

The Problems of a Political Animal

*Community, Justice, and Conflict in
Aristotelian Political Thought*

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apparent once one begins to look over the daunting list of rules that define and organize the profusion of political offices that Athenians took turns in occupying.⁷⁵ Without a disposition to follow this mass of general rules, it is hard to understand how the Athenians could possibly have managed to maintain all of these participatory institutions.

The combination of seemingly contradictory attachments to both the rule of law and popular sovereignty is very familiar to students of republican political rhetoric. Aristotle's understanding of the rule of law can help us explain why they both tend to emerge among members of political communities. These two strands of republican rhetoric will seem contradictory to those who, like the majority of legal theorists, see the rule of law as a final adjudicatory standard against which to measure the legitimacy of political actions. But if, like Aristotle, we see the rule of law as moral disposition toward lawful behavior, it becomes clear that they can work together in important ways.

Aristotle's understanding of the rule of law turns the contradiction between popular sovereignty and the rule of law into an unavoidable but creative tension in the life of a decent and relatively stable political community. Attempts at eliminating this tension in the name of increased democracy and political flexibility are bound to be self-defeating, according to this understanding. Political power depends, according to this view, for its existence on a disposition to follow general rules. Attempts to free political power from the constraints of a preference for lawful behavior are thus bound to undermine the very instrument that political reformers seek to liberate from the shackles of the rule of law.

Aristotle's account of the rule of law suggests that a political community's ability to maintain simultaneous attachments to popular sovereignty and the rule of law is something to be prized rather than eliminated.⁷⁶ We need, according to Aristotle, an attachment to general rules in order to establish and maintain political communities, but that attachment severely limits what we can do in the communities it helps us create. This problem introduces considerable tension and discomfort into political life. Nevertheless, Aristotle's analysis suggests that we should seek to bolster our ability to endure this tension and discomfort, rather than engage in vain and self-defeating attempts to eliminate it.

75. For a partial list, which in its compact form conveys the daunting organizational requirements of a participatory government, see *The Constitution of Athens*, chs. 42–69.

76. Josiah Ober (*Mass and Elite*, 299–304) makes a similar suggestion in his discussion of the tensions in Athenian political rhetoric.

Class Conflict and the Mixed Regime

Because Aristotle clearly and repeatedly points to the division between rich and poor as the main source of conflict within political communities, it is somewhat surprising that no one has attempted to develop a distinctly Aristotelian approach to class conflict. Apparently, the long shadow cast by Marx's ideas has obscured older approaches to the study of social classes and their role in promoting social conflict. As Moses Finley notes, the "current bad habit of pinning the Marxist label on any and every political analysis that employs a concept of class . . . ignores the long history of such an approach, in one form or another, in western political analysis ever since Aristotle."¹

When Aristotle's commentators raise the subject of class, they almost always do so in order to ask whether or not his ideas are compatible with Marx's approach to class conflict. Some, such as G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, find in Aristotle's works a nearly perfect reflection of Marx's ideas about class struggle, a reflection that proves the relevance of Marx's theory for the study of classical antiquity.² Others insist that because Aristotle's ideas about social conflict diverge so greatly from Marx's we are seriously distorting Aristotle's social and political thought when we attribute to him a theory of class conflict.³ Neither group con-

1. M. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World*, 9–10.

2. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 69–80.

3. See M. Wheeler, "Aristotle's Analysis of Political Struggle," 164–66; E. Barker, *The Political Thought*, 488.

siders the third alternative that I develop in this chapter: that Aristotle does indeed present an extensive and interesting account of class conflict, but one that sharply differs from and challenges Marx's.

The distinctive feature of Aristotle's understanding of class conflict is his insistence on treating it as something that develops, for the most part, among members of political communities. Aristotle, unlike Marx, does not treat class conflict as the universal source of social conflict and stratification. His understanding of class antagonism is relevant only for individuals who live in political communities, and only for the citizens among that already small portion of the human species. It is primarily *political friends* who become *class enemies* in Aristotle's account. In other words, it is primarily those who have the mutual expectations characteristic of members of political communities who turn the division between rich and poor into the main source of their social conflict.

As long as we are looking for a universal theory of social stratification from Aristotle, the distinctive features of his understanding of social conflict are bound to remain obscure. Once we put aside this demand, however, the Aristotelian approach to class conflict emerges into view and poses a powerful challenge to theories, such as Marx's, that treat class conflict as the universal source of social stratification and instability.

CLASS CONFLICT IN ANCIENT GREECE

Questions about the existence and extent of class conflict in the ancient Greek republics have sparked considerable controversy among social theorists and classical historians. The importance of noneconomic forms of social stratification in Greek social life—for instance, distinctions between free and slave, citizen and metic—raises serious questions about the appropriateness of a theory of social conflict based on the place of different groups in the process of production. Metics and even slaves, for example, could gain great wealth, owning and operating large enterprises. But their noncitizen status clearly kept them from fully sharing interests and identities with wealthy citizens.⁴ Faced with these difficulties, Marxists have had to exercise considerable effort and ingenuity

4. Indeed, in most ancient Greek republics, wealthy metics could not even own land or their own homes within the boundaries of the cities they inhabited; see M. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 48, and, in general, D. Whitehead, *The Ideology of the Athenian Metic*.

to justify the relevance of Marxist theories of class conflict for ancient Greek social life.⁵

The opening line of *The Communist Manifesto* announces the central assumption of Marx's social theory: "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle."⁶ According to Marx, the struggle between classes—that is, groups of individuals who are hierarchically positioned within the process of production—explains the nature and direction of social change and historical development. The social struggles that move history are, accordingly, those that emerge from the relationship between exploited and exploiter, the relationship between those who produce things and those who reap the fruits of others' labor. Marx presents a rather harsh view of social development—harsh because it identifies unrelenting conflict of class interests as the primary agent of social change. Nevertheless, his view is, in some ways, surprisingly optimistic, not least of all in its faith that exploitive productive relations inevitably lead to conflicts that transform and improve the structure of social life.

However we assess the value of Marx's theory for the explanation of the relations between modern workers and capitalists, there are severe difficulties in applying it to social conflicts in ancient Greece. Most significantly, the most exploited ancient Greek class, the slaves, had little or no role in the major social conflicts of most ancient Greek cities.⁷ There was nothing in Greek cities to correspond to the alliance of subordinate classes, led by the bourgeoisie, that Marx believed toppled feudalism and the French aristocracy. On the issue of slavery there is little reason to doubt that rich and poor citizens closed ranks tightly. Moreover, although ancient slaves sometimes fought for their own emancipation, the emancipation of slaves as a class never emerged as a theme in the Greek political rhetoric. The exploitation of slaves inspired no dreams of a new, emancipated form of society, such as Marx believes emerged from the oppression of the bourgeois and proletarian classes,

5. By far the most elaborate and interesting effort is G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*. See also E. M. and N. Wood, *Class Ideology*, 25–64; P. Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*.

6. K. Marx, "The Communist Manifesto," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 473. Ste. Croix rightly emphasizes the universality of Marx's claim about class struggle against other classical historians who, despite their sympathy with Marx, are inclined to deny that Marx was very serious about that universality.

7. I am speaking, of course, of chattel slaves here and not of subject and enslaved peoples like the Spartan helots, who engaged in frequent and violently suppressed rebellions.

and thus cannot play the role in social development that Marx's theory needs to ascribe to it.⁸ Clearly, ancient Greek social life depended for many of its most distinctive features on slave labor.⁹ Nevertheless, master-slave relations never came close to provoking the kind of social conflict and transformation that Marx's optimistic association of exploitation and social change leads us to expect to develop.

To suggest, as one Marxist has, that we can save Marx's theory by distinguishing between a society's latent "fundamental" contradiction (in this case, the master-slave relation) and its active "principle" contradiction, the contradiction that gives rise to overt social conflict,¹⁰ merely begs the question of why the so-called fundamental contradiction is *not* the actual source of social conflict and change. These distinctions, which are very common in attempts to apply Marx's understanding of class conflict to premodern and non-Western societies, merely point to the difference between a society's actual sources of antagonism and the sources that Marx's theory leads us to expect to find. Similarly, when Marxist historians and social theorists tell us that order or status stratification, as in the citizen-noncitizen dichotomy, merely "masks class-consciousness" and "the objective reality of class,"¹¹ we rarely receive much evidence to prove the greater "reality" of what lies behind the "mask" than their initial assumption about the primacy of class stratification.

As Ste. Croix insists, a much more thorough rethinking of Marx's social theory is needed to demonstrate its relevance to the study of ancient Greek social life.¹² The great merit of Ste. Croix's attempt to develop a Marxist account of social conflict in ancient Greece lies in his frank acknowledgment of the challenge that Greek social realities pose to Marx's theory. His efforts at adapting Marxist theory to Greek social realities are by far the most sustained and serious attempt to meet this challenge. The failure of these efforts is therefore instructive. It teaches us something important about both the limitations of Marx's theory of

8. See J.-P. Vernant, "Class Struggle," 3.

9. I accept Moses Finley's reasoning here for calling the ancient Greek polis a "slave society" even if, as in the American South, many or even most citizens did not own slaves. See M. Finley, "Was Greek Civilization Based on Slave Labour?" and M. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*.

10. See C. Parain, "Les caractères spécifiques." This distinction is repeated uncritically in J.-P. Vernant, "Class Struggle," 1-2.

11. E. M. and N. Wood, *Class Ideology*, 57, following G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 55-57.

12. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 57-65.

social conflict and the kind of alternative we need to supplement or replace it.

Ste. Croix clearly recognizes that Marx's social theory stands or falls on his claim about the universality of class struggle. If we limit class struggle to conscious and overt social conflicts, then "it virtually disappears in many situations," such as the relationship between the slave class and their owners. If, however, we follow Marx in asserting the universality of class conflict, then we must assume its existence even in situations where there is "little conscious struggle of any kind." Ste. Croix decides that if we are to follow Marx we have to choose the latter option since "the opening sentence [of *The Communist Manifesto*] and the whole type of thinking associated with it have made this inevitable."¹³ The "whole type of thinking" that makes this choice inevitable is that derived from Marx's association of society-transforming conflict with the exploitation of subordinate classes. If one cannot find a way of reinterpreting class conflict that makes it relevant to exploitive relationships such as slavery, then the most important and inspiring claim of Marx's social theory disappears.

Ste. Croix saves this claim by so emphasizing Marx's association of class conflict with exploitation that he uses exploitation itself to define class and class struggles. Class, according to his reinterpretation of Marx, refers to a position within a relationship of exploitation rather than merely to one's place within a system of production. Class relationships, accordingly, refer to the relationships between primary producers and those who exploit them by expropriating the surplus value created by their labor. Even if there is no overt social conflict between the two groups, this relationship of exploitation is itself, for Ste. Croix, a form of class struggle, since it centers on the attempts of one group to wrest from another the fruits of its labor.¹⁴

Wielding this interpretation of class and class conflict, it is easy for Ste. Croix to demonstrate the relevance of Marx's theory of class conflict for the explanation of ancient Greek society, since the wealthy classes of that society clearly drew the bulk of their wealth from the labor of slaves. The problem for Ste. Croix is to connect what he understands as class conflict with the overt social struggles between rich and poor citizens that directly shaped social change in the ancient Greek republics.¹⁵

13. *Ibid.*, 57.

14. *Ibid.*, 44-57.

15. The great majority of contemporary students of ancient Greece see the tensions between rich and poor citizens as the most important source of conflict within ancient

If we follow Ste. Croix's definitions of class and class conflict strictly, it becomes hard to describe poor citizens, most of whom worked small pieces of land of their own,¹⁶ as a class engaging in class conflict. No one was directly or, for the most part, even indirectly expropriating the labor of these peasant citizens. Ste. Croix can bring them into his theory of class conflict only by emphasizing their fear of falling into the exploited condition of the slaves.¹⁷ His theory of social conflict can thus accommodate the most overt and influential conflicts in the ancient Greek cities only incidentally and with difficulty.

It is thus not surprising to discover that Ste. Croix effectively abandons his revised understanding of exploitation and class conflict when he turns from social theory to an account of historical events. In his historical account he focuses instead on the conflicts between rich and poor citizens that are well attested in his Greek sources.¹⁸ Nor is it surprising to discover that he is citing Aristotle's description of the conflicts between rich and poor citizens, rather than any account of the exploitation of slaves or any other form of dependent labor, when he insists that Aristotle's political analysis reflects a Marxist understanding of class conflict.¹⁹ Ste. Croix's reinterpretation of Marx's social theory saves its relevance for the explanation of ancient society only by making clear its inability to explain the most overt and influential social conflicts in ancient Greece.²⁰

In the end Ste. Croix's massive effort to save the universality of Marx's theory of social conflict is a failure.²¹ But its failure teaches us about some of the limits of Marx's theory of social conflict. Ste. Croix's effort fails because, however one interprets it, there is a massive gap between the most striking form of exploitation in ancient Greek society, slavery,

Greek cities. See, for example, M. M. Austin and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Economic and Social History*, 244; M. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World*, 11–23; J.-P. Vernant, "Class Struggle"; A. Fuks, *Social Conflict in Ancient Greece*, 12.

16. See E. M. Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slaves*.

17. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 96–97. Although such fears were certainly an important source of conflict in the early polis, they grew far less salient in the fifth and fourth centuries.

18. As noticed by E. M. and N. Wood, *Class Ideology*, 121.

19. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 74–77.

20. One way of saving the concept of exploitation pursued by some contemporary Marxists is to reformulate it, by means of rational choice theory, into a general attribute of social systems that limit individual opportunities in important ways. See E. O. Wright, *Classes*; J. Roemer, *A General Theory*. But to do so diminishes the ability of Marxist theory to help identify the specific ways in which exploitation develops within different historical periods, a contribution that Ste. Croix rightly believes to be one of the most important Marx made to social theory.

21. See the similar conclusion in J. Elster, "Three Challenges to Class," 161.

and the most important forms of social conflict. Marx's "optimistic" assumption about the necessary connection between forms of exploitation and society-transforming conflict is refuted by the social structure and experience of the ancient Greek republics. Extensive social exploitation and intensive class conflict clearly existed in these communities; but the latter did not develop directly from the most important examples of the former. Uncomfortable as it may be to admit, classical antiquity's massive forms of slave exploitation developed and passed from the scene without inspiring the kind of social conflict that might wreak vengeance on the exploiters and bring some improvement to the lives of the exploited.

To make sense of class conflict as it emerges in the ancient Greek republics, we thus need a theoretical approach that does not derive class conflict from a general, society-wide account of exploitation. Moreover, we need an approach that directly associates class conflict and participation in political life. We can find such an approach, I argue, in Aristotle's account of political conflict.

A POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CLASS CONFLICT

For Aristotle, as for most students of classical Greece,²² the most persistent and dangerous source of conflict within political communities is the mutual suspicion between rich and poor citizens. The continuing struggle between oligarchs and democrats, a struggle that occupies the largest part of his account of ordinary political life, is for him primarily a struggle between rich and poor citizens. As Aristotle repeatedly notes, the rule of the few and of the many is better and more precisely understood as the rule of the few rich and the many poor (*Pol.* 1279b, 1290b1).

Given this understanding of political conflict, it is quite reasonable to attribute to Aristotle a theory of class conflict. It is not, however, reasonable to attribute to him Marx's theory of class conflict, as Ste. Croix does. Ste. Croix argues that Aristotle's clear reliance on models of class conflict demonstrates the relevance of Marx's theory of social conflict to the study of ancient Greek society.²³ But in order to rescue Marxist interpretations of ancient Greek society from charges of anach-

22. See, among others, M. M. Austin and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Economic and Social History*; M. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World*; J.-P. Vernant, "Class Struggle"; A. Fuks, *Social Conflict in Ancient Greece*.

23. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle*, 79. In response, Josiah Ober ("Aristotle's Political Sociology") rightly points out that Aristotle clearly recognizes the importance of status and order, as well as class, in his account of social and political life.

ronistic irrelevance, Ste. Croix has to present an anachronistic interpretation of Aristotle. As noted in the previous section, the passages that Ste. Croix cites in support of this interpretation all refer to conflict between rich and poor *citizens* rather than conflict between all exploiting and exploited classes, as Ste. Croix's Marxist theory requires. Ste. Croix thus rightly draws our attention to Aristotle's insistence on the importance of class conflict, but he misleads us when he assumes that Aristotle's understanding of class conflict mirrors Marx's.

Aristotle's understanding of class conflict differs from Marx's in that it is an account of social conflict among members of political communities rather than a general and universal account of social conflict. Nowhere does Aristotle suggest, as Marx does, that class conflict provides the key for understanding social conflicts among all inhabitants—women, slaves, metics, as well as citizens—of a political community. Nor does he insist, as Marx does, that it provides the key for understanding social conflict and change among all forms of social organization, that is, the tribes of the north, the empires of the east, and the political communities of the Mediterranean. To the extent that Aristotle presents an understanding of class conflict, that understanding concerns the relations among members of political communities rather than among all individuals in all forms of social life.

Aristotle undertakes a number of analyses of the parts of actual political communities, but he always seems to come back to the division between rich and poor as the division that citizens treat as the most important of all (*Pol.* 1290a1–30, 1291b5, 1296a20). Perhaps, he suggests, the rich and poor are seen as the basic parts of a political community because no one can be *both* rich *and* poor, whereas one can simultaneously occupy many of the different functional positions that are often used to divide up a polis (*Pol.* 1291b5). In any case, Aristotle's emphasis on the division between the wealthy and the poor clearly grows out of popular perceptions of social cleavages rather than out of any theoretical or legal categories.

The lack of precision in Aristotle's language here—he uses the ordinary words for parts or portions (*mere* or *moriai*) rather than a more technical philosophic or sociological vocabulary—has discouraged some scholars from exploring his understanding of class conflict.²⁴ But the

24. Peter Calvert (*The Concept of Class*, 30), for example, contrasts the vagueness of Aristotle's categorization of rich and poor with the precision of the wealth classifications introduced by Solon into the Athenian constitution and suggests that such vague categories can have little theoretical interest.

lack of a technical theoretical vocabulary to describe class conflict need not be a disadvantage, especially if it helps capture truths that emerge from actual political experience. Our familiarity with Marx's elaborate theory of social conflict leads us to associate the category of class with specific productive locations rather than with the constructions of political rhetoric. Starting with the vague categories that emerge from Greek political rhetoric will not lead to the kind of general and universal theory of social conflict that Marx attempts, but it might open the way to insights into the nature of class conflict that escape these approaches. "Demagogues," Aristotle complains, "are always dividing the polis into two, waging war against rich," whereas oligarchs proclaim, "I shall be ill-disposed to the people and plan whatever evil I can against them" (*Pol.* 1310a3–10). I agree with Moses Finley that such talk "exemplifies class, class consciousness and class conflict sufficiently" to warrant further investigation.²⁵

The broader theoretical significance of Aristotle's approach to class conflict emerges only when one situates that account within his general understanding of political community, something scholars, given their tendency to treat conflict as the absence of community, have so far been reluctant to do. But once we recognize, as I have urged us to do, that the form of community shared by individuals will shape the kinds of conflict that arise among them, an interesting theoretical insight emerges from Aristotle's analysis of social conflict: social conflict among individuals who share the mutual expectations characteristic of citizens will, for the most part, develop and persist along the line between the wealthy and the poor.

This theoretical insight is interesting because, contrary to a fairly common opinion, social conflict between rich and poor is not necessarily the primary form of social conflict in every form of society. The evidence cited to demonstrate the universal primacy of class conflict is most often drawn, I suggest, from the history of *political* communities. When, for example, James Madison declares that the "most common and durable source of factions has been the various [*sic*] and unequal distribution of property,"²⁶ he might appear to be making a universal claim about the nature of social conflict. On closer examination, however, it becomes clear that Madison is speaking of the causes of faction within "popular" and "republican" government,²⁷ forms of social or-

25. M. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World*, 11.

26. Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, no. 10.

27. *Ibid.*

ganization that map neatly onto Aristotle's concept of political community. In general, the most frequently discussed examples of class conflict are drawn from the histories of city-states, the political communities of ancient, medieval, and Renaissance times, and of republican nation-states, the political communities of the modern world.

But political communities, and the distinctive experience of social conflict within them, are relatively rare over the whole course of human history. The majority of human beings have lived and continue to live within a variety of nonpolitical forms of social organization, from empires and absolute monarchies to feudal communities and military or one-party dictatorships. This fact poses problems for social theorists, such as Marx, who seek to develop a universal theory of class conflict. They need to expend a great deal of energy in order to unearth evidence that class conflict lies concealed beneath the surface of social life of the nonpolitical communities that occupy the larger part of human history. Although evidence of occasional flare-ups of class conflict in nonpolitical communities, such as periodic peasant uprisings, is not hard to come by, it is quite difficult to demonstrate that class conflict is the main source of social conflict and social transformation in nonpolitical communities that it seems to be in political communities.²⁸

From an Aristotelian point of view, Marx and his followers appear to have mistaken a particular form of social conflict for a universal one. In doing so, they treat the conflicts that they experience in their own communities, the political communities of modern Europe and North America, as characteristic of all forms of social organization. Marx suggested that Aristotle's emphasis on the universal significance of the polis was due to his failure to consider the particular socioeconomic conditions, such as slavery, that made Greek political life possible.²⁹ Given the opportunity, however, Aristotle could turn the tables on Marx and his followers. According to Aristotle's understanding of class conflict, one could say that Marx and his followers treat class conflict as the universal cause of social development only because they ignore the underlying *political* conditions that shape social conflict in the modern communities in which they live.

PERCEIVED INJUSTICE AND CLASS INTERESTS

It might seem at first that all we need to do in order to identify the sources of social conflict within a community is to locate the major

28. For debates about the primacy of class conflict in medieval Europe, see the essays collected in T. Ashton and C. Philpin, *The Brenner Debate*.

29. K. Marx, *Capital* 1:69.

competing interests that emerge within it. But we should not assume that competing interests, in themselves, lead to social conflict. Among other reasons, if we do not *expect* that others should take our interests into consideration, then their opposition to our interests need not, and often will not, lead to social conflict. Without these expectations, we are less likely to hold individuals responsible for the harm that their actions do to our interests.³⁰ We hold our family members far more responsible than our neighbors for the harm that, for example, their economic activity may do to us. Similarly, we expect more consideration from our compatriots than from foreigners and thus are more likely to complain when their economic activity hurts our interests. Both examples suggest that the identification of mutual expectations will make as important a contribution to any account of social conflict as the identification of competing interests.

Mutual expectations reflect the extent and nature of the communities that bind individuals to each other. One way, then, of locating the nature and sources of conflict among individuals is to reflect on their competing interests in the light of the different forms of community that they share with each other. Aristotle, of course, does not make explicit use of the concept of "expectations." Nevertheless, something like this approach seems implicit in his famous analysis of *stasis* (factional conflict),³¹ especially when we view this analysis in the light cast by his general understanding of political community.

Aristotelian political community involves shared forms of mutual accountability and mutual concern rather than social unity and shared identity. The citizens who engage in *stasis* in Aristotelian political communities act within the expectations created by political justice and political friendship. The ways in which they engage in social conflict will reflect something of the bonds that shape their shared life.

For Aristotle, perceived injustice, rather than competing interests, is the "general cause" (*aitia*) or "starting point" (*archē*) of *stasis* (*Pol.*

30. See M. Smiley, *Moral Responsibility*, for an insightful account of how our social expectations lead us to include and exclude individuals from our communities of mutual concern and responsibility.

31. *Stasis* is the Greek word that Aristotle, and the ancient Greeks in general, use to characterize the whole range of political conflict and competition among individuals and groups. It is important to keep in mind that *stasis* refers for Aristotle to a broad range of phenomena from everyday competition between political factions to extraordinary and violent events such as civil wars and other attempts to overthrow established governments. For this reason, I leave *stasis* untranslated.

On the meaning the Greeks gave the term *stasis*, see M. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World*, 105–6. In general, see D. Loenen, *Stasis*; A. Fuks, *Social Conflict in Ancient Greece*; A. Heuss, "Das Revolutionsproblem." For an exhaustive collection of incidents of social conflict in ancient Greece, see H. J. Gehrke, *Stasis*.

1302a23, 1301a25–40). Competing interests in honor and profit are, in contrast, “the things for which individuals engage in stasis” (*Pol.* 1302a33). The key to Aristotle’s understanding of class conflict lies in how he relates this “general cause” of stasis with the object that individuals seek when they engage in it.

Aristotle insists that what motivates people to struggle against each other within the political community is not merely the fact that they want something others will not give them but that they believe they *deserve* something from others that they are not getting. In political communities mutual accountability takes a particularly open form: public deliberation about general rules and other standards by citizens who regularly exchange positions of power. Political justice provides a public forum for debate about competing conceptions of fairness, a forum that is lacking in most other forms of social justice. Moreover, since political justice inevitably involves deliberation about natural right, that is, about decisions whose intrinsic merits concern us,³² citizens will always have good reason to make use of this public forum. Citizens are thus involved in a practice of mutual accountability that encourages them to assert their own understanding of justice and to expect recognition of the justice of the claims they assert. When some citizens rise up against others in political communities,³³ they do so, according to Aristotle, because they feel that their compatriots have failed to live up to these expectations, especially their expectations about sharing in the power to establish and adjudicate their community’s standards of justice.

Aristotle makes two further assumptions that make perceptions of injustice and stasis all but inevitable in ordinary political communities: the heterogeneity of interests and character among citizens (*Pol.* 1261a) and the tendency of citizens to be bad judges of justice in their own cases (*Pol.* 1280a15). Sharing in political community prompts citizens to put forward for public approval their understanding of justice as the basis for the community’s standards of mutual accountability. The variety of interests and characters among them, along with an understandable tendency to exaggerate their own deserts, ensures that they will put forward *competing* conceptions of justice. Political decisions about which understanding of justice to enshrine in laws and other public standards are, as a result, bound to inspire the perceptions of injustice and the kind of resentment that lead to stasis.

32. As argued in chapters 2 and 5.

33. *Stasis* is derived from the Greek verb for standing up or rising to one’s feet.

Aristotle uses the debate between oligarchs and democrats to illustrate this explanation of social conflict among citizens.

Popular rule arose as a result of those who are equal in any respect supposing that they are equal simply, for because all alike are free persons, they consider themselves to be equal simply; and oligarchy arose as a result of those who are unequal in some one respect conceiving themselves to be unequal simply. Then the former claim to merit a share in all things equally on the grounds that they are equal, while the latter seek to aggrandize themselves on the grounds that they are unequal, since “greater” is something unequal. All such regimes have, then, some sort of justice, but in an unqualified sense they are in error. And it is for this reason that, when either group does not share in the regime on the basis of the conception it happens to have, they engage in stasis.

(*Pol.* 1301a28–38; cf. *Pol.* 1282b, *NE* 1131a25)

To what extent are these competing conceptions of justice ideological masks for the pursuit of group and self-aggrandizement? As the example of oligarchic versus democratic claims clearly shows, Aristotle recognizes the deep connection between the “general cause” of stasis in perceived injustice and the pursuit of profit and honor that leads individuals to engage in it. Nevertheless, he does not go so far as to suggest that individual and class interest is the underlying cause that explains the public assertions and social conflicts of oligarchs and democrats.³⁴

Although Aristotle’s account of class-based views of justice may bring to mind Marx’s theory of ideology, it differs from that theory in important ways. Marx argues that the universalization and idealization of the general interest of the ruling class establishes the dominant understanding of justice in any particular society.³⁵ Justice and injustice thus represent, for him, a means of maintaining class dictatorship, that is, the imposition of the partial interest of the ruling class over the activity of the whole community. For Aristotle, in contrast, the rich and poor tend to universalize their partial conceptions of *justice* rather than their partial conceptions of interest; the claims that they make are not, in themselves, illegitimate impositions of their particular interests on the community. Instead, their claims “each have some element of justice,” even if “in an unqualified sense, they are in error” (*Pol.* 1301a36).

34. Thus, although Moses Finley (*Politics in the Ancient World*, 2, 134) rightly criticizes commentators for ignoring “Aristotle’s ‘important truth’ that the state is an arena for conflicting interests, conflicting classes,” he misses an important element of Aristotle’s understanding of that arena when he suggests that “*stasis* was avowedly a clash of interests, nothing more, whether or not it was covered by rhetoric about justice or about ‘true’ equality.”

35. K. Marx, *The German Ideology*, 60.

As a result, Aristotle does not treat oligarchy and democracy as forms of class dictatorship, even though he considers them imperfect regimes in which the good of the ruling group usually takes precedence over the good of the community as a whole. Oligarchies and democracies, unlike class dictatorships or Aristotelian tyrannies, set up some standards of justice, however limited and partial they may be. These standards, embodied in the oligarchic and democratic regimes, most often serve the interests of the ruling group. But they still provide some standards of mutual accountability. Only the most extreme and degenerate forms of oligarchy and democracy, forms that verge on tyranny, are no longer constrained by such standards (*Pol.* 1292a15, 1292b8).

Aristotle argues that oligarchs and democrats universalize one-sided views of justice because "they themselves are concerned in the decision, and perhaps most men are bad judges when their own interests are in question" (*Pol.* 1280a15). Nevertheless, it is still justice that they are concerned about, however much their interests lead them to misjudge its full requirement. And it is the inevitable failure of their compatriots to live up to the one-sided standards of justice they put forward that provides the general cause of factional conflict.

Of course, Aristotle recognizes that each class has good reason to fear the full recognition of each other's claims. The stakes in this argument are very high: the power to make law and set general standards for life within the political community. Accepting the rich's claim to rule seems to grant them the power to oppress and exploit the poor. Accepting the poor's claim to rule seems to grant them the power to despoil the rich (*Pol.* 1281a11–38). Each class suspects, often with good reason, that selfish interests lurk behind the other's claims about justice. Nevertheless, we would be wrong, according to Aristotle, to see class conflict as a mere battle for spoils. Class conflict is driven by the kind of indignation that injustice inspires rather than by unvarnished lust for power and material advantage. Without the expectation that citizens should live up to shared standards of justice and acknowledge each other's right to participate in the formulation of those standards, the competing interests of rich and poor would not inspire the kind of conflict found in most political communities.

Political community is particularly prone to conflicts growing out of competing views of justice and injustice because it encourages people to formulate and put forward for public approval their understandings of justice. By encouraging citizens to participate in determining the standards that will promote the common good, political community in ef-

fect encourages individuals to act as judges in their own cases, thereby ensuring the emergence of competing, one-sided standards of justice. Participants in nonpolitical forms of community will be no better judges in their own cases than citizens will be. But they do not get the kinds of opportunities that citizens ordinarily get—or at least expect to get—to be judges in their own cases. Unlike citizens, they do not share a form of mutual accountability that encourages the expectation that they can bring forward and have approved their own view of appropriate standards of justice. As a result, nonpolitical communities are far less likely to suffer from the kind of social conflict, characteristic of political communities, that arises out of the assertion of competing perceptions of justice.³⁶

Even if we grant that competing, one-sided perceptions of justice and injustice are bound to clash in Aristotelian political communities, we might still ask why the fundamental contradiction among these perceptions should reflect the gap between the views of rich and poor citizens. Aristotle's answer to this question seems to lie in the way in which he conceives of distributive justice and the claims that rich and poor citizens make about it. Justice, all agree, requires "equal [shares] for equal persons." What people disagree about is what weight to give various equally and unequally held attributes when deciding the distributions of goods and honors (*Pol.* 1282b20). Given their different social situations, the many poor and the few rich are likely to grasp only one side of justice, the importance of either egalitarian or inegalitarian principles. When they raise their claims against each other, they thus raise the most fundamental question about distributive justice: To what extent should equalities or inequalities be recognized as the basis for distribution of goods, honors, and power? Most questions about distributive justice can be recast in these terms, and thus most questions about distributive justice will adapt themselves to the form provided by the debate between the rich and the poor.

There is, for Aristotle, another group in the political community who would much more justifiably defend inegalitarian principles of distribution: the virtuous. But the virtuous always form a far smaller and less powerful group than the wealthy within any political community. "In what city shall we find a hundred persons of good birth and of virtue? The rich, in contrast, are abundant everywhere" (*Pol.* 1302a1; cf.

36. This is not, of course, to deny that they may be plagued by other forms of social conflict.

1304b1). Moreover, although the virtuous have the greatest justification for rising up to defend egalitarian principles, "they are the least likely to do so" (*Pol.* 1301a38), since, as just individuals, they are the least likely to grasp after more power and honor. As a result, although the opposition between virtue and vice may, in principle, be the greatest opposition in the community (*Pol.* 1303b15), it is the opposition between the wealthy few and the many free and poor citizens that, in practice, defines the basic lines of social conflict in the political community.

POLITICAL FRIENDS, CLASS ENEMIES

While we are considering Aristotle's understanding of stasis, it is important to keep in mind that, for Aristotle, participants in factional conflict share the bonds created by political friendship, as well as competing perceptions of injustice. Aristotle, like Plato, insists that stasis, in contrast to war (*polemos*), is a kind of conflict that takes place among friends.³⁷ Friendship ties may often keep us from complaining about an affront that we would not accept from strangers. But as I have noted in previous chapters, Aristotle believes that friendship ties can also lead us to take offense at actions that would not bother us when performed by strangers, since we bring expectations of special solicitude to our interactions with friends. When friends disappoint these expectations, we feel betrayed as well as hurt, which leads to a more intense anger than we express toward strangers who harm us (*Rhet.* 1379b2; *Pol.* 1328a10).

The individual citizens who engage in stasis begin with the expectations of, and dispositions toward, mutual concern characteristic of political friends. Sometimes these expectations and dispositions will moderate factional conflict. At other times they are bound to heighten social tension and suspicion, especially when one takes into account the unequal and asymmetric nature of the political friendship between rich and poor citizens.

Accordingly, to present a complete Aristotelian account of stasis we need to turn to Aristotle's account of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and especially to his discussion of unequal friendships between rich and poor individuals. Aristotle does not directly invoke these discussions in his analysis of stasis in the *Politics*. Nevertheless, their im-

37. See G. Contingourgos, *La théorie des révolutions*, 26, 60; J.-P. Vernant, "City-State Warfare," 20.

plications provide a useful supplement to that analysis, a supplement that is interesting both in its own right and as a means of rendering a fuller picture of Aristotle's understanding of social conflict.

Political friendship, as discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is a tie that binds *all* members of a political community, not just those who share political viewpoints and goals.³⁸ The ancient Greeks had considerable experience with small groups of individuals who band together to pursue common political goals. They called these groups *hetaireiai* (from the word for "comrade" or "intimate," *hetairos*), which is usually translated as "club" or, far less accurately, as "party." The *hetaireiai* were, for the most part, groups of wealthy individuals and their friends and clients who socialized together and worked to advance each other's social and political interests.³⁹ But, except in *The Constitution of Athens*, Aristotle focuses his attention on the friendship ties that bind all citizens together rather than on these narrower forms of political friendship.⁴⁰

Friends, for Aristotle, do "what they can" to help each other, as opposed to what they are obliged to do according to some mutual standard of obligation (*NE* 1163b15). Aristotle—rightly, in my opinion—seems to take for granted the existence among citizens of at least some minimal disposition toward mutual concern.⁴¹ Exaggerated rhetoric aside, the question that promotes controversy in political life is the extent to which and in what way, not whether, citizens should support each other. Representatives of poorer classes may treat anything less than the level of support that they demand as no support at all, whereas the represen-

38. As emphasized in chapters 2 and 4.

39. See W. R. Connor, *The New Politicians*, 25–87; Calhoun, *Athenian Clubs*. The normal path to a political career, at least in fifth-century Athens, led directly through one or more of the *hetaireiai*. Thus, Connor (*The New Politicians*, 25–66, 119–51) argues that Cleon initiated a "new style" of politics in Athens by ceremoniously announcing that he would pursue his political career without the help of personal friends and *hetaireiai*. To highlight the unusual nature of Cleisthenes' political strategy as a democratic reformer, Herodotus (*History*, book 5, chs. 62–63) suggests that after Cleisthenes failed to gain political backing in the usual way, from the *hetaireiai*, "he introduced the *demos* into his *hetaireia*." (A similar point is made in *The Constitution of Athens*, 20.) Thucydides (*History*, book 3, chs. 82–83), among others, thought that the *hetaireiai* were primarily responsible for the internal conflicts that broke out among so many Greek cities during the Peloponnesian War. See also A. Lintott, *Violence, Civil Strife, and Revolution*, 91–92.

40. A comprehensive account of the relationship between stasis and friendship ties, which Aristotle does not provide, would have to include a full discussion of the *hetaireiai* and, more generally, partial, as opposed to community-wide, bonds of social friendship.

41. See *Pol.* 1320a30, where the question is the form that such support should take. On the Greek practice of social support, see A. Fuks, *Social Conflict in Ancient Greece*, 56; and, more provocatively, P. Veyne, *Bread and Circuses*.

tatives of wealthier classes may offer arguments against mutual support altogether in order to defend themselves against suggestions that they should greatly increase the support that they already give. Nevertheless, this rhetoric merely masks the reality of some, however minimal, level of mutual support, of public beneficence by the rich and public service by the poor, within political communities.

In unequal forms of friendship, such as that between rich and poor citizens, both the needs that friends expect each other to support and the abilities to do what one "can" to help friends are asymmetrical. Wealthy individuals, of course, have fewer needs and far greater abilities to assist their friends than poorer people have. For this reason, Aristotle suggests, it is hard to see how wealthy and poor individuals can be friends rather than patrons and clients. Nevertheless, he concludes, friendship between unequals is possible as long as we do not demand the *same* or symmetrical expressions of mutual concern from rich and poor.

This then is also the way in which we should associate with unequals; the man who is benefited in respect of wealth or excellence must give honor in return, repaying what he can. For friendship asks a man to do what he can, not what is proportional to the merits of the case; since that cannot always be done, for example, in honors to the gods or to parents; for no one could ever return to them the equivalent of what he gets.

(NE 1163b12–19)

Because friendship urges us to do for each other "what we can," then it is satisfied when friends support each other with the means at their disposal, the rich with public beneficence, the poor with public honors. In this way Aristotle accounts for "liturgies" (NE 1163a28), the system of expected but noncompulsory expenditures by wealthy individuals that ancient Greek cities, especially Athens, relied on for much of their public finance. The liturgy system treated the great expenditures of wealthy citizens on the city's defense and food supplies as admirable acts of public beneficence rather than the fulfillment of public obligations—no matter how strong the pressure was to perform them.⁴² As a result, one could say, with Aristotle, that rich and poor friends both get more of something from the other, "not more of the same thing, however, but the superior more honor and the inferior more gain: for honor

42. See P. Veyne, *Bread and Circuses*, 76–77; M. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 151–52; M. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World*, 36–39.

is the prize of excellence and of beneficence, while gain is the assistance required by inferiority" (NE 1163b1).

Aristotle supports direct aid to the poorer citizens of a community as well as a system of public liturgies. He ridicules, however, the utility of distributing small regular payments to the poor, which he compares to pouring water into the proverbial "leaky jar." Aristotle prefers, instead, the accumulation and distribution of larger, one-time payments geared to helping poor citizens gain relative economic independence by buying a piece of land or setting themselves up in a trade. By such means, he concludes, the Carthaginian upper classes "have acquired the friendship of the people" (*Pol.* 1320a30–b10).

Aristotle's arguments suggest that as long as we think of political relationships in terms of justice (that is, in terms of standards of mutual obligation), the inequalities of contribution and receipt of benefits in the relationship between rich and poor is bound to create problems. But if we can think of the relationship between rich and poor in terms of friendship (that is, in terms of relative ability to show mutual concern), then we can be more easily satisfied when rich and poor citizens offer each other different and unequal forms of support. Without the dispositions promoted by this kind of unequal friendship between rich and poor citizens, it might be impossible to establish and maintain political communities among rich and poor individuals.

Before moving on to the ways in which this unequal political friendship contributes to class conflict, we need to distinguish it from patron-client relationships, a form of "instrumental friendship" that looms large in contemporary political sociology and cultural anthropology.⁴³ As students of social patronage frequently point out, patron-client relations tend to cut across class lines and diminish class conflicts. If political friendship between rich and poor citizens turns out to resemble patronage relations, then we would have good reasons to doubt conclusions about how it contributes to class conflict.

There are indeed some striking similarities between patron-client relations and Aristotle's unequal political friendship: the basic inequality of its participants, the instrumental character of their relations, the asymmetric character of their obligations and expectations, and the kind

43. See especially E. Wolf ("Kinship, Friendship, and Patron-Client Relations"), who explicitly refers to Aristotle and his concept of instrumental friendship. In general, see the collection of essays in S. Schmidt, J. Scott, et al., *Friends, Followers, and Factions*; C. Clapham, *Private Patronage and Public Power*; S. Eisenstadt and L. Roniger, *Patrons, Clients, and Friends*.

of benefits that its participants receive from each other. Nevertheless, patron-client relations involve a kind of personal dependence on and subordination to a particular patron that is incompatible with Aristotle's understanding of political friendship. "A free man," Aristotle notes in the *Rhetoric* (1367a31), "does not live in dependence on others [*pros allon*]." If you depend on other particular individuals for your livelihood, you are in danger of becoming "slavish" in character (*Pol.* 1337b19), which is one reason why Aristotle happily welcomes poor farmers as citizens but works to exclude laborers in "menial" and vulgar activities. Patron-client relationships are incompatible with the kind of individual character that Aristotle expects of citizens.⁴⁴

The beneficence that poor citizens receive from wealthy ones is, for Aristotle, a *public*, rather than a private, beneficence. In insisting on the public character of beneficence, Aristotle seriously differs from Isocrates, who made similar arguments about support for the poor but wanted to impose a private and ultimately patronizing form of redistribution.⁴⁵ Although Aristotle recommends individual honors for wealthy public benefactors, they are to be honored for the public good they have done for their fellow citizens, for their acts of *political* rather than *personal* friendship. As long as such expectations of *public* beneficence are maintained, then it will be difficult to develop the kind of dyadic relations of beneficence and dependence characteristic of systems of patronage.

This is not to suggest that all personal patronage and patron-client relationships disappear in a community bound by ties of political friendship. As long as there remain considerable differences in levels of wealth and status, patronage will persist as an important social relationship. Nevertheless, the existence of ties of political friendship will block the development of the systematic forms of patron-client relations, such as those that political sociologists and anthropologists have identified as the foundation of social stratification in many Mediterranean and other societies. Individual patron-client relationships undoubtedly exist in every form of human society, but systematic structures of patron-client relationships are far rarer.⁴⁶

44. See P. Millett, "Patronage and Its Avoidance," 17, 28, 33.

45. See A. Fuks, *Social Conflict in Ancient Greece*, 180, for a discussion of Isocrates and Aristotle on this point. Paul Millett ("Patronage and Its Avoidance," 25–28) notes the "patronizing" implications of Isocrates' arguments.

46. See the insightful defense of this distinction by T. Johnson and C. Daneker, "Patronage," 223. Barry Strauss notes that in classical Athens "clientelism was crucial to elite politics, but it played only limited role in the political community" as a whole; B. Strauss,

Systematic patron-client relationships tend to defuse class conflict since they promote vertical and personal ties of solidarity among chains of patrons and clients in place of horizontal ties of solidarity among the rich and the poor. It is thus not surprising to find both a resistance to systematic patron-client relationships and an emphasis on systematic class conflict between rich and poor in ancient Greek political thought and practice.⁴⁷ Some forms of social organization, such as the kind of political community that Aristotle explores, seem both to block the development of systematic structures of patronage and promote class conflict and stratification.

To understand the ways in which political friends are particularly prone to become class enemies, we need to go a little beyond Aristotle's explicit arguments and consider some ways in which his explanation of political conflict and his ideas about unequal political friendship might work together. If friendship involves a disposition to do what one *can* to aid someone with whom one shares things, then it is clear why friendship between unequals might ameliorate the conflicts that arise from their conflicting perceptions of justice: it may lead them to support each other far more than they think they are obliged to do by the community's standards of justice. Conversely, however, friendship ties may also dispose individuals to support each other *less* than even their own standards of justice insist on, since friendship asks them do what they *can* rather than what they are *obliged* to do. Real friends, for example, do not ask each other to impoverish themselves in order to pay back a debt. No friend, they will think, should ask another to do more than he or she can even to avoid an injustice.

By asking us to do what we can for each other, rather than what justice obliges us to do, friendship introduces an essentially subjective component into our judgments about other-regarding behavior. When we do what we *can* for others, we always have to make a judgment about our abilities to help others without seriously harming ourselves, a judgment that cannot, without being turned into a judgment about justice and injustice, be measured against shared public standards. There will, of course, be quite a variety of shared expectations about what

Athens after the Peloponnesian War, 174–75. This important distinction between *individual* instances of patronage and *systematic* structures of patronage is ignored by historians, such as Moses Finley (*Politics in the Ancient World*, 40–41, 45), who want to assimilate the Greek practice of liturgies and instrumental friendship to the general concept of patron-client relationships.

47. See P. Millett, "Patronage and Its Avoidance."

friends will do for each other in particular situations. Nevertheless, friendly action, if it is to be *friendly* action at all, must proceed from an individual's disposition to help someone to the extent he or she can and therefore must include subjective judgments about one's ability to help others.

Given our tendency to be bad judges in our own cases when it comes to determining appropriate standards of distributive justice (*Pol.* 1280a15), it would not be surprising to discover that we are also bad judges when it comes to determining the needs of our friends and our ability to help them without seriously harming ourselves. This tendency will likely be especially pronounced among participants in shared advantage friendships, a group that includes members of political communities. Shared advantage friends come together because of the differing skills and goods they possess rather than because of any special moral virtues that might make them good judges of their obligations and ability to help their friends.

Consider the ways in which rich and poor citizens might be bad judges of their needs and of their abilities to support each other. Wealthy citizens may feel disposed to contribute some of their wealth toward the support of their poorer compatriots. But they are likely to expect very great honors for minimal contributions, since they are likely to think, as when they reason about justice, that their "unequal" contribution is so much more important than the support offered them by poor citizens. They are also likely to place the threshold past which expected contributions to the community exceed their ability to provide them at a relatively low level, especially since they are likely to think of any demand for a contribution that might endanger their "unequal" wealth and leisure as the equivalent of asking them to "impoverish" themselves for friends.

Conversely, poor citizens will likely be disposed to expect maximal contributions for relatively minimal honors, given the relatively greater importance that this more "equal" capacity to bestow honor will have for citizens who lack the unequal assets of their wealthy compatriots. They will, not without reason, tend to be suspicious of wealthy citizens' complaints about being impoverished by their expectations of friendly support, since given their more literal notion of impoverishment, it will take the wealthy far longer to reach the limits of their ability to help their poorer compatriots. Moreover, they will also be suspicious of wealthy citizens' demands for maximal honors for services rendered, since the accumulation of honors tends to increase the power and rep-

utation of wealthy citizens to the extent that it threatens the one main honor poor citizens have: their political freedom. As a result, poor citizens will also worry about the threshold past which they cannot honor the rich without risking their own political freedom, a risk that no political friend should ask of another.

Given our tendency to be bad judges in our own cases of the needs of our friends and our abilities to satisfy them, as well as the asymmetric needs and abilities of rich and poor, political friendship ties can thus promote mutual tension, suspicion, and conflict between rich and poor citizens. Because rich and poor citizens think of each other as political friends, they will expect from each other solicitude both for their needs and for the limits of their abilities to support each other's needs without seriously harming themselves. But since they are likely to react to these issues in the ways described in the preceding paragraphs, these expectations of mutual solicitude are bound to be disappointed. And when these expectations are disappointed, or when rich and poor citizens suspect that they will be disappointed, these citizens will likely feel betrayed as well as injured. The harshness and ugliness of civil conflict owes much to this sense of betrayal, a sense of betrayal that we cannot appreciate unless we first identify the bonds of friendship shared by its participants. Strangers may become competitors or hated opponents, but only political friends tend to become class enemies.

THE MIXED REGIME AND POLITICAL JUSTICE

Aristotle's analysis of stasis suggests that mutual suspicion, competition, and conflict between rich and poor citizens are normal states of affairs in political life. In books 4–6 of the *Politics* Aristotle offers much advice on how to limit and moderate the consequences of this persistent tension between rich and poor citizens. But he offers little hope of simply eliminating the sources of factional conflict from political life, for the sources of stasis lie in the very nature of political community, in the combination of expectations about participation in framing public standards of justice with the social heterogeneity that Aristotle thinks is essential to political life.

Accordingly, I disagree strongly with W. L. Newman when he suggests that Aristotle "hardly realizes how difficult it is to prevent stasis."⁴⁸ Aristotle's major means of taming stasis, the "mixed regime," assumes

48. W. L. Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle* 4:277.

the persistence of the competing perceptions of injustice that provide the "general cause" and "starting point" of class conflict. Moreover, the mixed regime is never more than a partial means of preventing stasis, a means that must rely on compromise and ad hoc adaptation to changing circumstances if it is to be successful even in moderating factional conflict in the political community. Although Aristotle insists that political philosophers must concern themselves with improving imperfect regimes, he never suggests that legislators and politicians can gain *control* of political contingencies in such a way as to eliminate stasis.

The Aristotelian statesman should not be confused with the Machiavellian political virtuoso. A reading of Aristotle's daunting list of the ways in which regimes can be challenged and overthrown is unlikely to inspire the exhilarating sense of the endless possibilities for political manipulation that one gets from a reading of Machiavelli. It is much more likely to inspire a sense of the enormity of the task that faces anyone who seeks to preserve a political regime, let alone that which faces anyone who seeks to replace an established regime with a new and stable political order.⁴⁹ For Aristotle, keeping up with the impact of changing circumstances—let alone manipulating their effects—seems hard enough,⁵⁰ which may be another reason for his relatively conservative attitude toward political and legal innovation. Custom and habit often bring people to accept constraints on their behavior that they would be unlikely to accept were they to deliberate openly about the best constraints to choose. Indeed, laws have no better source of authority than the long habit of following their requirements. Accordingly, it is foolish to introduce legal and political innovations except when absolutely necessary (*Pol.* 1260a). But this means that political virtuosity is seriously limited by the vast variety of contingent and often contradictory habits that different peoples develop in response to the changing circumstances of their political life.

The mixed regime is Aristotle's basic recommendation for moderating the effects of stasis because it directly addresses the "general cause" of factional conflict: the differing perceptions of injustice among rich and poor citizens. As long as rich and poor citizens cleave to exclusively inegalitarian or egalitarian principles of justice, both groups will be prone

49. Reforming an established regime, Aristotle notes, involves many of the same difficulties, such as countering socialization of individuals by earlier institutions, involved in introducing a revolutionary new regime (*Pol.* 1289a3).

50. As Ronald Polansky ("Aristotle on Political Change," 325) points out, such ordinary events as a good harvest can upset political and constitutional calculations by greatly increasing the number of citizens who meet a property qualification for office.

to suspect each other of the kind of injustice that inspires factional conflict. To tame stasis, one must therefore find a way of moderating these one-sided views of justice and injustice. Aristotle implicitly rejects as ineffective the most direct means of broadening perceptions of justice: public education or other forms of enlightenment. (Public education does have a role to play in limiting stasis, according to Aristotle, but it plays that role by socializing individuals in the spirit of justice characteristic of regimes, such as oligarchy and democracy, rather than by challenging and broadening the regime's partial standards of justice [*Pol.* 1316a].) Instead, he recommends an indirect approach to broadening perceptions of justice: the "mixing" of democratic and oligarchic—and, occasionally, aristocratic—claims to rule. Some political offices should be distributed in accord with equally held qualities, such as political freedom, whereas others should be distributed in accord with unequally held qualities, such as wealth, birth, and virtue.⁵¹

How will the mixing of claims to rule broaden standards of justice and thereby moderate factional conflict? Alexis de Tocqueville, for one, dismisses the idea of the mixed regime as a "chimera" that usually conceals the predominance of the kind of one-sided views of injustice that Aristotle seeks to moderate. "When a society really does have a mixed government, that is to say, one equally shared between contrary principles, either a revolution breaks out or society breaks up."⁵² De Tocqueville argues that what passes for mixed regimes are really nothing but relatively stable and successful democracies, such as the United States, or oligarchies and aristocracies, such as Rome and Venice. Far from being a means of moderating factional conflict, the mixed regime is, he suggests, a recipe for bringing factional conflict into the very structure of government. Mixing the claims of political office merely gives contending factions greater power with which to intensify their struggles.

Aristotle has a compelling response to de Tocqueville's arguments against the mixed regime. But in order to appreciate that response, we must first distinguish Aristotle's understanding of the mixed regime from the more familiar conception of the mixed regime as a balance of power among competing social forces, for de Tocqueville clearly had the latter conception in mind when offering his critique of the mixed regime.

The familiar conception of the mixed regime as a balance of powers owes much to Polybius's influential analysis of the Roman constitution.

51. These arguments are developed throughout books 4 and 6 of the *Politics*.

52. A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 251.

Polybius reconstructed the constitution of the second-century Roman republic as a mix of monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic institutions whose internal balance checked the usual cycle of decline that plagued most other political regimes.⁵³ According to this understanding of the mixed regime, the Romans used social hostility as a stabilizing force by giving competing groups institutional powers with which to check and balance their opponents. It is this Polybian view of the mixed regime, rather than the Aristotelian view, that has shaped the most familiar accounts of the mixed regime in Western political thought.⁵⁴

For a particularly ferocious version of this image of a balance of internal powers, consider the following defense of the mixed regime by Gouverneur Morris at the American Constitutional Convention.

The checking branch [of government] must have a personal interest in checking the other branch. One interest must be opposed to another interest. Vices, as they exist, must be turned against each other. It [the Senate] must have great personal property, it must have the *aristocratic spirit*; it must love to lord it thro' pride, pride is indeed the great principle that actuates both the poor and the rich. . . . To make it independent, it should be for life. It will then do wrong, it will be said. He [Morris] believed so; he hoped so. The Rich will strive to establish their dominion and enslave the rest. They always did. They always will. The proper security against them is to form them into a separate interest. The two forces will then control each other.⁵⁵

Such portrayals of the mixed regime seem to confirm de Tocqueville's arguments against it. If ever a community were so foolish as to establish a mixed regime along these lines, it would soon suffer from either civil war or anarchy. Americans should be grateful that Morris's views did not prevail at the Constitutional Convention.⁵⁶

Were Aristotle to share the Polybian view of the mixed regime as a mere balance of social power, then his arguments would be vulnerable to de Tocqueville's criticism. But "Aristotle in no way seeks the correct mixture [of regimes] . . . in a balance between competing elements of

53. Polybius, *Histories*, book 6. On Polybius, see K. von Fritz, *The Theory of the Mixed Constitution*; W. Nippel, *Mischverfassungstheorie und Verfassungsrealität*, 142.

54. G. Aalders, *Die Theorie der Gemischten Verfassung*, 69.

55. In M. Farrand, *The Records of the Federal Convention* 1:512 (July 2); my emphasis.

56. The separation of powers, clearly approved of by the members of the American Constitutional Convention, should not be confused with a mixed regime. The separation of powers requires the division of a single claim to rule, in this case popular consent, into different forms and offices that will check each other, whereas the mixed regime requires public recognition of different claims to rule (for example, wealth as well as popular consent).

the regime."⁵⁷ Indeed, Aristotle suggests that it is a serious mistake to seek to combine the elements of each regime in mixed regimes (*Pol.* 1317a35). Aristotle's mixed regime is tremendously flexible. In some circumstances it should lean toward democracies and will be described as a "polity." In other circumstances it should lean toward oligarchy and will be described as an aristocracy (or, as Aristotle qualifies the description in order to distinguish this regime from genuine aristocracies in which a few virtuous individuals hold power, as a "so-called aristocracy") (*Pol.* 1293b-94a). In all cases, the mixed regime should be constructed and maintained in accordance with the kinds of institutions that local traditions and experience make most acceptable. Aristotle offers no general model of political equilibrium or balance of power as a guide to statesmen. Instead, he encourages them to seek out the most effective contingent and local means of introducing some mixing of egalitarian and inegalitarian claims to power into a community's regime. Success is achieved when citizens find it hard to tell whether the regime is a democracy or an oligarchy (*Pol.* 1299b15), rather than when one approaches a particular institutional model.

But how can the mixed regime moderate factional conflict if not through the kind of balance of internal powers that de Tocqueville criticizes? Aristotelian mixed regimes moderate factional conflict indirectly by broadening the one-sided views of justice that citizens ordinarily appeal to in political life.

The regime (*politeia*) is, for Aristotle, both the institutional ordering of public offices and the general standards or way of life associated with particular, say, democratic or oligarchic, ways of ordering these institutions.⁵⁸ Moreover, it is the "governing body" (*politeuma*) that defines "the regime" (*politeia*) (*Pol.* 1278b11). With this assertion Aristotle suggests that the ruling group sets general standards throughout the political community. It does so, however, not simply by virtue of its power to formulate general standards of justice but, more significantly, through the way in which communal standards and ways of life come to reflect the general standards of justice embodied in publicly recognized claims to political power.⁵⁹

If stasis is usually caused by one-sided views of justice that lead to

57. G. Aalders, *Die Theorie der Gemischten Verfassung*, 61.

58. See L. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*.

59. In this respect Aristotle has much the same view of the effect of political regimes on general standards of taste and behavior as that expressed by de Tocqueville in the second book of *Democracy in America*.

perceptions of injustice, and if the claims to power recognized in a constitution shape general standards of justice in a community, one way to moderate stasis would be to introduce both inegalitarian and egalitarian claims to power into the structure of a regime. If one is successful in gaining acceptance for competing principles as claims to power, even if only for less powerful and important offices, then one will accustom citizens to invoking both egalitarian and inegalitarian principles of justice, thereby making them less suspicious and combative when they are faced with fellow citizens who make claims on them on the basis of these principles. Socialization in the standards of a mixed regime would provide the basis for an indirect yet effective form of moral education. Such socialization would not likely eliminate the competing perceptions of justice and injustice that give rise to stasis, but it might, on occasion, help defuse social tensions and make each class more amenable to compromise.

Conceived in this way, the mixed regime is not vulnerable to de Tocqueville's critique since it moderates civil conflict by broadening one-sided conceptions of justice rather than by arming competing groups with the power to check their opponents. Moreover, this Aristotelian model of the mixed regime provides us with a far subtler and more flexible conception of political institution building than the rather mechanical construction of balanced powers associated with the Polybian model. To achieve its desired effects, the Aristotelian mixed regime seeks publicly acceptable means of introducing competing principles of political justice rather than a fine-tuned equilibrium among the powerful groups within a community. The socializing effect of the mixed regime depends on the acceptance of competing claims for specific political offices, claims that members of particular communities will be comfortable, for historical and sociological reasons, in acknowledging, despite the fact that they run counter to the general standards of oligarchic or democratic regimes.

Accordingly, there are as many kinds of mixed regimes as there are particular political opportunities for mixture (*Pol.* 1294a–b). Indeed, Aristotle is quite willing to endorse the use of extreme democratic practices that he ordinarily despises, such as payment for attendance at the assembly, if they provide a means of establishing a mix of political principles (*Pol.* 1297a35). Payments can, for example, be combined with fines for members of the upper classes who do *not* attend the assembly as a means of getting public acceptance for both egalitarian and inegalitarian standards of justice. Success in building a mixed regime depends

on finding combinations of practices that will lead otherwise reluctant groups of citizens to recognize the justice of competing claims to political office.⁶⁰

Ellen and Neal Wood have argued that Aristotle uses the mixed regime as a means of pushing democratic regimes in a more oligarchic direction, an effort that follows from what they claim is his general conviction that "the oligarchs' position, while imperfect, is less so than that of the democrats."⁶¹ But far from suggesting that oligarchy is less imperfect than democracy, Aristotle repeatedly insists on the superior moderation and stability of democracy and more democratically inclined mixed regimes (*Pol.* 1289b4, 1296a12, 1302a9). The best mixed regime, Aristotle insists, will be one in which the majority of citizens have political rights (*Pol.* 1297b4). Finally, and most important, Aristotle insists that the *pleonexia*—the "grasping" quality that leads individuals to want more than what is distributed to them—of the wealthy is far more dangerous to the stability and moderation of regimes than is that of the many (*Pol.* 1297a10).

The implication of these passages seems to be that it is far harder to moderate the *pleonexia* and partiality of the wealthy than the *pleonexia* and partiality of the many. There is considerable historical evidence to support this contention. Even in the most democratic of ancient Greek regimes, Athens, the great majority of leadership roles continued to be occupied by elites of wealth and birth.⁶² The many, it seems, are more likely to accept a mixture of inegalitarian and egalitarian principles than are the few wealthy individuals. The "characteristic mildness" of democracies emerges most clearly in the moderation of their revenge against civic enemies in comparison to that exacted by oligarchs.⁶³ As long as

60. Richard Bodéüs ("Law and the Regime," 237) presents a similar picture of the task of building an Aristotelian mixed regime.

61. E. M. and N. Wood, *Class Ideology*, 249, 239. The Woods seem to base this judgment on Aristotle's clear dissatisfaction with Athenian democracy. Within the context provided by Athenian political debate, a defense of polity and the mixed regime would no doubt be perceived as a somewhat oligarchic move. But Aristotle's audience is considerably broader than the body of Athenian citizens. Aristotle addresses the problem of stasis, which was increasing throughout the fourth-century Greek world (see A. Fuks, *Social Conflict in Ancient Greece*, 12–13; B. Strauss, *Athens after the Peloponnesian War*, 171–72), as it affected all Greek cities, with their wide range of regimes, not just democratic Athens. In that context, his defense of the mixed regime leans, if in any direction, toward democracy.

62. For the best account of this phenomenon, see J. Ober, *Mass and Elite*.

63. *The Constitution of Athens*, 22, 40. After the defeat of the Thirty Tyrants and the restoration of democracy in 403, the Athenian people established a general amnesty for crimes committed in the civil struggle and "even refunded at common expense the money that the Thirty had borrowed from the Spartans for the war." Such behavior,

they receive important forms of political recognition, the many often accept nonegalitarian principles of distribution such as election, wealth, and birth in some offices (as Aristotle recognizes in his account of the argument for democracy in book 3 of the *Politics* [1282a–b]). As a result, one will likely be far more successful in establishing the kind of mixture of political principles that Aristotle seeks if one starts with democratic rather than oligarchic institutions.

But more than the poor, it is the middle class that Aristotle expects to be most favorably disposed toward mixed regimes. The social position of the middle class, where there is one to be found, disposes them toward the broader mix of egalitarian and inegalitarian principles of justice that Aristotle seeks to enshrine in the mixed regime. Middle-class citizens have what we might best describe as “simulated virtue.” Without in fact developing the virtues of character that would dispose them toward justice and willingness to promote the common good of the whole community, the social position of “middling” citizens disposes them, more than most other citizens, in the direction that virtues of character would dispose them. Because they have relatively little to fear from the poor, whose envy is directed at the upper classes, and little need to covet the redistribution of the wealth of the rich, they will express less pleonexia than will either their poorer or wealthier compatriots (*Pol.* 1295b30). Because they have less occasion to be either arrogantly superior or vindictively envious, they will be more reasonable and willing to take turns in positions of political power (*Pol.* 1295b5). We should expect the middle class, accordingly, to be much more open to recognizing the relevance of both egalitarian and inegalitarian principles of justice. It is for this reason, I suggest, that Aristotle designates the middle class as the most favorable social foundation for the mixed regime.

If one is fortunate enough to have a large middle class in one’s community, then it will be relatively easy to establish the broadened public conception of justice that Aristotle associates with the mixed regime. But Aristotle believes that the existence of a large middle class will be relatively rare and therefore cannot be counted on when drawing up political plans (*Pol.* 1295b38–1296a36). The normal situation for political communities will be one in which legislators will have to deal with the mutual suspicion and hostility created by the differing percep-

according to *The Constitution of Athens* (40), “was the most admirable and most statesmanlike that any people have ever shown in such circumstances.”

tions of injustice held by the rich and the poor. Without the stabilizing effect of a large middle class, legislators will need much more political subtlety to maintain a mixed regime and use it to defuse the mutual suspicion and hostility associated with class conflict.⁶⁴

APPENDIX. “POLITICAL REVOLUTION”: A MISSING ARISTOTELIAN CATEGORY

Aristotle has a great deal to say about the revolutions (*metabolai*) that occur within political communities, that is, the kind of revolution that leads to the replacement of one kind of political regime with another, democracies with oligarchies, mixed regimes with democracies, and so on. His account of this kind of revolution has been fully explored by other commentators.⁶⁵ In this appendix, in contrast, I want to consider a kind of revolution that Aristotle does not discuss: “political” revolutions, that is, the revolutions that lead to the establishment of political communities in place of nonpolitical forms of social organization. Aristotle explicitly discusses only the revolutions of regime that occur *within* already established political communities. Without a supplement that helps explain the establishment (and dissolution) of political communities, his account of revolutionary change is radically incomplete.

It has often been noted that Aristotle’s concept of revolution lacks the sense of the singular, extraordinary historical event that the concept conjures up in the minds of most modern individuals.⁶⁶ Aristotle never speaks, as we often do, of *the* Revolution (whether we mean by the term the French or the Russian revolution or some continuing process that includes both). One reason he does not speak this way is that he rejects the idea, implicit in such talk, of a political event that gives historical events a particular direction. Although revolutions within political communities occur quite frequently, according to Aristotle, they follow no rational or predictable pattern, not even a cycle of decline, such as Plato describes in the *Republic* (*Pol.* 1316a). Another reason for this difference is Aristotle’s unfamiliarity with the phenomenon of revolutionary ideologies. Aristotle was, of course, quite familiar with ideolog-

64. Modern liberal democracies have the advantage of possessing large middle classes, which may be one reason why their citizens are more inclined than were their ancient counterparts to accept political institutions, such as representation and judicial review of legislation, that limit the power of democratic assemblies.

65. See esp. G. Contingios, *La théorie des révolutions*; M. Davis, “Aristotle’s Reflections on Revolution”; R. Polansky, “Aristotle on Political Change.”

66. See, for example, M. Davis, “Aristotle’s Reflections on Revolution,” 50; R. Polansky, “Aristotle on Political Change,” 325.

ical justifications of arguments for oligarchic and democratic revolution. But the construction, by intellectuals, of grand ideologies that involve claims about the direction of human history did not begin until long after the collapse of the classical polis. Marsilius of Padua noted that the one cause of revolution that Aristotle could not possibly have foreseen is the ideological claim to power made by Catholic priests and bishops.⁶⁷ We should add to Marsilius's list the ideological claims to power made by intellectuals who claim to have identified and speak in the name of *the* revolutionary direction of human history.

Nevertheless, even when we leave aside self-deluding claims about intellectual vanguards and the direction of history, there is something of importance and grandeur in an event such as the French Revolution that Aristotle's discussion of revolutions fails to capture. I would suggest that Aristotle's discussion of revolutions is inadequate to an event such as the French Revolution because that event involves the creation of a political community where there was none before, rather than the mere replacement of one kind of political regime with another.

This view of the French Revolution has become increasingly popular in recent years. The last decade has seen a widespread effort among historians to replace the "social interpretation" of the Revolution as the story of the bourgeoisie's rise to power with a more "political" interpretation that identifies the development of a new, more inclusive and participatory political culture as the Revolution's central drama.⁶⁸ The advocates of this political interpretation of the Revolution usually speak of the birth of "democratic" or "modern political culture" rather than of the birth of political community.⁶⁹ But much of what they mean by "democratic political culture" is captured by the concepts of political justice and political friendship that Aristotle associates with political community per se. (Indeed, Aristotle's understanding of political community could help to clarify the conceptual framework of this new interpretation of the Revolution.)

Conversely, Aristotle's account of revolutions also needs to be supplemented with an account of the collapse of political community into

67. Marsilius of Padua, *Defender of the Peace*, 4–5, 89–91.

68. This move toward a more political interpretation of the French Revolution has been led by F. Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, and is the guiding theme of the three large bicentennial volumes edited by Keith Baker, F. Furet, et al., *The French Revolution*. See also K. Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*; L. Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*. For a critical assessment of what the author describes as the "new orthodoxy" about the Revolution, see J. Censer, "The Coming of a New Interpretation."

69. As in the title of the bicentennial volumes edited by K. Baker, F. Furet, et al., *The French Revolution and the Birth of Modern Political Culture*.

nonpolitical forms of social organization, something the classical Greek world experienced with the final triumph of Macedonian imperialism shortly after Aristotle's death. Aristotle does, of course, speak of revolutions that lead to the establishment of tyrannies within political communities; and, tyrannies, according to Aristotle, barely have the form of regimes and thus seriously diminish political life. But he clearly thinks of tyrannies as temporary interruptions within the life of a political community rather than the dissolution of the bonds that join individuals in a shared political life (*Pol.* 1315b).⁷⁰ Tyranny seems, for Aristotle, to be self-seeking, one-person rule over individuals who share the expectations characteristic of political justice and political friendship. In other words, tyranny involves rule over individuals who expect considerably more than the self-aggrandizing rule of a particular individual. Aristotle's concept of tyranny does not provide us with a category with which to conceptualize the social condition that dissolves political community and the mutual expectations political community inspires. Like the category of political revolution, serious consideration of the collapse of political community is missing from Aristotle's analysis of revolution.

Even if Aristotle is unfamiliar with the revolutionary emergence or collapse of political communities, we certainly have experience of such events and thus need to supplement Aristotle's analysis of revolutions with a concept of "political revolution." One of the most significant limitations of Aristotle's account of actual political life is the absence of serious consideration of the relationship between political and nonpolitical forms of large-scale social organization. His account of ordinary political life would be much clearer and more useful if it were accompanied by a sketch of nonpolitical forms of social organization that would help us think about the emergence and disappearance of political communities.

70. Aristotle knows only one tyranny that lasted a century. Most collapse far more quickly, with even a forty- or fifty-year duration being quite remarkable (*Pol.* 1315b).