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Thumos in Aristotle's *Politics*

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 Abstract

Thumos in Aristotle's *Politics*

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Recent interest and scholarship in the role of emotions in politics provide an opportunity for revisiting the idea of ancient Greek *thumos* as understood by Aristotle. In Aristotle's *Politics*, *thumos* is a capacity of the soul for affection; it is most clearly seen in anger and righteous indignation; and it is indispensable for understanding the nature of politics. Aristotle shows that *thumos* motivates political actions that can be beneficial as well as destructive to the city. This ambivalence has an enormous impact on what is possible or desirable in political life and raises important questions about the extent to which *thumos* should be cultivated in society and in individuals.

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INTRODUCTION

Until recently, most theories about politics have largely ignored or downplayed the role of emotions. The rational actor diligently pursues his self-interest. Interest groups jockey for resources and influence. Institutions constrain and channel individual behavior. Individuals make game-like decisions based on what they expect others to do. Depending on attributes such as sex, race, income, and educational attainment, individuals can be expected to perform some political actions and not others. The Bayesian updater encounters new information and diligently revises prior beliefs and judgments.

Rebelling against these organizational, structural, and rational actor models of politics, some political scientists have called for greater attention to the role of emotions in politics. These political scientists attribute the longstanding neglect of the study of emotion to the bias against emotions and the emphasis in Western thought on keeping emotions under control for the sake of civic peace and democratic politics (Marcus, et al., 2000; Marcus, 2000). The consequence of this neglect, they argue, is the failure of political science to understand basic political phenomena, such as how liberal democracy works as well as it does, even though most citizens, most of the time, are uninterested and uninformed about politics. Borrowing from psychology and neuroscience, political scientists have developed approaches such as hot cognition and affective intelligence to explain how emotions influence the way individuals understand and react to politics. For example, some political scientists argue that affective intelligence can explain fluctuations in voter competence, how partisan defections win elections, and why

American elections are cyclical (Marcus et al., 2007). Other political scientists argue that motivated reasoning can explain why new information tends to reinforce, rather than revise, voters' prior beliefs (Redlawski, 2002) and why political symbols require emotional appeal in order to persuade and motivate action (Edelman, 1964; Elder and Cobb, 1983; Edelman, 1988). But while the emotions have proven to be a fruitful area of political science research, one wonders whether the negative judgment on the emotions should be so quickly replaced by scientific indifference. Even if the previous paucity of political science research into the emotions can be attributed to a previous bias against emotions, it does not follow from the recent abundance of research that *any* kind of judgment on the emotions is inappropriate or irrelevant.

In fact, it is difficult to imagine political life without any kind of moral judgment on the expression of emotions. In every election cycle, for example, everyone regrets the excess of attack ads and negative campaigning, even if they admit that such emotionally-provocative tactics are often effective. President Barack Obama has been praised for his emotionally uplifting rhetoric, while his predecessor George W. Bush has been accused of warmongering. After all, the emotions are not simply given to us; most people would agree that one can and should restrain certain emotions and cultivate other kinds of emotions, implying a judgment that some emotions are better or more laudable than others. But current political science research into the emotions is not concerned with these everyday judgments on the proper role of emotions in political life, and this lack of concern makes it difficult for political scientists to explain how their findings are relevant to the average voter or politician, who have never forgotten the importance of emotions in politics.

Contemporary political scientists often cite Aristotle as an early proponent of understanding psychology in order to understand politics (Marcus, 2000; Neblo, 2007); in the *Rhetoric*, for example, Aristotle analyzes the various types of emotions and offers advice on how a leader can rouse his audience's emotions in order to influence them. Like other political philosophers, Aristotle found it necessary to understand the emotions in order to understand politics, and like other ancient political philosophers, he was interested in how the emotions play out in the *best* political regimes and how the emotions *ought* to play out. This willingness to hand down judgment on the emotions, to wrest it from the world of the *given* into the world of what *ought to be* is what distinguishes the ancient treatment of emotions in politics.

For the ancient Greeks, *thumos* is the part of the soul that is most clearly seen in assertive passions such as anger, courage, and righteous indignation. *Thumos* is often translated as "spirit, "spiritedness," "breath," or "heart." It encompasses a wide-ranging set of human phenomena, from noble indignation about injustice to the capacity for defending one's self and one's friends to the drive for mindless destruction. The ancient Greeks associated *thumos* with manly virtue; the word appears over 430 times in the *Iliad* (Wiseman, 2007). For Plato and Aristotle, *thumos* is a fundamental part of the drive for justice, the noble, and the good and is therefore an indispensable, though explosive, part of politics.

This paper examines Aristotle's understanding and critique of the role of *thumos* in politics by examining his treatment of *thumos* in the *Politics*. Aristotle identifies *thumos* as our capacity for command, liberty, and affection, and shows that *thumos* is, for better or for worse, an indispensable part of politics.

THUMOS AND POLITICS

Aristotle's most explicit statement on *thumos* in the *Politics* is found in VII.7, which is a discussion of the character of the ideal citizenry. According to Aristotle, the ideal citizenry possesses two traits: intelligence and *thumos*. I argue that his discussion of these two ideal characteristics revises and complicates his previous suggestion that there is a simple relationship between man and city. This suggestion is found in his earlier, more famous assertions in the *Politics* that man is a political animal and that the city comes into being for mere life but exists for the sake of the good life. By explicitly addressing *thumos* in VII.7, Aristotle qualifies the idea that there is a natural harmony between the individual and the city.

Aristotle's discussion of the ideal citizenry is guided by themes presented in VII.1. The opening lines of the chapter say that a clear investigation into the best regime must be preceded by a clear discussion of the best way of life. In contrast to his treatment of the best life in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle offers in the *Politics* a less individualistic treatment and emphasizes the problem of consensus: Individuals may not agree on the best way of life and the best life may not be the same for men in common and for men individually. The problem of consensus sets up the three major tensions in VII.1:

1. the tension between what is good for the city and what is good for individuals,
2. the tension between what is necessary and what is best, and
3. the tension between what is fine or noble (*kalon*) and happiness

Initially, Aristotle appears to resolve the first tension by drawing a direct parallel between the virtues of a city and the virtues of the individual: "The courage, justice, and prudence

of a city have the same power and form as those things human beings share in individually who are called just, prudent, and sound." (*Politics*, 1323b34-35) However, he admits at the end of the chapter that this assertion is open to challenge. He does not identify who the challengers are, but he does say that their arguments belong to another type of inquiry – namely, a non-political inquiry. By qualifying his assertion in this way, Aristotle suggests that the harmony between the virtues of the city and of the individual serves a political purpose and may or may not stand up to theoretical scrutiny. As for the second tension, Aristotle says that the three types of goods are external goods, goods of the body, and goods of the soul, and that people disagree about how much of each type of good is desirable and how to rank them. Aristotle appears to resolve these controversies by pointing out that there is a limit to external goods (since excess is either harmful or useless), while there is none for the goods of the soul, and that other things are desirable for the sake of the soul but the goods of the soul is not desirable for other things. Even if these assertions are true (and Aristotle does not, at this point, argue in a satisfactory way that they are), Aristotle does not extend them to the city and leaves open an important question: To what extent can the city subordinate the pursuit of external and bodily goods (i.e., what is necessary for the city) to the pursuit of virtue (i.e., what is best for the city)? As for the third tension, Aristotle says that the best city is characterized by happiness and by noble deeds. He appears to reconcile the two characteristics by saying "It is impossible to act nobly without acting to achieve noble things; but there is no noble deed either of a man or of a city that is separate from virtue and prudence." (*Politics*, 1323b30-33) But the relationship between nobility and happiness becomes increasingly unclear. In fact, in the very next chapter (VII.2), Aristotle shows that the pursuit of the noble may

conflict with the pursuit of the good, since the former often seeks war and the latter presupposes peace. I read Aristotle's discussion of *thumos* and the character of the best citizenry in VII.7 with these three tensions in mind.

In VII.7, Aristotle begins by examining the qualities of existing Greek and barbarian peoples to determine what the ideal citizenry should be like. He observes that the Europeans have much *thumos* and little intelligence, that the Asians have much intelligence but little *thumos*, and that the Greeks have both *thumos* and intelligence. As a result of the different amounts of *thumos* and intelligence, these peoples have different governments: the Europeans are free but cannot govern themselves or rule others; the Asians are slaves; and the Greeks are free and able to govern themselves. At first, Aristotle appears to endorse *thumos* (provided it is coupled with intelligence) because of the consequences for freedom and governance. But he soon reveals that he is not interested in freedom and governance as such. Leaving aside the idea of intelligence, Aristotle analyzes the nature of *thumos* and cautions against its excesses.

Aristotle defines *thumos* primarily as the capacity by which one feels affection for one's own (*philia*). As evidence for this, he points to the fact that *thumos* is "more aroused against intimates and friends than against unknown persons when it considers itself slighted." (*Politics*, 13281-3) He explains that our greater anger toward friends is the result of our double expectation of our friends: We expect that they not injure us and that they return favors (*Politics*, 1328a12-13). But where does this double expectation come from and how is it related to affection?

For clarification on the relationship between affection and anger, I turn to Aristotle's discussions of anger in the *Rhetoric* and of friendship in the *Nicomachean*

Ethics. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines anger as “an impulse, accompanied by pain, to a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight directed without justification toward what concerns oneself or toward what concerns one’s friend.” (*Rhetoric*, 1378a37-1378b15) Based on this definition, what causes anger has four major parts: one, the cause must be judged a slight; two, the slight must be unjustified, and three, the slight is directed toward one’s self or one’s own, and four, the slight must originate in some person or persons (otherwise the desire for revenge would not make sense). Of these four elements, only the second – that the slight is unjustified – can vary by degrees; the others, being dichotomous variables, must simply be present. Therefore, what makes an offensive friend particularly infuriating must have something to do with the degree of injustice. But what is the relationship between friendship and justice? In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle points to two very different possibilities: friendship completes and goes beyond justice or makes it unnecessary (1155a27). But both are rooted in the reciprocity that friends expect from each other. Being friends means having mutual good will and wishing for the other’s good on the basis of utility, pleasure, or virtue (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1156a3-5). Friends are expected to contribute to each other’s utility, pleasure, or virtue, and when there is no reciprocity of contribution, the friendship dissolves. This reciprocity appears to be justice in its most basic sense of giving and receiving one’s due. Accordingly, a friend’s act always has two meanings: the act in itself and the act as an affirmation (or rejection) of the friendship. A slight from a stranger is simply a slight, whereas a slight from a friend is both a slight and a rejection of the friendship. The slight of a friend is more unjust because we feel that our friendship is worthy of affirmation – in

other words, we implicitly demand that our friends to be *friendly*. This implicit demand for friendliness becomes explicit when we become angry at an offensive friend.

The meaning of Aristotle's claim that *thumos* is our capacity for affection must be that *thumos* is our power to detect when a friend is or is not being friendly. But if *thumos* is the power to detect friendly reciprocity, why do we feel angry at strangers? It seems strange that affection is a factor at all in this situation, since "unknown persons" are not usually considered the objects of our affection. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, however, Aristotle says that there is actually a very low level of affection that all human beings feel for other human beings; he observes that when traveling abroad, "one can see how near and dear and friendly every man may be to another human being." (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1155a21-22) Seen in this light, the difference between one's attitude toward strangers and friends is not the lack of affection for the one and the existence of affection for the other, but a difference in the degree of affection. The relationship between affection and justice is this: The greater the affection, the greater the potential for injustice, and, therefore, the greater the potential for anger.

Aristotle's observation that we tend to be angrier at our friends than at strangers has some troubling implications for the city. He brings the reader to these troubling implications in two ways. First, he omits a very important aspect of *thumos*: We feel angrier when our friends are wronged than when strangers are wronged. Second, he refers to the saying, "Harsh are the wars of brothers," which implies that *thumos* carries with it the danger of civil war. Aristotle's purpose seems to be to warn his audience about the dangers of *thumos*, despite its necessity in the ideal citizenry. By focusing on anger against friends rather than anger in defense of friends, Aristotle emphasizes the

potential conflict between what is good for individuals and what is good for their friends, or the rest of the city. Perhaps Aristotle has in mind Alcibiades, who insisted to the Spartans that he was a "true lover" of Athens even though he was aiding his country's worst enemies during the Peloponnesian War.

The conflict between what is good for individuals and what is good for the city was seen earlier in Aristotle's analysis of the competing claims to rule. Since ruling is considered a noble and good thing for individuals, competing claims to rule dominate political life. These claims are made on the basis of justice, understood as a kind of equality, but are asserted thumotically. As Aristotle personifies them, the many, or the poor, claim that they can justly redistribute the wealth of the minority among themselves because of their numbers: "By Zeus, it was resolved in just fashion by the authoritative element!" (*Politics*, 1281a17) The use of an oath highlights the thumotic nature of this claim to justice. But *thumos* is narrow-sighted because "it is evident that [the redistribution of wealth] will destroy the city." (*Politics*, 1281a19) Nonetheless, there is some merit to the claim of the many to rule because while they may not be excellent individually, their aggregate excellence may be greater than that of the few, and the many may actually be better judges of certain things compared with the few or excellent. To these arguments, which address the few (or the wealthy or excellent) on their own terms, the few offer a thumotic protest of their own: "By Zeus, it is clear that in some cases it is impossible: the same argument would apply to beasts – for what difference is there between some multitudes and beasts, so to speak?" (*Politics*, 1281b17) But if the few were to rule all the time, the city would also fall into ruin: "[T]o give [the many] no part and for them not to share in the offices is a matter for alarm, for when there exist many

who are deprived of prerogatives and poor, that city is necessarily filled with enemies." (*Politics*, 1281b27-30) According to Aristotle, there is some validity to both claims to rule, which means that these claims cannot simply be ignored or repressed in the name of peace and stability. At the same time, what is good for individuals cannot trump what is good for city, because no claim to rule has a complete view of what justice is. Contrary to the claim of the democratic many, equality in birth does not merit equality in other things, and contrary to the claim of the aristocratic few, inequality in wealth does not warrant inequality in other things. According to Aristotle, justice consists of equality for equal persons and inequality for unequal persons. The task of adjudicating the claims to rule is therefore difficult; when these claims are asserted thumotically rather than purely rationally, the task is made even more difficult because adjudicating badly would threaten the stability and very survival of the city. Perhaps that difficulty is why the ideal citizenry portrayed in VII is not divided into the few rich and the many poor.

But are competing claims to rule necessarily based on incomplete views of justice? Based on Aristotle's emphasis on the thumotic character of those claims, the answer seems to be yes. *Thumos* has an important limitation: It is aroused only when we perceive that we have less than we deserve, but not when we have more. After all, we are angry at our friends when they slight us, but not when they gratify us more than we deserve. In the city, neither the few nor the many express outrage that they hold too many offices or have too many honors; but if the claims of the few are true, then the many must have too much and if the claims of the many are true, then the few must have too much. If the relationship between *thumos* and justice were perfect, then *thumos* would always be aroused when we receive either more or less than our due. Because

thumos seeks justice only when it is good for us, *thumos* is necessarily limited in its pursuit of justice. This means that thumotic claims to rule, precisely because they are thumotic, are necessarily incomplete views of justice. Furthermore, when asserted thumotically, justice is claimed for the good of the one who asserts it. But justice, as commonly understood, is the good of another. The difference in the views of justice asserted by one and held by others aggravates the tension between one's good and the city's good. Because *thumos* is concerned with justice only in the partial sense, it is a necessary but insufficient condition for achieving justice in the city.

The inherent limitation of *thumos* with regard to justice is why it is necessary to adjudicate competing claims to rule even in the ideal city. Here, the argument between the few and the many gives way to the argument between the deliberative element and the military element – it seems that the two main characteristics, *thumos* and intelligence, of the ideal citizenry are at odds with each other. The deliberative element is responsible for making judgments concerning the advantageous things and the just things, while the military element is responsible for ensuring obedience inside the city and for defending the city from its enemies. Both have claims to rule because the other necessary elements – farmers, artisans, and moneymakers – are vulgar or lack leisure. To reconcile *thumos* and intelligence in the ideal city, Aristotle proposes that the same persons rule, just not at the same time: the military element should comprise the young and the deliberative element should comprise men in their prime (*Politics*, 1329a1-15). By showing that different claims to rule persist even in the ideal city, Aristotle reinforces the idea that politics is by nature thumotically partisan. By showing that even an ideal form of politics is contentious, Aristotle's goal seems to be to push actual political practitioners – who

presumably make up the majority of his audience – to be more realistic in their expectations and perhaps become more accommodating in their policies.

It is very questionable, however, whether Aristotle's proposal for placing the young and thumotic in the military element and the middle-aged and prudent in the ruling deliberative element would really solve the problem of thumotic claims to rule. After all, *thumos* is "an expert at ruling and indomitable." The military element, who has the most *thumos* in the ideal city, may simply not want to wait its turn and, since it is the most power element, it may not have to. Earlier in V.7, Aristotle points to an example of this very problem in the regime of Thurii, in which some young men acquired expertise and reputation in war, developed contempt for their rulers, and overturned an important law that eventually led to a revolution that transformed the regime into a dynasty (*Politics*, 1307b1-20). Aristotle's plan to have the same persons ruling but at different stages in life seems to be a tacit endorsement of the results of the revolution in Thurii. But why make this endorsement?

Aristotle admits that allowing the military element to rule eventually is a concession to its *thumos* (rather than its merit): "[I]t is impossible that those who are capable of using compulsion and preventing its being used against them will always put up with being ruled." (*Politics*, 1329a10) Furthermore, the military element "has authority over whether the regime will last or not." This statement can be taken in two ways: One, the military element is responsible for defending the city against foreign aggression and without this responsibility, the regime cannot last; and second, the

military element possesses the strength to overthrow the regime if it so chooses.[1] In the non-ideal city, it is conceivable that the political power of the many and the political power of the few can, to a certain extent, check one another. But in the ideal city, the military element has a monopoly on force, and it is unclear who or what would restrain them if they decide to overthrow the regime. Furthermore, the potential intensity of the violence seems greater. According to Aristotle's plan, the young fight, the middle-aged rule, and the old serve the gods. Because they are "the same persons," it is safe, I think, to say that these groups are the sons, fathers, and grandfathers, respectively. Given that anger toward friends (or family in this case) is greater than anger toward strangers, the possibility for a "harsh war of brothers" cannot be discounted. By allowing the military element access to rule, Aristotle appears to be making a huge concession to necessity – a concession that makes one wonder whether the ideal city is really ideal at all. Why not promote the use of a mercenary army or give the military element the same non-political status as farmers and artisans, while diminishing or even eliminating *thumos* through social disapproval and legal sanctions as Hobbes does? Aristotle's teaching seems to be that it is not possible to eliminate *thumos*, and that even if it were possible ("what one would pray for"), it would not be desirable to do so.

In his critiques of other political philosophers, Aristotle suggests that it is not possible to eliminate or contain *thumos*. Among other things, he accuses them of being unrealistic, especially toward the problem of *thumos*. He writes, "[O]ne's

[1] This seems to be an early formulation of today's "civil-military problematique." See Feaver, Peter, "The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control," *Armed Forces and Society* 23:2 (1996), 149-178.

presuppositions should indeed accord with what one would pray for; yet nothing should be impossible." (*Politics*, 1265a17) In his critique of Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle argues that the same persons cannot always rule because of the danger of factional conflict. Since claims to rule are made thumotically, the threat of factional conflict arises from those who claim to rule, even if they lack merit, as well as from "spirited and warlike men." (*Politics*, 264b7-10) To Phaleas, Aristotle points out that factional conflict arises not only from the inequality of property but also the equality in honors or political offices (*Politics*, 1266b38), and that every regime must be organized "with a view to military strength" (*Politics*, 1267a20). Against Hippodamus' division of the citizenry into artisans, farmers, and warriors, Aristotle argues that an inequality of arms necessarily becomes an inequality of prerogatives in the regime: "[Y]et if they [the artisans and farmers] do not share in the regime, how will they feel any affection toward the regime?" (*Politics*, 1268a20-24)[2] Claims to rule, military strength, desire for honor, and affection for the regime all pertain to *thumos* and since these other political philosophers do not account adequately for *thumos's* propensity to cause conflict, their schemes are not as stable as they think they are.

Even if *thumos* could be eliminated or suppressed, it would not be desirable. Given Aristotle's understanding of what a city is, the concession to the military element is not simply a practical decision to balance the external and internal security of the city. If security were the primary concern, the city would simply be an uneasy alliance or

[2] In his critique of Hippodamus, Aristotle says that those who do not share in the regime will be hostile to it, but he could not resolve this problem perfectly either. The merchants, artisans, laborers, and farmers of his ideal city are not citizens; in fact, the farmers are "slaves who are neither all of the same stock nor of spirited ones, as in that way they would be useful with a view to the work and safe as regards engaging in subversion." (*Politics*, 1330a25-27)

contract between the deliberative and military elements and not a city in the true sense. Alliances and contracts aim at utility, while the city exists for the good life. In III.13, Aristotle expresses reservations about the justice of ostracizing the strong from the city for the sake of equality, and comments that it would be better if the city were ordered in a way that would preclude such a remedy. His plan to allow the strong to rule eventually appears to be an example of such an ordering. Also, given that *thumos* is aroused in response to injustice, depriving the city of *thumos* would mean depriving it of the defenders of justice, even if those defenders are imperfect. Furthermore, if the city exists for the sake of the good life and if the good life consists of performing noble deeds (which, according to common opinion, pertain to war), then *thumos* is indispensable for that purpose, since *thumos* supplies the necessary boldness and strength needed for those deeds.

Furthermore, the desire for freedom is rooted in *thumos*. For Aristotle, freedom should not consist of "doing as one likes," but rather in ruling and being ruled in turn. The dignity of freedom can be seen in the contrast between the citizen and the slave. The citizen is one who is entitled to share in deliberative or judicial office (*Politics*, 1275b18). The willingness to deliberate and judge – that is, the willingness to be a citizen – requires a sense of importance, which the slave lacks. For this reason, Aristotle also criticizes the poor for being "very lacking in honor," since it leads them to avoid ruling (*Politics*, 1295a5). Ruling is necessary to human flourishing, and by always submitting to be ruled, one lives for the sake of mere life, rather than the good life. By showing that *thumos* is a necessary characteristic of the ideal citizenry (for freedom, security, and nobility), but at the same time, potentially threatening to the survival of the city, Aristotle reveals *thumos*

as a major source of tension between what is best for the city and what is necessary for the city.

The tasks of the city that exists for the sake of the good life include promoting justice, performing noble deeds, and cultivating virtue. These tasks depend on a kind of character which is in part thumotic:

> No one would assert that a person is blessed who has no part of courage, moderation, justice, or prudence, but is afraid of the flies buzzing around him, abstains from none of the extremes when he desires to eat or drink, destroys his dearest friend for a trifle, and similarly regarding the things connected with the mind, is as senseless and as thoroughly deceived by a false perception of things as a child or a madman. (*Politics*, 1323a27-34)

But *thumos* is malleable – it can be directed either at the defense of some good and noble cause or at the destruction of a friend for a trifle. Even children have *thumos* "immediately on their being born," and require superintendence by others to develop properly (*Politics*, 1334b22-27) In VII.7, Aristotle indicates that both *thumos* and intelligence are only raw material for virtue – both are desirable for being "readily guided to virtue by the legislator." But what is the role of *thumos* and intelligence in the attainment of virtue, and how should the legislator guide this development? For Aristotle, freedom and governance are necessary to the city, but the practice of virtue is the true happiness of the city. As "a thing expert at ruling and indomitable," *thumos* seems to be necessary for securing freedom, but its relationship to governance and to virtue is unclear, since Aristotle is ambiguous regarding what kind of rule *thumos* has expertise in and whether rule is something virtuous. At times, he says that the city devoted to the good life is the city that performs noble deeds; other times, he says that the city devoted to the good life is the city that actualizes virtue (*Politics*, 1328a37). Since

noble deeds pertain to war, the city that is devoted to performing noble deeds is tempted to be imperial. This temptation is suggested in Aristotle's remark that the mixture of *thumos* and intelligence would enable the Greeks to rule over others, if only they could unite under a single regime first.

The choice between performing noble deeds and actualizing virtue is the choice between becoming an imperial political city or an isolated, philosophic city. But this choice is not a simple one because the distinction between what is noble and what is virtuous is not clear and because it is unrealistic to pursue isolationism. Even the philosophic city needs to defend itself: "But if one does not accept [the political life] either as one's own or as the common way of life of the city, still men should be formidable to their enemies not only when these enter their territory but also when they leave it." (*Politics*, 1265a20-27) Furthermore, war is not altogether bad for the city, since "war compels men to be just and behave with moderation, while the enjoyment of good fortune and being at leisure in peacetime tend to make them arrogant." (*Politics*, 1334a25-28) The problem is, therefore, not whether the ideal city should be political or philosophic, but how it can maintain a proper balance between the two: "[O]ne should be capable of being occupied and going to war, but should rather remain at peace and be at leisure, and one should act to achieve necessary and useful things, but noble things more so." (*Politics*, 1333b1-3)

Aristotle tries to strike a balance between the political and philosophic life by distinguishing between the noble and the warlike and by promoting an education with a view toward leisure. The first task is particularly important because of the reality of regimes that claim to be devoted to virtue. Of all existing regimes, only a few make this

claim, but, according to Aristotle, these few regimes are all devoted to dominion (*Politics*, 1324b5-7). He points out that the education and laws of Sparta and Crete are organized with a view to war, and that among powerful nations, it is the ability to make war that is most honored. The second task is a course of action that is designed to elevate warlike cities from overly thumotic pursuits to more leisurely ones.

In VII.2, Aristotle observes a variety of customs that promote the view that the noble is essentially warlike:

> [A]t Carthage, so it is asserted, they receive armlets to adorn themselves for each campaign they go on. There was once a law in Macedonia as well that any man who had not killed an enemy had to wear a tether for a belt; among the Scythians one who had not killed an enemy was not permitted to drink from the cup passed around at a banquet; among the Iberians, a warlike nation, they fix in the ground a tomb as many spits as the number of enemies [the deceased] has destroyed; and there are many other things of this sort among other peoples, some of them prescribed by laws, others by customs. (*Politics*, 1324b13-22)

These practices are apparently ordered from least savage to most savage.[3] By vividly presenting these warlike practices of the barbarians, Aristotle urges the reader to wonder how the Spartans and other warlike Greeks really differed from warlike barbarians and whether warlike deeds, even if initially pursued for the sake of the noble, have a way of descending into savagery. After casting doubt on whether warlike cities are really as *noble* as they seem, Aristotle then questions whether they are as *just* as they seem. He empathetically states in VII.2 that it is unjust to rule and exercise mastery over neighboring cities without regard to their wishes, and insists that it is possible to dominate unjustly, and condemns the view that mastery should be sought over others without any regard for justice (*Politics*, 1324b23-27). By doing so, Aristotle extends his

earlier treatment in Book I of the justice of ruling and being ruled to foreign affairs. One of the major themes of the *Politics* is that different types of rule differ in kind, not in numbers, which means that there are better and worse kinds of rule. The best kind of rule is rule over equals, while the lowest is mastery over slaves. By pushing his audience to remember this distinction and by asserting that one should never be harsh to anyone, Aristotle points to a political life that values domestic life over the foreign. Military pursuits are good for the city only in a qualified sense (i.e., for security and just rule) and are not the highest end. The Spartan regime was laudable for pursuing virtue, but it was concerned only with the warlike virtues, which are not the highest; as a result, the Spartans were incapable of living in peace and leisure. By training for war, the Spartans aimed at a kind of virtue that is only useful and necessary for the acquisition of things, whereas the kind of virtue that Aristotle has in mind is the kind that involves reason, which is "the end of human nature" and is cultivated in leisure.

Leisure involves pleasure, happiness, and living blessedly, which are proper ends. Chief among leisurely pursuits is music, to which Aristotle devotes considerable attention in Book VIII. Like Plato, Aristotle believes that music can temper *thumos*: "For in rhythms and tunes there are likenesses particularly close to the genuine natures of anger and gentleness, and further of courage and moderation and of all the things opposite to these and of the other things pertaining to character." (*Politics*, 1340a18-22) Unlike Plato, Aristotle is much more skeptical as to whether thumotic men can be molded into philosophical men, and, accordingly, his educational program has the more modest aim

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[3] The Scythians' custom of passing around a exclusive cup during banquets is actually quite a savage practice since the cup is the gilded skull of a defeated enemy. See Herodotus' *Histories*.

of turning thumotic men into gentlemen, who may be sympathetic to philosophy. The contrast between Plato's optimism and Aristotle's pessimism toward the education of *thumos* can be seen most clearly in their discussions of what music is most appropriate in the ideal city. In the *Republic*, Platonic Socrates refuses to be limited by existing musical modes, such as the Dorian and Phrygian that Glaucon suggests. Claiming not to know the modes at all, Platonic Socrates advocates a violent mode to evoke courage and a voluntary mode to evoke moderation (*Republic*, 399a-c). In contrast, Aristotle unjustly accuses Platonic Socratic of advocating both the Dorian and Phrygian modes and argues for a musical education for the young based solely on the Dorian mode (*Politics*, 134b1-17). It seems that Aristotle's criticism of Socrates must be taken at a deeper level; by refusing to take seriously the proposal for new musical modes guided by philosophy, Aristotle underscores Platonic Socrates's radicalism and urges a program that uses what already exists and is therefore more attainable. Aristotle's more limited goals appear to be in line with his view that the ideal city cannot be a purely philosophical city but one that must realistically balance philosophical and political aims. It makes no sense for a city that cannot wholeheartedly pursue philosophy to mold its thumotic citizens into philosopher-kings.

CONCLUSION

Thumos is a necessary but extremely troublesome part of political life. It seeks justice, but only in an imperfect and selfish way. It protects the city, but at great risk to the city itself. It excels in war but is tempted by savagery and has trouble adapting to peace. At the same time, it is difficult to see how justice, nobility, and the good can be attained with the motivating power of *thumos*. Because of *thumos's* limitations and possibilities, Aristotle cautions against hoping for too much from *thumos* but recognizes and values its role in the higher stuff of politics. I have shown in this essay how Aristotle understood the role of *thumos* in politics in terms of the tension between the good of the city and the good of the individual; the tension between what is necessary and what is best for the city; and the tension between nobility and happiness. These tensions qualify Aristotle's famous claim that man is a political animal, which implies a basic harmony between the individual and the city.

To today's political scientists, Aristotle would say that what is most interesting and important about *thumos* in politics is that it gives rise to ideas and actions about justice, nobility, and the good, and because of the motivating power of *thumos*, these ideas and actions have enormous consequences for the character and survival of political regimes. For Aristotle, politics is not simply about pursuing one's advantage or gaining power; it is the thumotic give-and-take of individuals trying to reconcile their vision of the good life with that of their fellow citizens. Aristotle's insights point to a number of directions for future research in the role of emotion in politics, such as the impact of emotion on ideology, partisanship, and conceptions of justice; the relationship between

emotional demands for justice (such as mass demonstrations); and the role of emotion in civil-military relations.

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