

Discussion Notes for Aristotle's *Politics*

BOOK I

1. Introducing Aristotle

- a. Aristotle was born around 384 BCE (in Stagira, far north of Athens but still a 'Greek' city) and died around 322 BCE, so he lived into his early sixties.
- b. That means he was born about fifteen years after the trial and execution of Socrates. He would have been approximately 45 years younger than Plato, under whom he was eventually sent to study at the Academy in Athens.
- c. Aristotle stayed at the Academy for twenty years, eventually becoming a teacher there himself. When Plato died in 347 BCE, though, the leadership of the school passed on not to Aristotle, but to Plato's nephew Speusippus. (As in the *Republic*, the stubborn reality of Plato's family connections loomed large.)
- d. After living in Asia Minor from 347-343 BCE, Aristotle was invited by King Philip of Macedon to serve as the tutor for Philip's son Alexander (yes, the Great). Aristotle taught Alexander for eight years, then returned to Athens in 335 BCE. There he founded his own school, the Lyceum.
 - i. Aside: We should remember that these schools had substantial afterlives, not simply as ideas in texts, but as living sites of intellectual energy and exchange. The Academy lasted from 387 BCE until 83 BCE, then was re-founded as a 'Neo-Platonic' school in 410 CE. It was finally closed by Justinian in 529 CE. (Platonic philosophy was still being taught at Athens from 83 BCE through 410 CE, though it was not disseminated through a formalized Academy.) The Lyceum lasted from 334 BCE until 86 BCE, when it was abandoned as the Romans sacked Athens.
- e. Aristotle died in 322 BCE, one year after the death of his pupil Alexander had stirred up anti-Macedonian sentiment in Athens, leading Aristotle to leave the city one last time.
- f. Aristotle left behind a staggering number of works, of which we have only a small portion now. Still, what we have is not insubstantial. One thing to remember, though, when reading his texts, is that many of them are incomplete working drafts or even lecture notes. The *Politics* seems to fall into this category. At the very least, it is incomplete. This can create challenges for our own attempts to read an overarching, clearly coherent argument out of its pages.
- g. Aristotle's method, finally, builds on the model of Socratic dialectic while also critically modifying it. From dialectic, he takes the procedure of exploring contrasting opinions from both sides, thinking through the consequences of each rather than merely recommending one over the other. But he does not write dialogues to explore matters dialectically. Rather, he does so through thematically oriented 'monologues.' And his goal is to use dialectic to work through opinions and beliefs, so that we can ultimately arrive at firm knowledge (*epistēmē*) founded on first principles (*archai*). So he doesn't stop with Socratic questioning, but tries to push further.
- h. That's not to say that Socrates, too, didn't ultimately have some positive claims to make; but his method was more obviously about unsettling opinions, whereas Aristotle's approach tends to foreground the comparison of opinions so that clear knowledge might be attained and disseminated. Of course, from Socrates we learned

of the dangers of claiming to ‘know,’ and so we should be wary that we don’t simply become Aristotelian sophists, parroting knowledge-claims without first dialectically earning them.

2. The Authority of the *Polis*

- a. Aristotle begins the *Politics* by talking about the different kinds of community organization that structure human life. Such communities exist on every level of social life: there are families, households, religious organizations, and so on.
- b. But Aristotle takes the *polis*—the city or city-state—to be the most important kind of community. He does so because the city is the community that aims at the highest kind of good. This ‘good’ will turn out to be happiness, but here we can simply say that the good of the city aims to include and transcend the smaller-scale goods of the families and households that make it up. Because it aims at the highest kind of good, then, the city is the community that has the most authority. (I.i)
 - i. So, we could sum this order of authority up in this way:
 1. Community with Highest Authority = City
 2. Good with Highest Authority = Happiness
 3. Knowledge with Highest Authority = Political Science (the Statesman’s knowledge)
- c. At the end of I.i, Aristotle briefly introduces us to the method of analysis he will be leaning on throughout: “a composite has to be analyzed until we reach things that are incomposite.” By breaking the city down into its constituent parts, he wagers, we should be able to get a better sense of how cities work and how we might get cities to work well. The same would go for breaking down the overarching category of ‘rule’ into different kinds of ruling and being ruled.

3. The Natural Birth of the *Polis*

- a. Before breaking it back down into its parts, Aristotle first builds the structure of a city up from the basics. He takes the city as a product of natural processes, not entirely unlike the growth of a plant or a herd of animals, though of course at a higher level of maturation and sophistication.
 - i. One initial question for us here would be: How does the way Aristotle ‘builds his city up from scratch’ differ from the way Socrates and his companions do something similar? Are they similar approaches with a similar goal? Or are they different in both method and result?
- b. As part of this political naturalism, Aristotle points out certain natural relationships between kinds of humans. The first two he suggests are male and female (naturally related via procreation) and ruler and ruled. Here, very early on, Aristotle hints that institutions of ruling and even of slavery are not mere historically contingent phenomena, but natural outcomes based on inherent characteristics. As he writes: “For if something is capable of rational foresight, it is a natural ruler and master, whereas whatever can use its body to labor is ruled and is a natural slave.” (I.ii, 1252a)
- c. Another aspect of Aristotle’s naturalism is his claim that “nature produces nothing skimpily, but instead makes a single thing for a single task, because every tool will be made best if it serves to perform one task rather than many.” (I.ii, 1252b)
 - i. Here too we might ask: How does this singular correspondence of function relate back to the Socratic treatment of specific virtue? How do we get from an individual’s kind of virtue (*aretè*) to a thing’s task (*ergon*)?

- d. Aristotle next proceeds to give us a speculative natural history of the city. From basic family units come larger villages, which can then cohere into a self-sufficient and organized polis. This, too, is part of nature. Such a city “comes to be for the sake of living, but it remains in existence for the sake of living well. That is why every city-state exists by nature, since the first communities do. For the city-state is their end, and nature is an end; for we say that each thing’s nature—for example, that of a human being, or a horse, or a household—is the character it has when its coming-into-being has been completed.” (I.ii, 1252b.27-34)
 - e. The natural birth and growth of the city is then oriented to the maturation and completion of the city. The other forms of community are already ‘on the way’ to the city as their shared end, goal, or *telos*. Aristotle’s natural portrait of the *polis* can thus be called teleo-logical: the city is the properly expected result of an ordered process of natural development.
 - f. It’s not the case, then, that humans just happen to live in big communities we call ‘cities.’ They are actually naturally predisposed to eventually form such cities. It is the natural end-goal of human maturation. That’s what Aristotle is getting at when he says that “a human being is by nature a political animal.” (I.ii, 1253a)
 - g. A human person who, by nature, was in no way suited to the *polis* would then be either subhuman or superhuman, either a beast or a god.
 - h. The other reason that Aristotle gives for calling humans ‘political animals’ is that only we have speech in the proper sense. For him, speech does not consist in simply sharing information about pleasure or pain. He calls that kind of sonic communication ‘voice,’ saying that even animals share information with each other in that way.
 - i. Speech, on the other hand, goes beyond pleasure and pain to communicate about the beneficial and the harmful, which Aristotle holds parallel with the “just” and the “unjust,” as well as with the “good” and the “bad.” While animals communicate basic sensual data, then, humans give each other normative accounts of the other. Political speech in the city is simply the natural outgrowth of that process.
 - i. Here we could ask whether Aristotle’s comments here unsettle the Socratic notion of the ideal city as a community of shared pleasure and pain. Would that kind of community still be too ‘bestly’ for Aristotle?
 - j. Continuing on this note of justice, chapter two of Book I ends by summing things up for us: “justice is a political matter; for justice is the organization of a political community, and justice decides what is just.” (I.ii, 1253a.35-)
 - i. Again: how does the claim “justice is the organization of a political community” square with the suggestion in the *Republic* that justice is the right ordering of soul and city as to their parts?
4. Analyzing the *Polis*
- a. Also in I.ii (at 1253a.20), Aristotle argues that—despite the natural mini-history he’s just run through—the polis is, in a deeper sense, “prior to” its parts. This is because those parts—family-units, households, etc.—only gain their purpose and function from their place in the ultimate whole, according to the natural-teleological argument we’ve just seen.
 - b. In his analysis of the city, then, Aristotle proceeds to break down the different kinds of rule and knowledge that animate its life. There are four basic relations of rule, each of which corresponds to its own mode of knowledge (I.iii, 1253b):
 - i. Rule of master over slave

- ii. Rule of husband over wife
 - iii. Rule of father over children
 - iv. Rule as “wealth management”
- c. Much of Book I is then devoted to sketching out these kinds of rule.
- d. What is ‘politically’ at stake here is whether the rule of a whole city is similar to any of these other kinds of rule. For example: is ruling a city like owning a slave? Or is it more like raising children? Or is it something different from these entirely? These are the types of questions Aristotle’s approach can help us appreciate.
- 5. Masters and Slaves
 - a. Aristotle spends a large chunk of Book I on the difficult problem of slavery. One of the more troubling aspects of this problem is the question of whether or not there are ‘natural’ slaves: people whose function as humans is actually best realized when they serve as slaves to others.
 - b. A slave, in Aristotle’s view, is a piece of “animate property” used by a master in order to accomplish the actions that make up the master’s life. As such property, they belong to their master not simply as an employee, but as entirely his own. (I.iv)
 - c. In I.v, Aristotle argues that ruling and being ruled are necessary and even beneficial features of nature itself. The only thing we have to do is get clear on what the different types of ruling look like, so that we can be sure that we’re not misapplying one kind of rule to another kind of ruled object.
 - d. Our souls, for example, rule our bodies like masters rule slaves. But within the soul, understanding rules desire like a statesmen or king rules a populace. Here these parallels are still sketches, but eventually they should help us grasp broader truths about how to organize rule across all of nature. (I.v, 1254b)
 - e. Getting back to natural slaves, Aristotle argues that a natural slave is someone whose ‘task’—the best thing they can do—is to use their bodies to serve a master. As he explains: “For he who can belong to someone else... and he who shares in reason to the extent of understanding it, but does not have it himself, is a natural slave.” (I.v, 1254b.20-25)
 - i. Here we could ask: What does the slave’s reason consist in? On the one hand, they don’t ‘have it in themselves.’ And yet, unlike beasts, they can understand it on a level that goes beyond mere sensuality or feeling. So how do we draw the line between masterful reason and enslaved reason?
 - f. In I.vi, Aristotle addresses the very real possibility that people who are not natural slaves might become enslaved in fact. This happens all the time, as he admits. But this is merely the condition of legal slavery. It may follow the laws of wartime, but it is not therefore just. (I.vi, 1255a)
 - g. By introducing that argument, Aristotle hints to us that the ‘law’ is not always the same as ‘what is just.’ He is not ready to follow Thrasymachus in saying that justice is merely what is decided by the victors, or is another person’s good. He even calls those arguments from the *Republic* out in I.vi, 1255a, 13-20.
 - h. Instead, when it comes to the rule of master over slave, what is just is what is mutually beneficial. As a whole, the ‘community’ of master and slave forms a kind of mutual “friendship” that even borders one oneness of person, as the slave becomes something like a part of his master’s body. (I.vi, 1255b.10-15)
- 6. Economy and Wealth Acquisition
 - a. Perhaps surprisingly, Aristotle does not move on from the topic of slavery to the topic of wives and children. Instead, the discussion of slaves as property seems to

bleed naturally into a conversation about the fourth kind of rule: wealth or household management; in other words: economy or economics (*oikonomia*).

- b. At the beginning of I.vii, Aristotle reiterates his decisive claim that the distinct kinds of rule must be kept separate. To be a statesman is not the same as being a slaveowner or even the leader of a household. Each craft features its own particular kind of tasks and challenges and goals.
- c. To wit: “For rule of a statesman is rule over people who are naturally free, whereas that of a master is rule over slaves; rule by a household manager is a monarchy, since every household has one ruler; rule of a statesman is rule over people who are free and equal.” (I.vii.1255b.15-20)
- d. The rule of the householder, then, has to do with household management or *oikonomia* (the law or dividing-up of the household). This is where our modern term ‘economics’ finds its roots. *Oikonomia* consists in the dispensation, allotment, or simply the use of resources. (I.viii)
- e. But to engage in such economic management presumes that one has resources to dispense. There must also be an art of wealth acquisition or chrematistics (*chrēmatistikē*). That is how resources are initially procured for later use.
- f. But not all wealth is ‘acquired’ in the same way, as Aristotle admits. Some wealth-acquisition is naturally appropriate to economic management more broadly. The production of resources (through farming, hunting, manufacture, etc.) is part of natural chrematistics, as is bartering (exchange of goods for goods).
- g. But there is also another, unnatural form of chrematistics or wealth-‘creation.’ This is commerce. Commerce begins when barter ends: that is, when direct exchange is replaced by symbolic or monetary exchange. For Aristotle, the advent of money makes a big difference. When currency comes on the scene, humans have left behind the realm of natural economics and entered into the realm of pure exchange value and unlimited profit. (I.ix expends many words making this case.)
- h. Later in I.ix (1257b 30 – 1258a 15), Aristotle argues that the advent of unnatural commerce leads to the pursuit of unlimited profits and stores of wealth. But this is a misguided enterprise, since the real bedrock of human self-sufficiency is not money but natural resources (food, metals, etc.). The drive towards excess accumulation comes out of two potential obsessions:
 - i. Those who are “preoccupied with living, not with living well” are so concerned with ensuring the survival of themselves and their family that they continue to stockpile resources long after it’s necessary to do so. Instead of being satisfied with their moderate income and turning to other pursuits, they keep trying to make more and more money.
 - ii. Those who do try to “live well,” however, often make the mistake of thinking that living well means pursuing physical gratification. (Aristotle thinks this is a mistake, though he hasn’t given us a reason for this in the *Politics* yet; here he’s leaning on arguments from the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which he probably presumes we’ve read already.) But this excessive desire for gratification merely reinforces the drive for excessive wealth.
- i. The result of this obsessive drive towards unlimited wealth-creation is the erroneous reduction of all arts to commerce. Instead of pursuing different crafts for their natural purposes, people practice them only so that they can make money off of them. And so they “make all of these [arts and virtues] into forms of wealth

acquisition in the belief that acquiring wealth is the end, and that everything ought to promote the end.” (I.ix 1258a.10-14)

- j. And so Aristotle concludes that such commercial excesses are “justly disparaged” (I.x). It can be useful for the statesman (*politikos*) to know about such chrematistic activities and even the various kinds of economic practices (farming, shipping, etc.; I.xi) But these should in no way be prioritized as the ultimate end of anything.
7. Husband and Wife, Father and Child
- a. After giving us initial sketches of slavery and wealth-acquisition, Aristotle finally moves on to the other kinds of ‘rule.’ These are the rule of husband over wife and father over children. (I.xii-xiii)
 - b. At the beginning of chapter 12, Aristotle clarifies for us that all three of mastery, husband-rule, and fatherly rule are parts of “household management” (economics) more broadly. (1259a.37-40)
 - c. But even though they all coexist in the same dwelling, these remain three different types of rule. Neither being a husband nor being a father are akin to being a slavemaster. And being a husband is different from being a father, too: “For a man rules his wife and children both as free people, but not in the same way: instead, he rules his wife the way a statesman does, and his children the way a king does. For a male, unless he is somehow constituted contrary to nature, is naturally more fitted to lead than a female, and someone older and completely developed is naturally more fitted to lead than someone younger and incompletely developed.” (I.xii, 1259b.1-5)
 - d. So the rule of husband over wife is akin to the rule of a statesman over his people, while the rule of a father over his children is akin to the rule of a king over his people. These are different kinds of authority with differing degrees of freedom granted to the ruled subjects.
8. Ruling and Being Ruled
- a. The end of Book I tells us that “ruling and being ruled differ in kind.” (I.xiii, 1259b.35-37) Confusion between these two could lie at the heart of political disorder, both in the home and the city.
 - b. And yet, if any ruling relationship is going to work out, there will have to be “virtue” on both sides of that relation: “It is evident, therefore, that both [ruler and ruled] must share in virtue, but that there are differences in their virtue.” (1260a.1-3)
 - c. This “natural” relationship between ruling and ruled can also be found in the soul, Aristotle argues. It is reason that rules over the nonrational part in the soul, even though both retain their specific “virtues.” In soul and city, then, there must be virtue on both sides of the ruling relation. (I.xiii, 1260a.5-10)
 - d. A tad abruptly, Aristotle then moves from a consideration of the soul in general to a discussion of the different kinds of souls that different people have. The “deliberative” part of the soul, which rules by way of reason, is “entirely missing” from a natural slave. Women, meanwhile, have deliberative reason but it “lacks authority.” Children, finally, also have deliberative reason, but it’s incomplete; it hasn’t matured properly yet. (I.xiii, 1260a.10-20)
 - i. Can we say that Aristotle is drafting his own city-soul parallel here? Or is he up to something different than the *Republic* was with its parallelism of city and soul?
 - ii. Note also that here Aristotle calls out Socrates for too quickly allowing the identity of the characteristic virtues of male and female.

- e. Aristotle argues that we need to be willing to draw these kinds of fine-grained distinctions if we are going to investigate politics properly. “For people who talk in generalities, saying that virtue is a good condition of the soul, or correct action, or something of that sort, are deceiving themselves.” (I.xiii, 1260a.25-27)
- f. It might be a better method, he suggests, to list out the distinct kinds of “virtue” and how they fit into different political contexts. Then we’d have something more tangible to work with than broad generalizations.
- g. Finally, he adds that the virtues of specific parts can only be appreciated in light of the virtue of the whole. The whole regime or constitution—*politeia*, again—must be examined before we say too much about the role of each of its aspects. As he puts it: “As for man and woman, father and children, the virtue relevant to each of them, what is good in their relationship with one another and what is not good, and how to achieve the good and avoid the bad—it will be necessary to go through all these in connection with the constitutions. For every household is part of a city-state, these are parts of a household, and the virtue of a part must be determined by looking to the virtue of the whole.” (1260b.7-15)
- h. And, we might add, this is what the rest of the *Politics* is supposed to do. As it turns out, however, Aristotle will seem to lose interest in relating things back to household economics and become more absorbed in the holistic depictions of constitutions more broadly. (This may be because we have lost certain books of the *Politics* that bring it back to economics, properly speaking.)

BOOK II

1. Unity and Difference

- a. Book I, then, has set the goal for the subsequent discussion: to determine which type of political community is best. Rather than beginning by building up an ideal city from scratch, as we saw in the *Republic*, Aristotle decides that it would be more effective consider a variety of the most highly regarded constitutions in his time and compare them with one another. (Historical aside: Aristotle and his students had supposedly collected over 100 actual documents for this purpose.)
- b. The purpose of this goal, Aristotle claims, is not to seem “clever,” but rather to demonstrate how “the currently available constitutions are not in good condition.” (II.i, 1260b.30-35)
- c. A bit strangely, Aristotle next moves to discussing not the constitution of some existing Greek city, but the regime outlined in Plato’s *Republic*, which he presumably studied well.
- d. Also surprisingly (depending on your point of view), the first Socratic recommendation that Aristotle tackles is the policy of communal families. As Aristotle admits, the purpose of this policy was supposed to be unity. Without familial and tribal conflicts, the polis would become a community of pleasure and pain, following a shared harmony.
- e. Aristotle, however, finds this emphasis on unity misguided. A city, he argues, is not simply one thing. It is a composition: a multiplicity of many things that function together, without obliterating the distinctions between them. “And yet it is evident

that the more of a unity a city-state becomes, the less of a city-state it will be. For a city-state naturally consists of a certain multitude..." (II.i, 1261a.15-18)

- f. The point, it seems, is not to overcome this multitude of difference but rather to manage it effectively. This means that traditional family structures and other allegiances can be preserved, though they should be cultivated in such a way that they contribute to the overall functioning of the whole. This also goes for the question of a ruling class, which should also be diverse and even dynamically changing, rather than being locked in (as the golden guardians were). (Here Aristotle hints at such reciprocal equality of rule without fully developing the policy.)
 - g. The Socratic approach must, then, first of all be critiqued for the erroneous assumption about unity that undergirds it. "What has been alleged to be the greatest good for city-states," argues Aristotle, in fact "destroys them." (II.ii, 1261b.8-10)
 - h. It is through dynamic multiplicity, then, that cities become self-sufficient and eventually strong: "So, since what is more self-sufficient is more choiceworthy, what is less a unity is more choiceworthy than what is more so." (II.ii.1261b.13-15)
2. Against Socratic Communism
- a. After establishing that fundamental critique of Socrates' assumption about unity, Aristotle then launches into a more sustained attack on communal 'ownership' in general. This goes both for common families and common property (in the sense of 'things').
 - b. His main problem with Socratic communism is this: "what is held in common by the largest number of people receives the least care." (II.iii, 1261b.33-34)
 - c. In Aristotle's view, people care most about what's their own. This sense of ownership is what motivates them to maximize the virtue, effectiveness, and utility of whatever it is they own. (Contrast this with Socrates' concern that too much 'mine-ness' will simply tear the city apart at its core.)
 - d. Other practical concerns Aristotle has include the inadequate defenses of Socrates' plan against incest, patricide, and other ethical taboos. If no one knows who's related to whom, how can we be expected to preserve our moral standards?
 - e. Overall, though, it is this matter of ownership that most drives Aristotle's criticism of Socrates: "For there are two things in particular that cause human beings to love and cherish something: their own and their favorite. And neither can exist" in Socrates' city. (II.iv, 1262b.20-23) (Reeve's note says that the difference between the own and the favorite is that the favorite is of singular value to its 'owner;' like an eye to a one-eyed man.)
 - f. The result of this criticism is that Aristotle thinks we can improve things merely by modifying the current property system. He is against what he takes to be Socrates' radical, full-scale rethinking of property as we know it. With a more moderate approach, we could arrive at some kind of mixed system of property: "For while property should be in some way communal, in general it should be private." (II.v, 1263a.25-27)
 - g. And so "it is better for property to be private and its use communal." (II.v, 1263a.36-37) This is how we can strike a balance between incentivizing people to care for their belongings and encourage a civic sense of cooperation.
 - h. By using property as an incentive, we can put human self-interest to work rather than fighting against it in the name of a more ideally selfless society. As Aristotle says: "Besides, to regard a thing as one's own makes an enormous difference to one's

pleasure. For the love each person feels for himself is no accident, but is something natural.” (II.v, 1263a.40-42)

- i. A better regime than Socrates’, then, would try to make good use of our natural self-love by bridging our use of property and our sense of civic purpose.
3. Against Socratic Elitism
 - a. Socrates’ mistaken obsession with property is ultimately another symptom of his erroneous assumption about unity. There’s no need, in Aristotle’s mind, to destroy the entire system of ownership in order to chase some ideal of unification.
 - b. The city is not one note, but a harmony of many notes: “It is as if one were to reduce a harmony to a unison, or a rhythm to a single beat. But a city-state consists of a multitude, as we said before, and should be unified and made into a community by means of education.” (II.v, 1263b.35-38)
 - c. Aristotle acknowledges that Socrates talked much of education, but complains that this meant only the education of the elite guardians. By ignoring broader “habits, philosophy, and laws,” Socrates left out the vast majority of the city as a diverse multiplicity. A better regime would spend more time arranging the legal and intellectual shaping of all of its parts, not just one part. Only then will the whole benefit.
 - d. The result of the Socratic regime of guardians is that the guardians live unhappy lives, while the rest of the city is ignored. Aristotle rejects Socrates’ argument that the apparent unhappiness of the guardians will support the overall happiness of the city. To Aristotle, the happiness of the whole will depend on the happiness of each of its parts. (II.v, 1264b.15-23)
 - e. In Chapter 6 of Book II, Aristotle turns to another Platonic text, the Laws. There we get what some have called a more measured, policy-conscious, or even ‘realistic’ take on Socratic politics. But, even then, Aristotle is not impressed. The formulations are still too “general” for his liking. (cf. 1265a.25-35)
 - f. In the end, he classifies the Socratic city in this way: “The overall organization tends to be neither a democracy nor an oligarchy but midway between them; it is called a polity, since it is made up of those with hoplite weapons.” (1265b.25-30)
 - g. This is a bit of an oblique statement, but Reeve’s notes can help us here. He adds that the ‘hoplite’ comments signals to us that the ruling class of the Socratic city is neither as small as the wealthiest elite (as in oligarchy) nor as large as the vulgar masses (as in democracy). It is limited to those who can afford and wield hoplite weapons, which are too expensive for the masses but not so prohibitively expensive that only the wealthiest can afford them. A city where such a ‘middle class’ holds most sway could be said to be a ‘polity.’
 - h. This makes the Socratic city something like a ‘mixed regime.’ Even though Aristotle tries to poke holes in many of Socrates’ policies, he does admit that the best regimes are mixed rather than ideologically pure. As he writes: “the proposal of those who mix together a larger number [of constitutions] is better, because a constitution composed of a larger number is better.” (II.vi, 1266a.1-5)
 4. Phaleas and Practical Wealth Redistribution
 - a. At II.vii, Aristotle turns his attention from Socrates to Phaleas of Chalcedon, an older contemporary of Plato who also recommended certain forms of wealth redistribution or ‘levelling.’
 - b. Unlike Plato’s Socrates, Phaleas had recommended that wealth could be evened out through small, practical measures, such as limiting childbirths or using dowries to

balance things out. There was no need for a wide-scale abolition and rethinking of the property system.

- c. The mistake that Socrates made, but that Phaleas didn't, is to emphasize property over laws when it comes to questions of equality and levelling. To Aristotle, it is the laws which must shape habits and desires so that vicious inequality is avoided. There's no need to end the system of ownership as such. Even Phaleas' 'equality of property' measures strike Aristotle as going too far and missing the crucial role of the laws in all of this.
- d. So: "It is clear, then, that it is not enough for the legislator to make property equal, he must also aim at the mean. Yet even if one prescribed a moderate amount for everyone, it would be of no use. For one should level desires more than property, and that cannot happen unless people have been adequately educated by the laws." (II.vii, 1266b.25-30)
- e. Aristotle thinks many of his predecessors have oversimplified the complexity of human motivations for doing injustice. It's not, in his mind, all about property and equality. It's about desires.
- f. Building on certain Socratic comments about pleasure and pain and desire, Aristotle then lists out three kinds of human motivations. For each kind of motivation, there is a corresponding way of assuaging that motivation without resorting to injustice. So we have (1267a.1-15):
 1. For Necessities → moderate income & property
 2. For Pleasures That End Pain → temperance
 3. For Pleasure In Itself → philosophy & contemplation
- g. The laws, then, should try to channel these desires and motivations properly. Our need for the necessities should be met with moderate amounts of resources; our desire for pain-calming pleasures should be assuaged, but not excessively; and our longing for pleasure in itself should be cultivated through philosophical training.
- h. In summary, then, Aristotle thinks redistribution is an intriguing tool, but it shouldn't lie at the core of political thought. Focusing on property can distract us from the deeper concerns of human desire and greed.
- i. To wit: "So, while equalizing the property of citizens is among the things that helps prevent faction, it is certainly no big thing, so to speak. ... Besides, human greed is an insatiable thing. ... For there is no natural limit to desires, and satisfying them is what the many spend their lives trying to do. The starting point in such matters, therefore, rather than leveling property, is to arrange that naturally decent people are disposed not to want to be acquisitive, and that base ones cannot be." (II.vii, 1267a.37-1267b.6)

BOOK III

1. The Agency of a City
 - a. Aristotle begins Book III by asking us to consider what it means to say that a city ‘acts.’ On the one hand, we say this all the time: Athens declares war on Sparta; Chicago enacts a new ordinance; and so on. But on the other hand, it’s clear that a city is a composite made up of parts, as Aristotle never tires of reminding us. Because of this, the question of a city’s agency should cause us to look more closely at the individual agents that constitute that city as a whole. In other words, we have to examine that city’s citizens. (III.i; end of 1274b)
 - b. The question of who counts as a citizen is not as obvious as it might at first seem. There might be honorary citizens, or permanent residents from some foreign place, or other kinds of immigrants with various legal statuses. (Think of our own context and its questions of citizenship.) But Aristotle does not want to draw far-reaching conclusions from such exceptional cases.
 - c. Instead, he’s interested in what he calls “unqualified citizens.” (III.i.1275a.15) By this, he’s not referring to citizens who lack skills or talents. Rather, he means citizens who are citizens ‘full stop’—we don’t need to ‘qualify’ their citizenship by adding any extra adjectives to it (e.g., ‘honorary’). Only such a citizen would have a citizenship without “defect.” (1275a.19) (“Unqualified” is Reeve’s attempt at rendering the Greek *kath’ hauto*—‘according to itself.’)
 - d. And so: “The unqualified citizen is defined by nothing else so much as by his participation in judgment and office.” (1275a.22-23) To be a citizen, for Aristotle, means to (at least potentially) be involved in making judicial decisions (e.g., jury service) and deliberating about administrative policies (e.g., serving in a public assembly).
 - e. Immediately after defining the unqualified citizen in this way, however, Aristotle adds that a ‘citizen’ can be defined in many different ways, depending on which form of constitution is in place. So to be a citizen in a certain kind of oligarchy is not necessarily the same as being a citizen in some tyranny.
 - f. The unqualified citizen, though, sounds most like a citizen in a democracy, as Aristotle admits. (1275b.3-4) By saying this, Aristotle is arguing that democracies—which may or may not be the best form of constitution overall—have the best understanding of what it means to be a citizen. This means that this definition of a citizen is “prior” to all of the “deviant” definitions of citizenship we find in other modes of government. (1275a.35-40)
 - i. Question: How does this privileging of democracy square with Aristotle’s later claims that aristocracy and kingship are both nobler than even a well-constructed polity? (To answer this, we may have to do a better job philosophically unpacking Aristotle’s difficult comments about what ‘underlies’ different predicates—cf. the subject or *hypokeimenon*.)
 - g. So Aristotle’s definition of the unqualified citizen is not universal. Instead, it is primordial, in the sense that it should come first in our list of types of citizenship. This is because it more closely approaches the goal of forming cities in the first place.
 - h. As he sums it up: “someone who is eligible to participate in deliberative and judicial office is a citizen in this city-state, and... a city state, simply speaking, is a multitude of such people, adequate for life’s self-sufficiency.” (III.i.1275b.16-20)

2. The Identity of a City

- a. Aristotle next expands his inquiry to ask about what supports the identity of cities or city-states. His exploration of citizenship has already shown that he doesn't think citizenship or cities are entirely dependent on genealogical succession. It's more about participation in political organization than it is about birthright. (III.ii)
- b. But the problem still remains: "the problem of when we ought to say that a city-state is the same, or not the same but a different one." (III.iii.1276a.16-17)
- c. This differentiation of the city-state could seem to occur whenever there was regime change, or whenever a city grew so large that it spread out across an extremely vast stretch of land. But the integrity of the *polis*, it turns out, has little to do with geographical or spatial concerns.
- d. The identity of the city lies instead in the integrity of its constitution—not necessarily as a written document, but as a consistent form of political organization. As Aristotle writes: "when the constitution changes its form and becomes different, it would seem that the city-state too cannot remain the same. ... But if this is so, it is evident that we must look to the constitution above all when saying that the city-state is the same." (III.iii.1276b.1-12)
- e. A constitution, then, is not some accidental feature of a community, but rather the marker of its identity. A certain kind of constitution is what makes a certain city what it is.

3. Human Virtue & Citizen Virtue

- a. In III.iv, Aristotle introduces a difficult but crucial distinction between what it means to be a 'good person' and what it means to be a 'good citizen.'
- b. It turns out that we can be good citizens without necessarily being good people. This is because the virtue of a citizen is defined by the constitution in which they live. If they serve and preserve that constitution, they are showing the virtues of citizenship and being good citizens. But certain constitutions may ask them to do things that make them bad people, if we accept that there is a broader sense of virtue that applies to humans as such. Political demands, in other words, may lead us to compromise ourselves ethically.
- c. As Aristotle puts it: "the citizens... have the safety of the community as their task. But the community is the constitution. Hence the virtue of a citizen must be suited to his constitution. Consequently, if indeed there are several kinds of constitution, it is clear that there cannot be a single virtue that is the virtue—the complete virtue—of a good citizen. But the good man, we say, does express a single virtue: the complete one. Evidently, then, it is possible for someone to be a good citizen without having acquired the virtue expressed by a good man." (III.iv.1276b.25-35)
- d. Political life works best if as many citizens as possible exhibit citizens' virtue. In fact, the city will only function if the vast majority of its inhabitants act like good citizens in at least a basic sense. But perhaps not everyone can be a good person—in an unqualified sense—in Aristotle's eyes. At the very least, the likelihood of most people becoming unqualifiedly good would depend heavily on the constitution conditioning their community.
- e. To further understand what citizenship mean, Aristotle next reminds us of his earlier distinction between mastery and political rule. Unlike mastery (which aims more to rule than to know about what is ruled), political rule is "exercised over those who are similar in birth and free. ... A ruler must learn it by being ruled... Hence this too is rightly said, that one cannot rule well without having been ruled. And whereas the

virtues of these are different, a good citizen must have the knowledge and ability both to be ruled and to rule, and this is the virtue of a citizen, to know the rule of free people from both sides.” (III.iv.1277b.7-15)

- f. The virtue of the unqualified citizen thus consists in knowing how to rule and be ruled. But, when serving as a ruler, the citizen should be capable of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*). When being ruled, meanwhile, it is enough to get by on “true opinion.” (III.iv.1277b.25-30)
 - i. Question: If the unqualified citizen both rules and is ruled, how does practical wisdom come to be in them? Does it manifest when the citizen is serving as ruler, then grow dormant when the citizen is ruled? Or do some citizens have it while others lack it? And if so, does that undermine their ability to be good citizens at all?
 - g. In III.v, Aristotle addresses head-on the problem of whether or not everyone who gets to live in the city can count as a citizen. Obviously, this would depend on the constitution. But here Aristotle is willing to give us some prescriptive hints about who should be a citizen and who should not.
 - h. As he begins: “the truth is that not everyone without whom there would not be a city-state is to be regarded as a citizen.” (III.v.1278a.2-3) Some people are essential, then, but that doesn’t necessarily mean they get to take part in judgment and deliberation. (It’s all about offices, remember!)
 - i. Slaves, obviously, are already out, as far as Aristotle’s concerned. But now vulgar craftsmen, too, come more sharply into view: “The best city-state will not confer citizenship on vulgar craftsmen... but only to those who are freed from necessary tasks. Those who perform necessary tasks for an individual are slaves; those who perform them for the community are vulgar craftsmen and hired laborers.” (III.v.1278a.7-12)
 - j. While slaves lacked deliberative reason, Aristotle does not quite say this about vulgar craftsmen. What he does indicate is that they lack the ‘free time’ to pursue deliberation and judgment and all the other duties of governance. They are simply too busy keeping the city going with their production. The city needs this, of course, but that does not mean it should elevate those producers to positions of decisive power: “For it is impossible to engage in virtuous pursuits while living the life of a vulgar craftsman or a hired laborer.” (III.v.1278a.20-21)
 - k. The truest citizen—in the most unqualified sense—is whoever is free and able to participate in the offices of ruling the city. Anyone who falls short of that is akin to a “resident alien.” (III.v.1278a.37-38)
 - l. Finally, Aristotle sums up this part of his meditation on citizenship by going back to the distinction between a good person and a good citizen. The goal of finding the best constitution, we now see, has to do with uncovering a form of political organization that makes being a good citizen most equivalent to being a good person: “As to whether the virtue expressed by a good man is to be regarded as the same as that of an excellent citizen or as different, it is clear from what has been said that in one sort of city-state both are the same person, while in another they are different. And that person is not just anyone, but the statesman, who has authority or is capable of exercising authority in the supervision of communal matters, either by himself or with others.” (III.v.1278b.1-5)
4. The Taxonomy of Constitutions

- a. Taking a breather from his examination of citizenship, Aristotle next broadens his scope to look at constitutions as wholes: “A constitution is an organization of a city-state’s various offices but, particularly, of the one that has authority over everything. For the governing class has authority in every city-state, and the governing class is the constitution.” (III.vi.1278b.8-10)
 - b. Aristotle’s use of the term ‘constitution’ can be tricky at times, but here he signals to us that, if we can keep track of the way different governing classes operate in different cities, we’ll have a decent grasp on what the ‘constitutions’ of those cities are.
 - c. Now the best constitution, says Aristotle, would be one that emphasized not just living but living well. The goal of politics is not just survival but the cultivation of some “common benefit” for the citizenry as a whole. Like a captain on a ship, the statesman is ruling not only for his own benefit, but so that the whole ship and its crew can prosper. (III.vi)
 - d. Our search for the best constitution must, then keep its eye out for this goal of common benefit: “It is evident, then, that those constitutions that look to the common benefit turn out, according to what is unqualifiedly just, to be correct, whereas those which look only to the benefit of the rulers are mistaken and are deviations from the correct constitutions. For they are like rule by a master, whereas a city-state is a community of free people.” (III.vi.1279a.15-21)
 - i. Question: In some ways, this is Aristotle’s version of Socrates’ argument for why the goal of rule is to benefit the ruled, not the ruler. Has Aristotle indeed given us a similar argument here? Has his complexity added any extra nuance? And if so, what does that nuance change about Socrates’ initial insight into the purpose of rule?
 - e. And so, with this criterion of ‘common benefit’ in mind, Aristotle lays out a first, fairly vague definition of what the best constitution would be: “Since ‘constitution’ and ‘governing class’ signify the same thing, and the governing class is the authoritative element in any city-state, and the authoritative element must be either one person, or few, or many, then whenever the one, the few, or the many rule for the common benefit, these constitutions must be correct.” (III.vii.1279a.25-30)
 - f. So—regardless of the number of people involved in ruling—any constitution that aims at the common benefit is generally correct. But obviously that leaves a lot of variety on the table. And so Aristotle’s next move is to walk us through his taxonomy of constitutions.
 - g. To summarize (in order of descending goodness; cf. III.vii):
 - i. Kingship: one ruling for the common benefit
 - ii. Aristocracy: few ruling for the common benefit
 - iii. Polity: many ruling for the common benefit
 - iv. Democracy: many ruling for the benefit of the rulers
 - v. Oligarchy: few ruling for the benefit of the rulers
 - vi. Tyranny: one ruling for the benefit of the ruler
 - h. Aristotle also notes that ‘few’ and ‘many’ here often mean ‘rich’ and ‘poor,’ since a community with a majority of wealthy rulers would still be an oligarchy (or aristocracy), while a community with a minority of poor rulers would still be a democracy (or polity).
5. Political Virtue

- a. Aristotle next reiterates and expands upon his position that the goal of cities is not just living but living well. This means aiming at political virtue, especially ‘justice.’ But Aristotle thinks that most people are confused about what justice really is.
 - b. As he puts it: “justice seems to be equality, and it is, but not for everyone, only for equals. Justice also seems to be inequality, since indeed it is, but not for everyone, only for unequals.” (III.ix.1280a.10-13)
 - c. The point is that our general definitions of justice (e.g., as ‘equality’) don’t take into account the contextual and relative aspects of justice. We say that something is ‘just,’ but we often leave out the part about ‘for whom’ it is just. Aristotle thinks we aren’t considering deeply enough the ways in which people are equal to each other in some respects but not in others. In a general sense, everyone may agree that justice is ‘equality,’ but few would agree on how different people are equal to each other (or not) in specific ways. The pursuit of political justice, then, will have to deal with this problem of specifying what we mean by equality.
 - d. If we have a simplistic understanding of equality and egalitarianism, Aristotle thinks, we’ll miss the whole point of the city. As we’ve already seen, the purpose of cities is to live well—to aim at the height of political virtue: “So political communities must be taken to exist for the sake of noble actions, and not for the sake of living together. Hence those who contribute the most to this sort of community have a larger share in the city-state than those who are equal or superior in freedom or family but inferior in political virtue, and those who are surpassed in wealth but are surpassed in virtue.” (III.ix.1281a.1-6)
 - e. Here we are getting closer to what Aristotle thinks aristocracy is. The primary value for aristocracy is not equality (as human beings) or shared freedom or wealth, but political virtue. The definitions of justice and equality that matter are those that acknowledge this goal. (So: equality with regard to virtue is the kind of equality that matters when we define aristocratic justice!)
 - f. The “science of statesmanship,” then, is the only form of knowledge with the authority to help us properly approach justice as “common benefit” and the “political good.” And to do so, we have to reflect on how ‘equality’ is defined in each of the different kinds of constitutions. (III.xii.1282b.15-20)
 - i. At III.xi.1282b, Aristotle introduces the recurring theme of ‘laws vs. people.’ This theme is related to the question of who gets to decide what is just and on what basis they do so. Different constitutions grant different kinds of people the right to decide about justice, but Aristotle also thinks that people in general should be subject to just laws (rather than deciding on everything by decree in the moment). But after saying so, he then admits that we don’t yet have a sure way of establishing which laws are just and which are not, and so we fall back into the realm of debating which kind of people should be making such decisions.
6. Kingship
- a. The previous chapters have introduced us—in an oblique way—to Aristotle’s understanding of aristocracy. In an aristocracy, the few rule for common benefit, while their equality is determined according to their capacity for political virtue. Kingship, meanwhile, is the rule of one for the common benefit. But it can arise in many different variations, which Aristotle wants to walk us through.
 - b. He initially lists five kinds of kingship (III.xiv):
 - i. The Spartan model: permanent autocratic generalship

- ii. The hereditary model: like tyranny, but with legal and familial legitimacy (as far as the citizens are concerned)
- iii. Dictatorship: legally elected, non-hereditary pseudo-tyranny
- iv. Heroic kingship: voluntary, elective, legal, limited (and probably no longer possible)
- v. Absolute Kingship: the king rules as if over a gigantic household
- c. Here Aristotle returns to the question of whether it's better to be ruled by people or by laws. The problem with written laws is that they are too general to safely ensure the rule of justice: "the best constitution is not one that follows written laws." (III.xv.1286a.15) But the problem with people is that they can be corrupted or make decisions on a whim, rather than after careful deliberation. That may mean that aristocracy is ultimately safer than kingship, since it's harder to corrupt a number of people than it is to corrupt just one. (III.xv.1286b)
- d. III.xvi then makes clear that—even though we can still debate about which laws are just—it remains best to prioritize the authority of the laws over the authority of the rulers. Rulers should serve as the "guardians" of the laws. (Echoes of Socrates?) Because: "Anyone who instructs law to rule would seem to be asking God and the understanding alone to rule; whereas someone who asks a human being asks a wild beast as well. For appetite is like a wild beast, and passion perverts rulers even when they are the best men. That is precisely why law is understanding without desire." (III.xvi.1287a.28-32)
- e. Ideally, kingship, aristocracy, and polity would all aim at this goal of preserving just laws, with justice and equality defined in terms of capacity for political virtue.
- f. The decision between the three best kinds of constitution would then rely on the contingent contexts in which they came to be. Kingship would be appropriate if there were one exceptional family that was superior in political virtue. Aristocracy would arise if there were a free multitude that could rule and be ruled. A polity, finally, would be in place if there were a warrior multitude capable of ruling and being ruled. (III.xvii-xviii)
- g. Book III ends, finally, by arguing that the three good constitutions should bring the virtue of citizenship as close as possible to the virtue of being a good person (full stop). As Aristotle concludes: "the virtue of a man must of necessity be identical to that of a citizen of the best city-state. Hence it is evident that the ways and means by which a man becomes excellent are the same as those by which one might establish a city-state ruled by an aristocracy or a king, and that the education and habits that make a man excellent are pretty much the same as those that make him statesmanlike or kingly." (III.xviii.1288a.35-40)

BOOK IV

1. The Method of Political Science
 - a. Book III had ended with a promise of further discussion of the best kinds of constitution. Book IV flouts our expectations, however, by delaying that discussion and beginning with a reflection on the method of the statesman's knowledge (or 'political science').
 - b. This kind of science has to study political life from three main angles (IV.i):
 - i. What is the best constitution?
 - ii. What is the most appropriate constitution given certain circumstances?

- iii. What is the best constitution given certain assumptions we hold going in?
 - c. Aristotle reiterates these declarations to remind us about why he thinks his approach differs from that of Plato and Socrates: “For one should not study only what is best, but also what is possible and similarly what is easier and more attainable by all.” (IV.i.1288b.36-37)
 - d. And he adds: “what should be done is to introduce the sort of organization that people will be easily persuaded to accept and be able to participate in, given what they already have, as it is no less a task to reform a constitution than to establish one initially, just as it is no less a task to correct what we have learned than to learn it in the first place.” (IV.i.1289a.1-5)
 - e. The task of Reform, then, is just as difficult and pressing as the utopian task of building up an ideal city from scratch.
 - i. Big Question: Do we accept Aristotle’s argument that he is pursuing the matter of possibility in a way that leaves the Socratic project looking idle and utopian? Or could we come up with a Socratic counterpoint to Aristotle on the grounds that the thought of a civic paradigm is required if our piecemeal reforms are to accomplish any good at all?
- 2. Democracy & Oligarchy
 - a. After this methodological reminder, Aristotle turns back to his taxonomy—not only of kinds of constitutions, but also of sub-varieties of each kind. (Cf. species and genus in zoology, as always...) This variety, he suggests (at IV.iii), arises because cities are composites made of many parts, and so there are as many sub-varieties of civic organization as there are combinations of parts.
 - b. A constitution, he reiterates, “is the organization of offices in city-states, the way they are distributed, what element is in authority in the constitution, and what the end is of each of the communities.” (IV.i.1289a.15-17)
 - c. Almost in passing, Aristotle then claims that he’s already discussed the best constitutions. To an extent, he has, since Book III laid out a lot of the basics regarding kingship, aristocracy, and polity. But there is much left to say, as we’ll see with Aristotle in later books.
 - d. The next step, he says, is to explore the sub-types of democracy (defective polity) and oligarchy (defective aristocracy).
 - e. Democracy, in short, occurs when the free and poor hold political authority. An oligarchy, meanwhile, arises when the rich and usually well-born few attain authority. (IV.iv)
 - i. At IV.iv, Aristotle takes another dig at Socrates, saying that the Republic gives us an overly simplistic account of the division of labor in the city. It assumes that the city merely exists for providing necessities, rather than aiming for what most noble. (1291a.10-30)
 - f. Aristotle then lists five kinds of democracy (IV.iv):
 - i. Universal equality
 - ii. Equality based on property assessment
 - iii. Equality based on birthright
 - iv. Equality based on citizenship
 - v. Democracy-by-decree
 - 1. In that case, there are no laws but only occasional decrees—but this is not even a real constitution, in Aristotle’s eyes, since it does away with the rule of law altogether.

- g. And then there are four kinds of oligarchy (IV.v):
 - i. All the rich participate in offices (of judgment and deliberation)
 - ii. The rich elect those who will participate in offices
 - iii. Hereditary oligarchy
 - iv. Dynasty
 - 1. This is like hereditary oligarchy, but the laws are subject to the rulers' whim—much as in the most deviant form of democracy.
 - h. Somewhat confusingly, Aristotle then gives us four levels of democratic participation and four levels of oligarchic participation. These have to do both with the availability and capacity people have for taking part in the offices of judging and deliberating in each kind of constitution. (IV.vi)
 - i. For democracy:
 - i. The law is in charge, but there are infrequent assemblies (e.g., agrarian democracies)
 - ii. Everyone of uncontested birth can participate (though only few have leisure to do so)
 - iii. Everyone free can participate (but only few have leisure)
 - iv. Everyone free can participate and the even the poor are able (since offices are financially compensated)
 - j. And for oligarchy:
 - i. Everyone who meets a low property assessment can participate
 - ii. A higher property assessment allows a select few to elect new members of the ruling class
 - iii. A still higher assessment allows only a few to consolidate power
 - iv. The highest possible assessment concentrates power in the hands of the very few and their immediate group (cf. dynasty)
 - k. The general spectrum Aristotle is sketching out for us here is this: the two poles are the Authority of Law and the Authority of People. The more time and opportunity people have to participate, the more the Authority of the People can be actualized. The less time and opportunity people have to participate, the more the bare Authority of the Law will have to suffice.
3. Polity
- a. Aristotle next shifts to the confusingly named 'polity,' which is the 'good' form of democracy. Or, to be more precise, it is the healthy mean (average) between democracy and aristocracy.
 - i. This reference to aristocracy gives Aristotle a chance to remind us why it's probably the best constitutions: it involves election to political office by merit. This merit is determined not according to any context-specific understanding of virtue, but with regard to virtue in an unqualified sense (*kath' hauto*). In an aristocracy, the best parts of both oligarchy and democracy are preserved, while the destructive parts are cut away. As a whole, then, aristocracy is able to make good use of wealth, freedom, and (most important) virtue. (IV.vii)
 - b. Polity, too, is a kind of mixture of democracy and oligarchy, though it doesn't measure its ingredients out quite as effectively as aristocracy does. To clarify, Aristotle writes: "Polity, to put it simply, is a mixture of oligarchy and democracy. It is customary, however, to call those mixtures that lean toward democracy polities,

and those that lean more toward oligarchy aristocracies, because education and good birth more commonly accompany those who are richer.” (IV.viii.1293b.32-35)

- c. Polity finds a place for both the appreciation of wealth and the freedom for many of the seemingly poor. It's less effective than aristocracy, however, when it comes to maximizing the virtue of the city (which is, again, the whole point of living the political life!).
 - d. Aristotle tries to clarify all of this talk of mixture by classifying three modes of mixing (IV.ix):
 - i. A city could take legislation from two different constitutions
 - ii. A city could aim for the mean between two kinds of organization
 - iii. A city could pick out specific elements from two kinds of organization
 - e. As a mixture, then, the constitution of the polity aims at forms of legislation and organization that take the best from both democracy and oligarchy. For example (IV.ix):
 - i. A polity pays the poor for doing jury duty (like democracy) and fines the rich for refusing to do so (like oligarchy).
 - ii. A polity retains a moderate property assessment (the ability to purchase hoplite weapons) for entry into its assembly (whereas oligarchy has a higher assessment and democracy has none).
 - iii. A polity allows officials to be elected without regard for a property assessment. (Whereas democratic officials are chosen by lot and oligarchic officials can only be elected given a property assessment.)
4. Tyranny
- a. The final constitution Aristotle discusses here is tyranny. He doesn't have much to say about it, since he thinks it's so obviously wrong to mistake mastery for a decent form of political rule. (IV.x)
 - b. Still, he does give us a brief typology:
 - i. Legal Autocracy
 - ii. Legal Dictatorship
 - iii. Absolute Tyranny
 - c. The third is obviously the worst, since it does away with the pretense of law all together. Instead, absolute tyranny is merely the ruler of one over his equals or betters according to his own whim. Nothing could be worse, according to Aristotle.
5. The Middle
- a. After all this, Aristotle poses his question again: what is the best constitution that most people could actually live in? The goal here is not an ideal, a utopia, or an extreme of any kind. Rather, the emphasis is on the mean, the average, the middle.
 - b. Here he refers back to his association of virtue with the middle in the *Ethics*: if “a happy life is the one that expresses virtue and is without impediment, and virtue is a mean, then the middle life, the mean that each sort of person can actually achieve, must be best.” (IV.xi.1295a.35-40)
 - c. If much of politics devolves into class warfare between rich and poor, the best strategy might be to focus on the middle class. The problem with being too rich is that it leads to vice through arrogance. It contains a tendency towards mastery. Being too poor, meanwhile, leads to vice through malice. This is like a tendency towards slavery. But the middle class is best positioned to be obedient to reason and can balance out the two extremes, so it should serve as the solid core of the *polis*. (IV.xi.1295b.1-15)

- d. It is the middle, then, that is safe, stable, and good for the governing order. It's the defense against faction. And so the best constitution must look to the middle: "For the one nearest to this must of necessity always be better and one further from the middle worse..." (IV.xi.1296b.5-10)
 - i. Question: Do we agree with Aristotle that it's always the extremes that cause faction? Or might there be seeds for faction lying dormant within the middle itself?

BOOK V

1. Constitutional Calculus

- a. After spending much of Book IV outlining both the types of constitutions and their respective elements (or characteristic features), Aristotle now turns to the question of how one constitutions change.
- b. Related to the question of change is the possibility of destruction. A constitution could become so corrupted or undermined that it would cease to be what it was and so be replaced with something else. But with every threat of destruction comes the possibility of preservation. Aristotle's exploration of constitutional change should, then, allow us to think about strategies we might adopt for preserving our preferred kind of constitution (whichever that may be).
- c. Constitutional change, according to Aristotle, usually occurs as a result of "faction" (*stasis*). This occurs whenever the classes in a city turn on one another, with the result that the city ceases to function. (Compare our own 'gridlock.')
- d. Faction, in turn, usually occurs when there is disagreement over the meaning of equality—and, therefore, the meaning of justice, which is itself defined in terms of equality (though vaguely, as we've seen). As he writes: "though everyone agrees about justice (that is to say, proportional equality), they are mistaken about it." (V.i.1301a.26-28)
- e. To give us a sense for how different communities can be mistaken about equality, Aristotle then sketches out three difference conceptions of equality: the democratic, oligarchic, and aristocratic (V.i.1301a):
 - i. Democracy goes wrong when those who are equal-regarding-freedom take themselves to be unqualifiedly equal.
 1. Defining equality through freedom, and then expanding freedom to cover (almost) everyone, leads us to purely numerical equality. Everyone's place in society is then linked to their 'number' (each person is worth one share of society, no more or no less).
 - ii. Oligarchy goes wrong when those who are unequal-regarding-wealth take themselves to be unqualifiedly unequal.
 1. The rich are unequal-regarding-wealth because they are superior in wealth. This is a kind of proportional or ratio-based understanding of equality. It's not about how many people there are, but about how much each of those people 'are worth.' (This is money-as-merit.)
 - iii. Aristocracy stays on the right track when those who are unqualifiedly unequal are recognized as being so.
 1. Those who are shown to be politically virtuous (noble-minded in aims, perhaps?) are unqualifiedly unequal to the rest of the city, who lack such virtue. This may be because they are actualizing the virtue of a human being (full stop), not merely virtue relative to some constitution-specific definition of value, equality, or justice. (They are 'simply' better, rather than better-regarding-freedom or better-regarding-wealth etc.)
- f. Only aristocracy, then, escapes the trap of orienting itself around mere justice 'of a sort,' breaking through to the possibility of manifesting justice in its unqualified sense.

- g. But when these mistakes about equality and justice are allowed to fester, they lead to faction and unrest. If the poor masses press their hand too much in a democracy, the rich few might fight back more strongly. If the rich forget the qualification about their inequality-by-wealth and start acting like they're unqualifiedly better than everyone else, the poor masses will become more likely to rise up.
 - i. A bit later, Aristotle adds regarding justice and equality: "though people agree that what is unqualifiedly just is what is according to merit, they still disagree, as we said earlier. For some consider themselves wholly equal if they are equal in a certain respect, whereas others claim to merit an unequal share of everything if they are unequal in a certain respect." (V.i.1301b.35-40)
 - h. When faction leads to social change, this can happen in a number of different ways. (V.i.1301b.5-25) Whichever party emerges victorious might:
 - i. Change the entire constitution
 - ii. Take control of the existing constitution
 - iii. Change the constitution by degrees
 - iv. Change part of the constitution (cf. an amendment)
 - i. Finally, despite all of his preference for the "unqualified," Aristotle adds that cities should choose their constitutions based on context and other qualified conditions: "But it is a bad thing for a constitution to be organized unqualifiedly and entirely in accord with either sort of equality." (V.i.1302a.1-3)
 - j. We are still, then, in the realm of practical political life, where democracy and oligarchy are the most common constitutions, since freedom and wealth are more widespread than good birth and virtue (the bases of aristocracy). Democracy, in addition, is more stable than oligarchy, and the 'middle constitution' is the most secure of all. (V.i.1302a.5-15)
2. Preserving Constitutions
- a. So if faction over equality is the source of constitutional change and destruction, what are we to do to prevent this? How are we to preserve constitutions?
 - b. At V.viii, Aristotle gives us a number of practical policies to consider. Though they are introduced in a fairly general way, we might wonder whether each of them applies equally well to every kind of constitution. These policies are (V.viii):
 - i. Vigilance against minor violations of the law (slippery slope!)
 - ii. Avoiding deception of the multitude (contra Noble Lie?)
 - iii. Treating the ruled well (e.g., by not ruling for too long)
 - iv. Instilling fear in the populace (does this contradict the deception claim?)
 - v. Prevent internal rivalries from building up
 - vi. Alter property assessments based on wealth fluctuations across the city
 - vii. Slow down social mobility
 - viii. Ensure lifestyles of individuals and classes benefit the whole constitution
 - ix. Make sure no one profits unduly from their offices
 - x. Give preference to those who do not take part in the constitution explicitly
 - 1. This last policy looks different in democracies and oligarchies.
 - 2. In democracies, it would mean avoiding angering the rich by redistributing property and income. (Would this necessarily mean a ban on all taxation, however? What are the limits of redistribution?)
 - 3. In an oligarchy, meanwhile, it would mean avoiding exploitation of the poor.

- c. Overall, the ideal scenario seems to be a city where those who are most excluded from political power are still appeased in other ways. Ideally, the prohibition on profiting from offices should also lead to a situation where the poor stick to producing (since they won't get any money otherwise) and the virtuous elites are able to rule without being tempted by financial corruption. (1308b-1309a)
3. Preserving Kingships & Tyrannies
- a. Later in Book V, Aristotle admits that many of the policies put forward for preserving constitutions seem to make the most sense when applied to democracies, oligarchies, and perhaps aristocracies.
 - b. He devotes V.xi, then, to address kingships and tyrannies, the good and deviant modes of monarchy.
 - c. Aristotle has comparatively little to say about kingship here, perhaps because he thinks its inherent virtue would lead to a greater chance at stability and self-preservation. In short, he says that moderation is the key to preserving kingship. By this, he means that kings can often ensure the long-lasting duration of their power by (perhaps surprisingly) limiting that power. This will quell the people's fears that the rule of one is merely serving the interest of the ruler, rather than the common benefit of the ruled. (V.xi.1313a.20-35)
 - d. Aristotle has more to say about tyranny, though most of it is not good. Among the best ways to preserve tyranny, he lists: executing the educated and exceptional; spying on everyone; banning associations and meetings; impoverishing the masses through taxation, great works, and warmongering; and giving undue license to slaves and women (we may find this less horrifying than Aristotle does!). (V.xi.1313b)
 - e. More generally, the aims of tyranny can be summarized by three strategies: sow petty thinking among the ruled; sow distrust among the ruled; and sow powerlessness among the ruled. (V.xi.1314a.10-30)
 - f. All of these totalitarian measures, however, make up only one side of Aristotle's advice to tyrants. He also offers up a second, more devious set of strategies for preserving one's tyranny. (In doing so, he may be said to be preparing the way for Machiavelli's advice to princes.)
 - g. Put simply, the second strategy for tyrants is to act like a king while remaining a tyrant. That means leading the ruled to think they are being ruled willingly, when in fact they are being ruled unwillingly. (In effect, they don't really know what they've signed up for.)
 - h. Specific policies linked with this second strategy include: carrying oneself in a noble, kingly fashion; maintaining the appearance of fiscal responsibility (like a benign father or head of household); building up a reputation for dignity and military virtue; acting respectfully to the ruled (especially the youth); beautifying the city; paying respect to the gods; bestowing honors openly (while letting others punish); minimizing arrogance; and playing the poor and rich off each other, based on who's more powerful at any given moment. (V.xi.1314b-1315a)
 - i. The best-case scenario, then, is that of a "half-vicious" tyrant. In sum: "A tyrant should appear to his subjects not as a tyrant but as a head of household and a kingly man, not as an embezzler but as a steward." (V.xi.1315b.1-2)
 - i. Recall here Aristotle's argument about the fundamental dissimilarity between the mastery of the householder and the political rule of the statesman. (I.i)

BOOK VI

1. Elements and Combinations
 - a. Aristotle begins Book VI by reminding us once again of his analytical method, which proceeds from wholes to parts and then back up to different configurations of wholes. His goal in the *Politics* is not simply to give a general set of constitutional categories—aristocracy, democracy, etc.—but to break each category down and investigate its respective elements or features. (VI.i.1371a)
 - b. By doing this, he thinks, we can come up with a wider variety of political combinations. This should liberate us from the kinds of limited generalizations that Aristotle claims plague the pages of Plato’s *Republic*.
 - c. Studying elements and combinations should also, in turn, get us a bit closer to determining what the best constitution might look like. That constitution, as he’s already hinted, will be mixed. And if we get better at dealing with all of these various elements and the putting them together in different ways, we’ll become better Political Mixologists.
 - d. As Aristotle clarifies at the end of VI.i, the point is not simply to pick one political ‘principle’ (e.g. freedom) and stick with that. Rather, by mixing in different elements alongside one’s chosen principle, one can come up with a hybrid constitution that’s ultimately stronger and more resistant to corruption.
 - e. As he puts it: “those who are establishing a constitution try to combine all the features that are in keeping with its fundamental principle. But they err in doing so...” (VI.i.1317a.35-38)
2. The Principles & Elements of Democracy
 - a. Once again, Aristotle decides to start with the elements of democracy. By studying these, he argues, we can better understand not just the principles of democracy, but also the great variety of different democracies that are possible. As he writes: “For the features that go along with democracy and are held to be appropriate to this kind of constitution, when they are differently combined, cause democracies to differ...” (VI.i.1317a.29-31)
 - b. And once again, we are free to ask why Aristotle thinks it’s best to start with the elements of democracy, and then to move to oligarchy and the rest, when he ultimately does not think that democracy is itself the best constitution.
 - c. The principle of democracy, as we can already guess, is freedom. From this principle, Aristotle derives two basic goals of democracy:
 - i. Majority Rule
 1. Since justice is defined via numerical equality, it ultimately becomes “whatever seems right to the majority.” (VI.ii.1317b.5-7)
 - ii. Liberty to Live as you Like
 1. This is the supposed ‘result’ of freedom as the converse of slavery.
 - d. Grasping the principle and goals of democracy, however, is only the beginning. We also need to sketch out the variety of its potential elements. These include (VI.ii.1317b):
 - i. All choose officials from all
 - ii. All rule each and each rule all
 1. Because democratic citizens rule and are ruled in turn, alternatingly, of course.
 - iii. Elections are held by lot

- iv. There is no (or a very low) property assessment
 - v. Offices cannot be held for consecutive terms
 - vi. Terms themselves are kept short
 - vii. Public juries decide most cases
 - viii. The assembly holds more power than any one office
 - ix. There is paid compensation for offices
 - x. There are no permanent offices
3. Democratic & Oligarchic Justice
- a. The principles, goals, and elements of democracy all have something to do with the fact that democratic justice consists in ‘numerical equality.’ As Aristotle just said, this leads to majority rule, with the result that the majority get to decide on what is considered right or wrong.
 - b. But Aristotle next asks: how is this flattened-out, numerical kind of equality to be achieved? In his mind, the usual strategies for attaining numerical equality have to do with property reform of one kind or another. (Cf. his critiques of Socrates and Phaleas in Book II.)
 - c. Both democracies and oligarchies, in fact, erroneously make justice depend on property, because they look at equality primarily through a lens of property. As he writes: “For democrats say that whatever seems just to the greater number constitutes justice, whereas oligarchs say that quantity of property should be the deciding factor. ... But both views are unequal and unjust. For if justice is whatever the few decide, we have tyranny... On the other hand, if justice is what the numerical majority decide, they will commit injustice by confiscating the property of the wealthy few.” (VI.iii.1318a.17-26)
 - d. For Aristotle, then: the democratic definition of justice—where the majority decides what’s just—leads to an ‘unjust’ property policy. The oligarchic definition of justice—where the rich decide what’s just—leads instead to quasi-tyranny.
 - e. Though Aristotle wants to reject both approaches to justice—since both miss out on the aristocratic appreciation for political virtue as approaching human virtue—he does provisionally side here more with the oligarchs. He is more willing to allow that property amounts should be considered when we are trying to measure out a ‘majority’ as against a minority position. (VI.iii.1318a.30-40)
4. The Best Democracy
- a. At VI.iv, Aristotle then proceeds to look at which components can be put together to make something like the best kind of democratic constitution.
 - b. This democracy would, first of all, consist mostly of farmers. Even though farmers don’t have much leisure for political engagement (e.g., going into the city for assemblies), they do have a kind of virtue to their pursuits. Aristotle even thinks that they can be ennobled by the constraints of their work. Because they’re busy farming and feeding the city, they don’t have much time to be tempted by political corruption and scheming.
 - c. Constraint, then, isn’t always a bad thing: “For to be under constraint, and not to be able to do whatever seems good, is beneficial, since freedom to do whatever one likes leaves one defenseless against the bad things that exist in every human being.” (VI.iv.1318b.35-40)
 - d. This kind of agrarian democracy can be encouraged, Aristotle thinks, by specific policies of land reform that encourage agricultural production as a popular vocation. (1319a.5-15)

- e. More generally, though, Aristotle is claiming that the best kind of democracy will come out of the best configuration of the best kinds of democratic citizens. He ranks such citizens in descending order:
 - i. Farmers
 - ii. Herdsmen
 - iii. All Other Laborers
 - 1. E.g., merchants, vulgar craftsmen, etc.
- f. These other kinds of workers seem to be suspect because, though they are relatively busy with their work, they also have more free time than farmers and a greater proximity to the assembly and other seats of power. This gives them many opportunities to meddle and scheme. (VI.iv.1319a.25-35)
- g. The goal when forming democracies, then, is to always “exclude the worst multitude.” (1319a.40) Due to the demands of context and circumstance, it may be necessary to allow less virtuous groups into the citizenry. But this should be done sparingly and in piecemeal fashion. First allow the herdsmen in, etc. If you let everyone into the realm of citizenship and political involvement, you’ll run the risk of encountering the danger that is universal democracy.
- h. The danger of universal democracy is that it will abolish any hope that true political virtue will be valued in the city. Instead, there will only be the mayhem of mass politics and libertine license. In order to avoid this, bigger democracies should alternately consolidate and break up associations (civic, religious, etc.), so that the old alliances don’t lead to hopeless faction within the multitude.
- i. As Aristotle describes the temptations of universal democracy: “many people will support a constitution of this sort, since for the many it is more pleasant to live in a disorderly fashion than in a temperate one.” (VI.iv.1319b.30-32)
- j. Universal democracy, in short, collapses into disorder. Still, it remains tempting for those who (over)value freedom as the supreme good for political organization. But, for Aristotle, it’s not freedom but virtue that we’ll have to keep in view as we move ahead, finally, towards whatever the best constitution is.

BOOK VII

1. The Most Choiceworthy Life
 - a. At long last, Book VII aims to make good on Aristotle's promise that he's going to tell us about what he thinks the best constitution might look like. Before we get to that payoff, however, we have to work through the prefatory comments made by Aristotle (at VII.i-iii) in order to prepare for what's to come.
 - b. To determine what the best constitution really is, Aristotle tells us, we first have to agree on what the most choiceworthy life is for everyone (or, at least, almost everyone). Only then will we be able to see which constitution creates the circumstances for such a choiceworthy life to occur.
 - c. Such a life would have to count as a "happy" (cf. *eudaimonia*) or even "blessedly happy" (cf. *makarios*) life. But what is it that makes us happy? According to Aristotle, there are three main categories of goods that can make us happy (VII.i.1323a.20-40):
 - i. External goods
 - ii. Goods of the body
 - iii. Goods of the soul
 - d. Though most people would agree that all of these are goods which can make us happy in one way or another, it's tougher to come to an agreement about what the correct quantity and proportion of these goods would be. Some people might think happiness consists in not having to worry about the necessities or work for material possessions, since you've attained enough wealth to be at ease. (Perhaps cf. Cephalus.)
 - e. But Aristotle has his own hierarchy in mind. For him, the goods of the soul are worth more than the goods of the body, which are in turn worth more than external goods.
 - f. With regard to material possessions, he writes: "a happy life... is possessed more often by those who have cultivated their characters and minds to an excessive degree, but have been moderate in their acquisition of external goods." (VII.i.1323b.1-5)
 - g. When it comes to body and soul, meanwhile: "since the soul is unqualifiedly more valuable, and also more valuable to us, than possessions or the body, its best states must be proportionally better than theirs. Besides, it is for the sake of the soul that these things are naturally choiceworthy, and every sensible person should choose them for its sake, not the soul for theirs." (VII.i.1323b.15-20)
 - h. Happiness, then, is to be sought through neither material possessions nor bodily pleasures, but through the goods of the soul: virtue, practical wisdom, and the actualization of both: "each person has just as much happiness as he has virtue, practical wisdom, and the action that expresses them." (VII.i.1323b.20-25)
 - i. The pursuit of material and bodily goods is always limited by their finitude, but the good of the soul—virtue—is without limit. Aristotle thus prescribes moderation in possessions, but excess in virtue.
 - j. Next, Aristotle adds that what is true about individual happiness is also true about the happiness of the whole city: "the best life, both for individuals separately and for city-states collectively, is a life of virtue sufficiently equipped with the resources needed to take part in virtuous actions." (VII.i.1323b.40) So, if there remains a place for material goods, it is as the prerequisites needed for the life of virtue to take place.

- k. The best and most choiceworthy life for both individuals and cities is, then, a life of virtue enabled by adequate resources. This is the path to personal and civic happiness.
2. The Political Life or the Philosophical Life
- a. If Aristotle has so far set up what the aim of life is—happiness—and how to get there—virtue—we might still ask which kind of virtuous life is most effective at attaining its end. It would seem that both the life of political engagement (that of the statesman) and a life of contemplation (that of the philosopher) would be candidates for the best kind of life here.
 - b. To relate this back to Plato, we might say: Once you’ve escaped the cave, is it really best to go back in and try to lead your chained companions out of darkness? Or would prancing around in the fields of thought count as a happier life?
 - c. According to Aristotle, both lifestyles do count as virtuous, especially since both activate one’s practical wisdom. But the life of the statesman is certainly plagued by more dangers. (VII.ii)
 - d. The main danger of the political life is the temptation to fall away from true Rule and back into Mastery. This is such a temptation because our acquisitive drives often lead us to try to dominate more and more resources (cf. *pleonexia*). This is the case even if we’re tame at home, though fierce in foreign policy. The acquisitive urge becomes the urge to dominate, and so even a seemingly virtuous ruler can fall back mastery or ‘despotism.’ (Cf. *despotēs*)
 - e. Running alongside this temptation to mastery is an overvaluing of military virtue. Aristotle, we know, has a lot of respect for military prowess, but he doesn’t want it to become the primary or decisive value for the rule of a city or the organization of a constitution.
 - f. This general temptation to dominate and conquer is, then, based on that nagging misconception we tend to have about rule and mastery. But a true ruler, Aristotle tells us, is as far above a mere master as that master is above his slave. (VII.iii.1325a.15-30)
 - g. The search for the happy life, then, might be more safely pursued outside of the demands of political life. But that doesn’t mean it should be pursued in a life of lazy idleness: “For happiness is action, and many noble things reach their end in the actions of those who are just and temperate.” (VII.iii.1325a.30-35)
 - h. But ‘action,’ it turns out, doesn’t only take place in the assembly, the courtroom, or the battlefield. Thinking can be a kind of action, too. In fact, it might be the truest kind of action we can do.
 - i. As Aristotle puts it: “Yet it is not necessary, as some suppose, for a life of action to involve relations with other people, nor are those thoughts alone active which we engage in for the sake of action’s consequences; the study and thought that are their own ends and are engaged in for their own sake are much more so.” (VII.ii.1325b.15-20)
 - j. It is in thought, as internal action, that the happy life is action is more likely to be found. Free of the temptation to dominate, the philosopher might have the best chance of drawing closest to something like the divine kind of life: contemplation.
 - i. Recall here that Aristotle’s conception of God has to do with “though thinking about thought”—contemplation and self-reflection.
3. The Conditions for the Best City

- a. After walking us through happiness, as the goal of human life, Aristotle next aims to construct his own “ideal city-state.” (VII.iv.1325b.35) In doing so, he’ll begin to satisfy (in some small way) our urge for him to rival Socrates’ ideal city.
 - b. Again, Aristotle stresses that he wants his ideal city to be the best possible one—with the emphasis on its ‘possibility.’ The construction of such a city would depend on having the right kind of favorable conditions. But these conditions would still have to be potentially real. (VII.iv)
 - c. With that in mind, Aristotle begins with a consideration of some fairly down-to-earth aspects of the city: the size of its population and its territory. Both, he thinks, are most effective if limited. “Law is a kind of organization,” he tells us here, but—unless you’re God—it’s hard to organize everything well. (VII.iv.1326a.25-40) And so the best constitution should set a limit on the extent of its city, so that it’s more effective at managing the whole. (Again, here we see the virtue of the mean for Aristotle—the city should be neither too small to be self-sufficient nor too big to be manageable (or ‘surveillable’). Incidentally, this will also have the effect of making the city not just efficient, but also beautiful—since beauty is also a function of measure and proportion.)
 - d. As he sums up: “the best limit for a city-state is this: it is the greatest size of multitude that promotes life’s self-sufficiency and that can be easily surveyed as a whole.” (VII.iv.1326b.20-25)
 - e. Territory, too, should be limited and dictated by the ideal of the mean. Here Aristotle suggests that this tendency towards the middle should serve as a general rule about property or possessions as such, though he doesn’t quite explore that fully. (VII.v)
 - f. In VII.vi, Aristotle turns his gaze to the sea. He addresses the good uses of proximity to the sea (wealth, a strong navy), as well as the drawbacks. For him, port cities draw in unseemly ‘foreign’ agents, while also increasing the amount of commerce in the city, which can lead to a decrease in virtue. (As we saw already in Book I, Aristotle is very suspicious about the temptation of unlimited wealth-accumulation or *chrematistics*.)
 - g. Turning back to the population of the city, Aristotle argues for the importance of cultivating the right qualities in citizens. Here he introduces some questionable generalizations about different ethnic ‘natures’ of humanity. The Greeks, he says, seem to occupy the ideal mean between ‘European’ spiritedness and ‘Asiatic’ intellect. Both of these—*thumos* and *logistike*, we might say—are needed if the citizens are to virtuously rule and be ruled.
 - h. As he writes: “both spirit and intelligence should be present in the natures of people if they are to be easily guided to virtue by the legislator.” (VII.vii.1327b.35-38)
 - i. Though *thumos* might, at times, seize control and lead to wanton warfare and domination, in general it retains a key place in Aristotle’s ideal city. This is because it plays a role both in ruling and in being free. The great-soul citizen, then, would be able to channel their *thumos* so that it strengthens true political rule (over free and willing citizens). (VII.vii.1328a.1-20)
4. The Constitution of the Best City: Its Parts
 - a. At VII.viii, Aristotle turns more explicitly to the constitution of the best city as the proper arrangement of its parts. First, though, he must get clear on what the true parts of the city are.

- b. We've already heard a lot about different parts of the city-as-whole, but here Aristotle emphasizes the distinction between (a) things that a city needs and (b) things that are truly part of a city.
- c. For example, a city needs a water supply, but the water is not 'part' of the city in the way that its citizens and citizen-households are. All property is also necessary without being truly a part of the *polis*, he adds. But Aristotle takes this to a surprising level, arguing that there are many *people* who live in the city, but who are not truly parts of it, insofar as they aren't truly citizens.
- d. Properly speaking, a city is made up only of citizens, not of its property—and that goes for human 'property,' as well: "property is not part of a city-state. Among the parts of property are many living things, but a city-state is a community of similar people aiming at the best life." (VI.viii.1328a.35)
- e. These best citizens, aimed as they are at the goal of happiness, will be engaged in cultivating a life of virtue. Anyone who is not engaged in that may live in the city, but they could never truly count as a citizen.
- f. Looking at the *sine qua non* of cities, Aristotle then lists the following six requirements (VI.viii.1328b.1-20):
 - i. food
 - ii. crafts
 - iii. weapons
 - iv. wealth
 - v. priesthood
 - vi. capacity for judgment (both deliberative and judicial)
- g. But, of course, a city is made up not only of such requirements, but of its actual underlying parts: the citizens. These citizens, as we've seen, must be trained in political virtue and aimed at its end: the happy life. Writes Aristotle: "in a city-state governed in the finest manner, possessing men who are unqualifiedly just (and not given certain assumptions), the citizens should not live the life of a vulgar craftsman or tradesman. For lives of these sorts are ignoble and inimical to virtue." (VII.ix.1328b.35-40)
- h. True citizens cannot spend all of their time working away at their repetitive trades. (Nor should they even farm, despite the idyllic picture of the agrarian democracy we glimpse earlier.) Rather, they must spend their time on two main tasks: warfare and deliberation. These tasks should be given to the same people—true citizens—but at different stages of life. The young should spend their time training and fighting, while the older citizens should put their practical wisdom to use in judging and planning. (VII.ix.1329a.1-15)
 - i. The oldest of the citizens, then, will become the priests, paying homage to the gods when they are no longer as sharp in their practical wisdom. (VII.ix.1329a.25-35)
- i. The happiness of the city—not just parts of the city, as with Socrates' guardians—can be attained only if all of its parts are happy. Aristotle accomplishes this goal by restricting the true parts of the city to the proper citizens—those engaged in thinking and deliberation full-time. (Everyone else, the non-citizens, may or may not be happy, but it's irrelevant to the question of the city's happiness.)
- j. As he summarizes his position: "For the class of vulgar craftsmen does not participate in the city-state, nor does any other class whose members are not 'craftsmen of virtue.' This is clear from our basic assumption. For happiness

necessarily accompanies virtue, and a city-state must not be called happy by looking at just a part, but by looking at all the citizens.” (VII.ix.1329a.20-25)

- k. And: “Farmers craftsmen, and the laboring classes generally are necessary for the existence of city-states, but the military and deliberative classes are a city-state’s parts.” (VII.ix.1329a.35-40)
5. The Constitution of the Best City: Its Policies
 - a. After clarifying his position on citizenship, Aristotle turns to detailing further policies of the best constitution. As he’s said before, its property will be privately owned but communally used. (And only true citizens can privately own it!) Every citizen will receive a plot of land in the city and another out on the frontier, so that they have a vested interest in both urban and military issues. The workers on the rural plots will be spiritless slaves, perhaps motivated by the dream of eventual freedom. (VII.x)
 - b. In VII.xi-xii, Aristotle discusses his recommendations for city placement, planning, and wall-building. When it comes to the layout of the ideal city, he’s clear that the messy intrigues of the commercial market and harbor should be kept far away from the serene centers of deliberative governance. (He does, however, allow for a ‘free marketplace,’ an *agora* mainly for conversation and debate rather than for crude exchange and bargaining.)
 - c. All of these policies aren’t difficult to come up with, says Aristotle, but they can be difficult to implement given the particularities of context. As he writes: “they are not hard to think out, just hard to do. Speaking about them is a task for ideal theory; the task of good luck is to bring them about.” (VII.xii.20)
 6. The Goal of the Best City
 - a. VII.xiii-xv hammer home Aristotle’s view on how the best constitution aims at the ultimate goal of the happy life. He begins by reminding us that well-being in general requires two things: aiming at the right end (*telos*) and having the right means to achieve that end. Everyone, he remarks, aims at living well and at happiness, but many either are incorrect about what happiness actually is or simply lack the resources to pursue happiness at all. (VII.xiii.1331b.25-40)
 - b. Aristotle, thankfully, wants to give us the tools to pursue happiness properly. First of all, then, happiness is this: “a complete activation or use of virtue, and not a qualified use but an unqualified one. By ‘qualified uses’ I mean those that are necessary; by ‘unqualified’ I mean those that are noble.” (VII.xiii.1332a.5-10)
 - c. Necessary virtue, it turns out, is virtue in the face of vice. But noble virtue is virtue for its own sake, which is not reactive but instead productive of new goods. (It’s pursuing virtue even when you don’t have to.)
 - d. An excellent man, then, is “the sort whose virtue makes unqualifiedly good things good for him.” (VII.xiii.1322a.20-25) Instead of ‘using’ virtue to accomplish occasional tasks, the truly virtuous person aims to bring virtue completely into being for its own sake. Only in this way can a virtuous citizen rise to the level of a virtuous human being full-stop. (The task of the constitution, then, is to cultivate the conditions under which this can happen.)
 - e. People need three things, though, if they are to become virtuous in this way:
 - i. Nature
 - ii. Habit
 - iii. Reason
 - f. The role of education in the ideal city is, then, to take good natures and shape them through both habituation and (rational) instruction. (VII.xiii.1332a-1332b.10)

- g. To further understand the way that the best city could cultivate the best kind of people, we have to look closer at the human person. To that end, Aristotle divides the individual into soul and body, then breaks the soul up into two parts: ruling reason and the ruled rest (including desire, mostly). The soul's reason, too, is broken up into (1) practical reason and (2) theoretical reason. (Aristotle is going wild with analysis here!) (VII.xiv)
- h. With all of these divisions there comes a hierarchy of better over worse (e.g., soul over body). And: "the worse part is always [to be used] for the sake of the better." (VII.xiv.1333a.20) The body must be used for sake of the soul; war for peace; work for leisure; and the necessary-useful things for the sake of the noble.
- i. On the scale of the city, then, the necessary and useful people and property must be used for the sake of the noble people—the citizens, who alone will have the chance to complete their virtue by living a life of deliberation and even leisured contemplation.
- j. Many necessities indeed will be required if this kind of leisure is going to be attained, as Aristotle makes clear in VII.xv.
- k. Once the necessities are mostly met, virtue for its own sake can take over. Here Aristotle gestures back to some conventional aspects of virtue—temperance, courage, endurance, justice (if equality is properly understood!). These must be used not only so that the city can gain more—whether in commerce or in war—but so that the city can 'enrich' itself even in peacetime—not with money, but with virtue, reason, and understanding.
- l. The life of virtue, then, leads not only to ethical and political betterment, but ultimately to the true goal of human life, which transcends those categories: reason, understanding, contemplation. Philosophy, in other words, is the truest virtue of the human person. (Humans are the only animals that can philosophize, after all.) It is our highest and even our most natural function, though it remains so very difficult to attain. But the political project should—must—help us set the conditions for its attainment. Otherwise, we're abandoning our role as human beings.
- m. As Aristotle sums it up: First, "reason and understanding constitute our natural end. Hence they are the ends that procreation and the training of our habits should be organized to promote. Second, just as soul and body are two, so we see that the soul has two parts as well, one that is nonrational and one that has reason. Their states are also two in number, desire and understanding. And just as the development of the body is prior to that of the soul, so the nonrational part is prior to the rational. [...] But supervision of desire should be for the sake of understanding, and that of the body for the sake of the soul." (VII.xv.1334b.15-30)
- n. If both procreation and education (habituation plus instruction) should aim at the highest human function—contemplation—then we'll next have to explore how children can be brought from birth up to adulthood in a way that prepares them for this life of highest virtue. And that is just what occupies Aristotle for the rest of the *Politics*.

BOOK VIII

1. Educating All of the Young
 - a. As promised near the end of Book VII, Aristotle spends most of Book VIII exploring the education of young citizens. Obviously, the best kind of education would be one that best prepares the young to live virtuous lives—to rule and be ruled, with an eye to the greater end of exercising humanity’s rational virtue.
 - b. Early on, Aristotle lays out four basic guidelines for planning out a city’s educational policies. Such education should be (VIII.i):
 - i. Suited to the particular constitution (of the city)
 - ii. Aimed at building the characters and qualities associated with that constitution
 - iii. Communally managed for the benefit of all (citizens)
 1. Aristotle clarifies that this explicitly means replacing the system of private education (as chosen by each head-of-household).
 - iv. The same for all (since the city has one shared goal)
 - c. This emphasis on commonality in education leads Aristotle to emphasize the communal aspect of the city in a way that might surprise us, given his earlier critique of Socrates: “one should not consider any citizen as belonging to himself alone, but as all belonging to the city-state, since each is a part of the city-state.” (VIII.i.1337a.25-30)
 - i. Should we then take this as a real contradiction with his earlier position about the advisability of private property? Or is Aristotle using his words more carefully here?
2. Legislating Education for the Sake of the Noble & Virtuous
 - a. Aristotle next turns to the question of how best to legislate education, so that the common group of young citizens can be trained in virtue. There is much disagreement, he acknowledges, about what students should learn. Aristotle claims that this debate about pedagogy is rooted in a deeper division about the meaning of virtue: “people do not all esteem the same virtue, so they quite understandably do not agree about the training needed for it.” (VIII.ii.1377b.1-5)
 - b. But, as we’ve already seen, Aristotle’s ideal constitution will establish that the road to virtue must pass through the realm of material possessions and bodily goods, so that it might arrive at goods of the soul (and even of the more rarified ‘mind’).
 - c. This means that students who are free citizens should not be overly distracted by skills and arts that fail to enrich the soul.
 - d. Here Aristotle takes the opportunity to clarify his position on the vulgar craftsmen: “there is a difference between the tasks of the free and those of the unfree;” the free “should share only in such useful things as will not turn them into vulgar craftsmen. (Any task, craft, or branch of learning should be considered vulgar if it renders the body or mind of free people useless for the practices and activities of virtue. That is why the crafts that put the body into a worse condition and work done for wages are called vulgar; for they debase the mind and deprive it of leisure.)” (VIII.ii.1377b.10-15)
 - e. Aristotle then further clarifies that even more important than the kinds of activities is the reason for engaging in such activities. As he puts it: “What one acts or learns *for* also makes a big difference.” (VIII.ii.1377b.15-20) The question is whether or not our system of education is keeping in view the virtuous end of humanity as such, or

if we're just falling back into the realm of mere utility and production for production's sake.

- f. Next, Aristotle lists out some of the usual disciplines involved in education: reading, writing, drawing, gymnastic, and music. It's only music, though, that calls to our attention the question of what education is really aiming for. Unlike the other disciplines, he argues, music is pursued for its sake alone. It is the exemplar of the kind of 'leisured activity' that—far from being lazy idleness—fulfills our deepest and truest function as human beings. (VIII.iii)
- g. Work, he has already said, is for the sake of leisure. But what is leisure for? Leisure, it turns out, is for the pursuit not of necessary virtues, but of noble ones. As such, it aims at happiness: the complete activity of our virtue in rational contemplation.
- h. Utility, then, isn't everything. The proper response to education is not the question: "What are you going to do with that?" In education, you're already 'doing it'—you're already living out the activity of virtue.
- i. By first habituating ourselves and then receiving rational instruction, by first training our bodies and then our souls, we can, through education, hope to engage in those noble pursuits that are pursued for the sake of nothing other than themselves. As Aristotle puts it: "there is a certain kind of education that children must be given not because it is useful or necessary, but because it is noble and suitable for a free person." (VIII.iii.1338a.30)