*Pol*/V.11, 1314a33-40)

The word for 'playing the part of the king' is *hypokrinô*, to act as a part in a play. Aristotle is recommending a dramatic PR campaign, the careful management of appearances for an audience, or for the market constituted by his subjects. He continues by explaining the appearances that the tyrant should cultivate:

He should seem to take care of public funds ... (1314a40) He should also appear not harsh but dignified, the kind of person who inspires awe rather than fear in those who meet him. But this is not easily achieved if he is contemptible. That is why even if a tyrant neglects the other virtues, he must cultivate military virtue [MSS: political virtue] and get himself a reputation for it.

πρῶτον μὲν δοκεῖν φροντίζειν τῶν κοινῶν ... καὶ φαίνεσθαι μὴ χαλεπὸν ἀλλὰ σεμνόν, ἔτι δὲ τοιοῦτον ὥστε μὴ φοβεῖσθαι τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον αἰδεῖσθαι· τούτου μέντοι τυγχάνειν οὐ ῥᾶδιον ὄντα εὐκαταφρόνητον, διὸ δεῖ κἂν μὴ τῶν ἄλλων ἀρετῶν ἐπιμέλειαν ποιῆται, ἀλλὰ τῆς πολεμικῆς, καὶ δόξαν ἐμποιεῖν περὶ αὐτοῦ τοιαύτην.  
(*Pol*/V.11, 1314b18-23)

Here the cultivation of appearances of public concern and nobility appears to require the actual cultivation of the virtues of war, even if the reputation for that virtue is the primary goal of the cultivation. Aristotle has begun to suggest that some actual cultivation of actual virtue is the best and most effective way to cultivate appearances that effectively preserve one's power. He continues:

A tyrant should appear to his subjects not as a tyrant but as a head of household and a kingly man, not as an embezzler but as a steward. He should also pursue the moderate things in life, not excess, maintaining close relationships with the notables,

while playing the popular leader with the many. For as a result, not only will his rule necessarily be nobler and more enviable, but since he rules better people who have not been humiliated he will not end up being hated and feared. And his rule will be longer lasting, and his character will either be nobly disposed to virtue or else half good, not vicious but half vicious. (*Pol* V.11, 1315b1-10)<sup>33</sup>

The tyrant cultivates an appearance of virtue to keep his hold on power. His instrumentalizing of virtue thus appears to be total: he wants it only for its appearance, and he wants the appearance only for the sake of gaining for himself the goods of rule. And yet, in this concluding passage, it is evident that Aristotle considers this instrumental form of virtue to be beneficial, both for he himself and for his subjects. His subjects, not being humiliated or living in terror, will be "better" in their character. Most interestingly, his concern for appearances effectively constrains him: he is said to act moderately, and so he achieves a kind of intermediate. He may, by dint of habit, find his pursuit of virtue relatively painless, hence being "nobly disposed to virtue". However light the tone, no more greater violation of the principle of reciprocity could be found than to be described as "half-good" or "half-vicious"-- it is evident that the tyrant could not attain all of the virtues by these means.

While I recognize the perversity of attributing to such a character even a shadow of virtue, it is significant that Aristotle uses virtue-terms in describing him, and that he prefers the imitation of virtue, however mercenary, to the more traditional tyrannical application of violence. The parallel with the best democracy is clear: one starts, so to speak, with a perverse regime, ordered to a private good, and then introduces forms of constraint to hold back the darkest human instincts and desires. These constraints, however they are motivated, are beneficial both to the city itself and to the constrained individual. Continued restraint forms a habit; a habit changes what is pleasant and what is painful. Moreover, a constraint keeps a kind of intermediate between extremes, the desires that might push us toward vice.

### VIII. Conclusions and consequences

I have argued that Aristotle's *Politics* takes as its key endeavor the adapting of the full virtue of character outlined in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to particular circumstances. Such adaptation provides compromise in the full splendor of human excellence and human flourishing. Imperfect cities will not necessarily provide for full forms of happiness, in activities pleasant in themselves and in the

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<sup>33</sup> περιεργον δὲ τὸ λέγειν καθ' ἕναστον τῶν τοιούτων· ὁ γὰρ σκοπὸς φανερός, ὅτι δεῖ μὴ τυραννικὸν ἀλλ' οἰκονόμον καὶ βασιλικὸν εἶναι φαίνεσθαι τοῖς ἀρχομένοις καὶ μὴ σφετεριστὴν ἀλλ' ἐπίτροπον, καὶ τὰς μετριότητας τοῦ βίου διώκειν, μὴ τὰς ὑπερβολάς, ἔτι δὲ τοὺς μὲν γνωρίζουσιν καθομιλεῖν, τοὺς δὲ πολλοὺς δημαγωγεῖν. ἐκ γὰρ τούτων ἀναγκάσιον οὐ μόνον τὴν ἀρχὴν εἶναι καλλίω καὶ ζηλωτοτέραν τῷ βελτιόνων ἀρχεῖν καὶ μὴ τεταπεινωμένων μηδὲ μισούμενον καὶ φοβούμενον διατελεῖν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν εἶναι πολυχρονιωτέραν, ἔτι δ' αὐτὸν διακείσθαι ἀρχὴν εἶναι πολυχρονιωτέραν, ἔτι δ' αὐτὸν διακείσθαι κατὰ τὸ ἦθος ἥτοι καλῶς πρὸς ἀρετὴν ἢ ἡμίχρηστον ὄντα, καὶ μὴ πονηρὸν ἀλλ' ἡμιπόνηρον.

fullest development of the human being. But legal constraints can keep rulers and ruled from the worst in us; they can turn us, willingly or not unwillingly, to act for the common good.

Compromise in the cultivation of good character, then, is a central feature of the arts of politics and legislation for Aristotle. The use of virtue-terms to describe imperfect virtues is perhaps not decisive; a philosopher's language can always be re-interpreted, and imaginary 'scare quotes' introduced for the sake of consistency. But if, as I have argued, the imperfect states share substantive traits in common with the full virtues of the *NE*, the promise of politics to cultivate virtue and happiness will not be entirely in vain.

If I am correct, this argument has several important consequences for our understanding of Aristotle's ethical and political thought. First of all, against our common understanding, there is nothing ordinary about the virtue of character described in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Full virtue, which reciprocally implies all the virtues, is treasured for its own sake, and the exercise of which constitutes our flourishing will be as rare as a hothouse flower. So much is consistent, in the end, with the implications of the passing remarks about existing regimes Aristotle makes in the *NE*. He praises--alone among regimes--the lawgivers of Sparta and Crete. Given his clear and incisive criticism of Spartan virtue in the *Politics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*, we ought to conclude that the city that cultivates true virtue of character exists only in our prayers--or in his, as the case may be.

Secondly, readers of the *Politics* have argued over whether the goal of the analysis of regimes is the cultivation of virtue simply or whether the stability of a constitution is an independently valuable goal. I have not addressed this argument in its details, but if at each point in the analysis Aristotle shows a primary concern for virtue, and if we see that the cultivation of virtue is emphatically the purpose of legislation at the end of *NE*, that strongly favors one side of the argument. If we consider democracy and tyranny to be paradigmatic or illustrative, it is clear that each regime is made more stable exactly by the cultivation of imperfect virtue. A virtue, after all, is no merely moral term: it is constituted by the good condition of a thing. It is clearer, simpler and more plausible for Aristotle to think that good conditions are brought about through forms of order, and that, while order comes in degrees, it is always beneficial and worthy of choice.