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Aristotle's Anticommunism

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This essay examines Aristotle's critical review of Plato's *Republic*, the focus of which review is restricted, surprisingly, to Socrates' communistic political institutions; Aristotle hardly mentions any of the other important themes developed in the dialogue. For this reason commentators have charged Aristotle with misrepresenting Plato's intention. Against this view, the author finds in Aristotle's anticommunism the most incisive formulation of his political disagreement with Plato's Socrates. Communism will not promote the harmonious articulation of city and man, as Socrates suggests; rather, it undermines the integrity of the political community and precludes the proper development of the best human nature. Aristotle holds that communism thus disrupts the entelechies of both city and man. Modern critiques, by contrast, merely indicate the adverse effects of communism on economic productivity or efficiency. Thus Aristotle's anticommunism is seen to offer for our consideration a dimension of this important issue that is typically neglected in contemporary political argument.

Preliminary Considerations

In Plato's *Republic* Socrates argues in behalf of the most radical form of communism ever proposed.[1] Not only would he prohibit the private possession of material goods among his guardians,[2] he would eliminate all privacy and communize even the family. In the *Politics* Aristotle undertakes a lengthy critical examination of Socrates' political proposals as a primary step toward

[1] Many students now consider Socrates' endorsement of communism to be ironic, i.e., not to represent his true view, much less Plato's. The evidence for this interpretation is impressive but not conclusive. Among other considerations, it will suffice here to note that *Aristotle* treats Socrates' proposals as indicating his genuine intention. He goes so far, in fact, as to identify Socrates' communistic proposals as belonging to *Plato* (1274b9–11). Aristotle even points toward a motive underlying Socrates' intention (1264b15–17; note the middle voice, *aphairoumenos*). The textual foundation for Aristotle's interpretation lies, I suggest, in Socrates' express reliance on a communistic regime to make manifest the divine quality of the philosophical nature and to aid in its proper development (497a3–5, 497b1–c7). Aristotle's chief objection to Socratic communism meets this issue head-on: according to Aristotle, communism precludes exactly this education or development of the philosophical nature. How Plato might respond to Aristotle's criticism is one of the most intriguing questions in political philosophy. The significance of the dialogue that would emerge from such a response depends, however, on whether Aristotle's objections to Socrates' city are indicative of a genuine disagreement or merely evidence of misunderstanding. The commentators, as far back as Proclus, typically charge that Aristotle's political criticism stems from misrepresentation, misconception, or merely a careless reading of the *Republic*. Against this tendency, my intention here is to show that Aristotle's objections are coherently organized and that the focus of his presentation is strategically centered on what is, indeed, a central concern of Plato's *Republic*. Thus this essay provides a first but essential step toward the eventual reconstruction of a truly significant dialogue between two great political thinkers.

[2] Since Aristotle contends that Socrates fails to determine the political institutions in force among the rest of his citizenry (1264a13–17), perhaps one should say "*at least* among his guardians." In return for his trouble in pointing out this difficulty, Aristotle has been reproached virtually unanimously by classical scholars as careless and captious. But a careful reading of the *Republic* will indeed reveal a dilemma in the scope of communism in Socrates' city. Socrates does suggest that if his guardians ever acquire private property, they should rather be called householders and

presenting his own account of the best regime, which, he argues, necessarily embraces separate families and private property. I aim in this essay to bring to light something of the political disagreement between Aristotle and Plato that this controversy indicates.

One would hardly describe Aristotle's break with Plato as an under-researched or arcane topic of scholarly analysis. But the available commentaries fail to preserve, to say nothing of explaining, the particular phenomenon of their *political* disagreement. Most commentators allege that in the *Politics* Aristotle misrepresents (or simply misunderstands) Socrates' arguments and impertinently directs his ojections at his own misconceptions; what we have, they suggest, is not a genuine disagreement but rather a case of mistaken identity.[3] Others construct merely eclectic reconciliations which, moreover, tend to belittle Aristotle's own declaration of opposition.[4] Those commentators who

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farmers (417a6–7); but he also says that above all his guardians must ensure that the youths best suited to rule in the future are properly selected, nurtured, and preserved from corruption (415b3–c6). Now some of those selected to join the guardians will have been born of artisan parents. If communism provides the proper nurture for the golden children of the city's rulers, the same arrangements would seem, on this basis, to be necessary for the farmers and artisans, whose children may well include some golden natures too young to have sufficiently shown their "metal" but not too young to be corrupted by an unfit rearing. On the other hand, private property would seem to be necessary for the farmers and artisans, whose bronze and iron natures presumably require the incentives associated with private ownership to perform properly their civic function. Hence, the textual evidence is ambiguous; there is difficulty, as Aristotle suggests, either affirming or denying the proposition that communism is limited to Socrates' guardians.

[3] Consider, for example, these representative indictments of Aristotle's political criticism of The *Republic*: Franz Susemihl (Susemihl and Hicks, 1894), "It is not easy to imagine a stronger case of inability to transport oneself to an opponent's sphere of thought. In fact [Aristotle] cannot be acquitted of very culpable carelessness in the use of the work he is criticizing" (p. 241). Benjamin Jowett (1885), "Nor is it possible to set any limits to the misinterpretation of Plato passing under the name of Aristotle" (II, p. 56). R. D. Hicks, in Susemihl and Hicks (1894), "Hence the arguments advanced by Aristotle have little direct application to the scheme which he is ostensibly criticizing" (p. 221). E. Bornemann (1923), "I cannot see anything in it other than a sophistical amusement *[sophistische Spielerei]*" (p. 128). W. D. Ross (1930), "Here Aristotle seems to forget Plato's actual arrangements" (p. 244). R. G. Hoerber (1944), "In this connection another instance of carelessness on the part of Aristotle is of interest.... [It] is a clear indication of insufficient study of, and care in quoting, his sources" (p. 106). Ernest Barker (1959), "He was not criticizing what Plato had meant" (p. 391).

[4] Consider Werner Jaeger (1948, pp. 187–96, 393–99), who suggests that despite the evidence of a growing rift particularly between Aristotle and the Speusippean Academy, his project remained through all the stages of his career the elaboration of essentially Platonic insights. Thus John Wild (1948) maintains that we should understand the differences between Plato and Aristotle not as evidence of opposition but as manifesting two phases of "one and the same philosophy" (pp. 12–22). Eric Voegelin (1957) maintains that "there is a continuity of evolution from Plato, the founder of the good *polis*, through the Athenian Stranger, who transmits as much of his mystical knowledge as is bearable to the founders of a colony, to Aristotle, who formulates standards and devises

do address the disagreement between Aristotle and Plato as such elect a strictly metaphysical focus and disregard the political dimension of the controversy.[5]

There is good reason to be skeptical of any reductionist account of the political controversy between Plato and Aristotle, but especially of a metaphysical reduction. For it was Socrates' renunciation of the study of physics and metaphysics to concentrate on human affairs that first "brought philosophy down from the heavens" and thus provided the occasion for Aristotle's political disagreement with Plato. Socrates chose this political focus, which distinguished him from previous philosophers, not because he had grown weary of cosmological inquiry but precisely because he calculated that politics provided the best access to the *kosmos* or whole (*Phaedo*, 99c6–100a3; *Metaphysics*, 987b1–3).[6] As Leo Strauss (1953) notes, "Socrates' turn to the study of human things was based, not upon disregard of the divine or natural things, but upon a new approach to the understanding of all things... of the whole" (p. 122).

If our access to understanding the whole indeed lies in human affairs or politics, and Aristotle's teaching regarding the *kosmos* or whole opposes Plato's, we may well expect politics to be a primary rather than merely a derivative factor in their overall disagreement. In support of this suggestion, it is worth noting that nowhere else does Aristotle devote so elaborate and textually detailed a discussion of his opposition to the teachings of a Platonic dialogue as in the passages of the *Politics* on which I hope here to shed some light. In this sense, Aristotle himself emphasizes above all the political dimension of his disagreement with Plato.

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means for their maximum relatization under varying material conditions" (p. 283). For an approach to the reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle that does not depend upon speculation concerning the order of composition of either Aristotle's treatises or Plato's dialogues, see Harry V. Jaffa (1963, pp. 80–85). Jaffa bases his reconciliation on what he sees as the compatibility of Aristotle's *pragmatic* objections to Socrates' scheme with Plato's ironic intention. For a further elaboration of this theme, see Arlene Saxonhouse (1982).

[5] Consider, for example, Erich Frank (1940), Harold Cherniss (1944), and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1980). For a suggestive exception see Helmut Flashar (1977). Although primarily devoted to a criticism of Jaeger's reading of the *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, Flashar presents in the concluding paragraphs of his essay a brief "hint" concerning the true relationship between the Platonic and Aristotelian teachings. What is remarkable is that in so doing he adopts for once a *political* standpoint: he turns to the differences between their images of man's status in the "cave."

[6] References to Plato are to John Burnet's edition of the dialogues (Oxford, 1900–1907) and, unless indicated otherwise, are to the *Republic*; references to Aristotle are likewise to the editions included in the Oxford Classical Text series and, unless indicated otherwise, are to the *Politics*. The translations in this paper are my own.

A more immediate impetus than the prospect of cosmological insight for this study of Aristotle's anticommunism exists, however, in our own contemporary political circumstance. For the great controversy that currently divides Left and Right, to say nothing of East and West, concerns precisely the propriety of private property and the scope of political authority over private men and women. It is fitting, then, that the disagreement between Plato and Aristotle comes to light first for us in its aspect as a dispute over the status of private property and family life. By beginning accordingly, with what is first "for us" (*N.E.*, 1095b2–4), it is possible not only to move toward a deeper understanding of the political teachings of Plato and Aristotle but also to recover that fundamental perplexity which is itself prerequisite to our own political learning. For one cannot compare the arguments of Plato and Aristotle concerning private property and the family without accounting for the role these arguments play in their disagreement concerning the best political community. Nor, in turn, can one attend carefully to their profound disagreement concerning the best *politeia* and not acknowledge the radical and truly perplexing character of the question: in what manner *is* the best political community constituted?

It should be observed, furthermore, that contemporary political argument against communism presumes that man is essentially an apolitical individual. Yet Socrates abolishes private property and communizes family life, not in pursuit of individual equality or welfare, but to ensure the cohesion or integrity of the political community *as a whole* (462c10–d7 with 464a4–c4). In response, Aristotle objects to Socrates' proposals, not fundamentally because of their consequences for the maximization of economic productivity or even because of their apparent impracticability; Aristotle contests Socratic communism rather because of its corrosive effect on political cohesion or community. Aristotle's anticommunisn, then, expressly addresses a neglected dimension of the primordial political issue (*prōton*, 1260b36–37). Hence, I recount Aristotle's critique of Socratic communism not to indulge an antiquarian curiosity, but to gain a deeper insight than is otherwise available into one of the most urgent and fundamental political questions.

Before plunging into the depths of Aristotle's specific objections to Socratic communism, it is well to recognize and address a difficulty evident in the very surface of his account. It has been well said that "the problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things." Thus one immediately encounters the surprising fact that Aristotle, in his critical review of the *Republic*, bends all his efforts toward refuting Socrates' claims in behalf of communism and hardly mentions any of the other important themes that play a part in the dialogue. Now Plato's *Republic* indeed contains a thorough examination of the grounds for introducing communism into political life. But that, as every reader of the *Republic* knows, is not all that it contains. It is evident, furthermore, that no commentator, not even Aristotle, can extract

a particular discussion from its dialogical context without disturbing its place, and hence ultimate significance, in the *Republic* as a whole. Such neglect of the logographic and dramatic integrity of Plato's work can result only in the misrepresentation of his intention. Considering especially that Aristotle's guiding interest lies expressly in the constitution of the best political order (1260b22–30), however, it is incredible that *he* disregards particularly the most sensational of Socrates' political prescriptions: that philosophers should be kings. Still, Aristotle does not so much as mention the philosopher king. His remarkable omission of reference to the philosopher king deserves the closest scrutiny, to say the least. One might even hazard to pronounce it the touchstone of competing accounts of Aristotle's critique of the *Republic*.

An attractive explanation of Aristotle's omission is suggested by Leo Strauss (1964:122).[7] One might well consider Aristotle's disregard of the philosopher king to be legitimate, notwithstanding its apparent violation of the compositional integrity of the *Republic*, Strauss maintains, since Socrates introduces the philosopher merely as *instrumental* to the realization of his best city, not as an integral part of it. Now this interpretation, unlike any which preceded it, has the significant merit of explaining the restricted focus of Artistotle's criticism on the basis of his insight into, rather than misrepresentation of, Plato's dialogue. But it too proves untenable, in my view, in light of Socrates' argument in the *Republic*. For whatever the initial cause on account of which Socrates *introduces* philosophers, he leaves little doubt finally that the philosopher king is essential to the *intrinsic* perfection of the city (502d8–503b5; 506a9–b2; 520e4–521a9). This refinement in Socrates' argument immediately renders questionable, i.e., examinable, exactly the "legitimacy" of Aristotle's apparent disregard of the philosopher king. We must frame the difficulty as squarely as possible: against Aristotle's judgment that philosophy is extraneous to or "brought in from outside" Socrates' city (1263b39–40), Socrates affirms the continuity and coherence of the best city through its warlike and philosophical stages (497c3-d2; 503b1-5; 540c5-9; 541a3-4).

[7] Professor Strauss, whose works always warrant the closest study, writes here only obliquely on the disagreement between Plato and Aristotle. His orientation toward this controversy is governed to some extent, we may infer, by his broader concern with the presentation of the "ancients" and "moderns" as the fundamental alternatives in political philosophy. This presentation involves a mitigation of differences, a closing of ranks, within each camp for the purpose of highlighting the difference between them. Certainly, no one who has read Strauss's account would maintain that the gulf separating Aristotle and Plato is greater than that separating, say, Aristotle and Hobbs. Nevertheless, we should remember, as Strauss was undoubtedly aware, that a narrow fissure may be deeper than a wide one. The relative importance of disagreements between various philosophers need not be determined presently, however, to agree with Strauss that an understanding of the ancients must be guided by their understanding of themselves. Aristotle in particular understood his search for the best regime to require an aggressive critical examination of Plato's *Republic* as a primary step. Aristotle's self-understanding, then, is in an important way bound up with his opposition to Plato.

I suggest that Aristotle's exclusive focus on the city of warrior kings should be understood instead as an implicit *denial* of the continuity Socrates affirms. I shall argue that Aristotle disregards the philosopher king precisely because, in his estimation, the communistic political arrangements Socrates endorses *preclude* the education of a philosopher. At stake in Aristotle's contention is nothing less than the very integrity and sufficiency Socrates hopes to achieve for his city (423c2–4). For a city to be self-sufficient, it must be capable of generating its own rulers. But, according to Aristotle, Socrates' choice of institutions undermines the education of the very philosophers destined to become rulers in his best city. Thus Aristotle's scrutiny of Socratic communism, we shall see, does not betray inattention to the rest of the *Republic* or violate its logographic integrity. On the contrary, Aristotle chooses his focus strategically, targeting what he sees as a weak but essential link in the construction of Socrates' political philosophy as a whole. Communism, in Aristotle's judgment, is the keystone, if not the apex, of Socrates' dialectical edifice. Consideration of Aristotle's specific objections to Socratic communism will substantiate this interpretation.

Aristotle's Objections

Just as an adequate comprehension of Aristotle's critique requires an explanation of his peculiar focus on communism within the *Republic* as a whole, it is necessary similarly to account for the role th critique plays in the plan of the work of which *it* is a part. Now the principal thesis, quite literally, of Aristotle's *Politics* is that the rule of a statesman is different in kind—and not simply in quantity of subjects—from the rule a household manager (1252a7–16). Aristotle presents his teaching regarding household management *(oikonomia)* in Book One. This includes discourses on what we today narrowly term economics, as well as on the proper bearing of master to slave, father to child, and husband to wife. The latter discussions turn naturally to a consideration of the specific excellence appropriate to each of these relations. But since the household is only a part of a more comprehensive partnership, the *polis*, the specific excellence of its component relationships can be properly understood only with a view to the *part* the household plays in the *whole* political community (1260b8–24). For this purpose it is necessary, Aristotle says, to make a fresh start *(allēn archēn)*. We must consider political regimes, because the regime *(politeia)* governs the ordering of the political whole and its parts. Aristotle intends to present his own understanding of the best such political regime. But first he must show the necessity of his search for something beyond those regimes, whether already in existence or merely put forward in speech, which are thought to be well ordered (1260b28–36). This he does by devoting Book Two to the criticism of a number of theoretical and actual regimes, beginning with that described in Plato's *Republic*. Now Socrates' city warrants this immediate attention because its regime turns the order between the *polis* and its

constitutent parts topsy-turvy. Although it, like the other regimes Aristotle considers in Book Two, appears to be finely contrived, Socrates' regime, more even than these others, poses an obstacle hindering the establishment of Aristotle's principal thesis. For Socrates' regime, according to Aristotle, utterly confuses whole and part; Socrates, Aristotle contends, "makes a household out of the *polis.*"

According to Aristotle, it is above all Socrates' reliance upon communism, ostensibly prescribed to promote political unity, that reduces the *polis* to the status of a household, and destroys the political community as such (1261a21–22). Now it is not immediately evident in what sense the *polis* would be destroyed by being unified in the manner of a household. Surely certain advantages would accrue to a political community that could rely on the bonds of kinship to reconcile the conflicts of interest that regularly threaten to break it up into rival factions. For this reason Socrates proposed that all citizens in his city regard one another as brothers, and took the necessary steps to support the credibility of this supposed kinship by communizing family life and property (464a4–c4).

Aristotle recalls, however, that the *polis* initially evolves out of a community of many households. The household outside a *polis* is incomplete—even as a household. Only as a part of a political community, Aristotle claims, is the household perfected *(telestheisēs)*, and its capacity to achieve its proper end *(telos)* energized (1252b9–39, 1253a18). If one tries to make a household out of a city, reversing the development, the political community will be incapacitated with respect to *its* proper end. Such an incapacitated association is, according to Aristotle, no longer truly a political community. For "it is evident that the cultivation of virtue must belong to the *polis* that is truly, and not merely for the sake of a word, so called" (1280b6–8, 1253a23–25). Thus Aristotle finally objects to Socratic communism, not because it is impracticable or economically inefficient, but rather because it "destroys the city" as a fit habitat for human excellence. Aristotle's several objections to the regime described in Plato's *Republic* can be seen, then, to culminate in a single comprehensive contention: Socratic communism disrupts the entelechies of man and *polis*, disabling even the best human nature from its proper fulfillment. Aristotle criticizes Socrates' *politeia* because he finds it feeble and impotent, while the regime for which he is searching is the "mightiest of all" (1260b27–29).

As we have seen, Aristotle suggests that Socrates' chief mistake is his confusion of political unity and familial kinship, of whole and part, and that this is responsible for all his subsequent political errors (1263b29–31). We infer, accordingly, that it is not the *destruction* of the family as much as its *elevation* into a paradigm for political unity to which Aristotle objects. Although Socrates hopes to make his citizens care for one another as for brothers, Aristotle maintains that Socrates' elevation of the household into the dominating principle of political life erodes the true bond of political unity, namely friendly love

(philia), and simultaneously undermines the proper education of the philosophical nature. It is to the effects of communism on friendly love, that we shall turn first to discover the foundation of Aristotle's criticism of the *Republic*.

Communism and Friendship

Communism, then as now, seems to promise a "wondrous friendship" among everyone (1263b15–18). But, Aristotle argues, the appeal of communism is specious; in fact communism undermines friendship. Aristotle's analysis of the *Republic* reveals three ways in which *philia* or friendly love suffers from the measures Socrates proposes. First, Socrates' attempt to expand the domain of such terms of familial endearment as "son," "brother," and "father" results in less rather than more concord or likemindedness *(homonoia)*, which, it seems to Aristotle, is a specifically political form of *philia*. Second, Socrates' expansion of the household to comprise the entire *polis* means that the realms of familial and erotic love will no longer be separate; *philia* can scarcely flourish in the mingling that results. Third, Socrates' communization of property obstructs the development of generosity or liberality, the special work of which is to liberate *philia* from its bondage to one's self and possessions. Let us consider these each in turn.

The *polis* is literally held together by concord or likemindedness *(homonoia)*, which, it seems to Aristotle, is "political friendship" (*N.E.*, 1167b2–3, 1155a22–28). Accordingly, it is with a view to *homonoia* that Aristotle first criticizes Socrates' political institutions:

> Nevertheless, even if this is the best – for the community to be one as much as possible – it is not manifestly indicated in accordance with the saying: "if all at the same time say 'mine' and 'not mine' ". . . because all is two-fold. . . on account of which all saying the same thing is in one way fine but not possible, and in another way not fit at all for *homonoia*. (1261b16–32)

Homonoia, we learn, arises for fellow citizens when, "concerning what is advantageous they share a like judgment, choose the same things, and act on their common resolutions" (*N.E.*, 1167a26–28). Aristotle maintains that "all saying the same thing" is not at all indicative of *homonoia*, i.e., of a truly common resolve and disposition to act. For although all say the same thing, they may not speak from personal conviction. With this consideration in mind, Aristotle himself splits in two the property of each of the citizens of his best *polis* (1330a14–20). One part he would locate safely in the central districts of the city, the other part more remotely and precariously near the frontier. In this way each citizen has a personal stake in both places. This leads, Aristotle says, to more *likemindedness*. For citizens then can stand together behind a foreign policy which is based on their common personal interests rather than splintering into factions favoring either jingoism or appeasement. Hence it would indeed be a fine thing if each spoke for himself *(hōs hekastos)*, saying "mine." But in Socrates' regime, all, when they say "mine," speak only collectively, on

behalf of the *polis* (462d8–e3). Aristotle contends that for them to speak for themselves is impossible. Why?

His reasoning turns on the nebulous connection among citizens established by familial communism. He says:

> A thousand youths become sons to each of the citizens, but they are not his personally *[hōs hekastou]*; rather to the chance man likewise the chance youth is son. . . . Thus, each says "mine". . . in whatever relation to number he happens to be, namely "mine or someone else's". . . and doubting this too, for it is unclear to whom a child happens to be born and for whom saved once born. (1261b38–1262a6)

Thus the clarity of personal interest and conviction is doubly obscured by Socrates' communization of family life. Each says not "mine," but "mine or someone else's"; and he doubts even this already diluted connection. This circumstance precludes likemindedness because each is not himself permitted to have a clear "mind" to be likeminded with. Hence their all saying "mine" is hollow; such speech, Aristotle says, is a paralogism, an abuse of *logos.*

Merely saying the same thing, then, is not sufficient for *homonoia.* But neither is it even necessary. For if all citizens say the same thing – for example, "I'll rule" – the result is civil war rather than likemindedness. Likemindedness exists, for example, when the whole political community intends that a particular person should rule, provided he is willing (*N.E.*, 1167a30–34). But then the ruled say "you rule," while the prospective ruler says "I'll rule." We see *homonoia* in this instance precisely because fellow citizens are *not* all saying the same thing. They say different but concordant things. Aristotle infers, then, that by stretching the application of such terms as "son," "father," and "brother" beyond their natural domain, Socrates does not at all contribute to *homonoia* or political *philia* among his citizens.

In fact, in Aristotle's estimate, the present mode of speaking is more indicative of *homonoia* than that which Socrates proposes. Aristotle emphasizes that *philia* stems especially from the sense of ownership (1262b22–23); but in Socrates' city the disjunction "mine or someone else's" dulls and dilutes this sense. The present mode of saying "mine," therefore, is mightier and better *(kreitton).* For presently many speak with personal conviction of the same youth as their own. Some call the same lad son, others call him brother and still others nephew or cousin. All of them employ these different terms, however, as expressions of their personal relationship to the lad. Each speaks "for himself" when calling the lad his own. Their personal attachments provide a basis for a *truly common resolve* to tend to his welfare. Aristotle concludes, then, that it is better to be a private nephew than even a son in the manner prescribed by Socrates. For Socrates so dilutes the special care that accompanies familial *philia*, that its specific care inspiring quality is rendered ineffectual.

In any event, Aristotle observes, some of Socrates' citizens will inevitably detect their own kin, despite his elaborate precautions. Children tend to resemble their natural parents. Aristotle indicates, moreover, that the existence of such resemblances as betray natural kinship is just (1262a23–24). His objection to Socratic communism penetrates deeper than the practical observation of family resemblances initially suggests. Once again it is not fundamentally considerations of impracticability, but rather concern for communism's consequences on the promotion of human excellence that moves Aristotle to opposition. Particularly interesting is Aristotle's juxtaposition of the doubting (*distazōn*, 1262a5) to which Socrates' prescribed designations give rise and the trustworthy evidence (*tas pisteis*, 1262a18) seized upon by his citizens in accordance with natural family resemblances. For every greater confidence Socrates' citizens place in *natural* similarities, Aristotle thus suggests, the authority of *conventional* designations, and the political community which posits them, is further diminished. In a good *polis*, by contrast, law or convention *(nomos)* supplements and fortifies a father's rule; in turn, the father's endorsement of law adds the force of filial love and respect to its authority (*N.E.*, 1180a18–24, 1180b3–7). Accordingly, the mightiest and best *(kratiston)* program for supervising the care and education of the young must combine community and private participation (*N.E.*, 1180a29–b13). Socrates' elimination of private family connections, however, precludes the possibility of this combination.

Against Socrates' hopes of instilling friendly love in his citizens by extending familial kinship, Aristotle maintains that it will be all the more difficult for such a community to guard against assaults, incest, and other outrages as a result of Socrates' reforms (1262a25–27). Presumably, this follows because fear and shame, the safeguards on which Socrates depends to discourage these outrages (465a10–11), will be weakened by the dilution of the familial *philia* on which they are based. Significantly, however, Aristotle chooses not to dwell on the increased difficulty of preventing these crimes. Instead, he stresses their impiety and impropriety.

Aristotle objects in particular to Socrates' handling of *erōs*. Socrates allows *erōs* between citizens, in part because of its irresistibility, but also as a lever for unification. This becomes apparent when he accedes to Glaucon's "addition" to the law governing the behavior of guards on military campaigns (468b11–c5): no one – father, mother, brother, or sister – may then refuse the overtures of a lover. Socrates presumably hopes that his warriors will be stirred by the presence of the beloved to perform deeds of heroic valor. Certainly the city benefits from the intensified exertions of its warriors. But Aristotle insists that such an incestuous arrangement, allowing *erōs* between kin, involves the greatest impropriety *(aprepestaton)*.

Once again, the fault can be traced to the Socratic scheme for political unification. Having eradicated the private family, Socrates has no choice but to introduce incest into his city. As a consequence, *erōs* may pervade the whole

city; there no longer exists a shielded environment in which *philia* can arise and develop uncontaminated by the influence of *erōs*. Socrates may have intended the opposite, but his city does not become chaste; the household merely loses its innocence. *Erōs*, we infer, has no business in the household, which is the cradle of *philia*. On this basis Aristotle criticizes *erōs* among kin as out of place *(atopon)*.[8] For *philia* requires a sheltered environment to be nurtured to maturity. But Socrates destroys this environment, according to Aristotle, by communizing the family. As a result Socrates causes a diminution rather than an increase of *philia*. For this reason incest, *erōs* between kin, is superlatively improper; the most fitting thing among kin, not to mention fellow citizens, is *philia*.

Up to this point Aristotle has discussed only the shortcomings of Socrates' proposed communization of the family. To examine his proposal for communal property involves a separate *(chōris)* inquiry, Aristotle says, because even if the current separation of families were maintained, one could still ask whether property should be common. Socrates, we recall, recommends a legislative declaration abolishing all private property for his guards (416c5–417b9). Aristotle maintains that legislators should attend to the characters of their citizenry rather than to their property. Property will be used in common, he says, if men become friends; men do not become friends as a result of the communization of their property. Thus the integrity of Aristotle's apparently independent inquiries emerges in his recurrent concern for the effect of Socratic communism on friendly love, i.e., *philia*. In accordance with this concern, Aristotle first indicates that liberality, a virtue that implicates private property, is itself a prerequisite for sharing in *philia*, and thus for participating in the political community. Then he argues that Socrates' politicization of property and other *household* matters results instead in the development of habits which undermine liberality.

Aristotle begins his examination by making a distinction that proves to be important for determining how property might be made common. In accordance with the distinction between holding, or possession, and use there are three possible schemes according to which one might make property common. Use could be common, while possession is private; possession could be common, and use private; or, both possession and use could be made common (1262b37–1263a3). Aristotle indicates his dissatisfaction with both common possession and common use. Common possession, or holding, leads to neglect, and common use leads to abuse or overconsumption. Nevertheless, he does not mention a fourth possibility, that possession and use remain private. Aristotle,

[8] Whether Aristotle acknowledges *erōs* as appropriate even between husband and wife is an interesting question. Certainly he authorizes some suspicion to the contrary by omitting to mention *erōs* in connection especially with his description of human beings as "coupling" even more than political animals (*N.E.*, 1162a16ff.). More likely, this silence is itself indicative of the delicate treatment fitting for that *erōs* which necessarily plays a role in the household.

in other words, stops short of recommending that property be *kept* private. Property must somehow be made common, though by law it is thoroughly private (1263a26–27, 1263a37–39). Why?

If property were *kept* private, there would be no sharing. The corresponding character is called by Aristotle illiberal, or even money-loving (*N.E.*, 1121b12–16). Aristotle says that individuals like the self-lover and the money-lover are justly condemned, but hastens to add that their perverted loves should not be confused with the *philia* we all quite naturally have for ourselves (1263a41–b5). Taking Aristotle quite literally, the decisive difference between the "self-lover" *(philauton)* and one who "feels a friendly love for himself" *(to philein heauton)* appears to be the *inseparability* of the self-lover's *philia* from his *self*. To be a self-lover or money-lover means essentially to have one's *philia* "stuck on" one's self or possessions. The attachment to these things is, in this case, greater than that to which we are naturally bound. In this stuck condition *philia* cannot be drawn out of the radically private. The self-lover, accordingly, is incapable of partaking in the common bond that holds together the political community (*N.E.*, 1155a22–28).[9] But man, who uniquely possesses *logos*, is by nature a political animal; it follows, then, that it is *unnatural* for *philia* to be stuck on anything that prevents one's partnership in a *polis*. It is the function of liberality, I suggest, to *liberate philia* from this bondage, and thus to support the possibility of a political community.[10]

In contrast to the self-lover, one who feels friendly love toward himself evidently possesses an unfettered capacity for friendship that may be extended to others. He alone can truly become a citizen, a member of a political community, as distinguished from an "individual." But precisely how this liberation of *philia*, with its politically advantageous consequences, is to be brought about

[9] The money-lover, like the self-lover, lacks the liberal character necessary for political life. The money-lover becomes addicted to hoarding owing, presumably, to the undeniable pleasure of ownership. But the greatest pleasure of ownership, Aristotle insists, arises when one makes his private possessions common in use. The liberal man's pleasure is greater than the money-lover's, then, because it is genuinely a pleasure of *ownership*. Paradoxically, only if one shares his property with another can it be said that he has truly acquired it. This is the insight that lies beneath Aristotle's otherwise puzzling use of the verbal and substantive forms of "possession." In other words it is in a liberal action that it first comes to light that a possession *(ktēma)* can be one's own apart from the active possessing *(ktēsis)* or hoarding of it. Thus only the liberal man will feel genuine, natural pleasure in ownership.

[10] In this respect Socrates' proposals, which aim to promote the cohesion of the political community, are properly judged by the test of their consequences for liberality. Thus W. L. Newman's (1887, I, p. 168) objection, that one might reasonably consider whether the loss of opportunities for liberality entailed by the communization of property might not be outweighed by gains in other constituents of happiness, misses the point. Newman supposes that Aristotle treats liberality indifferently as one among many elements of the good life which might be sacrificed in order to obtain certain others. The key to Aristotle's argument, overlooked in Newman's analysis, is that liberality occupies a special position in that it is *prerequisite* to community, including the political community, and thus to the promotion of the "other constituents of happiness".

is not immediately clear. Aristotle offers two remarks, however, that suggest, in outline, a feasible strategy. First, he observes that in whatever manner the liberation of *philia* is to be accomplished, it is the "private job" *(ergon idion)* of the lawgiver, surprisingly describing the task of *community* building as something private (1263a39–40). Community spirit may be promoted, it seems, by assigning personal responsibility and honors especially where the fruits of one's efforts are common. In line with this observation, Aristotle further notes that, notwithstanding the "unspeakable" pleasure that arises from considering something as one's own private property, the *greatest* pleasure comes from graciously aiding friends, guests, and comrades (1263b5–6). In contrast to the "unspeakable" pleasure of hoarding, Aristotle would appear to be offering deeds of good legislation and hospitality as the very things of which instructive stories or "myths" are made. The customs inculcated by such music presuppose, however, the existence of private families and property. Socratic communism cannot promote liberality. Communized property only nurtures hoarding illiberality and aggravates conflict (1263a4, 1263a10–15). Private property is necessary for the nurture and perfection of liberality.

Property, then, is not an ingredient of political *homonoia*; it is emphatically no part of the *polis* (1328a34–35, cf. 1253b23). For Aristotle it is toward the development of liberal characters, rather than toward the designation of specific property arrangements, that legislation is properly directed. The politicization of property and other household affairs, authorized by Socrates' peculiar notion of political unity, will merely undermine *philia*. If the polis is made into a large household, these contentious trivialities will be elevated into the political realm, poisoning the community between fellow citizens. For the extended household contains only an adulterated, watery *philia*, which is too weak to facilitate a harmonious sharing of the all-too-hu an things. Even within the household, Aristotle observes, "we collide especially with those of our servants whom we use most in connection with routine chores" (1263a19–21). No potent familial *philia* lubricates this friction with servants. Aristotle suggests, significantly, that the best one can do is to hire someone else to supervise his servants, freeing himself for "politics or philosophy" (1255b35–37).

Communism and Philosophy

Aristotle's concluding objections are directed toward the impact of Socrates' political proposals on education. Socrates communizes property and abolishes the private family to promote political unity, to ensure that his guards remain the friendly allies of their fellow citizens. But he implies that such precautions would not be necessary if the guards were "truly educated in a fine way" (416b5–c5). Presumably because they have not yet received this education, Socrates supplements their early training in music and gymnastics with his communistic institutions. As Aristotle notes, however, the evils Socrates wishes to remove from his city arise as a consequence of viciousness, not as a result of

the lack of communism (1263b22–23). Thus he picks up Socrates' suggestion that communism is an institutional prop for his regime, which serves in the absence of the intrinsic support that only a proper education can provide. The difficulty with this strategy, according to Aristotle, consists in the immediate effects of communization: communism cannot serve as an effective stopgap because its own consequences preclude the effectiveness of Socrates' higher, philosophical education.

Because of this preclusion of further education, Socrates' guards will fall out among themselves:

> The manner in which Socrates establishes even the rulers is precarious in that he has the same ruling always. But this is a cause of faction even among those who possess no noteworthy qualities, and certainly will be with spirited *[thymoeidesi]* and warlike men. (1264b6–10)

To appreciate the point of Aristotle's remarks here one must recall that Socrates originally placed philosophy in man to temper the ferocity essential to the nature of a good guard (375e9–376c5, 525b8–9). Aristotle, however, describes the guards, who Socrates says must be philosophical as well as spirited, merely as spirited and warlike. He deliberately omits the guards' philosophical quality, which is precisely the factor on which the city depends if it is to be saved from the guards' savagery.

In Aristotle's estimate Socrates has failed to develop the philosophical capacity characteristic of the guard's nature. Socrates' reliance on the household *(oikia)* as an appropriate pattern for political integration commits his philosophical guards to the authority of the kindred *(to oikeion)*. By virtue of the monopoly he establishes for the kindred, Socrates makes it impossible for any claim higher than the claim of what is *nearest* and dearest to arise in his city. The guards' devotion to the city as their own obstructs their transcendence of the political horizon. Such potential philosophers, we can infer, will never escape the cave.

This discovery reveals an added dimension to Aristotle's earlier criticism of Socrates' regime as impious (1262a28). Piety as ordinarily understood requires that special care be taken in regard to kinship. This, however, is the piety Aristotle notoriously excludes from his own catalogue of virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In this respect it is perplexing to see Aristotle criticizing Socrates for impiety. But piety assumes a special meaning, particularly when Aristotle is faced with the task of criticizing Plato, or his fellow academicians. For then he stresses that it is precisely piety that requires that special care and allegiance to kin, our nearest and dearest, be overthrown:

> It would seem to be a better thing, and necessary as a condition of preserving the truth, to overthrow our nearest and dearest *[ta oikeia]*, especially insofar as we are lovers of wisdom *[philosophous ontas]*; for although both of them are dear, it is pious to honor the truth foremost. (*N.E.*, 1096a14–17)

Aristotle perhaps eschews the treatment of piety as a separate virtue in the *Ethics* because true piety is, for him, a component of philosophical virtue. *Philia* in its aspect as *philosophia*, the love of wisdom, however, cannot be tolerated in Socrates' regime, precisely because it is in its nature to challenge the kindred. Aristotle thus suggests that Socrates' regime in fact precludes philosophy.

Aristotle underscores this point in comparing Socrates' city to Sparta. He maintains that if a regime such as Socrates' were observed coming to be not merely in speech but in deed, it would differ little from what the Spartans have undertaken (1264a10–11). The comparison to Sparta is apt, in connection with Plato's criticism of it for cultivating only the polemical virtues (1271b1–10, 1334a11–41; *N.E.*, 1180a24–26), but especially in light of the notorious xenophobic tendency of the Spartan regime. In Sparta the "foreign seed" (*Rep.*, 497b3–4) of philosophy would not be tolerated.

Aristotle's astonishing objection that Socrates "takes happiness away from his guards" (1264b15–16) must be understood in this light. Commentators have ridiculed this contention as the most preposterous of Aristotle's claims against Socrates, suggesting that it is essentially nothing more than a resurrection of Adeimantus' materialistic objection within the *Republic* (419a1–420b1).[11] But Aristotle's careful formulation of this particular objection furnishes a further clue to his interpretation of Socrates' treatment of philosophy in the *Republic*. Aristotle's use of the middle participle *(aphairoumenos)* suggests that Socrates acts *in his own interest* in "taking away" happiness from the guards; further, the position of this participle, standing between the guards and happiness *(tēn eudaimonian aphairoumenos tōn phylakōn)* reinforces this contention. What then is Socrates' interest, and how does it literally stand between the guards and their happiness?

The clearest indication of Socrates' interest in the *Republic* surfaces in his response to the prevalent reproach leveled against philosophy. Only in this connection in the whole of the *Republic* does the remarkable sobriety of Socrates falter. The mudslinging against philosophy, Socrates says, arouses his spiritedness or anger (536c2–7). The genuinely philosophical nature, Socrates insists, is neither wicked nor worthless as many believe. On the contrary, it is truly magnificent and divine. But this cannot be perceived, Socrates notes, under present political circumstances,

[11] Consider Susemihl (Susemihl and Hicks, 1894): "Here Aristotle is guilty of a further piece of carelessness.... [He] has not attended to another passage V 465d–466b, where this thread is taken up... whence it appears that the former statement is only provisionally made.... Thus this objection breaks down entirely. We have had instances of similar negligence already" (p. 244). Jowett (1885): "This passage like many others in the *Politics* involves a misconception of Plato's meaning" (pp. 57–58). Bornemann (1923): "Has Aristotle really read Plato's Republic?... This last maneuver of Aristotle is completely meaningless" (p. 150). Both Susemihl (Susemihl and Hicks, 1894, p. 243) and Wilhelm Oncken (1875, pp. 190–91) further miss the point of Aristotle's objection by reading guards (*phylakes,* 1264b22) as philosophers. But it is Aristotle's principal concern, as I suggest, to show that these guards *cannot* be philosophers.

> but this is the charge I am bringing—that none of the presently existing cities is worthy of the philosophical nature.... if it should, however, receive the best *politeia*, just as it too is best, then it will be manifest that the philosophical nature is really divine while the others are merely human. (497b1-c2)

By founding in speech this best *politeia*, Socrates hopes, on the way toward illuminating the nature and profitability of justice, to debunk the popular conception of the philosopher and reveal his life as best. This, simply stated, is Socrates' interest. We note that his strategy will succeed, on his own account, however, only if the regime he founds *genuinely is best*. With this consideration in mind, however, Aristotle charges that Socrates' political prescription for a regime worthy of the philosophical nature conflicts with the happiness of his foremost citizens, who are themselves potential philosophers!

According to Aristotle, Socrates establishes his guards like a garrison in a foreign land rather than as citizens (1264a26-27). The guards' full-time occupation with the city's business is necessary, Socrates indicates, if the city is to be integrated and made whole and to achieve its greatest good. This demands too much, according to Aristotle, for precisely those citizens who have the greatest aptitude for philosophy are made to care above all for the city—their own city. But, as we have noted, the special mark of a philosopher is to be free to honor the truth ahead of his own. Thus Aristotle maintains that Socrates deprives his guards of happiness, *above all by stunting their development in philosophy.* This is Aristotle's most devastating indictment of Socrates' best regime, and with it his critique of the *Republic* reaches its culmination. The means by which Socrates attempts to satisfy the political necessity of devoted rulers are irreconcilable with the prerequisites of philosophical education.

Summary and Conclusion

Aristotle's critical review of Plato's *Republic*, rich in detail and particular considerations, nevertheless culminates in a comprehensive and formidable contention. Socratic communism, Aristotle charges, disrupts the entelechies of man and *polis*. Both political integrity and philosophy suffer under a communistic regime. This contention of Aristotle points toward a genuine and important disagreement with Plato's Socrates regarding the conditions of philosophical education and their compatibility with political concerns. Plato is fully aware of the difficulties plaguing any effort to reconcile civic and philosophical interests. In fact, he may be said to share with Aristotle the view that these two interests make the most rightful demands of allegiance on human beings and yet are not *obviously* in harmony with one another. But Socrates, anyway, evidently supposes that he has achieved a successful reconciliation, for he concludes his discussion of his philosopher kings saying,

> Each in turn, although for the most part spending time *[diatribontas]* at philosophy, when his turn is come, drudges in politics and rules for the sake of the city... and in this way having always educated other like men... they depart to the Blessed Isles to dwell. (540b1-7)

Aristotle, the careful student and critic of the *Republic*, is aware of Socrates' aims and strategy. But he deliberately disagrees that Socrates has achieved the reconciliation between philosophy and the *polis* for which they both hope. He does not so much as mention the philosopher kings, and by implication lumps them together with the other extraneous material with which, he says, Socrates has filled up the *Republic* (1264b39–40). Paradoxically, this omission is the most telling indication of Aristotle's critical view of the *Republic*. Socrates has no right to speak of philosophers as rulers in his city, in Aristotle's view, because his political institutions preclude philosophy. Aristotle's answer to Socrates' introduction of philosophers as the actual rulers of his best city is eloquent in its simplicity: you can't get there from here! "Thus, the *politeia* concerning which Socrates has spoken involves these dead-ends *[aporias]* and others no less than these" (1264a24–25).

By taking happiness away from his premier citizens, that is, by precluding the possibility of their philosophical development, Socrates undermines the putative continuity of his warrior city and *kallipolis*, the city ruled by philosophers. Socratic communism, Aristotle contends, creates a fracture or discontinuity within the political community. As against the household unity elevated to political status in Socrates' regime, Aristotle indicates that the integrity of the *polis* properly consists in its ability to achieve its *telos*, namely the cultivation of excellence and the good life. We may say, then, that for Aristotle the continuity of the political entelechy constitutes the integrity of the *polis*. But Socratic communism, he charges, renders both man and commonwealth powerless to achieve their goals. Communism, in Aristotle's view, precludes the integration of the political community and thus also precludes any contribution it might make to the integration of the human soul. The precise dimensions of this prospective contribution in a noncommunistic regime remain for Aristotle, and for us, to explore in the balance of his *Politics*.

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