

Power and Friendship:
Plato and Aristotle on Rule in Interpersonal Relationships

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A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Philosophy

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts (Philosophy) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

25 March, 2007

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ABSTRACT

Power and Friendship:

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Zoli Filotas

This thesis explores rule or power [*archein*] in Plato and Aristotle's discussions of interpersonal relationships. I argue that the collectives and communities that are for both thinkers the most important elements of the social world are necessarily structured by power. To see this gives us a better grasp of the relationship between parts of ancient thought that are too often kept apart, and allows us to make sense of the point of view that sees them as continuous with each other.

I begin with Plato. His dialogues describe rule as a crucial object of philosophical study, run through with puzzles. Social problems are for Plato best understood by studying both the city and the soul as composite wholes made up of hierarchically arranged parts. And all this theory is realized dramatically in the character of Socrates. Chapter two focuses on what might now seem a puzzle. Aristotle claims that men rule over their wives by nature, but also that they can be virtue friends, which for him implies that they are equal. Using marriage as a case study, I show that for Aristotle there is no tension between equality and rule. Along the way, we see that, in his characteristic systematic manner, Aristotle develops many of the same theoretical materials as Plato. In my final pages, I suggest that modern political discourse's focus on equality makes it difficult to see the importance of rule. I suggest that the views of Plato and Aristotle can therefore make an important contribution to contemporary ethical thought.

Acknowledgements

When I came back to school to study philosophy, two of my first professors were in the Political Science department at Simon Fraser university. In David Laycock's "History of Political Theory," I wrote a term paper on Hobbes; in Lealle Ruhl's "Radical Political Theory," I wrote on Foucault. These courses and their wonderful teachers are jointly responsible for starting me on the line of thought that led to this project.

Marguerite Deslauriers's 2006 seminar on Aristotle was one of the best I have ever attended, unfailingly clear, intellectually exciting, and politically meaningful. This thesis is built directly on the ideas I worked with there. All too often, I have struggled toward a partial insight, only to find something similar but much better, fully developed in her work. I hope to work with her more closely as I continue this project.

I am deeply grateful to the entire faculty at Concordia University—I could scarcely imagine a more hospitable environment to do my MA. The professors on my committee deserve special thanks. It has been a joy to benefit from Matthias Fritsch's intelligence, generosity, and astonishing gift for teaching. I was very excited to have the privilege of working with my advisor, Justin Smith, whose wit, verve, and philosophical sense will long remain models for me. Finally, when Andrea Falcon arrived at Concordia, this project was already underway. He has since not only come fully on board, but also become a mentor. I cannot say enough to thank him for his profound knowledge of ancient philosophy, and for the boundless generosity and care he has offered me over the past two years.

This is an essay on friends, family, and *ēros*. Over the months I have worked on this project, I have been blessed with regards to all three. My relationship with Heather McDonald began around the same time as my work on Aristotle and marriage, and no one has been closer to me, or given me more joy, through the project's ups and downs. Her kindness, creativity, and love have been an inspiration, day after day. Thank you also to my friends Kevin Davis and Ian Fryer for many bracing philosophical conversations. And finally, my deepest love and thanks to my parents, Les and Judy Filotas, who have supported me from the very beginning. Throughout my work on this project, as ever, their guidance, friendship, and virtue have been precious to me.

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Introduction

I

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle celebrates what he calls the friendship of virtue, in which the best people share each other's most admirable qualities, and each pursues the other's good for its own sake. The friendship of virtue may be, as one commentator suggests, the "highest summit" of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the culmination of a theory tying character and community to the best life for human beings.¹ If, however, the discussion of friendship in books VIII and IX shows us the pinnacle of the good human life, we must look to Book I of the *Politics* to find its foundations. There we learn that the "first growth and origin" of the *polis* is a man's power or rule [*archein*] over his wife and slaves (1252a24-28).²

This essay explores the conception of rule in interpersonal relationships in the works of Plato and Aristotle. It is a conception that shows the ties between the friendships described in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII and IX and the relations of power in Book I of the *Politics*. This connection is too often ignored. Although Aristotle's discussion of friendship has through the centuries been among his most admired, and his views on slavery and the inferiority of women have recently attracted a great deal of attention, I do not know of any extended inquiry into the relationship between them. Aristotle, however, gives us good reasons to consider the two discussions together. Not

¹ Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 7.

² Throughout this essay, I rely on the translations in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941). I also frequently consulted Terrence Irwin's translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (2nd ed. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999).

least, he says repeatedly and explicitly that politics and ethics make up a single study (1094a27-b11, 1181b13-24), and he specifically includes friendships within the household—that is, between men and their wives, slaves, and children—as part of his more general discussion of friendship (*EN* VIII 12).³ Evidently, if we want to know how Aristotle thinks his intended listeners, Athens’s elite, ought to interact both with each other and with the various and sundry other members of the *polis*, we may learn a lot by illuminating his discussion of friendship with that of ruling one’s household, and vice versa.⁴

One reason that modern readers are not inclined to do so is that even as we profess to acknowledge Aristotle’s claims that ethics and politics make up one study, we discuss them in separate books, store them on different library shelves, and teach them in isolated university departments—for the most part, we cannot help but see friendship as a moral relationship, and slavery and marriage as political institutions. One goal of this paper is to show how concepts that have since come under the purview of political theory are for both Plato and Aristotle perfectly at home in the ethical world. A second reason the two discussions are rarely connected is that while many scholars admire Aristotle’s comments about friendship, it has thankfully become impossible—at least, I take it, in the philosophical community—to agree openly with what he says about women and slaves. And so, discussions of the first book of the *Politics* tend to run in one of two directions.

³ Recent discussions of the link between Aristotle’s politics and his ethics include Malcolm Schofield’s “Aristotle’s Political Ethics” in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* (edited by Richard Kraut, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), which argues that the discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* takes for granted a political context—its virtues are not just human, but civic virtues. Judith A. Swanson follows the connection in the other direction in *The Public and the Private in Aristotle’s Political Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), which argues that the *polis* is for the sake of interpersonal relationships.

⁴ The *Eudemian Ethics* does not seem to have the same connections with the *Politics* as their *Nicomachean* counterpart. The former work, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

Scholars who approve of Aristotle typically see the discussion of rule as inconsistent with the rest of his philosophy.⁵ According to many such scholars, the culture of ancient Athens blinded him to the implications of his own thought, and the best reaction to his claims about women and slaves is to replace them with others that fit better with the more palatable parts of his philosophy. An opposing camp tries to show that the domination of women and slaves not only coheres with, but indeed follows from, the rest of Aristotle's work. Aristotelianism, on this account, is irredeemably flawed, and we must reject it root and branch.⁶

Both of these approaches split Aristotle into independent good and bad parts, and this is surely less than ideal. Since Aristotle sees friendship and rule as subsections of a highly unified inquiry, one of our goals as interpreters should be to come to terms with the point of view that can see them this way.⁷ This, I believe, requires acknowledging

⁵ The body of more or less neo-Aristotelian literature is vast—here I will name only a few of the best known texts, and of those, only a few most closely related to my thesis. One strand seeks to reconcile Aristotle with Kant (e.g. Christine Korsgaard's "Creating the Kingdom of Ends: Responsibility and Reciprocity in Personal Relations" in *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996]). Another, on the contrary, finds in Aristotle an alternative to liberalism; see Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). Following MacIntyre under the banner of "virtue ethics" are such thinkers as Martha Nussbaum in *Love's Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) and Rosalind Hursthouse in *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). These make a great deal of the importance of interpersonal relationships, both in the good life and in the *polis*, and the role of emotions and situation-specific reasoning therein. They also say a great deal about moral education, which is a paradigm case of rule. Nevertheless, I do not know of any that stress the general importance of power relationships in Aristotelian ethics.

⁶ See Judith Green, "Aristotle on Necessary Verticality, Body Heat, and Gendered Proper Places in the *Polis*" (*Hypatia* 7.1 [Winter 1992]: 70-96). Versions of both approaches I discuss here have been well explored by feminist philosophers. See the introduction to *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*, edited by Cynthia A. Freeland (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), as well as essays throughout the volume.

⁷ The solution to the problem is not to eschew evaluation altogether. Although it is often best that the philosopher and the historian remain circumspect about their views, it is difficult if not impossible to keep evaluation entirely at bay. To cast an Aristotelian argument as cogent is to some extent to endorse it; to show that it entails unacceptable views—including views that, granted our moral and political situation, no contemporary reader will accept—is surely to condemn it.

how difficult history has made it for us to see things as Aristotle did. As I try to show in what follows, the temptation to split Aristotle into good and bad parts is not simply the result of a difference of opinion—we agree with some claims, but disagree with others—but a result of the historical distance between Aristotle and us. Aristotle’s understanding of the interpersonal, I will argue, depends on a very particular conceptual framework, one in which all cooperative activity presupposes that one party rules or exercises power over the other. In this framework, central concepts mean different things and function differently than they typically do for us. In particular, the concept of equality is so different that it is fair to say that our conception of it is entirely absent from Aristotle’s thought.

What is our conception of equality in interpersonal relationships, the one with which I want to contrast Aristotle’s views? I find it doubtful that everyone (or even, say, all educated North American non-philosophers) shares an implicit theory of interpersonal relationships, or that if we did, a philosophical text could capture it. But it is nevertheless surely fair to say that mainstream moral discourse is predominantly liberal. This, I take it, is partly to say that it includes a conception of equality that instructs us to grant all people equal moral worth.⁸ Certainly, few people, at least in the academic community, would

⁸ One of the difficulties of sorting out modern conceptions of equality in interpersonal relationships is that as I have already suggested, this view is most often and most famously expressed in political or legal discussions, rather than in moral philosophy. See Ronald Dworkin *Taking Rights Seriously* [London : Duckworth, 1977], Will Kymlicka *Contemporary Political Philosophy* [2nd ed, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], and Bernard Williams, “The Idea of Equality,” in *In the Beginning Was the Deed* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005]). Nearly everyone involved agrees that the discussion is confused, and that equality admits a sometimes bewildering variety of interpretations.

Christine Korsgaard notes the paucity of philosophical studies of interpersonal relationships in her “Making the Kingdom of Ends” (*op cit.*). On her account, Kantian reciprocity (a form of which she falsely attributes to Aristotle), amounts to equality, but she does not spell out why this is so.

In the chapter on Aristotle, I contrast his view, according to which equality presupposes difference, with the tendency of liberal thought to base equality on sameness. I first discovered this contrast in Wendy Brown, “Liberalism’s Family Values,” in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). She owes a great deal to Catharine MacKinnon’s much more

agree with Aristotle's view that some people are, in morally relevant respects, better than others, and by that very fact entitled and indeed obligated to rule over them.⁹

However we understand its content, there can be little doubt that contemporary Western moral thought has been heavily influenced by Christianity and by Enlightenment liberalism. How does Aristotle figure in this story? The approach I propose is very different from a prominent body of literature, perhaps best exemplified by the work of Arthur Adkins. Adkins places Aristotle, along with his teacher Plato, at the crossroads between the archaic ethics of Homer and modern moral theory. On Adkins's account, we find in Plato and Aristotle shaky steps toward the concepts that would later become central to moral thought: the unified, rational agent; cooperation rather than competition; abstract, universal considerations; and so on.¹⁰ Adkins's basic approach is so widespread that even some of his most passionate critics also find in Plato and Aristotle a turn from archaic ethics toward something more modern.¹¹

exhaustive treatment in *Toward a Feminist Theory of State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). Also very helpful is Marguerite Deslauriers, "Two Conceptions of Inequality and Natural Difference" in *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 37:4 (2004).

⁹ Something closer to Aristotle's view, in which the social world is fundamentally shaped by power relationships, has in the past fifty years gained some currency in parts of the philosophical community. Discussions along these lines typically have roots in Nietzsche's doctrine of the will to power; one sophisticated expression is Michel Foucault "The Subject and Power" in *The Essential Foucault* (edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas S. Rose. New York: New Press, 2003). Foucault, however, is very reluctant to ask the question which we will find in Aristotle: granted the ubiquity of power, how should we act?

¹⁰ Arthur Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960). Similarly, Gregory Vlastos (e.g., "The Individual as Love Object in Plato" in *Platonic Studies* [Second Printing. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981]) finds in Plato and Aristotle a turning point toward what he describes as Christian morality.

A related debate, which has by now mostly passed into oblivion, begins with Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (5th ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966). Popper finds Plato (and, to a lesser extent, Aristotle) at the roots of twentieth-century fascism; others consider him something like a liberal. The debate is anthologized in *Plato: Totalitarian or Democrat* (edited by Thomas Landon Thorson, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

¹¹ Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). See also his "Pagan Justice and Christian Love" in *A Sense of the Past* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006).

I do not exactly disagree with these readings. Surely many aspects of Aristotle's work do point toward modern forms of moral thought. But in this project I will stress the other side of the story, the many ways that—notwithstanding the sea changes that concern Adkins and others—Aristotle's thought remains foreign from ours. When historians seek out the origins of contemporary concepts, they too often suppose that these origins will reveal something fundamental or essential. But as Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault have well argued, historical beginnings typically contain not the driving truth or original purity of concepts, but a tangle of materials that have since been reappropriated, abandoned, and cobbled together piecemeal.¹²

To recognize some of the ways that otherness runs through even the most familiar parts of Aristotle's work—even those which would eventually lead to Christianity and liberalism—is thus both to grasp an under-recognized truth about his philosophy, and to get a more realistic grasp on our complicated historical relationship with his work.

Williams disagrees with a number of Adkin's specific claims (on his account, for example, it is Plato that begins the *fragmentation* of the person, by separating body and soul), but more generally he argues that archaic Greek ethics survive in some strands of our thought, and these ought to replace the Christian and Kantian, developments.

¹² Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *The Essential Foucault*, edited by Paul Rabinow and Nikolas S. Rose (New York: New Press, 2003). Foucault bases his work on that of Nietzsche, especially *The Genealogy of Morals* (the standard translation is Walter Kaufman [New York: Vintage Books, 1989]). Foucault writes specifically about the ancients in *The Use of Pleasure* (translated by Robert Hurley, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), which he sometimes describes as an attempt to do the genealogy of ethics, understood as a relation of the self to the self. But the most thorough applications of Foucauldian genealogy to ancient philosophy are in David Halperin's *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and its follow-up, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Halperin is concerned, above all, with the genealogical study of sexuality. None of these works says much about the concepts with which I am occupied here, namely, equality and the legitimate use of power.

II

I should say something about this project's scope. For although this is a thesis on Aristotle, I am about to commit a sizable part of my discussion to Plato, and I will also promise to say something about contemporary implications of Aristotle's views. This may seem like an inquiry suited for volumes rather than a few short chapters. There is a sense in which this is true—certainly I will not say everything which I might. But (as I will argue more fully in my first chapter) my topic is narrower than it may appear. Rule is of extraordinary importance for both Plato and Aristotle, but rule in interpersonal relationships—my concern here—is a secondary discussion, and quite a small one. This is not because these thinkers treat rule as a political rather than an ethical concept, but because interpersonal relationships are on the conceptual periphery of theories focused on what we might call the intrapsychic and the intrapolitical, the dynamics of the city and the soul.¹³

Thus, this thesis follows one narrow thread through Aristotle's thought. I focus on rule in interpersonal relationships not because it is a central concern for Aristotle, but because it ties together two discussions he thought belonged together and which we are today inclined to separate.

In both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, Aristotle makes it clear that he is developing and responding to ideas laid out by Plato, especially in the *Lysis* and the

¹³ So-called communitarian readings of the ancients stress the intrapolitical stream; others, like Foucault's *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (edited by Frédéric Gros, translated by Graham Burchell, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), stress the intrapsychic.

Republic.¹⁴ Chapter one of this thesis shows how Plato erects the scaffolding for Aristotle's discussion of rule in interpersonal relationships. After setting the scene with a discussion of the *Lysis*, I argue that the *Republic* establishes a framework—based on the harmonious operation of the parts of composite wholes—which gives rule or power a central evaluative place. This will turn out to be the same framework upon which Aristotle builds his discussion of interpersonal relationships in general and of rule in particular.¹⁵

I then turn to Plato's so-called erotic dialogues, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. These, Plato's most direct discussions of interpersonal relationships, are based on *paiderastia*, a highly polarized relationship, centrally built on rule. I argue that although Plato takes issue with many aspects of this relationship, the changes he suggests are anything but egalitarian.¹⁶

Finally, I turn to the drama of the dialogues. Plato studies the power of the one partner over the other, and there uncovers a series of philosophical riddles. But these emerge only partly in the positions Plato assigns to his character, Socrates. This is

¹⁴ For a point-by-point analysis showing how the *Nicomachean Ethics*'s account of friendship responds to the *Lysis*, see Julia Annas, "Plato and Aristotle on Friendship and Altruism," *Mind*, New Series, 86:344 (1977): 532-54. On the connection between the *Republic* and Book II of *Politics*, see Robert Mayhew, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997). I am particularly indebted to Mayhew for his treatment of whole-part relationships in Aristotle.

¹⁵ There is an overwhelming body of secondary literature about the *Republic*. Much of my discussion relies on G.R.F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato's Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

¹⁶ Again, there is a great deal of literature on both dialogues. Much work on the *Phaedrus* subordinates Socrates' speeches on love to his later points on discourse (e.g. Rona Burger, *Plato's Phaedrus: A Defense of a Philosophical Art of Writing* [University: University of Alabama Press, 1980]). A useful general discussion is G.R.F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). On both the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, I find much both to agree and disagree with in Martha Nussbaum's *Fragility of Goodness* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Useful on the role of asymmetry in the *Symposium* is David Halperin, "Why is Diotima a Woman?" (in *Before Sexuality*, edited by David Halperin, John Winkler, and Froma Zeitlin. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

because Socrates—for all his virtue and for all that Plato admires him—is himself ineffectual and even irresponsible in the way he exercises power in the *polis*. Plato's depiction of Socrates thus strongly suggests a critique of Socratic rule. Indeed it is perhaps the character of Socrates who most fully realizes the problems to which Aristotle strives to find a solution.¹⁷ Throughout my discussion of Plato, I argue that he makes rule the site of a complex of puzzles or *aporiai*. It is an approach that, for all the similarities between the two discussions, contrasts sharply with Aristotle's systematic discussion.

Chapter two, my treatment of Aristotle, begins with what might strike many modern readers as a contradiction. On the one hand, he claims that husbands and wives can have a friendship of virtue, which for him means they are equal; but on the other, he says that men rule over their wives by nature. The solution—essentially, that for Aristotle equality does not conflict with rule—brings us to the heart of my analysis. Aristotle, I claim, constructs a systematic account of social life within which the exercise of power is unavoidable, and within which the elite do not ask whether they should rule over their inferiors, but how they should do so. I argue that we can only see how Aristotle thinks of this question by first exploring a number of central concepts: equality, freedom, community, unity, and rule. These fit together into a picture of social life and interpersonal relationships that is profoundly illiberal.

¹⁷ My discussion draws rather indirectly from a trend in Plato scholarship that pays close attention to the dramatic context of Plato's dialogues, and distances the character of Socrates from Plato. This mode of interpretation was begun more or less singlehandedly by Leo Strauss in *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964). Friedrich Nietzsche was, if not the first, then certainly the most memorable philosophical critic of Socrates (*Twilight of the Idols* in *The Portable Nietzsche* (edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann, revised edition, London: Chatto & Windus, 1971).

My final pages open up a discussion on the contemporary significance of Aristotle's ethics of rule. Earlier, I said that to focus on the strangeness of Aristotle's view is to recognize something important about history. Just as importantly, the right kind of historical study can open the door to a critique of contemporary practice. Some such critique is sorely needed. Part of the reason it was difficult, a few pages ago, to characterize "our" conception of equality, is that equality is used to justify any number of acts and policies, invoked not only to support various economic programs, but to overthrow everything from governments to affirmative action programs. Discourse about equality can be used to justify just about anything, and it is a powerful political tool partly because it is often quite empty.¹⁸

In Aristotle's view, however, equality (in its modern sense) is unnecessary for—and even potentially an obstacle to—justice or friendship. Furthermore, Aristotle sees power (which is nowadays often seen as incompatible with equality) as an essential and unavoidable aspect of the social world. We need only consider the institutions that shape our lives—families, workplaces, the academy—to see that he is right that we spend much of our lives leading or being led by others. And there is also something right about his stronger view: that even in friendships between equals, the partners nevertheless rule over each other, perhaps taking turns as in the government of Athens.

These observations lead to a question: We constantly find ourselves empowered, encouraged, and compelled to influence or direct others, to exercise power—What, then, should we do? How should one rule? It is a question that Aristotle asks, and to which he gives a singularly unsatisfying answer. He gives us materials, however, that may be quite

¹⁸ For a highly readable, if slightly superficial account of how abstract principles like equality are often misused along these lines, see Stanley Fish, *The Trouble With Principle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

valuable. Plato and Aristotle, I believe, insist on questions that we should take very seriously. Of course I cannot answer them fully in this project. But maybe it is appropriate for a thesis beginning with Socrates to end not with a period but with a question mark.

CHAPTER 1 - Plato

I

Plato's *Lysis* is a dialogue about friendship, but it begins with a discussion of slavery and rule. In its opening pages, Socrates learns that a certain Hippothales is in love with a well-born and spectacularly good-looking boy by the name of Lysis.¹ Socrates enters the *palaestra*, a wrestling school, where the two often gather with the rest of their group. He lures Lysis over with the promise of conversation.

Socrates asks Lysis about his parents. Since they love him, mustn't they allow him to do whatever he wants? Lysis has to admit that, on the contrary, they place him under any number of restrictions. He may not drive the family chariot or spin the loom; he can't even whip the lowly donkey. To add insult to injury, his parents freely allow women and slaves to perform these tasks. And worst of all, Lysis himself—freeborn, beautiful, and intelligent though he may be—has his own person controlled by teachers and slaves. "It looks," Socrates says, "like your father has decided to put quite a few masters and dictators over you." Lysis' life amounts in sum to a "perpetual condition of servitude" (208d1-e3).

Socrates invites Lysis to join him in a brief fantasy in which he turns the tables and rules over not only his father and his neighbours, but all of Athens, and even the Great King of Asia (209c5- 210c5). But Socrates harshly reminds him that this is only fantasy—Lysis is still under the care of teachers; he is therefore still "thoughtless." If he had the right knowledge, he could rule anyone he liked; as is, he is not only unqualified to rule, but it is doubtful whether his parents love him after all (210c5-d9).

¹ I rely on the translations of David Bolotin (*Plato's Dialogue on Friendship* [Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1979]) and of Stanley Lombardo, in *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 687-707.

Socrates, then, says that Lysis is effectively a slave, but that under the right conditions, he could rule the world. It is clear that Socrates is evoking rule to appeal to Lysis' ego and to convince him, among other things, that he should build his life around knowledge and the good. But these pedagogical and philosophical goals must not distract us from how much we can learn from the exchange taken on its own.

We may begin by noting that hierarchy and competition pervade the *Lysis*, as they do much else in Greek society. It is significant, for example, that the dialogue is set in a wrestling school, and more significantly still that there is "much strife" in Lysis and Menexenus' friendship concerning which boy is older, which is nobler, and so on (207b9-c11).² But it is one thing to better your friend in competition, and quite another to dream of making him your slave. The Greek tendency toward agonism cannot by itself account for Socrates' focus on rule.

Socrates' discussion with Lysis, and its location at the beginning of a dialogue on friendship, draws our attention to what Plato evidently sees as a pervasive fact about the social world, one that applies not just to family relationships but also to the friendships that will occupy the rest of the dialogue. Our relationships, Plato is reminding us, often mandate that one party rule—or as we might prefer to say, exercise power—over the other. In some relationships, like Lysis' subordination to his parents and his guardians, one dictates what the other may and may not do. In others, including those that Socrates himself seems to be cultivating, the ruler can do much more, and even mould the life the other will live, the kind of person he or she will become.

² A great deal has been written about competition in ancient Greece. For a strong version, see Bernard Knox, "Always to Be Best: The Competitive Spirit in Ancient Greek Culture" (Professor J. Rouman Classical Lecture Series. University of New Hampshire, Durham, October 13, 1999. <http://www.helleniccomserve.com/images/Knox%20Lecture.pdf> Accessed 23 Feb. 2007.) "Agonism," Knox writes, was the Greeks' "national characteristic as long as they were a free people."

It is clear that to a great extent Plato takes this dynamic for granted. He does not need to argue that social relationships are everywhere shaped by power; rather, he shows us a world of kings and slaves, guardians and their charges, and assumes that we will recognize it. Consider, for example, the lovestruck Hippothales, whom Socrates thinks should be ruling over Lysis, but is instead completely in his thrall. His character helps to show that while Plato seems to take the ubiquitous *existence* of power relationships for granted, he certainly does not think that they are all as they should be. David Bolotin has convincingly argued that one of Socrates' goals in the *Lysis* is to reform the ways power is exercised in Athens. As Socrates ironically calls into question Lysis' parents' love for their son, he is also quite seriously questioning their authority. As Bolotin writes:

Socrates' vision of rule by the wise is in radical opposition to the belief that men should look up to their ancestors or the ancestral gods for guidance in how to live. If Socrates is correct that everyone, or at least everyone aware of his own best interest, will accept Lysis' rule once he has become wise, it must be assumed that all men are not yet adequately ruled or cared for by anyone.³

It is no accident, then, that just before the *Lysis* ends, Socrates and Lysis try to "drive away" the guardian who has come to take Lysis home (223a7), nor that the citizens of Athens would later accuse him of impiety and of corrupting their youth.

Socrates' practical, political agenda is yoked to a philosophical one. In the exchange with Lysis, Plato uncovers a number of puzzles or *aporia* about rule. Two sets of puzzles emerge. The first puzzle connects rule to the good. Strangely, for example, sometimes slaves rule over Lysis, a free citizen. More strangely still, this is apparently for the best. How, Socrates is asking, can we square this with the common sense view that

³ David Bolotin, *Plato's Dialogue on Friendship* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1979), 85.

the best should rule? The second set of puzzles connects rule and freedom. Lysis is permitted *some* tasks—he may, for example, play the lyre and write letters for his parents. Socrates points out that in a way he can do them as he likes: he can decide what order to write down letters, and whether to play the lyre with a plectrum or with his fingers. But this is obviously very far from the licence Lysis imagines when he thinks of rule. For if Lysis wrote unintelligibly or played out of tune, his parents would immediately withdraw these privileges. And if, as Socrates argues, rule is connected to knowledge and to arts that can be done either well or badly, similar restrictions will apply to all rulers. How can it be that the knowledge that puts us in a position to rule also simultaneously puts us under a new set of constraints?

Such questions, we will see, are at the heart of Plato's treatment of interpersonal ethics, and they make up the background for Aristotle's treatment of both friendship and the household. However, while the *Lysis* is a dialogue about friendship, it barely mentions how friends ought to treat each other. Socrates is instead concerned with rather more abstract questions: whether friends are alike or opposite; whether unrequited affection is enough to make a friend; and so on. I set these aside. To glimpse how the theme of rule fits into Plato's thought more broadly, we must instead turn to the *Republic*.

II

The *Republic*, Socrates famously reminds us, is not about some chance matter, but about how one should live. This is to say that (in addition to various other goals) it seeks to illuminate what contemporary philosophers call normative ethics. Remarkably, in this light, the *Republic* says almost nothing about how we should treat other people, focusing

instead on how to order our cities and our souls. Plato makes a point of showing us that this approach does not come naturally for at least a few of Socrates' interlocutors. Recall that the dialogue's wheels start turning when Socrates finds a definition of justice implicit in the ruminations of a pious old man: justice seems for Cephalus to amount to repaying debts and to telling people the truth. Socrates dismisses this definition with a counterexample. Polemarchus chimes in with another definition, that to act justly is to help one's friends and to harm one's enemies (331b-332d), and this is dispensed with almost as quickly as the first. These pre-philosophical approaches are both based on how we should act around others, and they contrast sharply with another approach, which begins to emerge when Thrasymachus bursts into the conversation.⁴

Justice, Thrasymachus roars, is "the rule of the strongest." When Socrates insists that he spell this out, Thrasymachus introduces two of the *Republic*'s most central topics: the *polis* and rule. Different kinds of *polis*, he claims, are ruled by different kinds of people, or by different social elements, and whichever element rules is the strongest. So far, Socrates agrees readily. But Thrasymachus continues. Rulers, he says, invent the requirements of justice and impose them on others to serve their own interests; it follows that only fools and weaklings are just (338d4-339a3).

Socrates, of course, dedicates the rest of his discussion to refuting this view. But in doing so, he accepts its basic focus; in particular, he never returns to the interpersonal approach of Cephalus and Polemarchus. Why does Plato write this seeming change of subject into the dialogue?

⁴ On the importance of Book I of the *Republic*, see Mark Gifford, "Dramatic Dialectic in *Republic* Book I" in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 20 (2001), 35-106.

It is worth repeating a note sounded in the introduction: Thrasymachus introduces the theme of rule through reference to the *polis*, but in the Greek context, this cannot be because rule is exclusively political. Indeed, we have seen in the *Lysis* that an inquiry into rule can focus just on individuals' power over individual others. Indeed, it is a note sounded throughout the opening pages of the *Republic* that rule extends beyond questions of ethics into such fields as medicine "To produce health," Socrates says, "is to establish the components of the body in a natural relation of control and being controlled, one by another, while to produce disease is to establish a relation of ruling and being ruled contrary to nature" (444d3-5). Thus in introducing both rule and the *polis*, Thrasymachus is introducing two distinct topics which are not self-evidently linked.

For Thrasymachus, rule over a *polis* may be a special case just because few can be as fully or deliciously wicked as tyrants are. But as Socrates reveals in his immediate answers to Thrasymachus, he takes rule in politics to be important for at least three additional reasons.

The first develops a theme we've already seen in the *Lysis*, namely that rulers (insofar as they are really rulers) are not free, but bound to act in the interest of those they rule. It follows that rule is a burden, and does not provide freedom for the ruler to pursue his (or, less likely, her) own ends (342a-e, 346e-347a). This puzzle is of course developed at great length through the figure of the philosopher king.

The second is new to our discussion. Socrates points out that if Thrasymachus really thinks injustice is better than justice, then he must admire not just the injustice of individual tyrants, but also the potentially greater injustice of collectives: bands of thieves, armies, and rogue *poleis*. To understand power, Socrates is saying, is in important part to

understand collective action, which necessarily involves cooperation and trust, i.e. the barest form of justice (351b4-d5). Since one of the best ways to get into a position of rule is precisely to participate in a collective, a study of rule must extend beyond the individual, toward larger groups, and thus toward the *polis*.⁵

But this is not all. Plato is also gradually moving towards a method of ethical inquiry that, because of its familiarity, surely seems more natural than it is: the famous analogy of city and soul. Studying justice in the individual, Socrates claims, is like reading tiny print from a distance. The justice of the city, on the other hand, is much more readable, like big writing on a large surface. Thus to read the small we must study the big and then compare.

Adeimantius is not at first convinced that this analogy fits (368d9-e1), and understandably so. At first sight it seems downright absurd to agree with Socrates that the difference in size between the *polis* and the individual could make the latter easier to study than the former, especially when it comes to intangibles like justice. As we follow Socrates through the discussion, his proposal becomes more puzzling still, because he does not simply use the city as a way to get at justice in the individual. On the contrary, he describes the best city (along with various other cities) in great enough detail that its study is clearly one of the main goals of the dialogue.

John Ferrari has argued convincingly that the main goal of this puzzling tactic is to exploit the difference in scale between *polis* and individual in a way that does not reduce either object to the other, but allows us to learn something new about both. We are swallowed up in cities, he writes, and readily see the division and conflict that run

⁵ Bernard Williams, "Plato Against the Immoralist" in *A Sense of the Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 97-107. For helpful general discussion of the exchange with Thrasymachus, see Terence Irwin, *Plato's Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 174-180

through them. Thus if we keep the nature of the city in mind when we turn to the individual, we see more readily that the self is not simply a unit, but is made up of parts, some wildly different from the others. This is the sense in which the large writing of the *polis* can teach us something about ourselves.

But this is only half of the lesson Plato wants to teach us, for we should also apply the analogy in the other direction. Because we are intimately familiar with the lives of individuals, “compressing the moral character of a city into the compass of a single human soul,” allows us to see the city as a unity. This, for Plato, must be the perspective of the legislator, who should never let the good of this or that social group eclipse the good of the *polis* taken entire.⁶

Ferrari, however, does not seem to recognize that this approach implies a very particular style of interpretation. The analogy allows us to see the partition of the individual and the wholeness of the city, and this is to say it allows us to see *both* as composite wholes. And this leads us, at last, to the third and most important reason why Socrates is willing to follow Thrasymachus in linking rule to the *polis*.

The analogy allows us to judge cities and people in various ways, but perhaps the most important is with regard to rule. Complex wholes are capable of a number of special qualities: their parts can be harmoniously organized or not; they can function smoothly, imperfectly, or not at all. One of Socrates’ primary assumptions in making this kind of evaluation is that in a composite whole, some part always rules, and this ought to be the best part. Thus a crucial question in interpreting composite structures, like city and soul, is of what should rule. As is well known, Socrates provides a detailed answer, sketching

⁶ G.R.F. Ferrari, *City and Soul in Plato’s Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), esp. 77-78.

out the qualities of both individuals and cities when they are ruled by their worse as well as their better parts. Plato's answer, of course, crucially involves access to the truth and the Good, via reason. And here collectivity re-enters the picture. For one remarkable feature of Callipolis is that processes that we typically think of as individual can be done collectively.⁷ Specifically, the guardians may reason for the less philosophically inclined workers, creating a strange kind of split agent, where the rational parts of some people can control the desires of others (431c9).

The question of who should rule gets much more attention in the literature than a second question that is no less important, namely how rule ought to be exercised. The importance of this question is surely one of the main points of Socrates' extended comparison of the human soul to a creature composed of an enormous (appetitive) many-headed monster, a medium-sized (spirited) lion, and a small (rational) human being.

Those who, like Thrasymachus, praise injustice, think we ought

first, go feed the multiform beast within well, and make him strong, and also the lion and all that pertains to him; second, to starve the human being within so he is dragged along wherever either of the two leads; and third, to leave the parts to bite and kill one another rather than accustoming them to one another and making them friendly. (588e3-589a4)

On the other hand, those who believe in justice think

first, that all our words and deeds should insure that the human being within this human being has the most control; second, that he should take care of the many-

⁷ This is complicated because, in both Plato and Aristotle, granted the structures of collective wholes, we may only want to attribute agency to the ruling, or rational, part. For these purposes, I assume the common sense view that when someone acts the entire person is to be credited, even if one part in particular is calling the shots.

headed beast as he does his animals, feeding and domesticating the gentle heads and preventing the savage ones from growing; and, third, that he should make the lion's nature his ally, care for the community of all his parts, and bring them up in such a way that they will be friends with each other and with himself (589a5-b7).

In these remarkable passages, we find the beginnings of an answer to the problems raised in the *Lysis*. The best part should rule. It should pursue not its own interests, but the good of the whole, and it remains an open question what this involves. Plato's claim is not, in either city or soul, that the ruler's power is justified by the consent of his subjects, much less that it is constrained by their rights. Instead we learn that where the rule of the worst part of the soul amounts to thoughtlessly dragging the ruled around, the rule of the best part involves a sophisticated play of cooperation and coercion. It rules different subjects differently, depending on their natures. Some are simply squashed; others nurtured; yet others recruited as allies.

The theme of rule within a tripartite soul is developed even further in the *Phaedrus*. There, Socrates describes the soul as a three-part collective made up of a charioteer and two horses, one good, the other bad. The good horse agreeably follows the charioteer's verbal instructions; but the charioteer has to fight to subdue and enslave the bad one. The tactics he uses are remarkable for their variety and for their ferocity: he starts with the whip and the goad, but before the domestication is complete, he begs it to comply, deceives it, and in a climactic struggle "violently yanks the bit out of the teeth of the insolent horse" so hard that "he bloodies its foul-speaking tongue and jaws, sets its legs and haunches firmly on the ground, and gives it over to pain" (253e2-254e7). The end result is that the bad horse "dies with fright" whenever it starts to feel temptation, and

this allows the tripartite team to finally run harmoniously. The passage makes vivid an important distinction: while the rational must rule, it needn't rule *with* reason—a rational ruler will sometimes recognize the need for force and compulsion.

There is no reason to doubt that such violence is involved in the rule of the best part of the soul in the *Republic* as well, and it is remarkable that, as we have just seen, Socrates thinks that it is not only consistent with, but productive (or perhaps even constitutive) of friendship. And the treatment of the bad horse makes it clear that here as in the *Lysis*, Plato asks who should rule and how, but it does not occur to him to ask whether anyone should rule at all. He never envisions a situation free of domination, and he never suggests—even in fantasy—that we should aim to increase equality. Insofar as he recommends that cooperation replace competition, his dream is of the agreeable slave, not the level playing field.

This, then, is Plato's theoretical account of rule. I have argued that in the *Lysis*, Plato's Socrates takes rule to be an essential part of the social world, but one that needs radical reform. He also calls into question the relationship between rule, self-interest, freedom, and the good. In the *Republic*, he pushes individuals' rule over each other to the background, along with interpersonal ethics in general. Nevertheless, rule re-emerges in a distinctive evaluative framework: as a structural element in composite wholes. When we study such wholes, we must ask which part rules and how, and we learn that the best kind of rule is conducive to their harmony and even friendship.

III

In the *Lysis*, Socrates claims to know nothing of friendship, and in the *Republic* he turns away from interpersonal relationships to the dynamics of city and soul. He makes, in other words, a concentrated effort to avoid discussing how we should act in interpersonal relationships. In the *Symposium*, however, Socrates describes himself as an expert in *erōs* (177e1), and in both the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* (often grouped together as the “erotic dialogues”), he embarks on long speeches which contain a great deal of positive theory and prescription. It is in these dialogues that we see the theoretical materials of the *Lysis* and the *Republic* applied directly to interpersonal relationships.

Rule is at the heart of both discussions, and two historical points may help to explain why. The first is that many of Socrates’ interlocutors (and also, most likely, of Plato’s readers) belong to the elite youth of Athens, young men about to take power by acquiring a wife and slaves, and by participating in the political assembly. Perhaps a few are also poised to develop another kind of influence, as philosophers refashioning the souls of their fellow citizens. It’s hardly surprising, especially in light of all that we’ve seen so far, that if Socrates wants to change these men’s behaviour, this will involve teaching them how to better exercise power.

The second historical point is that both dialogues revolve around the practice of *pederastia*, according to which an older man (the *erastēs*) falls madly in love with a youth (*erōmenos*). The youth, if he is interested, returns friendship, respect, and sexual favours, but feels no sexual desire himself.⁸ What is important about this practice is that

eros, as several scholars have shown in detail, is seen as essentially polarizing and hierarchical: it necessarily involves an active partner dominating a passive one. Indeed, it appears that *eros* as a relationship between equal, active partners was unthinkable in the ancient moral landscape.⁹ Plato, I want to suggest, appropriates these conventions for the philosophical ends we have found in the *Lysis* and the *Republic*.

In the first half of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates and his friend lounge in the shade beside the Ilissus River and discuss three seduction speeches. These explore rival visions of love, one brought out in a speech by the famous orator Lysias (read to Socrates by Phaedrus) and the other in two speeches by Socrates himself.

The first of Socrates' speeches occupies a complicated place in the dialogue, for Socrates later disowns it. All we need to remark here, though, is that it contains a remarkable description of love as a noxious form of rule. The *erastēs* (who, Socrates does not fail to note, is "ruled by desire and a slave to his passions"), wants to maintain complete control of his boy, and therefore "will not willingly put up with a boyfriend who is his equal or superior, but is always working to make the boy he loves weaker and inferior to himself" (239a1-4). This involves discouraging him from pursuing philosophy; keeping him pale, weak and effeminate; and jealously keeping him away from anyone who might weaken their link (239d2-5). The result is mutual dependence, but also a large share of jealousy and resentment. Whatever Socrates' final attitude to the speech, the

⁸ The seminal study of *paiderastia* is Kenneth Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London, Duckworth: 1978). His work is elaborated philosophically in Foucault's *Use of Pleasure* and Halperin's *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality* (see note 11 above). The best recent discussion, which incorporates an impressive amount of research, is Wolfgang Detel's *Foucault and Classical Antiquity* (translated by David Wigg-Wolf, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁹ See Foucault, *L'usage des plaisirs*, Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, and Detel, *Foucault and Classical Antiquity*, 161.

couple that Socrates describes—a diseased wolf and sickly victim, completely bound up in each other—is clearly meant to be both repellent and familiar.

This version of love is the mirror image of the form Socrates describes in his second *logos*, his famous Great Speech. The latter describes a relationship he calls “philosophical friendship.” When a philosopher sees a particularly beautiful boy, the story goes, he suddenly remembers the fleeting glimpses he caught of the Form of Beauty before his birth. The explosive memory nourishes the stumps of his soul’s wings, which soften, swell, and prick at him, overwhelming him with sexual desire. The response is the taming of the bad horse in his soul, discussed above.

This domestication of the bad horse proceeds in lockstep with the development of the philosopher’s love affair. It is something like the standard interpretation of philosophical friendship that it moves away from the dissymmetry and power-play standard in *paiderastia*. None other than Michel Foucault writes that Plato’s account of *erōs* moves “from the question of the dissymmetry of partners to that of the convergence of love.”

Unlike what occurs in the art of courtship [he goes on], the “dialectic of love” in this case calls for two movements exactly alike on the part of the two lovers; the love is the same for both of them, since it is the motion that carries them toward the truth.¹⁰

But a close reading of Socrates’ account of philosophical friendship makes it clear that this interpretation cannot be right. Philosophical lovers choose their partner on the basis of two talents, philosophy and, significantly, the “guidance of others” (252e4). They then

¹⁰ Foucault, “The Use of Pleasure,” 241.

embark on a thorough process of improving him and educating him, making “every possible effort to draw him into being totally like themselves” (253c2). In time, the partners can pursue philosophy together, but Socrates never suggests that the roles of teacher and student disappear. Even the emotions they feel remain quite distinct, the *eromenōs* developing not *erōs* but a mirror image to it, *anterōs* or counter-love.¹¹

Nevertheless, the *erastēs* does not simply dominate the *eromenōs*. On the contrary, he is bowled over by his beloved’s resemblance to the god of philosophy. He “gazes at him with the reverence due a god, and if he weren’t afraid people would think him completely mad, he’d even sacrifice to him as if he were a god” (251a5), and his passion lead him to sleep on the street like a slave (252a5). The *erōmenos* and *erastēs* are never on equal footing, but it is often difficult to tell who is in charge. The lesson is one we have seen already. The best people should rule—but when they do, they will themselves be enslaved.

It is interesting to compare philosophical love with the speech of Lysias, the first of the three speeches. Lysias, sophisticated, urbane, and shocking, writes on behalf of a suitor, arguing that it’s in a boy’s best interest to give in only to a man who’s not in love with him. Sensible partners will treat their love affair like a business (231a8), and will arrange their affairs to avoid the jealousy and instability that invariably come with love.

¹¹ Another supposed antecedent of symmetry in love is Aristophanes’ speech in the *Symposium*, according to which lovers are the separated halves of organisms that were once one. Here, the themes of unity and partition return, but as David Halperin forcefully argues (in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* [New York : Routledge, 1990]), there is no anticipation of equality or asymmetry between the partners. Although the two halves of the creatures in Aristophanes’ myth are formally equal, when separated into their analogues in our world, they take on explicitly asymmetrical places. In the case of those who are split off of fully male creatures, for example “while they are boys, they love men and enjoy lying with men... When they’re grown men, they are lovers of young men” (191e6-192b3).

On the other hand we will benefit from the tact, reliability, and straightforwardness of his coolheaded companion.

Lysias's non-lover recommends a relationship sensibly built on both parties' interests, and unshaken by the irrational appetites, rages, and ecstasies of violent emotion. Lysias takes the two partners as rational self-interested agents in something like a free market. He works carefully from their shared values toward a balanced relationship in which they are both free to fulfill their interests, and to coordinate these with each other through calculation.

If anywhere in the Platonic corpus we find two partners who are equal to each other in the modern sense, it is here. For Socrates, however, the speech is "horrible" "foolish," and "close to being impious" (242d6-8), and in the end he finds it more interesting as an example of bad argument than as an ethical proposal. It is a model of interpersonal relationships that would have to wait much longer to climb to the centre of philosophical ethics.

IV

Recall the discussion between Socrates and Lysis with which this chapter began. We have already seen that Socrates encourages Lysis to challenge parental authority, and suggests that it is the wise who should rule. Consider now Socrates' claim that the point of his exchange with Lysis was to show how best to treat beloved boys, namely by "cutting them down to size and putting them in their place" (210e2-3). Socrates' daemon prevents him from doing politics, but it evidently does not keep him from ruling.

We have not yet mentioned that while Plato says relatively little about interpersonal relationships, it is the nature of a dialogue to show them taking place. Plato is constantly showing us a Socrates working hard to influence the men around him, and to make his mark on Athens. The portrait that emerges illustrates the same paradox and suspicion we have found in Socrates' discussions, except it goes one step further. For while Socrates himself does not hesitate to endorse philosophical friendship, in the *Symposium*, Plato gives us good reasons to doubt that it works.

For the dramatic episode that closes the *Symposium* shows us the *Phaedrus*' philosophical friendship unmediated by Socrates, and the picture that emerges is ambivalent at best. Just as Socrates finishes his speech on love, in bursts the drunken Alcibiades, famous for his charm and good looks.¹² Alcibiades gives a passionate speech about his love affair with Socrates—at first Socrates came onto him as an *erastēs*, but he soon found the tables turned, and now *he* is in love, desperately pursuing the philosopher. He complains about damage to “my heart, or my soul, or whatever you want to call it.” Socrates, he says, the only man who has ever made him feel shame, has gods hidden inside him (222a3). But Alcibiades also complains bitterly about Socrates' *hubris*. The philosopher, he says, is “impudent, contemptuous, and vile”; he has “deceived” and “humiliated” both Alcibiades himself and the group at large (212c-222c).

In his relationship with Alcibiades, we get a glimpse of Socrates actually engaged in (at least the show of) an erotic relationship, in which he is using a wide variety of tactics to mold Alcibiades into a philosopher. But Plato makes it clear that the

¹² Martha Nussbaum is one of the first philosophers to treat Alcibiades speech as a serious philosophical addition to the *Symposium*, rather than a comic epilogue. See “The Speech of Alcibiades: A Reading of the *Phaedrus*” in *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 165-199.

educational enterprise has gone badly wrong, leaving its object full of dangerous resentment and hate.

The story gets worse. As Plato's readers knew well, things ended badly for Alcibiades. He was involved in a number of military scandals, accused of defacing sacred statues, and finally assassinated. In the world of Plato's dialogues at least, he is not alone. As many have pointed out, none of Plato's dialogues show Socrates having a positive effect on his interlocutors, and a few notable students, including Alcibiades, were notorious enough that the jury surely had them in mind when they convicted Socrates of corrupting the youth of Athens.

Plato's portrait of Socrates, then, is a tribute to an outstanding life, but it is also a warning. He is at pains to point out that those who live exemplary public lives often exercise a power with disastrous effects—the greatest leaders often have the most horrific followers. It is a frightening literary picture that crowns on a theoretical account of a social world in which the most meaningful lives and relationships are founded on rule. For Plato, we can establish through dialectic that rule is problematic. But we understand this more fully if we see for ourselves that in the context of at least one very virtuous life, it has disastrous effects on both ruler and ruled.

CHAPTER 2 - Aristotle

I

We have seen that in the *Lysis* Socrates takes it for granted that rule is a central part of the social world, and that it leads into a problematic project of social reform and philosophical investigation. We also saw that in Lysias' speech in the *Phaedrus*, Plato describes an approach to social problems according to which they are solved through the rational coordination of the interests of atomic individuals—but he introduces this view only to have it rejected, evidently in favour of another (developed in the *Republic*) based on seeing both the *polis* and the person as complex wholes. According to this model, a composite whole is best when it functions well and its parts are harmoniously arranged. For Plato, this means that the best part should rule over the others and adapt its rule to their natures. The picture is complicated, as we saw, by the fact that Plato treats the boundaries sealing off individuals from the rest of the social world as somewhat permeable: a foolish cobbler may, for example, be ruled by the rational part of a philosopher king.

When we turned to the philosophical friendship described in the *Phaedrus*, we saw Socrates describe “philosophical friendship” as one of the best possible human relationships. This shared life, in which one party moulds, teaches, and directs the other, is built on rule, and thus full of *aporia*. And in practice—as Socrates' failed educational projects and his martyrdom demonstrate—it runs into very real difficulties and dangers.

When Aristotle discusses interpersonal relationships, he makes it clear that he is responding to Plato—after the preliminaries of Book I, he addresses Book II to refuting

what he takes to be a serious political worry, the communism of Plato's *Republic*, and although he doesn't mention it by name, it's equally clear that the discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* begins with the questions Socrates raises in the *Lysis*.

As I promised at the outset, a study of how Aristotle develops these themes will help us narrow the gulf modern readers find between his discussions of virtue friendship and of rule. Our guiding thread in this chapter will be a case study, the relationship of marriage, which as I have said ties together the seemingly disparate discussions of *Politics* I and *Nicomachean Ethics* VIII. It is a relationship that prominently features rule: Aristotle notoriously writes in the *Politics* that men rule over their wives by nature (1260a-b). We work our way back to this—but before that we will touch on a sunnier claim, that friendship exists by nature between husband and wife and, *a fortiori*, husband and wife can have the highest form of friendship, the friendship of virtue (*EN* VIII 12 1162a16-28). We will see throughout that Aristotle develops in a systematic manner the materials that Plato developed into *aporia*.

II

We must first, however, discuss one prominent theme in Aristotle's ethical and political philosophy that did not appear in our discussion of Plato. In Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle embarks on a discussion of justice, and he claims it is premised on equality (1131a10-14). Justice and friendship, we learn later, are “concerned with the same objects and exhibited between the same persons” (1159b25), and so the highest friendships are founded on equality and reciprocity (1162b2-6). On any modern

conception of equality, this makes it nearly impossible to reconcile the claim that men rule over their wives by nature with the claim that married couples can be virtue friends. We must, then, begin our enquiry with an extended discussion of Aristotle's view of the place of equality in friendship.

The Greek word translated as "equality" [*ison*] is often better rendered as "fairness," or, when translators want to hedge their bets, as "equality or fairness." The ambiguity helps explain the close connection Aristotle draws between equality and justice. *Injustice* in its narrow sense (that is, when it means something more specific than simply bad behaviour) is motivated by *pleonexia*, the desire for too much of some basic good like money or security (1130a17-b7). It is, for Aristotle, the desire for what is not *equal to the right amount*. It follows, by contrast, that the just person knows how much of such goods is appropriate, and wants only that much, or presumably, assigns only that much to others. Equality, on this view, is primarily a relationship between a person and some goods, not a relationship between people.

What is the right amount of a basic good? For Aristotle, this depends on the worth of the person receiving it, which as for Plato depends on their share in reason. To distribute some set of goods fairly or equally between two people (and here is where the plurality of society reenters the picture), we calculate the worth of the two people and the worth of the goods; then we ask if each person's share is proportional to her or his worth. If so, the distribution is equal and therefore just. This is what Aristotle calls *proportionate equality*: the best get the most, the worst get the least, and so on (1131a21-b24). Far from treating all human beings as equals, friends who strive for proportionate equality "effect the required equalization" (1162b3), by distributing goods according to whatever

differences there may be in their worth. It is for Aristotle the purest and kind of equality—all others derive from it.

Aristotle writes that people disagree about how to determine a person's worth. For example, advocates of democracy grant all citizens equal worth just because of their status as freemen, and structure their society so that goods are distributed accordingly (1131a25). Aristotle is famously ambivalent about democracy as a constitutional principle (e.g. 1281a4-6), but there can be no doubt that he does not think that all freemen—much less all human beings—are, as a matter of objective fact, equal in worth. On the contrary, his view of human beings corresponds to his view of the cosmos as thoroughly structured by value. In Aristotle's study of nature, he teaches us that a star being is better than a porcupine, and a tree is better than either its leaf or its seed. In his ethics it is equally clear (however we understand the relationship between the two inquiries) that a philosopher king is better than a slave girl.

For human beings, worth is tied, via *eudaimonia*, to the capacity to reason, and Aristotle claims that women's rational faculty lacks authority (*Pol* I 13 1260a15).¹ Therefore as long as things are in accord with nature, women are inferior to men, husbands better than their wives. It follows that an equal (or fair) arrangement or distribution in marriage will provide the wife with a lesser share of goods than her husband. The asymmetrical distribution of goods is thus a key part of what is required for friendship of husband and wife. But in the special case of friendship we cannot ensure proportional equality in terms of the equal distribution of goods alone. There is, Aristotle writes, an additional requirement:

¹ Aristotle does not make it very easy to understand just what he means by this. See Marguerite Deslauriers, "Aristotle On the Virtues of Slaves and Women," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*. September 2003, 213-231.

Loving seems to be the characteristic virtue of friends, so that it is only those in whom this is found in due measure that are lasting friends, and only their friendship that endures. It is in this way more than any other that even unequals can be friends; they can be equalized (*EN VIII 8 1159a35-1159b3*).

A few pages earlier, he spells out how this works:

In all friendships that rest on superiority, the loving must also be proportional; for instance the better person, and the more beneficial, and each of the others likewise, must be loved more than he loves; for when the loving accords with the comparative worth of the friends, equality is achieved in a way, and this seems to be proper to friendship (1158b25-29).

Thus, to attain fairness or equality in its basic sense, a wife must get less than her husband, and she must love him more than he loves her.

With this, we've gone quite a ways toward resolving our riddle—it's clear enough that if this is what Aristotle means by equality, then there is simply no conflict between equality and the imbalance of power. And yet, one passage threatens to complicate the picture. Aristotle writes that in friendship, proportional equality is secondary to *quantitative equality* (1158b30). Quantitative equality is, simply, equality in value.

For Aristotle, as we will see in the next section, friends must have a great deal in common. He believes that if inequality in worth is great enough, this will make it impossible for the friends to share or hold things in common (particularly psychological things like goals and virtues), and friendship will become impossible. But Aristotle's elaboration of this claim is less than illuminating when it comes to the inequality between men and women.

The trouble with friendships between unequals [Aristotle writes] is most manifest in the case of the gods; for they surpass us most decisively in all good things. But it is clear also in the case of kings; for with them too, men who are much their inferiors do not expect to be friends; nor do men of no account expect to be friends with the best or wisest men (*EN* VIII 8 1159b35-a3).

This is all Aristotle has to say about the matter, but it seems that the most plausible reading of the claim that quantitative equality is “primary” in friendship is just that friendship necessarily presupposes some measure of equality—even though this measure can be very small, at least by modern standards. The difference in value between men and women is, at any rate, small enough not to foreclose the possibility of friendship—provided, as we have seen, that the couple offset it by distributing property and love asymmetrically.

III

Two related concepts approach modern conceptions of equality more closely than proportional or quantitative equality. If, granted some preexisting distribution, someone steals, bargains unfairly, or otherwise takes more than a fair share, it’s up to a judge to rectify the imbalance. The judge restores *arithmetical equality*, awarding damages to make up for the redistribution of goods, treating the two parties (counterfactually) as if they were equals. This is an imperfect kind of equality, but for Aristotle it is necessary considering the contingencies that run through the social world. Arithmetical equality belongs to so-called rectificatory rather than distributive justice: it comes into play when

something has gone wrong, as when an originally just distribution has been upset by theft or unfair exchanges.

While, granted the complexity of the *polis*, arithmetical equality is a necessary expedient, it is for Aristotle a crude brand of equality that surely has no place in friendship. For part of the reason that Aristotle thinks we can only have a few good friends (1171a) is that friends must be intimately responsive to the particulars of each others' goals and virtues (1131b25-33b29). The justice and equality they share must therefore not be the crude *modus vivendi* of arithmetic justice, and the latter must therefore be no part of virtue friendship between husband and wife.

Like arithmetical equality, *reciprocity* (the second concept) may be close to what we now understand by equality, but for Aristotle it is also inadequate to ensure just relationships between virtue friends. An exchange is reciprocal if what you give out is worth the same as what you get back. But since reciprocity—another form of rectificatory justice—takes no account of the differences in value between people, it allows for all manner of exchanges that he takes to be unjust by the stricter standards of proportionate equality. Aristotle is clear that reciprocity is inappropriate if the parties are different in value or in social position: “if an officer has inflicted a wound, he should not be wounded in return and if someone has wounded an official, he ought not to be wounded only but punished in addition” (1132b28-31).

Aristotle's account of justice, in short, does make room for kind of rational balancing we saw in Lysias' speech in the *Phaedrus*. But it paints this approach as second-best, making sure to remind us that it is inferior to the method that distributes goods according to the differences between people involved. This distinguishes

Aristotle's approach from at least one liberal account of equality. Consider a shopworn intro-to-moral-philosophy example of injustice: two job applicants, *in all relevant respects identical*, are subject to different hiring practices. On the understanding of equality this account seems to take for granted, if the two people are truly and meaningfully different (in terms of bona fide job requirements, according to the standard setup) there is no reason to treat them equally, and so no standard of justice to uphold.

Wendy Brown summarizes the situation thus:

In liberalism, equality is defined as a condition of sameness, a condition in which humans share the same nature, the same rights, and the same terms of regard by state institutions. Individuals are guaranteed equality—the right to be treated the same as everyone else—because we are regarded as having a civil, and hence political, sameness. This sameness is the token of our economic and political interchangeability.... It is important to note that liberal equality's conceptual opposite is not inequality but difference: while inequality is the problem to which equality as sameness is the solution, difference is the problem to which equality as sameness does not apply.²

Aristotle and the liberal agree that we ought to treat like cases alike and different cases differently, and he agrees that in some cases the law ought to treat citizens as equals. But the similarity ends there. For if the brand of liberalism described by Brown has no response to morally relevant difference, Aristotle's is founded upon it. We have seen that for Aristotle, questions of justice and equality can intelligibly arise not just between people who are different from each other, or (more strangely for us) between unequals,

² Wendy Brown. "Liberalism's Family Values" in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 153.

but even between humans and gods. Sameness, including equality in value, is not presupposed by justice—in fact, as we will see below, equality in value actually makes it harder to sustain just relationships.

IV

People often repeat Aristotle's slogans that the human being is a political animal, that outside the *polis* he is either a god or beast, but no man. But it's nevertheless easy to overlook how deeply this idea permeates his philosophy. It is worth noting, for example, that when Aristotle analyzes the *polis* into its most basic components, he finds not individuals but relationships: "In the first place," he writes "there must be a *union* of those who cannot exist without each other; namely of male and female... and of natural ruler and subject, so that both may be preserved" (1152a26-34, my emphasis).

This focus on relationships extends throughout the social world. If there is to be justice, equality, or friendship between anyone, there must also be community [*koinōnia*]. Indeed, without things in common [*koinos*], people do not have proper human relationships at all. Some of the shared items are quite banal—for example a *polis* is a community in the first place because its citizens share a location. What community involves in the case of virtue friendship, however, is quite strong. Aristotle says that the best kind of friends act through each other; that the friend is a second self, and that friends live together or share a single life (1171b29-34). These are remarkable claims, considering Aristotle's tendency to mean, literally, what he says.

At the limit, we might think that Aristotle is recommending complete fusion, that friends become like the double-creatures in Aristophanes' myth in Plato's *Symposium*. But this can't be right. In the *Politics*, he argues at length that greater unity in a state is not necessarily better: composites like the family and the *polis* are more fully realized than individuals, and it would undo this progress if they melted back into individuality (1261a15-35).³ Aristotle, responding directly to the *Republic*, is pushing Platonists to recognize the full power of the city-soul analogy we have seen developed in the *Republic*. The force of the analogy, as we have seen, is that it allows us to think of the *polis* as a composite whole—but some of Plato's suggestions for communism threaten to integrate the parts of the *polis* so closely that they might cease to be distinct parts altogether. Aristotle insists that community must be something more than a concatenation of individuals, but at the same time it must not be so unified that its members no longer have *relationships*, properly speaking, at all. A group of friends must be unified in a way that a heap of pebbles is not, but it cannot be a homogenous blend like a mixture of honey and water—rather, it must in some ways be analogous to a living organism.

Since virtue friends are of course not physically connected, what a group fundamentally shares—and this is enough, for Aristotle, to make up shared souls and shared lives—is ends or goals. This does not just involve that individual friends' goals happen to overlap, like corporate coworkers who share nothing but a desire for profit. Aristotle rather seems to be thinking of a single goal, held collectively, as when a jazz group or a sports team aim at musical or tactical ideas they couldn't even articulate

³ Mayhew, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

outside of their shared activity.⁴ This is to say that in Aristotle as in Plato, collective agency is a crucial part of the social world. Just as a worker can share a philosopher's reason, friends can share each others' aspirations and dispositions. And so, to say that married couples can be friends is to say that they make up a community, and share ends in a way that makes each partner part of a collective.

V

This finally brings us back to the concept of rule. We saw that Plato seems to assume that rule is everywhere in the social world, and that composite wholes are invariably structured by rule. In Aristotle, this becomes explicit. The state, he writes,

composed of unlikes, may be compared to the living being: as the first elements into which a living being is resolved are soul and body, as soul is made up of rational principle and appetite, the family of husband and wife, property of master and slave, so of all these, as well as other dissimilar elements, the state is composed (1277a5-13).

We may conjoin this claim with another, that

in all things which form a composite whole and which are made up of parts, whether continuous or discrete, a distinction between the ruling and the subject parts comes to light. Such a duality exists in living creatures, but not in them only; it originates in the constitution of the universe; even in things which have no life, there is a ruling principle, as in a musical mode (1243a20-30).

⁴ This discussion borrows from A.W. Price, *Love and Friendship in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 110-20.

It is thus for Aristotle a kind of a priori truism that insofar as community links people into a larger, formal whole, it also arranges them into a hierarchy of power—and since this is natural, it follows that it is good. When social groups are as they should be, they are stratified in terms of power—someone must rule.

In fact, Aristotle argues, it is a problem if the members of a community have equal worth. If a state turned out to be made of equals (or if we decided to treat all citizens as equals), we would nevertheless not have divested ourselves of the requirement that someone take charge and rule. But in a community of equals there is no non-arbitrary way to fulfil this requirement. The result, Aristotle writes, is that everyone must take turns—but this is inefficient and undesirable, as if at regular intervals everyone switched jobs: from shoemaker to builder, from farmer to philosopher. But, he continues, in politics as in the marketplace, it is better that each man stick to one job (1261a33-b5). So not only, as we saw above, does difference pose no obstacle for just relations. It turns out that equality of worth actually interferes with them, and it would seem that even friends who are actually equal in worth will not be freed from the obligation to rule—at least insofar as they maintain a real share of individuality. Rather—again, like members of a sports team or a musical group—they will have to either appoint a nominal leader or pass rule back and forth as the situation dictates.

Now, we learn from the *Metaphysics* that for Aristotle as for Plato, rule does not give one freedom or license. It is part of the makeup of the cosmos that the superior rule, but also that their activities must be more orderly (and so less free) than those of their inferiors.

All things [Aristotle writes] are ordered together somehow, but not all alike—both fishes and fowls and plants; and the world is not such that one thing has nothing to do with another, but they are connected. For all are ordered together to one end, but it is as in a house, where freemen are least at liberty to act at random, but all things or most things are already ordained for them, while the slaves and animals for the most part do little for the common good, and for the most part live at random; for this is the sort of principle that constitutes the nature of each.

(1075a16-24)

A married couple is not for Aristotle as unified as an organism or as complete as a *polis*. But although Aristotle clearly accepts much of the approach Socrates develops in the *Republic*, shortly after his discussion of equality in friendship, he makes it clear, as Plato does not, that the philosopher may draw conclusions from his study of the *polis* that put the interpersonal back at the forefront of ethics.

These considerations emerge from the “resemblances to the constitutions and, as it were, patterns of them” that we find throughout life, and “even in the household” (1160b23). The rule of a king, he says, is characterized by the excess of benefits he confers to his subjects, and this also characterizes the relationship between father and son. The rule of a tyrant is like the rule of a master over his slaves, which is in turn like the rule of a craftsman over his tools. In these relationships, because ruler and ruled have so little in common, there is no friendship at all—as if in each case the ruled was a “lifeless thing” (1161b2). There are, in short, different kinds of rule. Each is appropriate for ruling over a different kind of subject.

Things get trickier when it comes to the rule of husband over wife. For in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes that the friendship of man and wife

is the same as that found in aristocracy; for it is in accordance with virtue—the better gets more of what is good, and each gets what befits him; and so too in the justice in these relations. (1161a3-5)

So far, there are no surprises. But in the *Politics* Aristotle compares marriage to a *different* constitution.

In most constitutional states [he writes], the citizens rule and are ruled by turns, for the idea of a constitutional state implies that the natures of citizens are equal, and do not differ at all. Nevertheless, when one rules and the other is ruled, we endeavour to create a difference of names and outward forms and of respect, which may be illustrated by the saying of Amasis about his footpan.⁵ The relation of the male to female is of this kind, but there the inequality is permanent.

(1259b4-10)

Aristotle is evidently struggling to forge an awkward middle ground in his treatment of women. On the one hand he takes them to be better than slaves, and almost as capable of reason and virtue as Greek men.⁶ But on the other hand, he wants to insist that they are inferior to men, and this must manifest itself in their relationships in a way that evidently cannot quite be captured by any existing constitution.⁷

⁵ Amasis melted his golden footpan into a magnificent statue. The idea is that in terms of their underlying worth, the footpan and statue are the same, but we may nevertheless form them so that their values are for practical purposes different.

⁶ One possible social explanation for this is that women were often accorded a great deal of responsibility, at least within the *polis*. See Wolfgang Detel, *Foucault and Classical Antiquity* (translated by David Wigg-Wolf, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

This is what Aristotle evidently has in mind when he says that husbands rule over their wives by nature. But we can surely begin to get a better grasp of just what is involved in this form of rule if we return to the claim that the couple can be virtue friends. Men exercise power over their wives not because they are locked in a Hobbesian battle for control, but because they are unified but different. At their best, a married couple shares a single set of ends and reasons, a single life directed toward the good. The husband rules, like Plato's philosopher king, not in the interest of one party or the other, but of the whole.

VI

For Aristotle, as I have argued, marriage presupposes inequality, asymmetry, and the exercise of power. It does not involve anything like a liberal conception of equality or—much less—the requirement that both parties be basically morally similar. Aristotle does not see the imbalance of power between husband and wife as a problem, and so he sees no need to try to eliminate or compensate for inequality in worth or the distribution of goods or affection.

Because of this, marriage turns out to be an occasion for a project that, like discussions of equality more generally, we now often restrict to political philosophy: the analysis of how best to exercise power. One of the main goals of Book I of the *Politics* is to show that there are different kinds of rule, that the head of a household must *not* rule over his wife the same way, for example, that he rules over his slaves. This opens the door to a set of *technai* (including household management, statescraft, and perhaps

⁷ Marguerite Deslauriers, "Aristotle on the Virtues of Women and Slaves" (*Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, September 2003, 213-231).

others) that allow the good citizen to exercise power, variously and appropriately, as he deals with others in the *polis*.

Aristotle acknowledges the existence of such skills, but says disappointingly little about them. Concerning the rule over one's slaves, he says:

This so-called science is not anything great or wonderful; for the master need only know how to order that which the slave must know how to execute. Hence those who are in a position which places them above toil have stewards who attend to their households while they occupy themselves with philosophy or with politics (*Pol I 6 1255b 31-356*)

And as for rule over various kinds of *poleis*,

there is no difficulty in distinguishing the various kinds of authority; they have been often defined already in discussions outside the school. (278b9)

Beyond this, he gives us only the suggestion that we have already seen in the *Republic*, that the best ruler, insofar as he forms a community with his subjects, will rule either in their best interests or in the interests of the whole.

Aristotle, I believe, provides many examples of how to go badly wrong on the related questions of love, equality, and power. But he also provides tools to help us formulate and answer questions that matter deeply. Aristotle thinks that husbands ought to seriously ask themselves, "How should I rule over my wife?" To understate, this is not a good question. But it brushes shoulders with a crucial one. Granted that, like it or not, I find myself saddled with power—in my romantic relationships as well in the academy and just about everywhere else—what should I do? Aristotle gives no satisfactory

answers to this question; but reading him reminds us that, as I will argue in my final chapter, it needs to be asked.

Concluding Remarks – Equality and Power

I

The *polis* and the *oikos* are both long gone, and we can no longer understand community and the individual the way Plato and Aristotle did. Most people now live in complex capitalist societies, and political thought has been thoroughly transformed both by the demands of such societies and by the various emancipatory movements that have formed within them. New conceptions of the individual—as the locus of desires and interests imagined by economists, as the inimitable artistic genius of the romantics, and others—have come to dominate the ways the West understands both the best political organization and the good life. And tied to all these changes has been the rise of equality to the centre of political discourse, both inside and outside of the academy.

If equality is indeed “the principle normative idea of modernity” as some think,¹ this is surely most obvious in the political and legal spheres—the state is typically considered just if founded on a constitution that treats everyone’s interests equally, and if its laws are applied fairly. But equality has also found its way into the ethical world. This is true to some extent in philosophical discourse, and it is certainly true in the moral intuitions of many non-philosophers. Many, for example, accept that—whatever we say about an individual’s abilities, flaws, or peculiarities—we must never judge him to be, simply and all things considered, better than someone else.² Being judgmental is on this

¹ Christoph Menke, *Reflections of Equality* (translated by Howard Rouse and Andreis Denejkine, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 4. In his well-regarded introduction to political philosophy, Will Kymlicka goes even further, claiming that equality must be “at the heart of all plausible political theories” (*Contemporary Political Philosophy* [2nd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 4).

view a serious character flaw, and thinking oneself superior to others a grave sin, primarily because both show insufficient regard for equality.

The rise of equality has certainly been responsible for a great deal of good, especially for women, American blacks, and other subjects of discrimination. And its various narrower, interpersonal elaborations should also sometimes be applauded: our mistrust of judgment, for example, encourages us to acknowledge the complexity of character, to look for the good in others, and to foreswear judgement when (as often) it serves no purpose but self-congratulation.

Nevertheless, equality has its critics. Their standard complaint—a version of which we have already seen in Plato and Aristotle—concerns the difficulties of applying abstract principles to particular situations without doing violence either to the principles or to the individuals involved. As I suggested in the introduction to this essay, this problem is complicated by the fact that the language of equality (like the language of its sister freedom) is a powerful political weapon, even (and especially) when it is inherently unclear. The Aristotelian views I have discussed in this paper can, I think, contribute something to the strand of modern thought suspicious of egalitarianism.

It is nothing new to enlist Aristotle against liberal universalism. But our discussion here has put us in a position to understand an additional, and somewhat less-recognized danger of the ascendance of equality. Because egalitarian relationships are often imagined as perfectly symmetrical, and because egalitarian struggles have usually aimed to dethrone oppressors, thought centred on equality tends to occlude rule and its equally important place in interpersonal ethics.

² Perhaps the most famous philosophical application of equality to interpersonal relationships in the famous second formulation of the categorical imperative in Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (edited by Mary Gregor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

II

We are nowadays rightly reluctant to say with Plato and Aristotle that some people are better or more valuable than others. But we should nevertheless grant that in many cases, because of the natures of the situation and the people involved, it is appropriate for someone to take control. A clear and uncontroversial example (and one particularly important to Plato) is the education of children. Much of the framework I have explored throughout this paper obviously applies to this relationship, including for example the need to use compulsion in some cases, and to avoid it in others. More interesting, though, are the ways that such power relations can blur the individuality of parent and child. It does not seem too fanciful to say that just as Plato's kings think on behalf of their citizens, good parents share their rational faculties with their children. By thinking, as it were, with someone else's mind, children learn to develop their own capacity for reason.

Similar power relationships are appropriate even when the ruled are fully capable of reason. We engage in them in countless situations (we might think, for example of the positions of trainers, coaches, team leaders, etc.), but perhaps a particularly revealing one occurs when we ask a friend for advice. In putting ourselves, as we might say, in a friend's hands, we take on his or her judgment as our own. And even if over the course of our conversation, we deliberate collectively, we usually do not contribute equally—the best friends can do us a favour either by letting us work through our problems at our own pace, or by forcing us to confront self-deception.

This is the interpersonal form of a kind of rule that Aristotle takes pains to distinguish from the tyrannical rule of masters over slaves. On his account, it is a kind of

rule “which is exercised over freemen and equals by birth,” a constitutional rule, “in which the ruler must learn by obeying, as he would learn the duties of a general of cavalry by being under the orders of a general of cavalry” (1277b7-12). The cavalry example goes some way to settling the question of who should rule in cases like this—there are certainly times when one of a pair of friends is superior to the other in virtue of her or his experience or distance from a difficult a situation, and for that reason justified in taking charge. In other cases, however, there may be no clear way to judge who should lead. But we can nevertheless see why, on Aristotle’s view, one might have to take the reins.

We have seen that Aristotle treats rule in the *polis* and the household as a *technē*. Although he does not say so, it does not seem far from the spirit of his discussion to think that the correct handling of rule in interpersonal relationships could amount to a virtue (we might name it the virtue of leadership). Much like the other virtues, it requires that we use practical reason to see how to rule in the right way, at the right time, and so on, striking a mean between being a bully and a pushover. Like rule over the *polis*, it must be done in the interest either of the collective or of the ruled, but not in the interest of the ruler (except insofar as he or she is a part of the collective) (1279a2-5).

Now, to take rule as a virtue is to recognize the Foucauldian point that power is something that we *do*, not a property that we have. But it is also to recognize that in dealing with power we have to respond to contingent features of our environment that are in large part beyond our control. Like it or not, we find ourselves in social structures in which some of us are set up to act on others. And even from a position of privilege, it is not always easy to escape from these expectations. University teachers face some of these

difficulties when they try to re-establish a friendly, egalitarian atmosphere with their students.

Male feminists (and other similarly situated people) find themselves in a dilemma that is in some respects similar. Unlike the teacher, they truly hope to get rid of their privilege and power. A great deal can of course be done quite simply to advance this goal—a good start is listening when the other talks. But this is not enough, for we cannot opt out of power relationships altogether, and it would not help anyone to participate only as subordinates. A large part of the solution must surely be for men and women to build relationships which do not strive to eliminate power but to handle it wisely, passing it back and forth, always asking whose interests are being served, and how power should be exercised, whoever is holding it.

Of course, to meet these and other challenges, we need much more than Aristotle's account can provide. We need an awareness of the ways history shapes power relationships, and the possibility of changing it. And we cannot accept the way he grounds rule, be it in reason or in nature.

Nevertheless, I think we could learn a lot from Aristotle's view that relationships between free and equal citizens cannot be free of power. In the political realm, it is a sobering thought that the distribution of power must to some extent be arbitrary, and will result in laws that cannot do justice to the specificity of individuals' needs and capacities. But the small scale of interpersonal relationships, opens up the door to a much richer way to handle power: we can either pass it back and forth, or leave it in one person's hands—whatever the situation dictates. If, for the moment, we are called on to rule, we must do so in accord with the other's nature, and always with an eye to the good of both the other

and of the collective. We must rule not with the licence of a tyrant, but with the wisdom and selflessness of a philosopher king.

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