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**Nature, Function and Capability:
Aristotle on Political Distribution**

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NATURE, FUNCTION, AND CAPABILITY:
ARISTOTLE ON POLITICAL DISTRIBUTION

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It will be seen how in place of the wealth and poverty of political economy come the rich human being and rich human need. The rich human being is simultaneously the human being in need of of a totality of human life-activities -- the man in whom his own realization exists as an inner necessity, as need.

Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844

I Introduction

This paper has a double purpose: to describe a promising view about the basis and aims of political distribution, and to show that Aristotle held this view. The two aims support one another, since I think that Aristotle's account makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of this sort of view and how it works; in several ways it seems to me to go further philosophically than contemporary statements of a similar view. And looking at the contemporary debate can also help us to appreciate the force of some of Aristotle's statements. But the aims also pull apart to some extent. For Aristotle's statement of the view is full of internal obscurity and inconsistency; and sorting our way through all of this will take us at times away from a straightforward investigation of the view. I shall hope to balance the two tasks as well as possible; and I shall be content if I can succeed in opening up these complex philosophical and textual issues for further work.

The view in question is, briefly, the following one. The aim of political planning is the distribution to the city's individual people of the conditions in which a good human life can be chosen and lived. This distributive task aims at producing capabilities. That is, it aims not simply at the allotment of commodities, but at making people able to function in certain human ways. A necessary basis for being a recipient of this distribution is that one should already possess some less developed capability to perform the functioning in question. The

task of the city is, then, to effect the transition from one level of capability to another. This means that the task of the city cannot be understood apart from a rather substantial account of the human good and what it is to function humanly. An ethical investigation of a certain sort will provide that account.

The strategy of the paper will be to begin by looking at the distributive conception of the city as Aristotle describes it in Politics VII 1-2 and elsewhere. We shall show more clearly what is at stake in this account by examining its relationship to two contemporary accounts of distribution: those of John Rawls and Amartya Sen -- the former of which defends the use of a more minimal theory of the good than Aristotle's account will find necessary, and the latter of which argues in favor of going over from this "thin theory" to a conception more like Aristotle's. Then in a separate section we shall point to evidence that Aristotle does not in fact consistently defend the distributive conception, but oscillates oddly between this idea and two others that are incompatible with it. Next, putting those problems to one side, we shall turn to Aristotle's remarks about capability, finding in the Politics evidence for our thesis about the two levels of capability and for our claim that the end of distribution is to be understood in terms of capability; again we shall make some comparative remarks. Then we shall pause to examine some of the difficulties in Aristotle's account. Finally, we shall return to the most promising parts of the view and describe the further work that would need to be done to make it fully convincing. We shall undertake one initial portion of that work, by an analysis of Aristotle's famous "human functioning" argument in Nicomachean Ethics I.7.

II. The Distributive Conception

"It is evident that the best politeia is that arrangement (taxis) according to which anyone whatsoever (hostisoun) might do best (arista prattoi) and live a flourishing life (zoiē makariōs)¹ (Pol. 1324a23-5). This is among the clearest

1. It has sometimes been claimed that makariōs means something different from eudaimonōs. In The Fragility of Goodness (Cambridge 1986) ch. 11, I argue, on the basis of all the available evidence, that Aristotle uses the two words, and their relatives, interchangeably.

statements of the conception of political arrangement that I shall be investigating here. I shall call it the distributive conception (DC).² Consider also 1325a7 ff.: "It is the job of the excellent lawgiver to consider, concerning a city and a class of human beings (genos anthrōpōn) and every other association, how they will partake in the flourishing living (eudaimonia) that is possible for them." This conception urges us to assess political arrangements by looking to the functionings of individuals, taken one by one -- as to whether they are enabled by that arrangement to function best. (The optatives prattoi and zoie may contain the suggestion that is made explicit elsewhere -- cf. section V -- that what the structure does is not to necessitate actual good functioning, but to create a context in which a person might live well, in other words, might choose a flourishing life.³ It opens a field of choice. We shall return to this point.) We are not yet informed as to the extent of the distributive obligation; indeed, Aristotle seems rather vague, perhaps deliberately, on this point. And yet, both genos anthrōpōn and especially hostisoun indicate that the scope is quite broad. We certainly do not get the idea that the lawgiver should be concerned only about the

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2. Since what is wanted here is a name for a genus of which Aristotle's conception and Rawls's (section III) are two species, we cannot choose a name that ties the conception too closely to Aristotle's own eudaimonistic idea. "Distributive" seems therefore the best word that can be found. But it is certain not ideal; among other things, it might be taken to contain the suggestion that the goods to be arranged belong to the government, or to the lawgiver, antecedently, and that he or she is in consequence playing the role of beneficent donor. It also might be taken to suggest that the end result will be some sort of private ownership of the goods in question. Both of these suggestions would be misleading where Aristotle's theory is concerned. His view about the antecedent situation of the goods is extremely unclear. but he certainly does not take them to belong to the "state"; and he investigates as candidates numerous forms of arrangement that involve at least some common ownership and/or common use. (See the remarks about the public meals in section IV below, where we find him approving of a fund drawn from the sale of publicly held produce and cattle.)
 3. It might also, however, point of the restrictions that natural circumstances sometimes place upon the realization of the best conception: see the passages discussed below.

landed gentry; or those who already have certain political privileges; or those who possess a developed set of moral and intellectual capabilities.

This same conception also appears, with some further refinements, at the very opening of Politics VII.1, where Aristotle introduces his theory of the best political arrangement. I discuss this passage after the textually later ones since its translation and interpretation present certain difficulties. Aristotle argues that a theory of good political arrangement requires and rests upon a theory of the good human life: "For it is appropriate, if people are governed best (arista politeuomenois) that they should do best (arista prattein), insofar as their circumstances admit -- unless something catastrophic happens" (1323a17-19). In other words: it is a criterion of best-ness for a political arrangement that the people involved should function best: and best, not absolutely, but best insofar as their circumstances permit. (I defend this translation in a note.)⁴ I think that the qualification -- which

 4. Most editors and translators take ek ton huparchonton autois with tous arista politeuomenous, rather than, as I do, with arista prattein. Thus Susemihl: "We should expect the citizens who live under the best constitution possible to them to fare best"; Newman: "for (the best constitution and the most desirable life go together, inasmuch as) it is fitting that those who live under the best constitution their circumstances enable them to attain should fare best, unless something contrary to expectation happens." Newman is puzzled as to how to interpret the relevance of ek ton huparchontōn, construed in this way. He writes: "for those who fare best must be those who live under the absolutely best constitution, which is contrasted in 1288b25 ff. with the best attainable under given circumstances." I agree with this. What we want here is a reason why the person who is going to describe the best government should look at the best life. On my reading, we have a good answer to this question: because a necessary (perhaps a sufficient?) condition of bestness is the securing to citizens of the best life that their circumstances make possible. On Newman's translation, we have, instead, a reason why someone who is interested in actual and non-best governments might be concerned with the best life: for citizens who live in a (non-ideal but) best available government would live best. Besides -- as so translated, the sentence seems likely to be false. If a non-best government could secure the best life, why, on Aristotle's account, would we need any other? We can go further: by 1324a24-5, if it did secure the best life to citizens, it would be best, by definition. Thus for several reasons my translation seems preferable. I believe it is also the most natural way to construe the Greek, including the word order.

occurs also at 1325a7 ff. -- is meant to take care of the obvious fact that one and the same arrangement might have different degrees of success in different material circumstances. And it would still be counted best, provided that it secured to the people involved a good life up to the maximum permitted by circumstances. A just scheme of food distribution will not bring about full health for all in any and every contingency; and the very same just arrangement will clearly do better from the point of view of human functioning in a naturally affluent part of the world than in a poor one. Aristotle is saying that it will still count as the best arrangement, provided that it brings the people as close to good functioning as their natural circumstances permit. "Unless something catastrophic happens" adds, I think, a further qualification. Sometimes an unexpected disruption, for example a war or an outbreak of disease, can break the causal link between good arrangement and good functioning. An arrangement that is best might still be paralyzed by a plague or some other unforeseen event of that kind -- and in that case we will not disqualify the arrangement from best-ness.

At this point, however, we should add to our interpretation of these remarks about possibility one interesting qualification. For Aristotle elsewhere insists that in order for a conception to be best in the first place it will have to have a certain relationship to what is in general practicable in human life. Criticizing Plato for describing, in the Laws, a city whose material conditions are unfulfillable, he writes:

All the speeches of the character Socrates are exceedingly ingenious and clever and original and probing. And no doubt it is difficult to do everything well. But it must not escape our attention that the number of citizens just mentioned will require a territory of the size of Babylon, or some other similarly unlimited space, large enough to support five thousand people in idleness, and in addition a crowd of women and servants many times that size. It is all right to make assumptions as one wishes -- but not to assume what is impossible. (Politics II.6, 1265a10-18)

And in Politics IV.11 he spells out this possibility condition further. The question about the best form of political order and the best life must, he says, be asked with reference to "most human beings" (tois pleistois tōn anthrōpōn); and since this is

so we should be concerned

not with a standard of excellence above the reach of most ordinary people (huper tous idiōtas), nor with an education that needs exceptional natures or exceptional resources (chorēgias), nor with a form of government that exists in wishes alone, but with a life in which most people (tois pleistois) are capable of sharing and a form of government (politeian) in which most cities can participate. (1295a26-31)

If Book VII is to be interpreted in a way that is, so far as possible, consistent with these remarks, then we should add to our account of the passage in question that an arrangement will not count as best in the first place unless it already takes account of average people and predictable resources in its very design. Thus the circumstantial variation introduced by "insofar as their circumstances admit" would be variation within this humanly possible and expectable range. We can add, too, that Book IV's emphasis on the idea that the lawgiver's concern should be with the "ordinary" person (idiōtēs is difficult to interpret, but presumably means people not especially wise or expert) and with the good life of "most people" (tois pleistois) and "most human beings" (tois pleistois tōn anthrōpōn) seems to cohere well with the requirement of Book VII that "anyone whatsoever" should be enabled by a good conception to live well. The Book IV passage gives us further information about the subjects of Aristotelian distribution, and helps us to interpret the extension of his hostisoun. We shall be returning later to this difficult question.

According to my reading, then, the opening of VII.1 makes the same point as the other two later passages from VII.1-2 that we have already discussed: that a political arrangement has as its task the securing to its people (and we still need to say more about how this group is defined) of the necessary conditions for a full good human life. It is to create a context in which anyone at all may choose to function in the ways that are constitutive of a good human life (with the restrictions noted). This end, then, cannot be understood apart from an understanding of those functionings. And Aristotle in fact introduces the distributive conception in order to support his claim that "a

person who is going to make a fitting inquiry into the best political arrangement must first get clear about what the most choiceworthy life is -- for if this is unclear, the best political arrangement must remain unclear also" (1323a14-17). This claim is followed by the remark about the function of political arrangement that we have just analyzed.

This point about the function of political arrangement and the task of the lawgiver (or constitution-maker) is stressed, as well, in numerous other passages in Aristotle's ethical and political writings. The point is, that the task of political arrangement is both broad and deep: broad, in that it is concerned with the good lives of many people, not just a small elite (of "anyone whatsoever", whatever this comes to); deep, in that it is concerned with the totality of the functionings that constitute a good human life. According to Aristotle it is not enough for an arrangement to concern itself with goods and resources and offices -- the traditional political rewards. The distributive task must be done, when it is done, with an eye on a full conception of the human good and human functioning. The "aim of every lawgiver", Aristotle insists, is to make people capable of living well; and "those who do not succeed in this are failing in their aim, and this is the difference between a good political arrangement and a bad one" (EN II.1, 1103b2-6). A political community has "good living" as its point, not just possessions and not just mere sustenance (e.g. Pol. 1280a25 ff.). Thus a legislator like Phaleas, who aims at an equal distribution of property, without asking himself how property is related to good functioning and what the right distribution is for that end, is not doing enough: for his proposal does not show a deep enough concern for the totality of the good human life (Pol. II.7, 1266b24 ff.). The argument of VII.1 concerning the role of a theory of the good in the design of a good political arrangement is thus sustained and developed both in other general ethical discussions and in the assessment of concrete political proposals.

III. Aristotle's Theory and Contemporary Relatives

This idea that a rather full account of the human good and

human functioning must precede and ground an account of political distribution is alien to much recent work in political theory. John Rawls, for example, in A Theory of Justice,⁵ concedes that a certain sort of theory of the good must be prior to the account of distributive principles -- for we need to have some idea of what we are distributing, and we need to be convinced that these things are good. But Rawls goes on to insist that what we want at this point, prior to the selection of a distributive arrangement, is not a full, but rather a "thin" theory of good. This he provides via the list of "primary goods", goods of which anyone, no matter what his or her full conception of good living, would (allegedly) prefer to have more of, rather than less:

But to establish these principles it is necessary to rely on some notion of goodness, for we need assumptions about the parties' motives in the original position. Since these assumptions must not jeopardize the prior place of the concept of right, the theory of the good used in arguing for the principles of justice is restricted to the bare essentials. This account of the good I call the thin theory: its purpose is to secure the premises about primary goods required to arrive at the principles of justice...Rational individuals, whatever else they want, desire certain things as prerequisites for carrying out their plans of life. Other things equal, they prefer a wider to a narrower liberty and opportunity, and a greater rather than a smaller share of wealth and income. That these things are good seems clear enough.

Rawls, as he tells us, is motivated by his desire to leave in the hands of each individual the autonomous choice of a view of good living. So in using a contrast with Rawls to get a clearer view of Aristotle's theory, we must ask, first, how Aristotle would criticize Rawls's "thin theory" and, second, whether Aristotle has simply ignored the importance of choice when he insists that the selection of principles should be preceded by a "thicker" theory.

Confronted with Rawls's list of "primary goods", Aristotle would certainly insist, first of all, that the list includes some

5. John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge, MA 1971), p. 396. Further development of the account of primary goods can be found in "Social Unity and Primary Goods," in Utilitarianism and Beyond, ed. A. Sen and B. Williams (Cambridge 1982) 159-86.

of the wrong items. For wealth and possessions, as he goes on to argue in this very chapter, are not items that are good in their own right; therefore they are not things of which it is always better to have more rather than less.⁶ (Aristotle seems to believe that if an item does have intrinsic value it is always better to have more of it rather than less; and that if the value is merely instrumental this will not be so.)⁷ Too much wealth, for example, can impair excellent functioning. And Aristotle insists, both here and elsewhere, that this holds good for all the items called "external goods" and "goods of fortune": they all have "a limit, like tools: all are useful for something" (1323b7-8) -- namely, good human functioning. The right amount in each case is what makes functioning best.⁸ In short, the right way to look at these instrumental goods is in the context of their relationship to human activity, asking how, in a variety of circumstances, they enhance or impede such activity. And the

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6. 1323a34 ff.; for a discussion of related passages elsewhere, see Fragility of Goodness ch. 11.
7. He claims this explicitly in Pol. VII.1. An apparent exception to this might be thought to be his remarks in EN VIII about the desirability of limiting the number of one's friendships. But we should probably understand this to be not so much a limitation on the number of intrinsically valuable relationships one has, as a protection of their intrinsic value; for friendship stretched too thin will not have the value of friendship at all. For a related discussion, see A. Sen et al., The Standard of Living, Tanner Lectures on Human Values, 1985, ed. G. Hawthorn, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987).
8. See also the criticism of Phaleas, Pol. II.7, 1266b24 ff., and, on the bad effects of either excessive or deficient wealth on virtue, IV.11, 1295b5 ff. On the "goods of fortune" generally, see EN 1124a20 ff., and Rhet. II15-17, discussed in Fragility ch. 11, 339-40. At Pol. 1265a28 ff., Aristotle makes the important point that the criterion of correct amount should be chosen by taking into account all the functionings of a given life together: for an amount that might be acceptable in one context might be too little when we consider other important functionings. The salient exception to Aristotle's position on amount of "external goods" is friendship: for friends are called "the most important of the external goods", and yet Aristotle plainly holds that the friends and the relationship have intrinsic worth. (See Fragility, ch. 12.)

things that it is the primary responsibility of the lawgiver to put in place, the things of which one cannot have too much and more is always better than less, are the bases of these functionings -- the capabilities of persons out of which excellent functioning, doing well and living well, can be selected. Throughout the Politics he consistently attacks those who claim that wealth has some independent significance.⁹ No item's worth can be properly assessed if we do not set it in the context of a thicker theory of good living; and when we do so, we discover that wealth has no independent worth. Rawls's theory, then, is too thin. His list omits the really "primary" items; and it ascribes independent significance to items whose worth can only be seen in connection with the truly primary items. There is no way around taking some stand about what functions are constitutive of human good living -- if we are to produce an account of distribution that offers a coherent account of the ways in which the city can actually promote people's good.

Now of course it is easier for Aristotle to say this than for Rawls, since Aristotle believes that there is just one list of functionings (at least at a certain level of generality) that do in fact constitute human good living; whereas Rawls is determined to leave the choice of these constituents to the individual. He selects the primary goods precisely because they play a supporting role in so many lives that individuals might choose. This is an important and deep difference; I do not mean to minimize it, and I shall return to it in section V. But it is important, too, not to exaggerate the extent of the disagreement here. For both Aristotle and Rawls are prepared to repudiate conceptions of good living that do not leave room for choice and

 9. See note 8 above, and esp. I.8-9, where he repeatedly insists that money is correctly understood as having a peras or telos set by the requirements of good functioning; and the false understanding of money is that it is good to amass it without regard to this limit. For criticisms of the Spartan and Carthaginian politeiai for encouraging this false view, see Pol. II.9, 127169-10, 16-17; II.11, 1273a37-9.

practical reason;¹⁰ in this sense Rawls does not leave every possibility open. And, as this remark shows, Aristotle does not omit, and centrally stresses, the value of choice in his theory of good. For what we are aiming to secure to people are precisely the conditions in which each of them, as individuals, will be able to exercise choice and to function according to their own practical reason. He would object not to Rawls's emphasis on choice but to his suggestion that items that are merely instruments of choice have an independent worth; and also to Rawls's unwillingness to specify further the various functionings over which we want people to be capable of exercising their choice, and which give the derivative goods their point.

A contemporary parallel will help to illuminate this criticism. In a series of papers on distributional questions, Amartya Sen has argued, like Aristotle, that we cannot properly estimate the worth of distributable goods until we have an account of the functionings towards which these goods are useful.¹¹ That, furthermore, in any particular case the distributional question must be addressed in the context of each

 10. For Aristotle, see below. For Rawls, see Theory of Justice, p. 261 (the theory has found an "Archimedean point" in the ideal of the person as rational chooser, and, unlike utilitarianism, refuses to put justice "at the mercy of existing wants and interests"); also 326-7: "As we have seen, a certain ideal is embedded in the principles of justice, and the fulfillment of desires incompatible with these principles has no value at all...Thus the contract doctrine is similar to perfectionism in that it takes into account other things than the net balance of satisfaction and how it is shared." For further development of these aspects of Rawls's view, see his Dewey Lectures, "Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory," Journal of Philosophy 77 (1980) 515-72.

11. This approach is developed in a number of Sen's papers, including: "Equality of What?", Tanner Lectures on Human Values 1, ed. S. McMurrin (Cambridge 1980), reprinted in his Choice, Welfare, and Measurement (Oxford 1982) 353-72; in the papers in sections IV-V of Resources, Values, and Development (Cambridge, MA 1984); in his Dewey Lectures, "Well-Being, Agency and Freedom," Journal of Philosophy 82 (1985) 169-220; in Commodities and Capabilities (North-Holland 1985); and most recently in "The Standard of Living," see n. 6 above. The criticism of Rawls cited below is found in "Equality of What?"

individual's functional needs. To take a straightforward physical example, food distribution will not be well done, or its aims well understood, unless we first ask what it is that people do as a result of being well or not well nourished. In a particular case we must ask what the functional requirements of the individual for food are, relatively to the metabolic rate, the activity level, and the other life conditions of that individual. Distribution does not aim simply at spreading some things around, as if they had significance in themselves. (He accuses Rawls of a kind of "commodity fetishism" here.) We are aiming to make people able to live and act in certain concrete ways. Such an approach does not ignore the value of choice, since what we aim at is to make them capable of choosing to act in these ways, not simply to push them into so acting. This means (1) that we will define our goal in terms of capabilities, not actual functioning; and (2) that one of the capabilities we must most centrally consider in each area of life is the capability of choosing.¹² So of course we need to specify the list of things that we want people to be capable of doing, and doing by their choice. This means that we will distribute with a view not to wealth itself, but (for example) to mobility; not to books and schools themselves, but to the capability to get an education; and so forth.

If I am right, Aristotle is making exactly this point. And the vehemence of his repeated attacks on the fetishism of money and goods gives evidence that he had an opposition (whether philosophical or "lay") against whom the claims of functioning and a "thick theory" of good needed defense.

The Aristotelian theory has another prominent opponent, very different from Rawls, whom we can now bring on the scene: namely, the utilitarian, whose approach to distributional questions dominates much of the contemporary economic and political debate. Aristotle would agree with the utilitarian that distributable goods are valuable because of what they do for people, and not as things of worth in their own right. This area

 12. Sen also makes this point, in Commodities and Capabilities, 69-71; it is developed at greater length in his "Freedom of Choice: Concept and Content," Alfred Marshall Lecture delivered to the European Economic Association; 22 August 1987.

of agreement is significant, and should not be ignored. But Aristotle would of course object strenuously to the idea that the criterion the lawgiver needs is to be found in people's subjective preferences or in the satisfaction of the desires they happen, as things are, to have. For he stresses throughout his ethical and political writings that many people are badly educated and therefore want the wrong things, or in the wrong amount. They are not all reliable judges of what functions the good human life contains. The good lawgiver's list of functionings will not be altogether independent of human desire and preference; for the various excellences are defined in terms of the preferences of a certain sort of human being, the person of practical wisdom. But the reflective evaluations this person performs are likely to differ considerably from the unreflective, or defectively reflective, preferences of most people. The fact, for example, (repeatedly noted by Aristotle), that people in many societies have a very strong desire for money, and feel frustrated when they cannot heap it up indefinitely, should not influence the lawgiver's decisions regarding money.

This raises deep questions about ethical objectivity and cultural difference; we shall try to state them at greater length, and to begin to reflect on them, in sections VI-VII. But at this point we can observe that this aspect of Aristotle's emphasis on functioning is, once again, closely paralleled (with reference to Aristotle) in Sen's contemporary writings. These writings attack the desire-basic approach at greater length than Aristotle felt the need to, given the nature of his philosophical opposition, and thus help us to grasp better the force of the Aristotelian position. In a series of anti-utilitarian writings, Sen has stressed the way in which educational deficiencies and other types of deprivation influence the desires of the deprived, in such a way that they come not to feel desire for the things that their situation or their traditions have put out of reach.¹³ He has spoken in particular of the situation of women in many

13. For Sen's criticisms of utilitarianism, see especially "Equality of What?", "The Standard of Living," Commodities and Capabilities, and, on deprivation and desire, the essays in Resources, Values, and Development.

parts of the world, women who have been so deeply and thoroughly taught to believe that they should not be educated, and in general should not function in various non-traditional ways, that they lack desire for these functionings. (One necessary condition of much desiring is the ability to conceive of the object of desire; so people whose sphere of experience has been very confined will for that reason alone be unable to desire many alternatives they do not know.) Even at the level of basic needs for food, it can be shown that women frequently express the belief that they are doing well, even while they are demonstrably suffering from diseases of malnutrition. Many of them die without perceiving their need. Thus if we use an approach based upon utility, we must conclude that such people are indeed doing well and that the lawgiver has no further responsibility to them. A further merit of the Aristotelian approach -- which asks, instead, which good human functions they are in fact able to perform -- is that it enables us to criticize such situations, and to say that more ought to be given to such people. Desire, the contemporary Aristotelian holds, is an easily corrupted, unstable, and unreliable guide to genuine human flourishing. (See section VI for further discussion of this issue.)

IV Problems with the Distributive Conception

Before we go on to see how Aristotle develops the distributive conception in terms of functioning and capability, we must acknowledge that he does not consistently hold this conception of the city's function. There are at least two other conceptions of the city that occur within the very same chapters of the Politics -- in such close proximity to the distributive definitions that we have to wonder whether Aristotle sees the differences. I shall call these the holistic conception (HC) and the whole-part conception (WP).

HC: A political arrangement is good (or virtuous in some concrete respect) just in case it has the same structure that is the structure of goodness (or some concrete virtue) in the soul of an individual human being.

WP: A political arrangement is good as a whole just in case its citizens are (each and every one?) good as individuals.

A classic statement of HC is Pol. VII. 1323b33 ff.: "The courage and justice and practical wisdom and moderation of a city has the same capability and structure in virtue of which each human being is said to be courageous and just and practically wise and moderate." This idea is several times stated in VII.1-2, in close proximity to statements of DC (e.g. 1324a8, 1324a33). WP is the dominant conception in VII.9-10. Consider, for example, the statement, "We must call a city eudaimōn not looking to one part of it, but looking to all the citizens" (1329a19 ff.).

WP and DC are not formally inconsistent. Both think of the goodness of city members distributionally: that is, taking them one by one as separate units. And both make the goodness of a city depend upon the functionings of the people in it. The two, however, are extremely different in emphasis and implication. DC tells us that the city has a task: it is to make it possible for its citizens to live well. It stipulates that the structure of the city should be chosen with this aim in view, and it requires the legislator to consider distributional questions. WP, by contrast, construes the goodness of a city not in terms of something it does for its people, but as a function of the qualities of the people, no matter how these came about.

We can see how crucial this difference is if we look at the way WP is put to work in VII.9-10. It is used to justify the exclusion of manual laborers and farmers from membership in the city. The argument goes: We want a good city. A city is good if and only if (all) its parts are good. Manual laborers and farmers cannot achieve goodness, because their lives lack leisure, and leisure is necessary for virtue. So: don't let these people be parts (citizens) of the city. (Cf. 1329a18 ff., 1328b38 ff.; and also III.5, 1278a5 ff.) In other words, don't let them pollute the nice structure we are creating. They may be necessary props or supports, but don't let them be parts.¹⁴ Now admittedly DC was

 14. For the distinction between "parts" of a city and "those things without which a city does not arise", as applied to farmers and craftsmen, see 1329a34 ff; cf. also III.5, 1278a2 ff.

vague about the scope of hostisoun (and of Book IV's tois pleistois tōn anthrōpōn). But it seems to go against the spirit of DC to exclude people from membership because, the way things contingently are, they don't in fact already live well. DC tells us to consider the entire group (however specified) and design a scheme that will permit each and every one of that group to live well. And if this should turn out not to be feasible for circumstantial reasons, then that would be a missing of the city's aim; it would not necessarily disqualify the scheme from best-ness, however, if we could show that it did as well as any possible and practicable scheme could in those circumstances (see section II).

DC leads Aristotle to criticize many actual regimes for their neglect of distributional questions. To take just one example, it leads him to criticize regimes that do not set aside some of the city's wealth to subsidize the participation of poor people in the common meals, which are an essential part of social functioning. Aristotle returns repeatedly and emphatically to that point, using it to criticize the constitution of Sparta (II.9, 1271a29-37) and to praise the arrangement in Crete, which is "more common to all", in that participation in the common meals is subsidized out of a fund created from public agricultural produce and cattle, and supplemented by tariffs paid by neighbours (the perioikoi -- II.10, 1272a12 ff.). His own ideal constitution follows the Cretan model (VII.10, 1330a3 ff.). But on the principle suggested by the application of WP to metics and craftsmen, we could justify any regime whatsoever, no matter how acute its neglect of distributional questions. Spartan citizens who lose their common meal functioning are, according to this argument, not wronged, as II.9 thinks they are: for they can just be defined as non-citizens and left outside as a support group. This is in fact what the Spartan constitution does, removing their right of political participation as a penalty for not joining the meal (1271a34-7) -- much to Aristotle's displeasure, in Book II. Take, again, a regime in which things are so arranged that only a single tyrant can live well. Then we could say: since we want a good city, and since the goodness of the city is a function of the goodness of its parts, and since in

this case only one part lives a good life, then -- let's have only one "part" in our city here, and keep all the others on the outside, as props or supports. According to WP as applied, there is no difference in goodness between the Philippines under Marcos (supposing we define this as a regime that has only a handful of citizen "parts" and a very large support group), and the Philippines under Aquino. According to DC, there is all the difference.

HC is clearly in conflict with WP. Since this conflict has been well explored by Bernard Williams with reference to Plato's Republic,¹⁵ and since this clash is not my primary concern, I shall be brief. HC allows that a city is good just in case its parts have a certain relation to one another that makes an overall structure that is similar to the structure of goodness in an individual soul; it does not require that its individual members each be good. So we could keep the farmers and laborers in as citizen parts, and just say that they are the appetitive part of the city's soul, or the feet of its body, or all the other cheerful things that Plato tends to say here. WP, by contrast, requires that each and every part be good as an individual -- with the odd results that we have seen.

The clash between HC and DC is equally serious, and seriously disturbing. HC says that we do not need to consider the whole good life of each and every person: we just have to make sure that in some way the city as a whole realizes each of the constituents of the good life in its overall structure. At 1324a8 ff., Aristotle illustrates HC with an example: if the good life for a human being is the wealthy life, the good city is the wealthy city. DC would, of course, require: the city that distributes wealth to each and every one of its people. It is especially obvious that a city can be wealthy in the sense of HC, without being at all concerned with the distributional questions of DC. The Philippines was a very well-shod city in the sense of HC, given the 3000 pairs of shoes found in Mrs. Marco's closet.

 15. B. Williams, "The City and the Soul in Plato's Republic," in Exegesis and Argument, ed. E.N. Lee et al., Phronesis suppl. vol. 1 (Assen 1973).

It was not well shod in the sense of DC. One could say much the same about education, about physical health, about most of the major functionings.

What are we to make of all this? The first thing to notice is that all three conceptions are present, as well, in Plato's Republic, where their juxtaposition creates similar problems. Where HC and WP are concerned, Aristotle's statements in Politics VII are extremely close to Plato's actual expressions.¹⁶ The second thing to say is that Politics VII (in other respects as well a very Platonic book) is the only place where the three cause such confusion. Elsewhere we do find many indeterminate remarks (e.g. that the end of the good politeiai is "good living" or "the common good"); but where we can be clear about what Aristotle intends, DC predominates. In fact, in Politics II.3 Aristotle criticizes Plato's organic conception of the city in a way that perspicuously states the difference between holistic happiness and distributional happiness; and he stresses his own preference for a distributional understanding:

A city is by nature a plurality; and if it becomes more unified it gets to be a household instead of a city, then a single human being instead of a household... So that even if it were possible to do this it should not be done: for it will take away the city...The good of each is what preserves each. (1261a17 ff.)

Again, he criticizes Plato's Socrates' claim that citizens in the ideal city will "all" say "mine" and "not-mine" together, by insisting that Plato has ignored distributional questions and the separateness of persons presupposed by these. "All," he writes, is "said in two ways": in the sense of each and every one, taken one by one, and in a more corporate or holistic sense. Plato's citizens will indeed speak together holistically, "but not as

16. With the statement of HC, compare Rep. 435B (Aristotle has morphe instead of eidōs, phronēsis instead of sophia -- but in other respects it is more or less a quote); for WP, esp. 435E, and cf. Williams.

each one of them" (1261b16-27).¹⁷ It is a fundamental point in the arguments against Plato that both family ties and property must be given to individuals taken as separate units. And in a later passage he rejects the whole idea of holistic eudaimonia as conceptually confused: eudaimonia is not a concept like 'even number', which can apply to a whole without applying to its parts. It applies to a whole only if it applies to "all or most" of the parts, taken as individuals (1264b15-22). Accordingly, Book II as a whole is profoundly concerned with distributional questions and their impact on the functioning of individuals, using such considerations often to criticize regimes.

I conclude tentatively that Politics VII represents a more primitive stage in Aristotle's thinking on these issues. (This does not necessarily mean earlier, although one would like to think that it does.)¹⁸ At this stage he is rather close to Plato,

 17. These passages and the issues they raise are discussed in my "Shame, Separateness, and Political Unity: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato," in Essays on Aristotle's Ethics, ed. A. Rorty (Berkeley 1980) 395-436.

18. In this way I incline rather cautiously to a conclusion that in some respects resembles that of Jaeger, but for quite different reasons. Jaeger argued that VII-VIII were early, but on the grounds that "ideal theory" was a Platonic way of doing political theory that Aristotle dropped once he began to do empirical study of constitutions. He groups II-III with VII-VIII, and holds that IV-VI are the late (post-constitution-gathering) books: "In unambiguous language he here abandons the purely constructive method that Plato and he himself had previously followed, and takes his stand on sober empirical study." I find this argument rather unconvincing -- especially the strained reading it imposes on EN 1181b13 ff., where Jaeger finds a reference to the constitutions. In general Jaeger seems to me not to have thought enough about what the relation between ideal theory and "empirical" description might be, and how they might function as different parts of a single project. It is also worth noticing that Jaeger oddly insists that Aristotle could not have had a distributional conception of the city; he equates a distributional conception with a utilitarian conception that places emphasis on goods, and insists that this must be a purely modern idea: "Aristotle is by no means subordinating the state to the welfare of the individual, as a liberal would do,...To say that the 'best life' of the state and of the individual are one and the same does not mean for him that things are well with the state if everybody has good food and feels comfortable.."

and is willing to take over Plato's formulations with all their attendant ambiguities. When he does sort things out more perspicuously in Politics II-III, in connection with his criticism of Plato, he opts on the whole for DC -- though I would not wish to claim that all problems simply disappear.

V Levels of Capability

We have said that the Aristotelian law-giver aims at enabling people to live well and do well. We now need to go into more detail about the goal sought; and we need to confront the difficult question, for whom will this goal be sought, and on what basis? In this section I shall argue that the goal is a certain sort of capability -- the capability to function well if one so chooses; that this goal is seen by Aristotle to have material and institutional necessary conditions; and that the basis of distribution is a lower-level capability of the person, an untrained natural capability to attain the higher functioning level, given the addition of certain further distributable conditions. There are many obscurities in all of this; and I shall simply be attempting to give a reasonably clear sketch of what we find in the texts, and to point out some of the problems on which further work is needed.

Capability to function well has, in Aristotle's view, two rather different sorts of necessary conditions, with both of which the legislator must be concerned. We could better express this by saying that he will, according to Aristotle, be concerned with producing two different sorts of capabilities. One sort is internal to each person: people are to develop traits of intellect and character and body such that, under appropriate circumstances, they will be in a position to choose well and act well. Let us call this sort of capability an I-capability, and define it, provisionally, as follows:

A person is I-capable of function A at time t if and only if the person is so organized at t that, should the appropriate circumstances present themselves, the person can choose an A action.

This definition is, of course, based upon the definition of

excellence of character in EN II; it contains that definitions's emphasis upon choice.¹⁹ I have broadened it to include the bases of other good functionings as well (e.g. of intellect, of body). We notice that, so broadened, it is a close relative of the account of "first entelechy" in De Anima II.1 (where the example is having some scientific knowlegde, as opposed to using it). This may be the same as what is in De Anima II.5 called "second capability" -- as at 417b30, where the example is the sense in which an adult (as opposed to a child) can function as a general. (The example is unclear: it is what we want only if it means an adult who already has military training.) Our idea also has a close link to the account of "rational capabilities" in Metaphysics IX.2 and 5, where Aristotle stresses that certain human capabilities are "two-way powers" -- i.e. that the agent can use them in the way he or she desires. I think that some I-capabilities will be two-way powers -- i.e. that the account of the capability will not itself mention the presence of desires to use that capability one way rather than another. It is, however, important to notice that ethical I-capabilities will not be like this, since in that case "so organized" would include a training or organization of desires such that the virtuous action will reliably be chosen.²⁰ But the emphasis upon choice remains in this case as well: for the action will be virtuous only if the agent chooses it.

I-capabilities are developed by education. And Aristotle repeatedly insists that one of the legislator's first and most essential tasks is the provision of an adequate scheme for the education of the young. (Cf. for example Pol. VIII.1, 1337a8, EN X.9, 1179b33-5, 1180a14-15.) In EN II.1 he insists (cf. above, section II) that the development of I-capabilities is the aim of every lawgiver, and that success in this is what makes the difference between good cities and bad (1103b2-6). EN X.9 argues

 19. The definition, it will be noticed, uses the word "can"; it thus does not claim to elucidate completely the notion of being capable of a function, and awaits a more detailed unpacking of the idea.

20. EN II.1 points out that these capabilities, unlike skills, require habituation for their development.

that if people are to become capable of functioning well, education must be publicly and not just privately instituted, and that the public sphere must provide not only for the initial development of capabilities in the young, but also for their maintenance during adulthood.²¹ But in addition to a system of public education, the love and intimate particular knowledge of the family is also required; and so the legislator ought to support and not undermine the family as a social institution. (In Politics II Aristotle argues against Plato's scheme for family communism by pointing to the way in which it will erode attachments that are at the root of the excellences.) Other institutional conditions are also essential for the development of I-capabilities: and Aristotle's keen interest in these shows us most clearly that his concern with flourishing is not confined to those people in the city who already possess a developed set of I-capabilities. Throughout Politics II he criticizes lawgivers (theoretical and actual) for neglecting the development of some capability, or for emphasizing a particular one more than is appropriate. And repeatedly he analyzes the ways in which cities' institutional arrangements do or do not support the development of excellences: the way in which Spartan institutions correctly foster courage, but on the other hand nourish avarice, etc. In Politics VII the same is true. We hear a good deal about the conditions that are best for the production and distribution of food, and other goods that are productive of health. VII.9-10 stresses the importance of leisure, and the absence of repetitive labor, for the development of ethical and intellectual capabilities. There Aristotle concludes that the lawgiver must make sure that the citizens are not forced into a way of life that is "ignoble and subversive of excellence" (1328b39-41).

An I-capability might be present and still lack circumstances for its activation. A person may be brought up to have all of the I-capabilities ready and waiting, and then be given a way of life that impedes or even totally prevents the

 21. See Fragility ch. 12, 346 ff. for a discussion of relevant texts; and especially EN 1180a1-4.

exercise of some or all of them. (In The Fragility of Goodness chapter 11, I have brought together all of Aristotle's statements about impeding circumstances and have analyzed his view.) So we need to worry, as well, about the external conditions in which people live once they have already developed the I-capabilities. Some of the conditions we look for here will be the same ones that also foster initial development: relative leisure, an absence of repetitive labor; close ties to family members and friends; sufficient nourishment and bodily care. But several new considerations enter in at this point. The institutional structure of the city must be such that the morally capable individual has scope to exercise the functions corresponding to the various personal and social excellences. This idea is used by Aristotle in a number of concrete and striking ways. It is prominently used to argue that no citizen should be prevented by poverty from taking part in the social functionings of the "common meals", as we have already seen (§IV). It is used to argue against communism of property, on the grounds that this system removes scope for individual choices of generous actions (1263b11). It is used, somewhat more oddly, to argue against communal holding of women and in favor of monogamy, on the grounds that the communal system would remove scope for the choice of temperate actions (1263b10-11).²² (The idea behind this seems to be that if women are not private possessions there will be no room to abstain virtuously from taking another man's possession.) In short, it is used to argue against institutions that block I-capable people from turning those capabilities into action by their choice. And Aristotle makes it clear in these passages that if a "right" result (say, giving to others) is accomplished by a coercive strategy rather than by personal choice, a part of good human functioning will have been lost.

Finally, this idea is used in Politics III to argue that a good political arrangement will be one in which political

 22. These examples are placed here because Aristotle stresses that it is frustration of the erga of moderation and generosity that he is criticizing; but presumably the same arrangement will also undermine the formation of the relevant I-capability, and/or its maintenance in adulthood.

participation of two basic types -- the judicial and the deliberative -- are open to all citizens. Citizenship is in fact defined in terms of capability: it is "the authorization (exousia) to share in judicial and deliberative functioning" (1275b18-20).²³ (Notice the way in which the functionings that are constitutive of the person's good living include political functioning -- so that the ends of city and individual are actually defined in terms of one another. This is fitting, since Aristotle has argued that the human being is a political creature, who would consider a life not lived with others to be not worth living.) Aristotle is very careful, here again, to stipulate that it is exousia, authorization or being-empowered, that we are after here, and not actual functioning. For (as he explicitly observes in the Magna Moralia) perhaps a person will choose not to hold office. What is important is that the city opens to them this choice. In Athenian terms, their name is in the lottery -- although should it come up they can always decline the function. Aristotle stresses the human importance of this sort of capability in his account of Solon's reforms, saying that Solon gave the dēmos the "most necessary capability" (anankaiotatēn dunamin), viz. that of electing their magistrates and calling them to account, and that without this the dēmos would be living the life of slaves (Pol. II.12, 1274a15 ff.).

Since this type of capability, and in general the type of capability we have described in the last two paragraphs, refers to the presence of external conditions for the functionings in question, I shall call this sort E-capabilities, and define them as follows:

A person is E-capable of function A at time t, if and only if at t the person is I-capable of A and there are no circumstances present that impede or prevent the exercise of A.

(One might hesitate between this negative account

23. The text actually creates some confusion as to whether it is a conjunction or a disjunction. The crucial summary at 1275b19 reads "or" in the MSS, though editors print Aretinus' conjecture "and", for reasons of harmony with what precedes.

of E-capability and a more positive account stipulating that circumstances are such as to make available the choice of an A action. I have preferred the negative formulation only because the normal flow of life does not make available each and every one of the functionings at every time; and yet we do not for that reason withdraw our ascription of and E-capability. The poor man who has been given sufficient funds to join the common meal is E-capable even if the time for enrollment has not yet come round; the person with some means is E-capable of generous action even when there is no recipient on the scene.)

The line between E- and I-capabilities is not rigid, nor should it be. For the same conditions that block the activation of a trained I-capability will also inhibit its development in an immature person; and, sufficiently prolonged, they will erode that I-capability in an adult. (All this I have argued in The Fragility of Goodness, ch. 11, and I shall not recapitulate here.) An I-capability that never happens on E-circumstances for its activation is, Aristotle emphasizes, only in a shadowy way ever there, since it is dubious that we will wish to call someone good (for example) if that person is perpetually asleep or comatose -- or in some other way totally cut off from functioning (see EN 1102b5-8). So the legislator's total task will be to train I-capabilities in the young, to maintain those in the adult, and simultaneously to create and preserve the E-circumstances in which those developed capabilities can become active. The traditional distributables, money and property, have their place as means to I-capabilities and also as E-circumstances permitting the active exercise of those capabilities.

Who is to receive all this attention, and why? At this point, we cannot avoid confronting the difficult question of breadth head on, asking to whom these benefits will be conferred, and on what basis. Who is hostisoun (or, if we may use Book IV's terms, who are hoi pleistoi tōn anthrōpōn)? First we can make some progress by elimination:

(1) The subjects of distribution cannot, if Aristotle is consistent, be subjects because of being citizens. For Aristotle carefully defines citizenship in terms of E-capability: so that

this condition can hardly be the basis on which capabilities are distributed.

(2) The subject cannot be required to possess an already trained set of ethical and/or intellectual capabilities. For one of the primary benefits given out by the lawgiver's arrangements is education, as we have seen; and education is a development of these capabilities. EN II.1 makes capability formation the lawgiver's most essential task; and Politics II repeatedly criticizes lawgiver's for failing in this task.

(3) The subject cannot be picked out by wealth or birth, since it is precisely that way of proceeding that Aristotle so sternly criticizes in his attack on Spartan arrangements; and it is the opposite way of proceeding that he praises in the case of Solon.

(4) For similar reasons, the subject cannot be picked out as the child of parents who are already citizens. Aristotle praises Solon for extending political rights to the previously unenfranchised, and criticizes Sparta's persistent exclusions. He is also interested in raising and answering the question, to whom, if we are beginning de novo, should we give these entitlements? (And it will certainly not help to say "the children of parents who are rightly citizens, or who should be citizens: for this just raises our very question in a new form -- on what basis is it that Aristotle believes that they should have this capability?) (Cf. Pol. III 3)

(5) The subject cannot be picked out merely by geographical location. This point is less clear than the others, from a textual point of view; and certainly geographical location will play some role. For Aristotle never criticizes lawgivers for not dealing with the needs of people who live at a great distance. But Pol. III.1 criticizes ideas of the city and citizenship based on mere geography. Nor would this criterion suffice to explain Aristotle's exclusions from the polis (see below).

(6) The subject group is rather broadly based: note the terms chosen to define it in VII and in IV.11.

We begin to make progress towards a positive account of the basis for distribution when we consider one further point:

(7) The subject group excludes women and natural slaves.

And it does so on the grounds that these people (allegedly) possess natural capabilities that are different "in species", not just in degree, from the natural capabilities of those who will, by contrast, receive an education aimed at eudaimonia. Aristotle claims that the natural capabilities of women and slaves are such that they can never achieve eudaimonia, under any circumstances. The natural slave does not possess at all the natural capability for deliberation and practical reason (1254b22, 1260a12, 1260a37, cf. also EN 1149a7 ff.), while women possess it in a deficient degree, in such a way that they are by nature incapable of governing their own lives. (1260a12-13) Aristotle's criticisms of Sparta's practice of giving property to women (EN VIII.10) that this guarantees that that property will not be used as it ought to be used, namely as a tool for virtuous functioning (1161a1-3, cf. Pol. III.9, 1269b12 ff.)

If we can separate Aristotle's philosophical principle here from its unpleasant and unjust application, we can, I think, begin to see what he thinks the basis for the distribution of I- and E-capabilities must be. At least a necessary condition of being a recipient of such distribution is that one should already possess by nature a less developed capability to perform the functionings in question, a capability such that, given the appropriate education and external resources, one could, in time, become fully capable of that functioning. This sort of capability is prominently recognized by Aristotle in a number of texts. Let us call it a Basic Capability or B-Capability, and define it as follows:

A person is B-capable of function A if and only if the person has an individual constitution organized so as to A, given the provision of suitable training, time, and other instrumental necessary conditions.

(In this sense, a boy is capable of functioning as a general (DA 417b30); a myopic person is capable of seeing well (cf. Metaph. V.22); an embryo is capable of seeing and hearing; an acorn is capable of becoming a tree; a male child is capable of the ethical virtues.)

Is the presence of a B-capability (or B-Capabilities)

sufficient as well as necessary for being a subject of the lawgiver's concern? I am inclined to think that it is. We cannot find any other positive criterion that fits as well. This account would explain both the terms Aristotle uses (hostious, tois pleistois) and his judgements about Solon and Sparta. It fits well with his emphasis on the duty of the legislator to provide education for all; and with his views on the importance, in education, of attending to the particular requirements of each individual (see below); it also fits well with his attitude to children more generally, as beings who exist in a state of incomplete fulfillment of their natures, and with his tendency to treat capabilities as things that in their very nature reach out to and demand fulfillment in an appropriate mode of activity. It fits well, finally, with IV.11's stipulation that the lawgiver should not think in terms of the extraordinary nature, but of the more average case.

We can add that this reading derives further support from a passage in which Aristotle discusses the morally relevant criteria for the distribution of offices in the city, insisting that the basis for that distribution will be capability to perform the function in question (Pol.III. 12). For his argument makes the more general point that in each area, when what we are distributing are the necessary material conditions for a certain function, what we should look to is not irrelevant characteristics (like birth or wealth) but to a relevant characteristic, namely, the capability to perform the function in question. Aristotle's example is aulos-playing. If we are giving out auloi, and if the function at which we are aiming is that musical function, then to whom should we give our auloi? To what characteristics should we look in the people before us, in settling that issue? To good health? To beauty? Surely not, Aristotle says. To what, then? To an ability to play the aulos -- since those are the people who will use the resources well. He concludes that the distributional criterion must be relevant to the functioning (ergon) that is to be performed (1283a1-3).

In the example, and in the point about offices that the example is used to make, Aristotle seems to be thinking of an already trained capability: for that would be what would be

relevant where we are concerned with allotting the necessary conditions for going from an I-capability to an E-capability. But he conspicuously uses the example to make a more general point: that capability is the morally relevant criterion for distribution of the conditions for a function, since capability, unlike other features, has relevance to the performance of the function. Surely we may apply this general point to the situation in which the legislator is distributing education, and other necessary conditions of the I-capabilities. When we do so, we find that the characteristic of persons to which he should look is not birth, or wealth, or good looks, but the presence of a B-capability to perform the function in question. And the aulos example implies, furthermore, that it is unjust if the legislator does not give the auloi to the capable players. (It is introduced in answer to a request for an account of just distribution.) Applying that further point to the case of education, we would be entitled to say that it is unjust of the legislator not to give these essential goods to all those who are by nature capable of using them.

On this account, then, Aristotle is telling us not to give the resources of the city to those who cannot make use of them at all. So, don't give goods connected with reproductive functioning to the hopelessly sterile; don't give rational education to "natural slaves" who are by natural accident completely "unable to foresee things with their reason." But to those who have a B-capability, give as much of the relevant goods as would be required to bring that person along from a B-capability to an E-capability -- just as we set the flute-player up with the conditions of flute playing. Aristotle's discussions of education suggest that this ought to be done not meritocratically, that is, not by giving extra rewards and attention to those who are moving more quickly and slighting the more hesitant, but rather by attending to the special abilities and needs of each individual taken one by one, so as to bring that individual along from an uneducated state to an educated state, a state ready for good functioning. For he insists that a good educator is like a good doctor, who, by understanding that particular constitution and those particular symptoms, in each case, will be able to bring

the patient along from sickness to health (EN X.9, 1180b7 ff.). And he uses this to argue that the legislator should give parents a central role in education for good functioning: for parents know the needs of the individual child better than a public teacher does, so that "each child will be more likely to get what is beneficial" (1180b12-13).²⁴

This account of the basis of distribution provides, then, a way of looking at distributable goods and opportunities that integrates them, from the first, into the doings and functionings of people. It seems to be a natural extension of the capability account of distribution's goal: for if the goal is not just to spread some goods around, but to produce E-capabilities, then there would be no point in giving those goods to a person who never would under any circumstances perform the function in

 24. Sometimes Aristotle seems to adopt the meritocratic conception of distribution, rather than the needs-based one, where the distribution of political rule to adults is concerned. But he never, to my knowledge, speaks this way in the context of the formation of ethical and intellectual I-capabilities; never does he say that it is better to neglect a child who is moving slowly. Nor, plainly, does he have that sort of attitude to bodily health and its medical requirements. He plainly thinks that good health care is care that gives the sick whatever they need to make them healthy -- presumably even if this means allocating more resources to them than to the healthy. He would regard it as absurd to suggest that the healthy should be rewarded for their health by having more medical treatment than the sick. I think we should conclude that he views all capabilities this way, as conditions that demand whatever is required to make them ready for flourishing activity. Where he does speak meritocratically, it is in the context of political functioning, where he holds that justice involves "giving equal shares to equals." More closely examined, however, such remarks do not really take a meritocratic direction. For he states that all adult males are to be regarded as "free and equal", and thus should "rule and be ruled by turns." A permanent distinction between ruling and being ruled would be justified, he says, only by a difference of nature amounting to a difference of species -- and not by any difference of "more and less" (Pol.I.13, 1259b34 ff., 1259b34 ff., cf. VII.3, 1325b3-5). Such a difference divides males (allegedly) both from females and from natural slaves; but differences among free males, except in very exceptional circumstances, will be differences of degree only, and thus will not justify exclusion from an equal share in political flourishing. (See 1259b5-6, 1255b20, 1288a12.) This idea is used at 1332b25-7 to justify, as just, alternation in ruling.

question (this is presumably Aristotle's point about difference of species), and great point in adjusting the level of distribution to the person's current requirements. On this account, B-capabilities are needs for functioning: they give rise to a claim because they are there and in a state of incomplete realization. They are conditions that reach towards, demand fulfillment in, a certain mode of activity. If that activity never arrives, they are cut off, fruitless, incomplete.²⁵ As Aristotle insists, their very being makes reference to functioning; so without the possibility of functioning, they are only in a shadowy way even themselves.

The B-capability basis is contingent; being B-capable is an actual property of individuals (really, a series of such properties) that individuals might for one or another reason fail to have. Being born of two human parents does not suffice: we are asked to scrutinize the actual characteristics of the individual. (Of course for Aristotle being human is itself a functional notior; so there won't be human beings who altogether lack important B-capabilities. But females, "maimed" as they are, are clearly both human and, in his view, lacking.) The basis does not, however, depend upon the presence of a desire for these functionings, or a need that is felt by the subject as such. A person who has been taught, in circumstances of deprivation, not to want the functionings in question still has a claim to them; for there is in that person right now a condition that demands that functioning as its fulfillment. Capability-needs are important because of the value of the functionings in which they naturally terminate; functionings are valuable, in part, for the way in which they realize capabilities. We cannot and should not prise the two apart. And all of this exists, and continues to exert its claim, whether or not the subject's desires and evaluations have been organized by education so as to want fulfillment. In this way, the approach has more power than do utility-based approaches (or approaches in terms of basic needs

 25. See Fragility, ch. 11; and A. Kosman's fine paper, "Substance, Being, and energeia", Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy 2(1984) 121-49.

that construe the significance of basic needs in terms of utility) to criticize the distributional policies of regimes that manage to talk their deprived people into not desiring more than they are in fact given.

This account of the capability basis for capability development seems to me to be an attractive supplement to Aristotle's theory as we have seen it so far, and also to contemporary versions of this sort of theory. It goes farther than contemporary statements towards explaining why the legislator has an obligation to attend to people who are not yet capable of functioning well, and also why he ought to attend to all of them, rather than striving to maximize excellent functioning, should those two ends be in tension.

But there may seem at this point to be an asymmetry between the Aristotelian account and its contemporary analogues. For it may be suggested that Aristotle focusses above all on moral B-capabilities, whereas Sen, for example, is concerned above all with health and related physical goods -- so that it would be misleading to say that they share an approach to distributional questions. To put things this way would be, I believe, misleading, and on both sides. Sen is explicitly interested in the full range of capabilities that make up good human functioning in all areas. He devotes attention to education and to social goods like self-respect, as well as to bodily health. He focusses more often on hunger and health, both because of expertise and commitment, and also because no other issue of human functioning can be addressed when people are starving. Food is a prerequisite for all other functionings.²⁶ But the shape of his view explicitly leaves room for a full account of good human activity. On the other side, interpreters who stress Aristotle's role as theoretician of civic virtue often forget that the Aristotelian virtues are, for the most part, dispositions concerned with the reasonable use of external goods: so they are not "moral" in the sense of being occupied with a noumenal realm that is totally cut off from or independent of the material circumstances of life. In general, Aristotle does not recognize

26. Sen, "Hunger and Entitlement."

any separate realm of moral as opposed to non-moral values and virtues. Interpreters of Aristotle in affluent parts of the world too often forget, furthermore, and very much underemphasize, Aristotle's deep and urgent interest in the questions of hunger and scarcity, of property and its distribution and redistribution, of population control and its relation to scarcity (e.g. 1265a38 ff.). European and North American interpreters of Aristotle have not been, on the whole, very interested in these questions and these passages; Aristotle was interested in the questions and wrote the passages. And the basis for his concern with these question is his deep interest in, and practical commitment to, the furthering of good human functioning, and the development of each human being towards the fulfillment of its nature.

Two basic approaches to political thinking are found in the ancient world. One, which we find exemplified in the Hellenistic philosophers, insists that the central problem in the way of human happiness is bad thinking and feeling. Independently of any material changes, human beings can be made to flourish by simply learning to think differently. And the task of political philosophy (insofar as such philosophy can be political) is above all to encourage correct thought. The second approach insists that human flourishing has material and institutional necessary conditions that can be described and also realized. Good functioning, and even good thinking and good desiring, are not independent of the resources people have and the institutions in which they live. It is the job of political thought to imagine such conditions. This is Aristotle's view. The barrier between the child's incomplete capability and adult flourishing cannot be crossed without political planning; and it is thus a most urgent task of the philosopher, qua worker for the human good, to think about such (to some modern eyes) unphilosophical topics as the number of children one should encourage, the nature of funding for public meals, the purity of a water supply, the distance of a marketplace from the sea. The close link that Aristotle wishes to establish between philosophy and public policy (between perspicuous and comprehensive foundational argument and empirical designing) is rarely found in the contemporary world. The

Aristotelian conception urges us to forget that link.

We must now return to Aristotle. For we must now acknowledge that, while the account we have presented is the one that seems to fit best the totality of the evidence, one striking problem remains on our hands. For in both III.5 and VII.9-10, as we have seen Aristotle makes judgements about farmers, metics, and craftsmen that seem to say that the city has no duty to give anything to them unless they possess an already educated set of ethical capabilities. On the account we have presented, we would have expected him to say that if they B-capabilities the city ought to educate them, even if it means giving them leisure. If it doesn't do that because it needs their labor, it is exploiting them. We might try to get round this by saying that B-capabilities are eroded by bad education or a demeaning way of life: so that by the time we encounter these individuals, as adults, matters are already hopeless with them, and so there can be no duty to educate them. This would be a harsh judgement, and we might not like it; but it would make the overall position consistent: and it seems to be something that Aristotle in fact believes. But then we would expect him to take special care about the children of these adults, that they should not have the bad way of life; and this he nowhere does.

I think that Aristotle grows unclear here, and fails to look our issue in the eye, -- perhaps because it is such a deeply difficult issue for a view such as his. If he is correct about what capabilities need for their development, then, given the city's need for labor and trade,²⁷ the city cannot do its job for all the people who are B-capable. This, I think, may be why he rather wistfully says that it would be nice if all the farmers and craftsmen could be natural slaves (1329a25-6, 1330a28 ff., cf. 1278a6-8) -- for then, of course, there will be a complete coincidence between the people who lack B-capabilities and the people who, for contingent reasons, can't get I-capabilities. His

 27. Cf. VII.9-10, also VII.4, 1326a18-20, b21. On metics. cf. also Fragility ch. 12. And, for a somewhat different account of Aristotle's own views, with much pertinent historical information, D. Whitehead, "Aristotle the Metic," Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society 21 (1975) 94-9.

second preferences is for "foreigners from neighboring regions" -- presumably because there has to be some geographical limit on the range of the city's obligation (on the hostisoun) -- so at least the city won't be exploiting the very same people to whom it has a duty; nor, since they are presumably immigrants, will the question of their education or non-education arise. (And let us hope that they leave their children at home.)

What should an Aristotelian conception say about this problem? It should, first of all, I think, moderate Aristotle's extreme requirement of leisure, which seems false to our intuitions about what full capability requires. We might keep the requirement in some form -- for example, as a requirement that children be subsidized so that they can go to school for a certain number of years without having to work at some job that makes education impossible. Child labor laws are a reasonable Aristotelian requirement; and they do not imply that only the extremely wealthy can be educated. On the other hand, even when Aristotle's requirement is modified we will frequently discover tensions of the sort that he describes, situations in which citizens are unable to take advantage of all the education available to them because of a need to work. In a rich country, the solution would lie in some form of redistribution, together with a strong subsidized program of public education. It should in fact be possible to ensure that no teenager would have to work at a job that is, as Aristotle says, "subversive of excellence"; and it is a first step in progress to acknowledge that some labor is like that. But in a poor country we might simply have to concede that the best life for all cannot be achieved even by the best arrangement. Aristotle's definition already provides for this.

VI Problems and Prospects

I have indicated why I find this account appealing. But at this point the job has only begun -- if we are to develop this view in a fully convincing way. Questions immediately crowd in. We will be asked what it means to distribute a capability (whether I- or E-): how much and what sort of access to means and

conditions counts as enough here?²⁸ (Do we say that a child growing up in a semi-literate ghetto family with access to public education, but severe economic strains that pull her away from education, has been given the capability to get an education? Does the distribution of employment-related capabilities require affirmative action measures or not, and, if so, which ones?) We will, again, be asked many questions about the capability basis: how is it ascertained, and what sort of level are we looking for when we judge that a certain person is or is not B-capable of a certain functioning. Much infamy might be practiced in the name of B-capabilities, Aristotle's own treatment of women and barbarians does not inspire confidence. We had better anticipate such abuses and guard against them. (In some cases we may feel that the potential for abuse in capability testing is so great that we should direct the legislator to proceed as if everyone is B-capable.) Again, does the presence of a lower number of first-level capabilities still give rise to some political obligations? (What are the city's obligations to train intellectually handicapped children? To feed and medically care for all sentient humans, and in general to promote their achieving the level of good functioning that their natural capacities make available to them? Is there any reason why the line should be drawn at the human species?).²⁹

 28. See Bernard Williams's comments on Sen's Tanner Lectures, in Sen et al., The Standard of Living (above n. 6).

29. One further advantage of the capability view is that it offers an attractive basis for developing an account of what we owe to other species. For a similar approach to the treatment of animals, see T. Regan. Where women and slaves are concerned, Aristotle does appear to believe that the lawgiver's task includes making it possible for them to achieve good functioning at their own (sub-eudaimonic) level. (Consider, for example, his criticisms of the Spartan policy on women in Pol.II.9, and his remarks about levels of good functioning that differ "in species" in Pol.I.13 and at 1260a37. But he rarely asks what treatment we owe animals in virtue of their sentience, although it would have been natural for him to have done so, given the well-developed debate on vegetarianism in his philosophical culture. He seems, in his ethical and political writings, to treat them, consistently, as tools of human purposes. (See, however, Pol.I.5, where he justifies human control over tame animals as in the animals' interest: 1254b10-13.) His neglect of this topic is odd in virtue of his great concern, elsewhere, to describe the telos in which good functioning, for each animal and in general living thing, consists.

Again, we will be asked a great deal about how this conception is related to the liberal ideal that citizens should be free to select their own conception of the good. In operating with a thicker account of the good, and in putting this into practice through (for example) a system of public education, don't we, even if we emphasize choice and practical reason, still impose something on everyone from the start in a way that makes many later choices impossible? And is this, or is it not, any diminution of the morally valuable sort of choice, the sort of which we most want human beings to be capable?

Again, we will have to decide whether the lawgiver can consider capabilities one by one, or whether he needs at every point to operate with a complete account of human functioning, so that he can assess the bearing of an allotment of commodities or resources on the totality of a person's ways of living and acting. Aristotle insists on the second approach; Sen concurs.³⁰ But obviously the second approach is far more difficult to implement than the first: for it means that a planner cannot simply aim at designing a good and just health care scheme, or a good system of education, but must consider the total picture at all times.

These are all hard problems. Whether the capability view can solve them and, if so, how, is an open question. But I want now to focus on what I take to be the most urgent problem in the way of such a view, a problem that must be resolved, if the view is to have sufficient content even to be seriously assessed. This is, what are the functionings with which the city should be concerned, and how do we arrive at our list of functionings? There are two questions here, closely linked: a content question and an epistemological question. They are closely linked because

30. Sen, in his exchange with Bernard Williams, in Sen *et al.*, The Standard of Living. For Aristotle's view, see the very interesting discussion of possessions at Politics II.6, 1265a28 ff., where he points out that the lawgiver has a "better criterion (*horos*)" if he thinks of sophrosunē and eleutheriotēs together, in allotting property, than if he thinks of either one alone. For "it is possible to live temperately but miserably", while generosity, on its own, is compatible with luxury (1265a28-34).

we will and should feel dubious about a procedure of selection if the content it generates does not match our intuitions and judgements; and on the other hand we will and should feel dubious about a list of functionings if we notice that it could not be generated by a procedure that seems to us to exemplify rationality. There is mutual support here -- though not, I believe, circularity of a vicious sort. I shall make a few general suggestions about where the answers to these questions might be sought; then I shall return to Aristotle to see how he might help us to get on with these questions.

We want, I believe, a list of functionings that is, on the one hand, non-detached, but, on the other hand, objective. What do I mean by this? By non-detached, I mean that it should not be discovered by looking at human lives and actions from a totally alien point of view, outside of the conditions and experience of those lives -- as if we were discovering some sort of value-neutral scientific fact about ourselves. I do not think this a coherent idea anyway; and if it were, it would not be likely to yield the sort of account of the human being that would be right for human choice and planning. Getting the list of functionings that are constitutive of good living is a matter of asking ourselves what is most important, what is an essential part of any life that is going to be rich enough to count as truly human. A being totally detached from human experience and choice could not, I think, make such a judgement.³¹

By objective, I mean that we do not want simply to take each culture's or group's work for it, when they tell us what they think the relevant human functionings are -- even when they are talking about themselves. If we were to do this, much of the point of going over from desire or preference to capabilities (section III) would be lost. Suppose we observe, as Sen has, that females in certain poor regions of India suffer from diseases of malnutrition in greater numbers than males do, and thus are less

 31. See Nussbaum, The Therapy of Desire, The Martin Classical Lecture 1986, forthcoming, chapter 2. Also M. Nussbaum and A. Sen, "Internal Criticism and Indian Rationalist Traditions." forthcoming in Relativism, ed. M. Krausz, Notre Dame University Press, 1988.

capable of various functionings requiring mobility and vigor (see section III).³² This pattern is the result of traditional distributional inequities, bolstered by culturally learned values. Let us say that, when questioned, these women not only say that they feel good and are doing well. (This, we recall, is what in fact they do say.) Let us say that they make a more sophisticated answer: that, according to their deeply held conceptions of value, a lower level of capability in these areas of life is what it is right and good for a women to attain. It seems to me probable that if asked the right questions they would in fact come up with this answer. Sen takes their case to show the deficiency of approaches to distribution that are based upon desire and satisfaction; well and good. But it seems to me that the capability approach will exhibit similar deficiencies, unless we can specify an objective valuational procedure that will have the power to criticize the evaluations of functionings that are actually made by people whose upbringing has been hedged round with discrimination and inequity. Sen seems on the whole to think that we remove the problem by moving from the utilitarian emphasis on desire to his own approach's emphasis on the valuation of capabilities. But the valuational procedure that is involved in capability selection seems to me, at least without further description, to be no more uncorruptible than desire itself is. Just as people can be taught not to want or miss the things their culture has taught then they should not or could not have, so too they can be taught not to value certain functionings as constituents of their good living, where their culture has an interest in, or cannot avoid, denying them access to these functionings. Indeed, sometimes and in some ways the level of desire might be more resistant to corruption than the level of evaluation. As Sextus Empiricus observed, "In the person who is burdened by hunger or thirst it is not possible to engender through argument the conviction that he is not so burdened" (M XI.148); it is frequently easier to convince people that careers,

 32. See especially "Family and Food: Sex Bias in Poverty," in Resources, Values, and Development; also Commodities and Capabilities.

or education, or truly adequate nutrition, or other forms of activity, are not valuable things for them to aim at. And often the evaluating subjects are so deprived of experience of alternatives that evaluation can be little more than a validation of the status quo. Aristotle's ethical and political writings are full of examples of entire communities that teach, and deeply believe, false values that are inimical to true human flourishing: excessive love of money, excessive preoccupation with honour and reputation, an unbalanced attachment to the warlike life, a deficient concern with due procedure and human equality in the administration of justice. We need to take these examples seriously and to design a reflective procedure that will enable us to criticize particular human traditions without importing a perspective that is altogether alien to human social life as it is lived.³³

It seems to me, then, that Sen needs to be more radical than he has been so far in his criticism of utilitarian accounts of well-being, by introducing an objective normative account of human functioning and by describing a procedure of objective evaluation by which functionings can be assessed for their contribution to the good human life. I think that Aristotle will provide substantial assistance in this task. For Aristotle's ethical thought contains an account of human functionings (of the diverse activities whose excellent performance constitutes the good human life) that is non-external, but still objective -- and objective in a way that still leaves room for a certain sort of sensitivity to cultural relativity. It would be an important project to establish this in detail.³⁴ Here I shall simply sketch an idea of how such a project might proceed, and then comment on

33. See Nussbaum and Sen, "Internal Criticism"; also Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: an Aristotelian Approach," a WIDER (World Institute for Development Economics Research) Working Paper, and forthcoming in Midwest Studies in Philosophy, 1988.

34. Two preliminary efforts in this direction are Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues," and Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics," forthcoming in a volume of essays on the work of Bernard Williams, ed. R. Harrison and J. Altham, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

one especially important text.

The project of elaborating and defending Aristotle's approach to ethical objectivity needs to begin, I believe, by establishing that Aristotle's account of human nature and human functioning is not vulnerable to a criticism that has recently been made against it by several philosophers, including Alasdair MacIntyre and Bernard Williams.³⁵ These writers charge that Aristotle imposes on ethics an account of human functioning derived from "metaphysical biology," basing judgements of ethical value on value-neutral scientific fact, rather than on the human experience of life and value. Both MacIntyre and Williams, though for different reasons, conclude that this metaphysical starting point is inappropriate and unavailable, and that Aristotle's entire project of justifying a certain set of ethical norms fails on that account. It is possible, I believe, to answer these charges. In doing so one would begin by establishing that the fact/value distinction is not really present at all in Aristotle, even where science is concerned. Having done this, one could then, I believe, go on to show that for Aristotle, as texts clearly show, the question as to whether a certain function is or is not a part of our human nature is a certain special sort of evaluative question, namely, a question about whether that function is so important that a creature who lacked it would not be judged to be properly human at all. This question is answered like any other Aristotelian ethical question: namely, by looking at the evaluative beliefs of the many and the wise.³⁶ (I argue this point in another paper,³⁷ in part by analyzing the way in

 35. A. MacIntyre, After Virtue (Notre Dame 1981); B. Williams, Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy (Cambridge MA 1985).

36. Obviously much more needs to be said about how we get from these views to objectivity. For a beginning, see Fragility ch. 8 ("Saving Aristotle's Appearances," in Language and Logos, ed. M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum, Cambridge 1982); also Nussbaum and Sen, "Internal Criticism," and Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues."

37. "Aristotle on Human Nature" (above n. 27); this paper will be circulated as a WIDER Working Paper before its publication in the Harrison and Altham volume, and will be available under that description from WIDER, Annankatu 42, 00100 Helsinki, Finland, by late fall. "Non-Relative Virtues" and "Internal Criticism" are currently so available.

which Aristotle argues that it is part of our human nature to be political or social beings.)

But can we get a general answer to the question about functioning, for all human beings, that is not insensitive to issues of cultural difference and yet still gives us a way of criticizing unjust cultures? I find in Aristotle a promising route towards just such an answer, which I have developed, with reference to relativist arguments, in a separate paper.³⁸ The idea is to begin by considering certain perfectly general conditions of human life that appear to be common to all human societies: that we are mortal; that we have bodily desires that are difficult both to control and to satisfy; that there is scarcity of material resources, with the distributional problems attendant on that; and so on. Beginning with each of these areas (usually "problem areas"), Aristotle asks, what would good functioning be with respect to that problem? That is how the list of the virtues or excellences is generated. Each excellence is initially specified with reference to the grounding problem, or sphere of experience -- as whatever it would be that would be good functioning and choosing with respect to that area or problem.

If we proceed in this way, it appears, first, that we can have competing accounts of, for example, courage, and still be satisfied that we are inquiring and arguing about one and the same thing. And, second, we can also discover that a particular good functioning has several different concrete cultural realizations, without concluding that there is not a single functioning here. We can then go, if we want, to assess comparatively the different realizations. Aristotle gives us a very nice example of this approach in Politics III, when he says that what all citizens must have is some sort of deliberative and judicial functioning, but that the concrete institutional realization of this varies with the city. In Athens, what we are after will be the function of the assembly-participant and the function of the juror; elsewhere these functions take on different concrete institutional forms, in the context of other

38. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues."

total ways of life. We can respect the integrity of each of these ways of life, without failing to notice that the functionings embodied in each have something very important in common; and Aristotle insists that it is under that common description that they are definitive of citizenship and constitutive, thus, of the good human life.

This point is related to a point made by Sen in one of his discussions of relativism. There he claims that we can hold fixed some quite general list of the human functions (for example, getting an education, or avoiding shame) without denying that what it is and what it takes to be educated and to develop shame-free associations with one's fellow citizens varies a great deal from culture to culture.³⁹ The same point is made by one of the best discussions of public education written in recent years, the report General Education in a Free Society written at Harvard in 1945 by a committee including Paul Buck, John H. Finley, Jr., I.A. Richards, George Wald, and others.⁴⁰ The authors argue (referring explicitly to ancient Greek models) that a national plan for general education should specify in extremely general terms certain capabilities that we wish to develop in all citizens: for example, social awareness and responsiveness, the ability to construct and understand a scientific argument, intellectual and emotional responsiveness to great works of literature, music and art. After discussing these general capabilities at some length, they then argue that it should be left to each local region and institution to specify a curriculum more concretely in these areas, on the basis of concrete reflection about how its particular students, in the context of their particular ways of life, might best realize the capabilities in question.

 39. See Sen, "Poor, Relatively Speaking," in Resources, 325-45. Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues" gives numerous other examples of this.

40. General Education in a Free Society: Report of the Harvard Committee (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1945).

VII Human Functionings: the Common Link⁴¹

But instead of launching into the discussion of specific constituents of the good life and their general and concrete specifications, I want to conclude this paper by speaking briefly of a common link among them. In speaking of good human functioning, we have spoken of a plurality of functionings and a plurality of associated capabilities. It is time now to recognize that Aristotle believes that all of these functionings have something important in common, and that it is with the development of this something that the legislator should most centrally be concerned. This something is the activity of practical reason.

The famous human function argument in the Nicomachean Ethics (I.7) occurs towards the very beginning of a work concerning the good life for a human being, a work that will concern itself with the critical evaluation of proposed constituents of such a life, and with the construction of a best life out of the available constituents. It occurs prior to any detailed discussion of the life's content; it appears to aim at setting some parameters for further discussion, showing the general area in which we will need to search for good functioning. It is associated with the rejection of an extreme form of hedonism that would attempt to construct the good life out of pleasures alone, omitting reasoning altogether. This, Aristotle has said, is tantamount to "choosing the life of dumb grazing animals" (1095b20). That remark suggests that there is, in his view, something less than fully human about a life devoted to pleasure alone, the life that many humans claim to want (1095b19). It seems to leave out something that we think a human life should have. This something is hinted at in the work "choosing", proairoumenoi, namely, the exercise of choice and practical reason. Aristotle suggests that there is something paradoxical about choosing to live without choice. This oddness suggests that the people who express such a view may be not just

 41. For a full discussion, see "Aristotle on Human Nature"; I also discuss this argument in my Aristotle's De Motu Animalium (Princeton 1978) Appendix to Essay 1; but I am no longer happy with what I say there.

wrong by some external standard, but also at odds with their own deeper beliefs: in their way of considering and selecting things, they implicitly ascribe to practical reason a value that the content of their argument denies it.⁴² At any rate, their view is certainly supposed to seem peculiar to the educated person who is following Aristotle's account. It is thus suggested that we might make progress on establishing the central importance of practical reason simply by working with the beliefs people have about who they really are -- i.e. about what lives will and will not count as properly human lives. The "human function" argument that follows attempts to establish some such basis of agreement about the centrality of practical reasoning, a basis from which people of diverse opinions might then proceed to further work on the difficult matter of specifying the good human life.

The passage is introduced by a revealing observation: we agree in saying that eudaimonia is the best, "but there is a strong desire (potheitai) that something clearer should be said about what it is" (1097b22-4). This remark about the limits of agreement refers back to an earlier passage (1095a19 ff.), where Aristotle told us that both the "many and the refined" agree on the name for "the top (akrotaton) of practical goods", namely that it is 'eudaimonia'; and they agree that living well and doing well are the same thing as eudaimonein. "But concerning eudaimonia, as to what it is, they are in disagreement" -- both with one another and, Aristotle points out, each person with himself. This situation of extreme disagreement as to the very "what is it" of the end in view poses grave problems for an ethical inquiry that is going to pursue this "what is it" question, basing itself upon people's beliefs. It is no wonder, then, that in the passage before us Aristotle speaks of an intense desire for a more substantial agreement.

But he now continues in a more optimistic vein: "This (sc. the clearer account) might in fact perhaps come into being, if the function of the human being should be grasped." Aristotle's optimism is, apparently, justified by his discoveries in the

 42. Compare M. Burnyeat, "Can the Skeptic Live His Skepticism," in M. Schofield et al., eds., Doubt and Dogmatism (Oxford 1980).

ensuing passage. For he concludes it with the claim that it has provided an "outline sketch" for the inquiry into the human good, one that can be further articulated and filled in over time, yielding an ethical progress that is analogous to scientific progress (1098a20-26).

The argument itself is difficult and disputed. I analyze it in detail in another paper, with discussion of other interpretations,⁴³ and shall here only summarize the conclusions of that longer analysis. Aristotle begins by making the logical point that the search for good functioning for anything must remain within and be based upon an account of the characteristic activities of that sort of thing, the activities or functionings in virtue of which it is that thing and not some other. Thus the search for an account of good human functioning must begin with an account of characteristic human functioning, just in the way that a treatise on the art of aulos-playing had better begin with an account of what the aulos and aulos-playing are, including the ways in which that instrument and its activities differ from other related instruments and their activities.

Aristotle now argues that a total way or mode of life consisting only in the activities of nutrition and growth, or organized distinctively around those activities, would not count as a human life; so that total mode of life cannot be what we are seeking.⁴⁴ Nor would a life organized around the activity of sense-perception, in which sense-perception was the distinctive and organizing feature, the one that gave the life as a whole its distinctive character or shape. That would be merely an animal life. The truly human life, by contrast, is a life organized by the activity of practical reasoning (1098a3-4: praktikē tis tou logon echontos), in which it is that activity that gives the life

43. "Aristotle on Human Nature."

44. Part of the argument of the longer paper is a detailed textual and philological argument supporting the contention of John Coope (Reason and Human Good in Aristotle, Cambridge MA 1985) that bios must mean (used with an adjective in -ikos) a total way or mode of life, not a single component activity in a life, and a further argument that the same holds true for the analogous construction with zoē, the word actually used in this passage.

as a whole its distinctive shape and tone. (The role of reason would, here, be two-fold: it would have an architectonic role, as what organizes the whole life, providing for its many activities, and it would infuse each activity, causing it to become human, rather than merely vegetative or animal.) This life will have many important components; some will be functionings relating to nutrition and perceiving. Aristotle is not rejecting these as parts of distinctively human functioning. He is saying, however, that they are distinctively human functions only when they are done as parts of a life organized by practical reason and infused with reason's activity. Thus, for example, gobbling one's food in the manner of a wild animal would not be a mode of distinctively human functioning, or a constituent part of a life that as a whole displayed characteristic human activity. The human way to approach food would be to aim, by practical reason, at its appropriate use and enjoyment. The account of the excellence of sōphrosunē mentions that it is the disposition concerned with the regulation of the appetites that humans share with other animals (118a23-5). And though not everyone has a truly virtuous disposition in this area, it is Aristotle's claim that anyone who is to be counted as a human being and a subject of ethical assessment has some reason-infused disposition. Again, the rejection of a "nutritive life" would exclude, as genuinely human functioning, the unguided functioning of the bodily systems in sleep, which could hardly be said to be infused with reason's activity. In fact, Aristotle tells us elsewhere that the sleeper's life is the life of a plant, nothing more (EN 1095b32-1096a2, 1176a34-5, EE 1216a5; the same is true of the embryo at an early stage -- EE 1216a6-8).

So interpreted, the argument about human functioning traces some outlines for the good human life by investigating some shared ideas about humanness. Since no life will count as a good life for a human being unless it is first of all a life for a human being, and since a life for a human being must be a life organized, in some fashion, by practical reason, in which all functionings are informed and infused by reason's organizing activity, the eudaimonia must be sought within the group of such lives, not in a life totally given over to bodily pleasure

without reason, not in the sleeper's life of non-guided digestive functioning, not in the slave's life of coerced and routinized labor. A reflective scrutiny of our most basic values, of our judgments about which functionings are so important to us that we take them to be definitive of who we are, informs us that there is a common notion at the core of all the functions we come up with. Reason is what all the functionings have in common; and this is, as well, the architectonic function that holds them all together. To say so much is, it seems, not to rule out much. But the example of extreme hedonism shows that it is to rule out a serious ethical position, one that Aristotle believes to have strong backing. More to the point for us, given our political interests, it gives some very pointed instructions (albeit general ones) to the lawgiver, telling him that our evaluative beliefs are so strong on this matter of practical reasoning, that a life that lacks this as its guiding element (even if nutritive and other requirements are taken care of) is a life less than human. Thus it has no chance at all of being good human functioning, and thus no chance at all of satisfying the criteria of good political arrangement.

The central task of the city will, then, be to give its people (all the ones who can lead such lives, in the sense of B-capability) the conditions of fully human living: living in which the essential functionings according to reason will be available. This means, don't just give out food and allow people to "graze": make it possible for people to choose to regulate their nutrition by their own reason.⁴⁵ Don't just take care of their perceptual needs in a mechanical way, producing a seeing eye, a hearing ear, etc, Instead, make it possible for people to

45. The implications of this for food relief policy need to be considered. It might, for example, be argued that this is a point in favor of cash-relief and/or work-relief programs and against direct food grants. on the grounds that the former integrate the giving of food into a reasoned mode of human activity and treat the subject of distribution as an active reasoning being, not just as a vegetative being. For a comprehensive consideration of argument relating to these questions, see J. Drèze and A. Sen, eds., Hunger: Economics and Policy, a four-volume work forthcoming from Clarendon Press. See also Sen, Hunger and Entitlements: Research for Action, a WIDER pamphlet publication, 1987.

use their bodies and their senses in a truly human way. And don't make all this available in a minimal way: make it possible to do these things well.

We could usefully compare to this the ideas about fully human functioning expressed by Marx in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844. Many actual forms of human life, he observes, bring it about that human beings perform their various functionings in a merely animal way. Since the worker lacks choice and control over his own activity, "in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal." He eats, drinks, procreates in a way that is separated from choice; thus, though these "are also genuinely human functions," he is performing in an animal way. Again: his senses, if used without a certain freedom of choice and freedom from the pressure of immediate want, will be used in a merely animal manner:

It is obvious that the human eye gratifies itself in a way different from the crude, non-human eye; the human ear from the crude ear, etc...The sense caught up in crude practical need has only a restricted sense. For the starving man, it is not the human form of food that exists, but only its abstract being as food; it could just as well be there in its crudest form, and it would be impossible to say wherein this feeding-activity differs from that of animals.⁴⁶

This passage develops, I think, two points that are Aristotle's:⁴⁷ that truly human living requires performing all

46. K. Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, trans.

47. For a fine discussion both of Marx's debt to Aristotle and of the similarities between their views, see G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, The Class Struggle in the Ancient World (London 1981), esp. 69 ff., but throughout. De Ste. Croix points out that Marx was intensively reading the Politics during the years 1843-5, and argues that the work was a "seminal influence" in the development of his theory of class struggle (pp. 55-6). If I am right, we also see Aristotle's influence in the formulation of his account of truly human functioning, written just at this time. And Marx's shift in allegiance from the Hellenistic philosophers to Aristotle dramatizes the profound difference between the major Hellenistic positions, with their emphasis on the acquisition of self-sufficiency through the management and transformation of desire and thought, and the Aristotelian position, with its emphasis on the necessity of material and institutional conditions for good functioning, and indeed for good thinking and desiring.

one's natural activities in a way infused by human choice and rationality; and that the capability to function in this human way is not automatically open to all humans, but must be created for them (brought forward from more rudimentary capabilities) by material and social conditions. There are, obviously, many differences in the way these conditions are understood and described -- not the least of which is that Aristotle at times shrinks back from what might be the revolutionary implications of some of his statements into the position that we owe this treatment only to those who have already managed to get a certain part of the way towards capability. But it seems to me that a political theory that developed the implications of these statements without shrinking could justifiably call itself Aristotelian. It seems to me that it would be worth our while to work out this view.⁴⁸

 48. This paper was presented at the Oberlin Philosophy Colloquium in April 1986; this version owes much to comments delivered by David Charles on that occasion. I am also grateful, for other criticisms, to audiences at the Ockham Society, Oxford, at the University of Edinburgh, the University of York, and King's College, London. A version of this paper formed part of a series of lectures I delivered at several universities in the People's Republic of China in the spring of 1987; the intellectual exchange with Chinese philosophers, and the experience as a whole, played an important role in my further thought on this subject. The research involved in revising the paper during 1987 was supported by the World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER), Helsinki, and I am most grateful to the community there for the supportive and stimulating atmosphere it provided. I am especially grateful to Amartya Sen for many discussions on these questions.

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