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## Aristotle's Gentleman

*A Good and Noble  
Philosophy of Education*



### I. Introduction

"You *can't* legislate morality!"—cries the average, educated modern as she defends private lives and bedrooms from the prying eyes of lawmakers, judges, and the obnoxiously religious; for everyone knows that such tyranny over private conscience, such callous disregard for diversity of values, would be *immoral*.

For Aristotle, this attempt to claim individual moral authority over some areas of human activity is arbitrary and nonsensical. To legislate "morality"—that is, to enact laws that encourage just and prohibit unjust behavior wherever such behavior may occur—is for Aristotle precisely what it means to legislate, period. As he says early in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "legislators make the citizens good by forming good habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator, and those who do not effect it miss their mark, and it is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one."<sup>1</sup> One cannot succeed in creating and maintaining a good constitution if the "good" is left to individual preference. This is not to the detriment of the individual; in fact, it is precisely the central importance of the individual in the polis that demands an objective standard of the good, for it is only

1. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE), translated by William David Ross, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, edited by Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 2.1, 1179b25. Throughout the *Politics*, Aristotle especially criticizes the Spartans for missing the mark in this regard.



through the cultivation of good and noble *individual* citizens according to such a standard that a good polis can possibly exist.

In this paper, I will interpret and defend Aristotelian political, ethical, and educational ideals and illustrate what the Aristotelian gentleman,<sup>2</sup> as the product of these ideals, looks like in order to counter misperceptions characteristic of our modern viewpoint. Specifically, I hope to demonstrate the necessity of good liberal education both in the lives of free men and in the life of a free polis.<sup>3</sup> Through the educated, good, and noble man—the gentleman—the relation between citizen and city will be illuminated. After analyzing this noble embodiment of Aristotle's political philosophy, I will compare him to the modern "men without chests"<sup>4</sup> and show thereby the strengths of what is at first glance crippling in Aristotle—such as the apparent sacrifice of individual good for that of the state and the insistence on an absolute moral standard, neither of which is considered acceptable to modern thought—as well as the weaknesses of what is assumed empowering in the modern approach to education, politics, and law.

## II. The Inseparability of Law, Ethics, and Education

In his frequent emphasis of the good life and good citizens in the healthy functioning of the polis, it is clear that Aristotle's political thought is continuous with and inseparable from his ethical thought.<sup>5</sup> An appreci-

2. On the use of the word "gentleman": "[O]ne of Aristotle's theses, as fundamental to the *Ethics* as to the *Politics*, is that only the noble is ultimately well and correct and good and that anything that is not noble is not really well or correct or good. The *kaloikagathoi*, however, or those who are literally "noble and good" I refer to as gentlemen, since that is what true gentlemen are." Peter Simpson, *A Philosophical Commentary on the "Politics" of Aristotle* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), xxvii. Following Aristotle in his frequent use of analogy, I understand "gentleman" to refer to: the morally perfect; those on their way to moral perfection; those who have perfected the degree of virtue possible for them in their particular circumstances.

3. As Leo Strauss explains: "The chief purpose of the city is the noble life and therefore the chief concern of the city must be the virtue of the members and hence liberal education." Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Charlottesville, Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1964), 31.

4. Following C. S. Lewis' brilliant *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1944).

5. Stanford Cashdollar points out that "there is far more continuity between *EN X* and *Politics I* or *II* than between almost any two consecutive books of the *Politics*." He continues, "*EN* and *Politics*, or more accurately, the political inquiry is viewed as having as its goal the attainment of the most choosable or desirable life for man (*EN I. 7, X. 6.; Pol. 1323a16, 1325a16–b1*). It is not



ation of the continuity of these two works is absolutely necessary in understanding Aristotle's political philosophy; the *Ethics* is "the immediate and particular context of the *Politics*,"<sup>6</sup> apart from which context misunderstanding is inevitable. It is imperative to remember that Aristotle considers his ethical inquiry to be a political one.

One area in which the developments of the *Ethics* are especially key is in Aristotle's recommendations regarding law and education. It is clear from his discussions in book III of the *Ethics* that moral agents must be free in order to be virtuous or vicious, for it is "by choosing [voluntarily] what is good or bad" that "we are men of certain character."<sup>7</sup> At the same time, "it does not follow that if [the unjust man] wishes he will cease to be unjust and will be just." The conviction that goodness and wickedness are ultimately matters of personal, *individual* responsibility is never forgotten throughout Aristotle's political inquiry; it remains a grounding principle even when he advocates ultimate supremacy of the law<sup>8</sup> and the jealous maintaining of "the spirit of obedience to law."<sup>9</sup> Rather than limiting the freedom of the citizen, as seems to be the case at first glance, good laws provide guidance for truly free actions: "in its ordaining of what is good [the law] is not burdensome"<sup>10</sup>—"men should not think it slavery" to live by the constitution, for it is their "salvation."<sup>11</sup> We moderns may cringe as visions of Big Brother loom in our heads when we hear Aristotle say:

No one will doubt that the legislator should direct his attention above all to the education of youth; for the neglect of education does harm to the constitution. The citizen should be moulded to suit the form of government under which he lives. . . . Neither must we suppose that any one of the citizens belongs to himself, for they all belong to the state, and are each of them a part of the state, and the care of each part is inseparable from the care of the whole.<sup>12</sup>

However, keeping in mind—as we always should—the investigations of virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and the vital importance Aristotle places

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a distortion to say that the ten books attempt to define that life and what is required for its attainment while the subsequent eight books attempt to describe the processes by which these desirable or choosable goals are insured through the actions of the political practitioner." Stanford Cashdollar, "Aristotle's Politics of Morals," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (1973):158.

6. Peter L. Phillips Simpson, *A Philosophical Commentary on the Politics of Aristotle* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), xxii.

7. NE 3.2, 1112a2.

8. See NE 3.5, 1282b3.

9. NE 5.8, 1307b31.

10. NE 10.9, 1180a24.

11. *Politics* 5.9, 1310a35.

12. *Politics* 8.1, 1337a7–28.



on the freedom of the individual to voluntarily act in the development of virtue therein, it is clear that the men being “moulded” in the ideal city—that is, the men being trained in, by, and for the noble and the good—look nothing like those raised on a Huxleyian assembly line. They are free, noble, virtuous moral agents. Still, it is hard for us to part with the extreme democratic sentiment fuelling a negative reaction to such a view of education and the state; the “false idea” that “freedom means the doing what a man likes” and “every one lives . . . ‘according to his fancy’”<sup>13</sup> is exactly the kind of illusion proper education allows a man to overcome. As the Catholic tradition puts it, “freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought.”<sup>14</sup> Acting on the ability to indulge whatever passions may move one is not freedom at all, Aristotle makes clear, and it is in fact enslavement worse than physical chains. Thus, the modern, in pursuing a shallow and false concept of freedom, renders himself unable to enjoy actual liberty and condemns himself to slavery and mediocrity. This is especially problematic in a society built upon a foundation of true autonomy and excellence. As will be discussed in greater detail below, a primary difficulty in the predominant modern political views is that citizens trained according to a doctrine of false freedom cannot maintain a good polis—a free society without truly free citizens will necessarily self-destruct. Hence the need for an education rooted in noble pursuit of the good—anything less will fail to support the continuation of democracy.

Again, the city exists for the sake of the *good* life, not life simply—otherwise “brute animals might form a state.”<sup>15</sup> For the citizens to be more than content animals, to be truly happy men (which is what the good life of a city consists in), there need to be good laws, keeping in mind that “the best laws, though sanctioned by every citizen of the state, will be of no avail unless the young are trained by habit and education in the spirit of the constitution.”<sup>16</sup>

## II. Aristotle’s Gentleman

In this section I seek to illustrate the full-fledged good and noble man, who is the guiding ideal the legislator (who in the ideal city is such a man

13. *Politics* 5.9, 1310a25–36.

14. John Paul II, “Homily in Orioles Park at Camden Yards,” October 8, 1995. <http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/popeo264is.htm> (accessed by author July 4, 2011).

15. *Politics* 3.9, 1280a32.

16. *Politics* 5.9, 1310a14.



himself) has in mind when he makes laws concerning his primary priority: education. In human affairs the ideal is rarely realized, but if it is not at least aimed at, not even a limited approximation will be possible. In educating all freemen as if they could be ideal statesmen—though nature does not seem to provide for such equality—each is at least prepared to maximize the excellence in his power, that is, attain that “state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well.”<sup>17</sup>

### 1. *The Gentleman is Free*

Aristotle firmly holds that a city is only as good as its citizens—what else could motivate writing the *Ethics* as the first half of his political inquiry?—saying at the outset of book VIII of the *Politics*, “and always the better the character [of citizens], the better the government.”<sup>18</sup> Shortly thereafter he also says, “Neither must we suppose that any one of the citizens belongs to himself, for they all belong to the state.”<sup>19</sup> This sounds quite harsh to our individualist ears. However, in the next chapter, Aristotle is quite clear that the state’s molding of citizens is producing free men who learn for their own sake (or the sake of friends or excellence) and who avoid the menial and the vulgar.<sup>20</sup> This highlights what is perhaps the first quality of the gentleman that stands out—he is *free*.

The gentleman is truly free; he is not a slave to the false freedom mentioned above; rather, his parents and city having nurtured “the development of reason and autonomous virtue ... guided by reason, ‘fostering their best part with their own’”<sup>21</sup> since his earliest youth; he is capable of freely desiring the good and noble. As Burnyeat argues, such habituation—which is central to the early stages of education and key for all future learning—is “actually a way of grasping [the noble and just] on a par with, though different from, induction, perception, and other modes of acquisition.”<sup>22</sup> The virtuous being so pleasant to him as a result of this habituation, the law which exists for the sake of encouraging virtue is no burden to him. His upbringing, education, and law are all united in the common political

17. NE 2.6, 1106a22–23.

19. *Politics* 8.1, 1337a28.

21. Randall Curren, *Aristotle and the Necessity of Public Education* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 49. Curren highlights Aristotle’s close following of Plato regarding the Socratic “principle of fidelity to reason.”

22. M. F. Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to be Good,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s “Ethics,”* edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 73.

18. *Politics* 8.1, 1337a7–13.

20. *Politics* 8.2, 1337b11–24.



mission to put into practice the understanding of the good discovered in the *Ethics*.<sup>23</sup>

Return now to Aristotle's unsettling claim that "no citizen belongs to himself"—not only does the gentleman belong to the state in such a way as to not contradict his freedom, but it is in fact in and through "belonging" to the state that he attains and maintains that freedom; again, "men should not think it slavery to live according to the rule of the constitution; for it is their salvation."<sup>24</sup> It is the state and its laws that educate the gentleman, that nurture in him "a capacity going beyond the application of general rules, to tell what is required for the practice of virtues in specific circumstances," so that he may in turn legislate and provide for citizens when he participates in ruling. While Aristotle himself only offers a rough sketch of things in these political works, in his outline of the dynamics of constitutional rule, wherein free men alternate between ruled and ruler, we see the beginnings of what his philosophical descendant Maritain develops as a "relation between two wholes":

For justice and law, by ruling man as a moral agent, and appealing to reason and free will, concern personality as such, and transform into a relation between two wholes—the individual and the social—what must otherwise be a mere subordination of the part to the whole.<sup>25</sup>

Again, while Aristotle would not have formulated it in personalist terms, he did see that the state to which citizens belong is primarily concerned with making them good and obedient to laws. The latter part is not to be interpreted as any kind of legalism—for Aristotle, the law is authoritative insofar as it is in accord with virtue. The ultimate goal of political inquiry is human happiness (action in accordance with virtue), so law must facilitate the achievement of this end; otherwise, it is not (ideally speaking) law.

Thus, when Aristotle says that the state is prior to the individual,<sup>26</sup> or that it is "finer and more godlike"<sup>27</sup> to attain or preserve the end of a state than that same end (happiness) of a single man, it is with the understanding that the relation between city and citizen is *not* one of subordination; a

23. Randall Curren, "Afterword for Aristotle," in *Philosophy of Education: The Essential Texts*, edited by Steven M. Cahn (New York: Routledge, 2009), 148.

24. *Politics* 5.9, 1310a35.

25. Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, edited by Mortimer J. Adler (New York: Macmillan Company, 1940), 77.

26. See *Politics* 1.1, 1253a19–27.

27. NE 1.2, 1094b7.



city is only good insofar as its citizens are noble and good, and citizens are noble and good insofar as the city enables virtue (i.e., insofar as *it* is good), which is determined in large part through its laws written and unwritten.

2. *Good Man, Good Citizen:  
The Ideal in a Non-Ideal World*

A problem arises when a gentleman finds himself in a less than ideal city, as the virtue of the citizen in such a city is different from that of the gentleman—while the latter lives in accord with true justice, the former is guided by a constitution and animated by a people deficient in justice. Some conclude from this difficulty that there cannot be gentlemen in a non-ideal city,<sup>28</sup> for it is through his political activity that he is virtuous and, again, the politics of a less-than-ideal city is necessarily deficient.<sup>29</sup> It seems the modern focus on this problem, which Aristotle largely neglects (discussed in further detail below), misses the ultimate guiding end of the legislator: to make men good. If the mediocre legislator is making mediocre laws, the good and noble gentleman will “play the part of a good citizen as best he can, given that his allegiance to the laws and the constitution of his city is not unconditional,”<sup>30</sup> for his ultimate allegiance is to virtue; the city has claim to his cooperation only as far as it “tend[s] to produce and preserve happiness and its components for the political society,”<sup>31</sup> without, of course, inhibiting or contradicting his noble and good character.

Collins argues that the problem for Aristotle is not so much a tension between city and citizen, but a tension “within moral virtue itself between its orientation toward the common good [in justice] and activity as an independent end.”<sup>32</sup> With this distinction, we can understand that, again, the interesting problem is not what the gentleman does in the less than ideal city—for he of course will do whatever justice and virtue demands, whether that is in accord or contrary to what the city demands—but what the

28. “[W]ithout the ideal city there will be no good men,” Terence Irwin as quoted in David Keyt, “The Good Man in Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics*,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 24, no. 2 (2007): 221. Also, Eugene Garver argues that Aristotle’s understanding of the activity of virtue as *political* yields the “radical and unlikely thesis: *All and only those activities are part of the human good which are activities of good citizens in the good polis.*” Garver, *Confronting Aristotle’s Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 128. Emphasis in the original.

29. *Politics* 3.5, 1278a40–b5.

30. Keyt, “The Good Man in Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics*,” 240.

31. NE 5.1, 1129b19–20.

32. Collins, “Moral Virtue and the Limits of the Political Community,” 57.



city does when it accomplishes its goal of leading a citizen to the truly good life. That is to say, what does the city do when its citizen succeeds not in the secondary good of political activity, but primary human fulfillment in self-sufficient wisdom? We will come back to this later.

### 3. All-Around Awesome: *The Gentleman is Magnanimous*

Magnanimity, (μεγαλοψύχια) says Aristotle, “seems to be a sort of crown (κοσμός) of the virtues; for it makes them greater, and it is not found without them.”<sup>33</sup> Thus only a good man can be truly great-souled—magnanimity is not what it may look like, arrogance or disgust for lower people, but the extra greatness that comes to the honorable, noble, just, liberal, courageous, and completely virtuous man. It is, in Hoffmann’s words, “appropriate self-esteem,” which is in no way the kindergarten self-esteem that is preached in contemporary culture—that irreproachable regard for oneself regardless of actual virtue or merit, but the appropriate awareness of the capacity for greatness, as well as the desire to achieve and maintain not honors, but honorability itself.<sup>34</sup> This requires real goodness and virtue—no arrogant jerk is a true exemplar of magnanimity, only the exceedingly good and noble gentleman. This necessity of great virtue explains why magnanimity or “true pride” (as opposed to vanity [χουνοτής] or, more appropriately, undue humbleness [μικροψύχια]) is so rare, and why in contemporary culture—in which virtue is all but completely forgotten—it is practically unheard of. The kindergarten variety is much easier.

As magnanimous, the gentleman is the “highest *nonphilosophic* human type,”<sup>35</sup> he is “virtue’s exemplar and champion.”<sup>36</sup> He is self-sufficient in this insofar as his magnanimity pushes him to continue to be virtuous, while the “humble” “actually seem to make themselves worse,”<sup>37</sup> since they

33. NE 4.3, 1124a1.

34. “[T]he magnanimous person considers himself worthy of honor, but what he desires is honorability, i.e. virtue as the basis of rightly deserved honors. Cf. Ernst Schmidt, ‘Ehre und Tugend: Zur Megalopsychia der aristotelischen Ethik,’ *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 49 (1967), 149–168.” Tobias Hoffmann, “Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas on Magnanimity,” in *Virtue Ethics in the Middle Ages: Commentaries on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, 1200–1500*, edited by István P. Bejczy (Boston: Brill, 2008), 103 n. 4.

35. Harry V. Jaffa, *Thomism and Aristotelianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 116.

36. Susan D. Collins, “Moral Virtue and the Limits of the Political Community in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*,” *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 1 (2004): 57.

37. NE 4.3, 1125a25.



refrain from doing the great things they think themselves unworthy of and thus have a limited opportunity to grow in virtue. This highlights the difference between modesty and improper deficiency in pride—the deficient do not want to appear vain and thus err on the side of lacking pride, which turns out to be in fact a false humility and a manifestation of pride in the pejorative sense.

Aristotle's analysis of the "great-souled" or "proud" gentleman, it is important to remember, is a *pre-Christian* analysis, and thus is not to be understood as necessarily anti-Christian despite the translation of μεγαλοψύχια as "pride." In fact, one could argue that Christian humility has a lot in common with Aristotle's greatness of soul,<sup>38</sup> for the Christian, like the proud pagan, knows himself and knows his due; he despises those honors that are inappropriate to him, namely, "honour from casual people on trifling grounds" or, for the Christian, the honors of the world. Further, the unduly humble or small-souled is understood as more opposed to pride than is vanity. Aristotle says that these pusillanimous ones are "unduly retiring," οκνήροι—they shrink, hesitate, hold back, etc., which is just as much a defect in the pursuit of Christian sanctity as in the pursuit of Aristotelian virtue.<sup>39</sup>

As the exemplar of virtue, the magnanimous gentleman possesses all the virtues in a unified way that distinguishes him from the simply courageous man, as Collins highlights. He is courageous, just as he is liberal, magnificent, temperate, just, etc. but in such a way that he does not separate his own good ends from the noble; rather, they are identical.<sup>40</sup> From this, the "crown" of his virtue is not so much the self-appreciation he can enjoy in the recognition of his own goodness, but rather the extra something that arises out of the harmony of mind, body, and soul that fully perfected virtue entails.<sup>41</sup> Much like the pleasure that completes an activity, which Aristotle

38. As Hoffmann highlights, Aquinas saw magnanimity and humility as partners in tempering and perfecting the passion of hope: "magnanimity orders the passions of hope *and* despair with a view to the attainment of one's own good, whereas humility orders them out of submission to God." Hoffmann, "Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas on Magnanimity," 127.

39. Of course that is *not* to say that the gentleman is a saint—far from it. But much like the concept of 'moral' does not make sense apart from a divine lawgiver, saintliness and true humility and charity do not make sense apart from an understanding of God as love. Apart from that grounding, without the divine stronghold that is source and anchor, as Kierkegaard explains in *Works of Love*, man's love would not exist. Thus, Aristotle's proud pagan is much more consistent than the atheistic moralist; consequently, the latter has little justification for his objection to the lack of charity of the former.

40. Collins, "Moral Virtue," 48.

41. "[T]he virtuous person's conception of what is truly pleasant is now shaped by his inde-



tries to articulate in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the gentleman in his magnanimity has crossed a threshold into a new level of virtue which approaches the supernatural. Similar is the case of the problematic philosopher who comes close to divinity in his contemplation of God, mentioned in the previous section.

#### 4. Gentleman Philosopher?

Moral virtue shows that the city points beyond itself but it does not reveal clearly that toward which it points, namely, the life devoted to philosophy. The man of moral virtue, the gentleman, may very well know that his political activity is at the service of noble leisure but his leasurable activity hardly goes beyond the enjoyment of poetry and the other imitative arts.<sup>42</sup>

The gentleman is not the philosopher. Or at least, he is not a philosopher qua gentleman. The gentleman is the perfection of moral virtue and, in the fullest exercise of that virtue, a statesman. However, throughout his education he would have been exposed to a great deal of philosophy and would understand to some extent its primary importance as the primary end of man. This exposure is integral to the well-being of the city, though it may not seem to be. For, if the highest fulfillment of man lies in philosophical activity, and the city is for the ultimate happiness of citizens, the legislator must provide for philosophy, though he himself may never enjoy or fully understand its importance. Further, only philosophy can properly convey knowledge of the virtues, which Aristotle emphasizes ought to be an integral part of the legislator's education, as they make laws in accord with what makes their citizens virtuous. But if the gentleman is the active statesman and not the philosopher, then what is the philosopher, and where does he and his near-complete self-sufficiency fit into the city?

Here it is important to understand the role of development, the role of process in stages of the gentleman in Aristotle's view. A gentleman is not born, he is formed. With an appreciation of this, one could further alleviate the tension of theoretical versus moral virtue. Strauss mentions the

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pendent, reasoned conception of what is good, just as it was earlier shaped by his father's or his teacher's advice about what is noble.... the noble is that which, being good, is pleasant because it is good (cf. *EE* 1249a18–19) And with all three categories in harmony, then, and then only, nothing will tempt or lure him so much as the temperate or brave action itself." Burnyeat, "Learning to be Good," 88.

42. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 27.



"enlightened statesman," the gentleman who has been affected by his philosophical training and takes that with him into his rule<sup>43</sup>; from here one can go a step further and see that problematic loner philosopher as a kind of *ascended* statesman. He could not have made it to that level without the previous virtue, and his leaving it behind does not negate its value—there is no contradiction to resolve; the city is not gravely harmed by this passing of a citizen from the political to the fully contemplative life, for it could only come after decades of very human wisdom-seeking, during which time the city was benefited by those years of virtuous political action, teaching, etc. To adjust the city so that no man could ascend beyond it would destroy its orientation toward the good and, thus, its very reason for existence.

### III. Modernity's Men without Chests

While the gentleman's life is marked by a harmony of soul which frees and energizes him in the pursuit of the good, the modern man's life is one of dissonance and crippling insecurity. This is directly related to the modern insistence highlighted in the introduction above on the separation between law and ethics. The primary result of such a bifurcation is the loss of that grounding that Aristotle assumes throughout his reflections, namely, the good and noble, which renders law essentially and fundamentally non-ethical, that is, neutral with regard to ethical concerns. This neutrality in effect neutralizes law itself. For if, as Aristotle holds, law derives its authority from the good it defends and promotes, and if the good is no longer accepted as objective, what does law have left to stand on? What is law for if not the safeguarding of, and guidance in light of, ethical standards? And by what is one to judge which laws are "rightly framed," that is, "commanding some acts and forbidding others ... rightly"?<sup>44</sup> The problems that Anscombe saw with modern moral philosophy are (necessarily) the same problems with modern political philosophy—integral concepts like human rights, equality, universal suffrage and education are grounded in assumptions that have been rejected by relativist and materialistic thought. It is only a matter of time before practice catches up with theory and law's relation to ethics is either recovered or eradicated. "If we shatter this basic order [of real justice] which links things human to the divine stabilities of

43. Ibid.

44. NE 5.1, 1129b24.



the universe," says Maritain "even the strongest empirical defenses of the social order will remain vain."<sup>45</sup>

Since law in the Aristotelian understanding is also educative, there result two additional crimes against the legislative art (and consequently, against man and the good); the first is nothing new to Aristotle: non-ethical education. This is the source of the good citizen versus good man dilemma, for in educating a "good" citizen in accordance with the unjust laws of the non-ideal city, one does not educate an unqualifiedly good man.<sup>46</sup> This would seem to contradict the essential purpose of education and learning. The second offence is more complicated and uniquely modern: in the *deliberate* splitting of ethics and law, executed in such a manner as to result in separate public and private spheres of morality, the city goes beyond having a defective justice typical of the non-ideal state; rather, the imperfect justice of the city is acknowledged and even accepted *as* injustice. The pursuit of a just and good city is given up in cynical despair and a corrupt one is instead tolerated in exchange for comfort and security. This is a deviant move Aristotle seems not to have foreseen—which is perhaps why he does not pursue the problem of how a good man in a non-ideal city is supposed to act, which is, to the modern reader, of utmost interest<sup>47</sup>—for he says, "all men cling to justice of some kind, but conceptions are imperfect."<sup>48</sup> But with the Machiavellian turn of modernity being highlighted, this no longer seems to be the case. There is no clinging to justice, but resigning oneself to inevitable injustice.<sup>49</sup>

With the acceptance of injustice as the rule of the city, the man in public service is now held to a standard different from individual's private conceptions of justice.<sup>50</sup> In other words, the city is accepted as inevitably and perhaps inherently unjust—politicians are assumed corrupt and often are proven to be with few consequences affecting their political career. While Aristotle claims that "the state exists for the good life" and "those who care

45. Jacques Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, translated by Harry Lorin Binsse (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 37.

46. Keyt, "The Good Man," 238.

47. Keyt, "The Good Man", 221.

48. *Politics* 3.9, 1280a10.

49. Which resignation is done for the sake of security, and "To prefer injustice to disorder, as Goethe put it, is to prefer disorder to disorder, disorder in the root to disorder in the flower." Maritain, *Ransoming the Time*, 37.

50. See *Public and Private Morality* for a discussion of Machiavellian politics and its impact on the relation between public and private spheres. Edited by Stuart Hampshire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).



for good government take into consideration virtue and vice in the states,"<sup>51</sup> the modern sees the state and government as inevitably corrupt, and thus is forced to look elsewhere for the good life. With this, the citizen and city are cut off from one another, severely disabling the natural and proper function of both. This is the problem facing the modern: if the legislator, whose first priority is supposed to be the good of the city and thus the virtuous education of individuals, is himself a villain, how can he be trusted to educate? And if the city and city leaders cannot be trusted to educate or make good laws, but are left in charge of lesser, material concerns, what is there to unify the citizen and the city? Only the material. Only security and economics. Again, imperfect justice—which is open to gradual improvement—is thus replaced with sheer injustice as the guiding rule, leaving citizens to find their own versions of good, if they choose to bother. This differs in a small but tremendously important way from Aristotle's gentleman who finds himself under an unjust regime; while both the gentleman and the cynical modern may have to find their own way to the good, largely without city and legal guidance, the gentleman: i. recognizes this as a perversion of the city, while the modern accepts it as the natural and inevitable way of power; and ii. seeks to heal the city through getting involved in legislation himself, while the modern resigns himself to the fact that the state will always be unjust.

### 1. *θυμός and the Modern*

Given Aristotle's account of the natural generation of the city and thus its natural orientation to the good life, the normalization of Machiavellian outlook has serious ramifications on the inner life of man. As observed above, Aristotle understands the state to exist for the good life of its citizens, that is, it exists for their exercise of virtue in political life. The splitting of the good life between the necessities for survival provided by society and moral perfection pursued individualistically results in a split within the very soul of man, out of which his spirited element, his *θυμός*, escapes him.

As Fukuyama explains, *θυμός* in the form of *megalothymia* (drive for superiority) has been replaced in modernity with the economization of life to fulfill ever increasing material desires, as well as *isothymia*, the desire for acknowledged equality.<sup>52</sup> However, man is not satisfied with these substitu-

51. *Politics* 3.9, 1280a31b5.

52. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 190.



tions, and still yearns for a struggle for superiority; so he finds this struggle in business, sports, politics, and art.<sup>53</sup> It seems that these largely “contentless” endeavors only delay or distract from what really satisfies man—the struggle for virtue, which, end of history or not, always remains essential to the good life.

### 2. *Men without Chests: the New Ideal*

In contemporary society, the gentleman has been jettisoned and replaced with a less offensive model, the “Intellectual.” C. S. Lewis says of modern “Intellectuals”—who have replaced the gentleman as the ideal: “It is not excess of thought but defect of fertile and generous emotion that marks them.” These are the Men Without Chests, whose heads appear so large and smart only in reference to their stunted chests, their withered spirit. They are the heroes of the Enlightenment who, with Dostoevsky’s villain, gleefully sneer at tradition saying: “Science now tells us, love yourself before all men, for everything in the world rests on self-interest.”<sup>54</sup> Courage, liberality, even true friendship are rendered incomprehensible by these new gentlemen-models of modern education, who are “content to sit at home and congratulate themselves on their broadmindedness and lack of fanaticism.”<sup>55</sup>

Unfortunately for modern man, the spiritedness these Men Without Chests lack is that very thing which drives men to virtue and happiness. Aristotle says, “passion is the quality of soul which begets friendship and enables us to love.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, when Lewis’ “Conditioners” work to squash spirit for the sake of control, or the democrat does so for the sake of feel-good mediocrity, they squash what makes man *man*, and what makes life worth living. Of course, as Garver explains, without the guidance of Aristotle’s polis, “the emotions rooted in thumos, assertiveness and competition, are destructive and bellicose.”<sup>57</sup> This is why θυμός must be cultivated and tamed if liberal democracy is to survive.<sup>58</sup> Otherwise, the result is, as has been the case, what Aristotle would call living “Cyclops fashion”: each as he pleases. When this is the accepted end of the city—to live like Cy-

53. *Ibid.*, 320.

54. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, translated by Constance Garnett (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 140.

55. Fukuyama, *The End of History*, 307.

56. *Politics* 7.7, 1328a1.

57. Eugene Garver, *Confronting Aristotle’s Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 121.

58. See Fukuyama, *The End of History*, 183.



clops—the pluralistic legislator of this amoral polis, having no right to legislate a good and noble education, is faced with either allowing the degeneration of the city into rebellion by neglecting education entirely, or setting up an education that drains *θυμός* and demands mediocrity of citizens. This cuts to the heart of the difference between modern education and Aristotle's model of guidance: where modern education seeks to fill the head with culturally acceptable and safe facts, the Aristotelian approach, following Plato, seeks to direct their attention and energy toward truth; where modern education instills a consequentialist attitude toward the world in preparing youth for work, the Aristotelian develops "an educated perception, a capacity going beyond the application of general rules, to tell what is required for the practice of virtues in specific circumstances."<sup>59</sup>

#### IV. What is Needed: A Gentlemen's Education

At the heart of Aristotle's political inquiry is the reality that "argument and teaching ... are not powerful with all men, but the soul of the student must first have been cultivated by means of habits for noble joy and noble hatred, like earth which is to nourish the seed."<sup>60</sup> This image of nourishment or cultivation is an important one; in the ideal city's education of gentlemen—from gymnastics and music in early childhood onward through political and philosophical studies in adulthood—is the realization of *individual* flourishing of *political (social)* animals. That is to say, Aristotle's education is meant to prepare and enable the moral virtue that is the natural end of man. The result is not a slave of the state but a free, just, magnanimous friend that, in a free society, *is, in a way, the state.*<sup>61</sup>

Aristotle makes very clear that education is necessary to the survival and well-being of the polis,<sup>62</sup> which again exists for the good life of its citizens. As Tessitore explains, "the failure to develop one's capacities for both reason and excellence precludes the possibility of lasting happiness despite

59. Burnyeat, "Learning to be Good," 72.

60. NE 10.9, 1179b25.

61. In contrast, the isolation of Rousseau's *Emile* renders him unable to attain *eudaimonia* in the activity of virtue because he does not receive the guidance necessary to habituate him to anything outside his own passions and material environment. However, the idea is somewhat understandable, for the limited education he would have received in the city, which filled the mind but neglected the soul and body, would not have left him any closer to happiness. Cultural insensitivity aside, the point that Aristotle makes when he applauds the Greeks as having the right amount of spirit and reason is a good one—human perfection lies in balancing spirit and rationality.

62. *Politics* 5.9, 1310a13–36.



whatever advantages of wealth, birth, or position an individual might enjoy.”<sup>63</sup> Virtue does not arise by nature nor contrary to nature<sup>64</sup>; rather, it requires cultivation from youth. The modern system, with its neglect of moral virtue that a free society necessarily requires in order to survive, is no better off than the Spartan, which found itself dependent on a virtue their education did not foster.”<sup>65</sup> As Fukuyama observes:

The doctrine that says that there is no privileged perspective dovetails nicely with democratic man’s desire to believe that his way of life is just as good as any other. Relativism in this context does not lead to the liberation of the great or strong, but of the mediocre, who were now told they have nothing of which to be ashamed.<sup>66</sup>

In such a society—where everyone has their own personal “bag of virtues”<sup>67</sup> and the purpose of the city is not to promote what it finds to be virtue but rather to facilitate the smooth coexistence of multiple moralities<sup>68</sup>—the proposition that a high standard of moral virtue be incorporated into public education is a hard sell. Additionally, there is a somewhat legitimate fear that “those in charge of [civic education] may wish to indoctrinate students rather than educate them.”<sup>69</sup> However, given the previous elucidation of the kind of men a democracy *needs* to survive, (as opposed to the mediocre *wants* of democracies) namely, magnanimous, virtuous, wise gentlemen, it is hard to see how such men can be the products of indoctrination.

## V. Conclusion

Given the stark contrast between the modern men without chests and the gentleman of Aristotle’s philosophy, it is understandable that the “sensible man” of today would respond to the gentleman’s excellence with “an

63. Tessitore, “Aristotle’s Ambiguous Account of the Best Life,” 211.

64. NE 2.1, 1103a23.

65. As Richard Bodéüs highlights in “Law and the Regime in Aristotle,” in *Essays on the Foundation of Aristotelian Political Science*, edited by Carnes Lord and David K. O’Connor (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 234–48.

66. Fukuyama, *End of History*, 307.

67. Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development*, vol. 1 in *Essays on Moral Development* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 184. The enlightened psychologist, of course, knows better—“virtues and vices are labels by which people award praise or blame to others, but ... are not the ways in which they think when making moral decisions themselves.” *Ibid.*, 226.

68. See Garver, *Confronting Aristotle’s Ethics*, 127.

69. Jack Crittendon, “Civic Education,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/civic-education/>.



urge to kick Aristotle's *ho megalopsuchos*."<sup>70</sup> The promotion of this "bag of virtues" sensibility is *the* goal of modern education. Greatness is offensive. Rather than the gentleman of leisure, we want worms that will kick that sort of arrogance. But we do not want them to actually act on the spiritual deficiency, oh no—

In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.<sup>71</sup>

70. A "Scotch commentator" quoted by Robert S. Brumbaugh and Nathaniel M. Lawrence, "Education as Self-Realization," in *Philosophers on Education: Six Essays on the Foundations of Western Thought* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 64 n. 2.

71. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 26.