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CANDIDATES FOR ARISTOTLE'S NATURAL SLAVES

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According to Aristotle only those who deserved to be enslaved, namely natural slaves, ought to be enslaved. My aim here is to canvass potential candidates for natural slaves among the vast number of coerced workers in the ancient world, barbarian and Greek alike. These would include roughly three categories of such people: 1) chattel slaves found primarily in those states of Greece which had some cash-crop agriculture and had access to markets; 2) non chattel, enserfed populations, for example, the helots of Sparta or the *penestai* of Thessaly; and 3) the agricultural populations of the non-Greek world.

I. Aristotle on Natural Slavery

Aristotle's principal discussion of slavery, as is well known, occurs in Book 1 of the *Politics*. There he examines the subject within the context of the household and the relationship of household to *polis*.¹

According to Aristotle property is a necessary part of the *oikos* and slaves are property. Without property there can be no households (1253b24-25). But although property is necessary for the existence of an *oikos*, slaves are not. Thus, Aristotle duly notes that not all the *oikoi* in a *polis* had slaves (1252b10-12). However, since slavery was an important part of many *oikoi* and in his ideal state slaves were necessary for all citizens, the subject of slavery inevitably came up for discussion, especially since its legitimacy was being questioned in some quarters. Aristotle's answer to critics of slavery was that if there were people who ought to be despotically ruled, that is people for whom such rule was beneficial and just, and without which such people would not flourish, then slavery was necessary and just. Otherwise it was unjust.

Unfortunately, it is not always clear when Aristotle is talking in *Politics* 1 of natural slavery and when of conventional slavery. It is also difficult to know whether he

¹ The fact that Aristotle discusses domestic, not plantation or industrial style slavery, is an important, though frequently overlooked aspect of his analysis of slavery.

is referring to the one or the other type of slavery (unless of course he explicitly says so) in the other books of the *Politics*. Indeed Eckart Schütrumpf has claimed in regard to both questions that there is no connection at all between Aristotle's theory of slavery in Book 1 and the reality of social conditions in ancient Greece; or between Book 1 and the rest of the *Politics*, with the exception of Books 7/8.² I take this to mean that Schütrumpf believes natural slaves correlate exactly, and only, with perfect natural masters. Since natural masters of this type exist only in ideal states a necessary corollary would be, I presume, that all other slavery, that is all actual slavery, all conventional slavery, is illegitimate, unjustified, and monstrous.

1. Characteristics of Aristotle's Natural Slaves

In Book 1 ch. 4 Aristotle tells us that "the nature (*physis*) of a slave and his essential quality (*dunamis*) is that he is one who is a human being belonging by nature not to himself but to another" (1254a14).³ He belongs wholly (*holōs*, 1254a13) to his master. Commenting on this passage Newman contrasts slave and free by citing Metaphysics A 982b25 where the *eleutheros* is defined as one "who exists for himself and not for another," i.e., unlike a slave, the free man is autonomous and belongs to himself.⁴ The natural slave is a correlative of his master, a possession, a tool for performing some action.⁵ Peter Simpson puts it well: the natural slave "depends on the master for his whole direction in life as the body depends on the soul."⁶ As the body is possessed by the soul, so is the natural slave possessed by his master. The natural slave is incapable of determining his own ends which are determined exogenously.⁷

By this definition natural slaves are human but deficient in some significant way. Yet, while we might expect that natural slaves would be defined in terms of their deficiency, we are told that they possess a *dunamis*, a capacity for something, in this

² "Aristotle's Theory of Slavery – A Platonic Dilemma," in *Ancient Philosophy* 13 (1993), 121.

³ All translations are from Rackham.

⁴ Newman 2.140 quotes Victor on *phusei*: "Aristotle adds this because at times it happens that a free man loses his freedom and is not *suae potestatis*, as for instance when he is captured by enemies. He is not *sui iuris* by an act of man not of nature."

⁵ "For the body is the soul's tool born with it, a slave is as it were a member or tool of his master, a tool is a sort of inanimate slave," *EE* 1241b23

⁶ P. L. P. Simpson, *A Philosophical Commentary on the Politics of Aristotle* (Chapel Hill, 1998), 31.

⁷ The natural slave does not have the capacity to "integrate an ends-influencing concern for the *kalon* into his instrumental calculations; as a consequence, he is held perpetually in the thrall of exogenously determined ends. Such a person truly is not his own man but someone else's," D. Dobbs, "Natural Right and the Problem of Aristotle's Defense of Slavery," in *Journal of Politics* 56 (1994), 86.

instance, the capacity to be the wholly possessed property of another, a property which, while not sufficient for an individual to be his own man, allows him to integrate with a more complete individual, one who *is* his own man.⁸

In ch. 5 Aristotle moves on to the next question, namely whether such humans who have the capacity to be articles of property of another, exist; second whether it is advantageous and just for anyone to be a slave or the opposite, whether all slavery is contrary to nature (1254a17f.). The answer Aristotle says is not difficult to determine, either by theory or empirically. Hence there will be two arguments, the first on the basis of observed facts, *ek tōn ginomenōn*, the second by argument, *toi logoi theoresai*.

The first argument, derived from what naturally occurs, is that there have to be natural slaves because in all composite things that are unities and not just haphazard collections of things, some parts are superior to others and, correspondingly, others have a built-in need to be ruled. Thus it will be beneficial for these things (or people) to be ruled by the natural entities arranged by nature for their rule. Human society being a composite thing is necessarily hierarchical. If these propositions are true then, a priori, it may be inferred that rule over slaves, which is a type of rule, will in some instances be necessary and good.

A fortiori, it can be inferred that, as Aristotle says, “wherever there are human beings that differ as widely as soul and body or human and beast” (1254b14-16) – the natural examples of despotic rule – then such rule will be just. This is the inevitable condition of those whose function is the use of the body and for whom such work is the best there is. For them to be ruled despotically by those who are their souls, as it were, must be beneficial and good. But those whose work is the use of the body, and for whom such work is the best there is (1254b17-19), will be on the same level as animals and the

⁸ Without at this point saying how the human in question came to possess this capacity, whether, as we would say, by “genetic” endowment, choice, or culture. According to Dobbs, “Despotic rule, when exercised in accord with nature, is never exploitative. The natural despotic partnership is a mutually beneficial association wherein a master gains studious leisure (*scholē*) by procuring in a noble way some of the necessities of life through his slave; the slave is both property and partner (*koinōnos*, 1260a40) of his master, in a life directed towards and by means of the *kalon* . . . the slave benefits along the way as a partner in the master’s life (1278b32-36),” (above, n. 7), 87. Cf. Newman 2.141: “[T]he rule of a natural master over a natural slave no more involves an infraction of nature or justice or the common advantage than the rule of the soul over the body.”

body.⁹ The usefulness of slaves diverges little from that of animals. Both provide bodily service for the necessities of life. And it is obvious that both benefit by being under the control of masters: for instance, it gives them security (1254b12). In the case of domestic animals it may be argued that their domesticity guarantees their survival and may even provide them with a better life than they might have had in the wild. This then is Aristotle's first argument, the argument *ek tōn ginomenōn*.

The second argument (1254b20f.) is based on deductive reasoning from the definition of the slave already provided in ch. 4. Aristotle arrives at the same conclusion, namely, that the natural slave is one whose best work is the use of the body. As noted in ch. 4 the natural slave is someone who has the power or capacity to belong to another. But here Aristotle advances a new idea: a natural slave is someone who shares reason sufficiently to perceive it but not have it.

The argument comes in two parts. The natural slave: a) does not have reason, but b) can perceive it. He can comprehend a line of reasoning, but is not able to initiate it himself. This deficiency is compensated for, as we have been told, by his special capacity to be the possession, the living tool, of one who is self-possessed and is thus able to guide his own actions by reason. Since the slave has the capacity to follow directions which originate in reason, he can be said to perceive reason.

2. To Bouleutikon

The natural slave's lack of reason is touched upon again in ch. 13, towards the end of Book 1 of the *Politics*. There Aristotle says: "For the free rules the slave, the male the female, and the man the child in different ways; for the slave has not got the deliberative part (*to bouleutikon*) at all (*holōs*); and the female has it, but without full authority (*akuron*); while the child has it but in an undeveloped form (*ateles*)" (1260a10f).

Interpreters offer a spectrum of explanations for the slave's lack of the powers of deliberation, some positing a high threshold for deliberative capacity, others a low.

⁹ cf. Xen. *Oec.* 13.9: treating slaves as bodies is part of treating them as animals. That it was through the body that citizens were primarily demarcated from slaves is brought out by Demosthenes who says: "If you really want to know what difference it makes whether one is slave or free, you would find the greatest difference is this: for slaves it is the body that is liable for punishment for all misdemeanors, but free men, however great their misfortune, can at least keep their bodies safe" (22.55). But this does not get us very far since the slave is not identified through his body, by recognizing some characteristic of it, but by juridical identification.

Martha Nussbaum, for example, proposes a low threshold for candidature for natural slavery, suggesting that we should regard those lacking deliberative capacity as analogous to people who have suffered a frontal lobotomy.¹⁰ This solution would, understandably, make for a relatively small pool, in fact an inadequate pool, of candidates for natural slavery. Schütrumpf, who correlates natural slavery and perfect natural mastery would also have difficulty finding natural slaves, but for the opposite reason: there are few perfect natural masters.

The argument regarding how we are to understand the natural slave's lack of *to bouleutikon* seems to be shaped by whether we restrict our analysis to the *Politics* or are willing to reach to the *Ethics* for further elaboration. In the first case, arguing exclusively from within the confines of the *Politics*, we have seen in chs. 4 and 5 that Aristotle is clear as to what he thinks constitutes natural slavery. Thus the statement in chapter 13 regarding the slaves' lack of the deliberative part does not add anything to what we already know. Nor does ch. 13 tell us what the master is expected to deliberate about. Being without deliberative capacity reminds us only that the function of deliberation belongs to the master not the slave.

The second line of approach (the high bar argument), does try to go farther in trying to make sense of what the lack of *to bouleutikon* in slaves means, as well as deciding what masters should deliberate about. In order to do this, however, it has to import assumptions about deliberation that are found in the *Ethics*.

In the *Politics* citizens are those who are born in a particular *polis* and are identifiable as such because there is some legal mechanism in place, for example, their names are on to be found on the deme roles, which allows them to be juridically identified as citizens. The criterion that is found in the *Ethics*, however is different: it is the criterion of virtue. That is, a citizen is someone who actively deliberates about the end of human existence in a noble way. This person is unlike the many, who as Aristotle so trenchantly says "show themselves to be utterly slavish, by preferring what is only a life for cattle" (1095b19f.). This approach makes identifying citizens much harder since only true citizens are those who practice virtue. It leaves in doubt the status of those *polis*

¹⁰ M. C. Nussbaum, "Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundation of Ethics," in J. Altham and R. Harrison (eds.), *World, Mind, and Ethics: Essays on the Ethical Philosophy of Bernard Williams* (Cambridge, 1995), 117.

dwellers who are juridically citizens but cannot, perhaps, satisfactorily demonstrate their actual practice of virtue.

Peter Simpson, for example, comments regarding the lack of ability of slaves to discern the good and the noble. “But this kind of discernment must be what Aristotle has in mind. For what the slave lacks and the master has is foresight and deliberation (1.2.1252a31-34, 13.1260a12),” [thus far Simpson’s arguments is from the *Politics*; but he now switches to the *Ethics*], “and these must be of the good and noble since the master must foresee and deliberate about the end of the household and the city, which is the good and noble life of virtue. Such discernment marks the difference between the few who are fit to learn about virtue and the many who are not, and between prudence and mere cleverness (*Ethics* 1.3.1095a2-b13, 6.12.1144a23-b1). Slaves by nature may have reasoning and be clever, but they cannot have reason or be prudent.”¹¹

Is there a way around this challenge? I think part of the problem of high and low thresholds derives from restricting the definition of the political community, *hē koinōnia he politikē* (1252a7), with which Aristotle begins the *Politics*, to the Greek *polis*. In cases where a high threshold is advocated the argument, as noted, is based on assumptions imported from the *Ethics* where deliberation is defined normatively as deliberation about the good and the noble and the beautiful. If, however we take political community in the broad sense, in the way, for instance, in which political community becomes any legitimate *politeia*, as in Book 3 of the *Politics*, then I think we can come to a somewhat different conclusion. This subject will be dealt with in II.4 below.

II. ACTUAL CANDIDATES

It would seem logical to expect that that the most likely place to find natural slaves would be among chattel slaves, i.e. those who, according to Orlando Patterson’s definition, are deracinated, natively alienated, violently dominated, articles of disposable property.¹² Chattel slaves of this type are not to be confused with helots and other forms

¹¹ Simpson (above, n. 6), 36-7

¹² O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge and London), 1982. Unfortunately, as we will see, a definition such as Patterson’s is not fully capable of capturing the dynamic and diffuse institution of chattel slavery.

of coerced laborers found in Greece and elsewhere in the Mediterranean world.¹³ Unlike chattel slaves, helots had certain acknowledged rights among which, for instance, were the right to a portion of their income, the right not to be sold, and the right to a family. Paradoxically, however, there is good reason to think we will not automatically find Aristotle's natural slaves in this category of coerced labor.

1. Chattel Slaves

First, many chattel slaves will have been free Greeks who had the bad luck to suffer enslavement through war or as the result of falling into the hands of slave traders. Such, for example, would have been the case of the well-to-do Athenian Nicostratus, who, while pursuing some runaway slaves of his own, was enslaved himself,¹⁴ or the Athenian hoplites enslaved by Syracusans after their unsuccessful invasion of Sicily, or the many Greek cities that were sacked by other Greeks during the fifth and fourth centuries. A recent review lists 37 Greek cities enslaved by other Greeks or Macedonians between 470 and 335.¹⁵ Clearly such persons, although technically chattel slaves would not, at least to begin with, exhibit the characteristics of classical natural slavery, and Aristotle himself explicitly recognizes this kind of enslavement as being problematic. Hence, although we might expect to find natural slaves in populations of chattel slaves we need to make distinctions regarding precisely what category of chattel slaves, and clearly there are many, we are talking about. This is not to say that badly treated, recently enslaved free people might not quickly develop the kind of traits that supposedly characterize natural slaves. Modern history has taught us rather too much about how this process works, and how quickly personal autonomy can be lost in oppressive situations such as those that flourished in Nazi Germany, the Soviet gulags or even less coercive POW and DP camps.

¹³ D. Lotze, *Metaxy Eluterōn kai Doulōn* (Berlin, 1959); P. A. Cartledge, "Serfdom in classical Greece," in L. Archer (ed.), *Slavery and other Forms of Unfree Labour* (London, 1988), 33-41; J. Ducat, *Les Hilotes*, BCH Suppl. 20 (1989); J. Ducat, *Les Pénestes de Thessalie* (Besançon, 1994); M. Whitby, "Two shadows: images of Spartans and helots," in A. Powell and S. Hodkinson, *The Shadow of Sparta* (London, 1994), 87-126.

¹⁴ Dem. 53.4-9.

¹⁵ V. Rosivach, "Enslaving *barbaroi* and the Athenian ideology of slavery" in *Historia* 40 (1999), 129-157.

These observation may seem perhaps too obvious to be worth mentioning, so I move on to other reasons for thinking chattel slavery is not, ipso facto, our best target in our quest for natural slaves.

Aristotle was himself aware of the narrowing of the juridical and cultural gap between slave and free as was Plato before him. The military revolution that accompanied the Peloponnesian War and flourished throughout the fourth century, heightened the role of metic rowers, mercenaries, slave rowers and slave infantry. As a result the distinction between slave and free was not at all as clear as it perhaps once was or at least was imagined to be. If there ever was a popular slogan among Greeks that might have been phrased "once a slave always a slave," or among the cognoscenti, "once a natural slave always a natural slave," it was undermined by the progress of the war. For instance, before the battle of Arginusae in 406, the Athenians freed *and* enfranchised the slaves who rowed in the fleet. A reasonable estimate suggests that as many as 13,000 were manumitted and enfranchised at that time.¹⁶ This was a gigantic number, amounting to 40-50% of the citizen population. In 338 B.C. another mass freeing, though without enfranchisement, was proposed after the defeat at Chaeronea.¹⁷ It did not go into effect because Philip did not march on Athens. These latter events, it should be noted, occurred just 2 to 3 years before Aristotle returned to Athens.

2. Helots

Oddly the best examples of the narrowing of the gap between slave and free comes from the state that had the reputation for possessing the most oppressive helot system in the Greek world, namely Sparta.¹⁸ It has been acknowledged for some time that the secret of Spartan military power was its large helot base upon which it could and did draw.¹⁹ Examples cited include the battle of Plataea, the critical event in the second Persian invasion, where helots fought in the rear ranks of phalanx behind the Spartiates;

¹⁶ M. J. Osborne, *Naturalization in Athens* (Brussels, 1983), 3&4, 34. The calculation is based on the fact that 110 ships were mobilized with a minimum enlistment of 22,000 men. Usually the proportion of citizens to slaves was 40:60.

¹⁷ Osborne (above, n. 16), 68. The gap between slave and free was not great in war, Hunt (below, n. 19), 118 with references.

¹⁸ Perhaps we should not be surprised. Sometimes those with the keenest appreciation of the value of freedom are those who have no opportunity to exercise it while the reverse is the case with many in free societies.

¹⁹ Peter Hunt, *Slaves, Warfare and Ideology in the Greek Historians* (Cambridge, 1998).

and the spectacularly successful campaigns of Brasidas during the Peloponnesian War which were conducted with an army of 700 Helots and 1000 mercenaries.²⁰ It is ironic that it was as result of the military successes of helots and mercenaries that Amphipolis was lost and Thucydides found himself in exile. Brasidas' helots were subsequently freed.²¹ The great loss the Athenians suffered in Sicily was, in good measure, occasioned by the presence of the Spartan general Gylippus with a force of helots and Greeks from mainland Greece.²² At Mantinea, characterized by Thucydides as "by far the greatest of Hellenic battles which had taken place for a long time," helots were present in "full force."²³ Finally, the entire helotized population of Messenia became, overnight, the Greek state of Messenia in 369 when liberated from Sparta by the Thebans under Epaminondas. This was an important event that had reverberations around Greece because it permanently undermined Sparta's war making powers. Perhaps more importantly from our viewpoint was the intellectual turmoil it caused by calling into question assumptions about who helots were and whether they were by origin Greek or pre-Greek.²⁴

The examples could be multiplied – but the point is that by the time of Aristotle Greeks acknowledged that the distinction between slave and free was not so gigantic as to be impassible.²⁵ Citizens, it seems, felt comfortable, or at least accepted the necessity, of associating slaves with them in such important *polis* activities as war making, traditionally and ideologically the exclusive preserve of citizens. This change in attitude, if such it was, raises doubt about the appropriateness of looking for natural slaves among at least those chattel slaves whom the Greeks regarded as worthy of emancipation.

An unpleasant corollary of this principle, however, would be that by acting this way, i.e. by being prepared to enfranchise certain groups of slaves, Greeks were in effect admitting that these particular slaves were not natural slaves, forever locked in slavishness, but humans enslaved unjustly in the first place, or slaves who had outgrown

²⁰ Thuc. 4.80.5, 4.78.1.

²¹ Thuc. 5.34.1. and settled with other neodamodeis. Cf. Hunt (above, n. 19), 59.

²² Thuc. 7.19.3; 7.58.3: 600 Helots and neodamodeis out of 1600 from mainland Greece. Cf. Hunt (above, n. 19), 60.

²³ Thuc. 5.57.1.

²⁴ P. Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter* (Baltimore, 1986), ch. 8: Greek History Writing about Slavery.

²⁵ Philon of Byzantium (5.4.14 – 15) advised the besiegers of a city to offer freedom *ahead* of time to the slaves of the besieged as this would prevent their arming by the other side.

their natural slavishness. This latter is an interesting possibility which leads to the next point.

3. Reversing Natural Slavery

Darryl Dobbs and David Depew argue that there is a correlation between deficient, morally and politically underdeveloped cultures and natural slavery.²⁶ Natural slaves are not, in their view, born but created, though in a different way from the one suggested above where freeborn men are reduced to slavish behavior by harsh treatment. Rather, Dobb's and Depew's natural slaves are the products of slavish cultures that make it impossible for their members to develop into autonomous individuals with the opportunity to practice virtue. People growing up in these deficient cultures would not know what virtue was because they had no exemplars of virtue to imitate, and even if they had such models the community itself would not furnish them the opportunity to engage in the practice of virtue. People in these backward cultures had no opportunity to deliberate, and were, therefore, by definition, natural slaves. Slavishness according to this hypothesis was not a "genetic" condition but one that resulted from an environment altogether uncondusive to human development and happiness.

This argument would invite us to look for natural slaves in cultures so deficient we would be able to identify whole classes of people whom we could reasonably take to be natural slaves. However, I would like to postpone discussion of these cultures until later when I come to the *barbaroi* (below, section 4) and instead extrapolate on the basis of the Dobbs/Depew premise. If natural slavery were the product of environment rather than genetics, then, presumably, when natural slaves were *removed* from their detrimental environments and transported to a good environment, to a well-functioning, healthy *polis*, then such individuals would have the opportunity to grown out of their slavishness.²⁷ Naturally it would depend on whether the presumed natural slave ended up, for example, in a mine, or some rich person's home in an urban environment, or as a public slave. Slaves who had the good fortune to find themselves favorably situated would quickly be introduced to *polis* life. They would hear about or even see what happened in the courts,

²⁶ Dobbs (above, n. 7); D. Depew, "Barbarians, Natural Rulers, and Natural Slaves: Aristotelian Ethology Meets Aristotelian Psychology," paper presented at SAGP Annual Meeting 1999 and forthcoming.

²⁷ Dobbs (above n. 7), 90-92 suggests that involvement in agriculture would achieve this end, but since this is precisely what such individuals did before they were enslaved it is hard to see how agricultural labor alone would enable natural slaves escape their slavishness.

in the assembly, in the council, in the gymnasium or the agora. They would know about the debates over policy, hear of military campaigns, or even, as we have seen, accompany citizen soldiers on campaign, serve with them in the phalanx or sit alongside them in warships, especially the latter, since a fairly large percentage of almost all Greek naval crews were slaves or coerced laborers.

All of these activities, one would imagine, would begin to break down slavish attitudes built up in the slaves' native land. Immersed in *polis* life we might expect a percentage of these slaves to begin to emerge from their slavishness. Evidence for this may be found in the Old Oligarch's complaint that at Athens slaves are indistinguishable from citizens.²⁸ We might also consider the behavior of the slaves in New Comedy, if that is any guide to social life, and Aristotle's own testimony to the lack of orderliness among slaves in democratic regimes (1329b28f.).

Following the logic of Dobbs and Depew the argument may be made that chattel slavery could, in some circumstances, actually rescue some, who in their homelands, would have been condemned to a life of natural slavery. The Dobbs/Depew argument may also be applied to helots and for the same reasons. Spartan helots and their counterparts in other Greek *poleis*, were not the passive victims of a backward culture but the oppressed subjects of an advanced one, and therefore aware of what constituted a better life than the one they led. Some among them had undoubtedly a keener appreciation of the benefits of a free life than those who were actually free as the well-known conspiracy of Cinadon in 397 suggests.²⁹ The Spartans, in turn, knew well the danger their helots constituted for them. Spartan fear of a helot uprising was both a

²⁸ "Slaves and metics at Athens lead a singularly undisciplined life; one may not strike them there, nor will a slave step aside for you. Let me explain the reason for this situation: if it were legal for a free man to strike a slave, a metic or a freedman, an Athenian would often have been struck under the mistaken impression that he was a slave, for the clothing of the common people there is in no way superior to that of the slaves and metics, nor is their appearance Where there are rich slaves it is no longer profitable for my slave to be afraid of you; in Sparta my slave would be afraid of you, but there [i.e. in Athens], if your slave is afraid of me, he will probably spend some of his money to free himself from the danger. This then is why in the matter of free speech we have put slaves and free men on equal terms; we have also done the same for metics and citizens because the city needs metics because of the multiplicity of her industries and for her fleet; this is why we were right to establish freedom of speech for metics as well, Ps. Xen. [*Ath. Pol.*], tr. J. M. Moore.

²⁹ Cinadon, a disenfranchised Spartan or "inferior" (*hypomeion*) planned to raise his fellow *hypomeiones*, helots, freedmen (*neodamodeis*) and *perioeci* against their masters, the Spartan officer class, the Equals (*homoioi*). An informer told the Spartan ephors that these plotters "would be glad to eat them (the *homoioi*) up raw" (Xen. *HG* 3.3.6).

literary and sociological topos and is cited by Aristotle himself on two occasions (1269a37-b7; 1272b18-20). Hence the annual declaration of war against the helots was not merely a ritual exculpation for enslavement but, along with the *krypteia*, a recognition of what it took to get rid of the least slavish of the helots.

4. Barbarians:

I refer back to earlier comments above (pp. 5-6) regarding the kind of argument made by those who think Aristotle believed that barbarians were, tout court, candidates for natural slavery. There I claimed that the argument was often made in normative or idealizing terms derived from the *Ethics* which raised the bar of citizenship so high that only a minute number even of Greeks would ever qualify for citizenship in a real *polis* and would be hard to identify anyway because the criteria for citizenship were shifted by this argument from juridic to purely moral grounds. The value of the high bar argument is that it makes it easy to account for Aristotle's supposedly cavalier attitude towards barbarians. If most Greeks were unworthy of citizenship, passive in its exercise, and slavish in their mores, then, a fortiori barbarians were quintessentially slavish. However, I want to challenge this view.

We know that Book 1 of the *Politics* states that the *polis* is the natural end of human socio-political development; that it is within the *polis* humans can flourish best and achieve their ends. But this should not be taken to mean that Aristotle thought the *polis* was the sole locus of political activity or that some degree of human flourishing could not be found in other right constitutions such as those of monarchy discussed in Book 3. Would the fact, for example, that deliberation in monarchies is limited in theory to the king, render the rest of the community natural slaves, as is thought to have been the common view among Greeks, expressed for example by Euripides' assertion that in a monarchy the king alone is free.³⁰ If that were the case, then presumably everyone else would be slaves.³¹ But although Aristotle often begins his discussion with endoxic

³⁰ Euripides, *Helen* 246; Newman 3.265.

³¹ Simpson, for instance, appears to believe this to be the case. Commenting on the second form of kingship in Book 3 he says: "The second [form of kingship] is the sort found particularly among barbarians. It is, in the largeness of its powers and the despotic character of its rule (the barbarian king rules for his own advantage), really the same as tyranny. What makes it different from tyranny proper is that it is according to law (as opposed, presumably, to being arbitrarily imposed) and the subjects put up with it willingly and even willingly defend it (a feature of kingships). *So these subjects are in effect natural slaves (willing to put up with a slavish condition is a sure mark of a slavish character; it betokens a*

opinions, he almost always moves beyond them and he is unlikely not to have done so in this instance also. Better to think of *poleis* as potentially, but not necessarily in actuality, occupying the high end of a spectrum of political entities. Needless to say, if we restrict ourselves to discussion of the best constitution, then presumably in Aristotle's view the best *polis* would hold the highest rank.³²

In the case of monarchy not only the king deliberated but also his advisors. They too would have the opportunity to flourish, because they had an opportunity to practice virtue.³³ These would include in the case of the Persian monarchy for example, members of the king's own family, his courtiers, officials, hired experts and the like, in other words, the whole apparatus through which he administered his vast realm. Aristotle himself had first hand experience with despotic rule both in his relationship with Hermias and later with the Macedonian monarchs Philip and Alexander. Surely Aristotle did not think that he had been reduced to the status of a natural slave just because he served in an advisory capacity to a strong man and a monarch respectively?

As for the masses of the people, the peasants toiling in the fields of the Persian monarch or of the Macedonian king, what of them? Are they likely to be the natural slaves we are looking for on the grounds they did not and could not deliberate? Clearly their level of participation in government was minimal in comparison to select *poleis*. They were, comparatively, passive figures, but their payment of taxes, their service in the army, their honoring of the king, and most importantly, their choice not to revolt, bespeak a level of deliberation. If they could be said to deliberate about ends it would be about how good their king was and how well off they were under him.³⁴ This is not a wholly improbable scenario; the Persian empire, it is generally agreed, was a well-run, prosperous, stable empire.

lack of spirit and spirit is necessary for virtue, which is the mark of the naturally free man, 1.5-7)" (above, n. 6), 181-182, emphasis added.

³² But even that is not wholly clear. Since the best man, the *spoudaios* of Book 3, could make an appearance in any legitimate constitution, ipso facto that constitution would be rendered the best for as long as the best man ruled, cf. D. B. Nagle, "Alexander and Aristotle's *Pambasileus*," in *L'Antiquité Classique* 69 (2000), 117-132.

³³ Albeit in a non-*polis* environment, but nonetheless in a legitimate constitution.

³⁴ The debate over the advantages of different constitutions was an old one as the Persian debate on the subject in Herodotus suggests (3.80-83).

This hypothesis might be challenged on the grounds that clearly most of the subjects of the Persian Empire worked with their bodies and did not actively deliberate and thus manifested the most easily identifiable characteristics of natural slaves. But if we use these criteria to identify non-Greek natural slaves, how are we to characterize the lack of opportunity for deliberation on the part of so many in narrowly oligarchic Greek *poleis*?³⁵ These Greeks, like their barbarian counterparts, were also largely engaged in manual labor. We might ask would the inhabitants of a well-run, stable, prosperous kingdom be worse off and deliberate less than Greeks in a poor, oppressive, unstable, disorderly, corrupt, faction-ridden *polis* of any type? What of barbarian *poleis* like Carthage used by Aristotle as an example of a well run state? Was there no deliberation there? Or the Persia of Xenophon which looks like an idealized Greece whose nobles are presented as exemplars of the kind of virtuous behavior that Xenophon found so signally lacking in his own contemporary Greece?³⁶

In the end the key issue for Aristotle would seem to have been the quality and the number of people who constituted the *politeuma*, the politically active subgroup in the larger community. Its size and membership, as Aristotle himself makes clear, varied from constitution to constitution, from the one to the few to the many. Indeed, Aristotle's ideal state with its tiny *politeuma* of the free does not look wholly unlike Xenophon's idealized Persian monarchy. In Aristotle's view a legitimate political community could take many forms ranging from those *poleis* closest to the ideal state to monarchies or even *ethnē* provided they exhibited the usual criteria for legitimacy, namely, that rule be according to law and on behalf of the governed. And so we are back to the question: are only those who actively deliberate about ends in a *polis*, are they alone free people while the rest of society which does not actively deliberate, are natural slaves?

³⁵ Not to mention the apathy, ignorance and sheer incompetence of many voters in the most advanced states of the modern world.

³⁶ See for example ch. 7, "Xenophon: The Satrap of Scillus," in P. Georges, *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience* (Baltimore, 1994); D. L. Gera, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia: Style, Genre and Literary Technique* (Oxford, 1993).

III. CONCLUSION

Where does all this point, if anywhere? Do we know any more about where we should find natural slaves now than we did in the beginning?

I think the data suggests that we should expect to find natural slaves among the populations of all three proposed categories of chattel slaves, enserfed laborers and barbarians. I would add a fourth: natural slaves may well have existed among backward populations of Greeks. No single category alone, however, would have been composed exclusively of natural slaves. While it is likely that traits of slavishness would be most likely to have been encountered among barbarians, especially those lacking *thumos*, it is important to distinguish among the many communities of non-Greeks that existed in the ancient world. Many of the inhabitants of the Persian Empire lived in well regulated, not necessarily oppressive communities, some of which were to a considerable degree Hellenized as both literary and archaeological sources demonstrate. Phoenician cities, barbarian by definition, were surely not to be categorized as identifiable reservoirs of natural slaves. By contrast many parts of Greece were truly barbaric and unstable, as were such regions of Europe as Thrace, Paeonia, and Illyria, not to mention the truly savage folk who lived in the steppes of the Black Sea and the Caspian.³⁷

It would not have been an easy task for a hypothetical conscientious slave owner to pick out in practice a natural slave: a) from either among the mass of chattel slaves to be found at any given time in any given *polis*; b) from among helots and other oppressed workers; nor c) from among barbarians – except in all cases under certain circumstances, by careful investigation and study of the candidates involved. As a practical matter Aristotle's analysis produces some guidelines which a conscientious slave owner might have found helpful for thinking, but which in the end would have been no more practically useful than the common sense judgment of ordinary Greeks who took the emancipation of slaves as a common phenomenon, so that whatever they thought the term "natural slave" might mean, it did not have the eternal and necessary character modern racialist thinkers might attach to it. Aristotle's thinking about slavery is not, in my

³⁷ Perhaps the remote barbarians described by Aristotle as "people irrational by nature and living solely by sensation, like certain remote tribes of barbarians, [who] belong to the bestial class (*zōntes thēriōdeis*)," *NE* 1149a9-11.

opinion, vitiated by false consciousness. Rather, he reflects accurately the real situation of the Mediterranean slave-owning world in which he lived. He is neither subtly undermining the slave regime of Greece nor overtly sustaining its legitimacy. He is merely, thoughtfully, stating what would have been obvious to the more aware of his contemporary hearers and readers who were as familiar as he was with the realities life and labor in the fourth century. In practice the way to solve the problem of unjust enslavement, as everyone knew, was to manumit one's slaves, minimally, as many, including Aristotle, did by testament.