Piety in Aristotle's Best Regime:

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A thesis

submitted to the Faculty of

the department of Political Science

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Boston College
Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences
Graduate School

March 29, 2019

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This thesis seeks to explain why Aristotle considers piety a necessary component of the best regime that he presents in book 7 of the *Politics*. It argues that Aristotle includes piety in the best regime because the pious belief in divine providence, that is, divine reward for virtuous human beings and punishment for vicious human beings, provides an essential justification for moral virtue that enables the best regime to habituate its citizens in the practice of moral virtue without compelling them to deny their natural longing for happiness. Only this pious conception of divine providence enables the citizens of the best regime to be happy as they cope with the demands of moral virtue and citizenship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to my thesis advisor, Robert C. Bartlett, for sparking my interest in Aristotle's treatment of piety in the *Politics* and for providing many helpful comments and criticisms throughout the writing process. I would also like to thank Susan Shell for acting as the second reader for this thesis. Finally, my wife, Natalie, deserves a special thanks for encouraging me to persevere as a writer and a student.

INTRODUCTION

Piety is a puzzle in Aristotle's "philosophy of human affairs." On the one hand, the philosopher conspicuously omits piety from his exhaustive list of eleven moral virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but, on the other hand, he includes "care for the divine," which he calls "priestcraft," and thereby all the traditional institutions and objects of piety in his list of essential components of the best regime in the *Politics.* Why does Aristotle omit piety from his treatise on the best individual way of life but include it in his treatise on the best regime, which establishes what he calls "the most choiceworthy way of life?"

In response to this puzzle, some scholars have sought to identify covert accounts of piety in the *Ethics.* Sarah Broadie, for instance, finds a "veiled" account of piety in 10.8, where Aristotle presents the so-called *theophilestatos* argument, which concludes that the gods "delight in what is . . . most akin to them" and that contemplative human beings are most akin to the gods (Broadie 2003, 61, 69). Broadie argues that Aristotle sees piety "in its truest form" as "the disposition for intellectual activity engaged in . . . purely for the love of the activity itself," that is, not for the love of any god(s) (Ibid, 67). On this view, Aristotle omits piety from his list of moral virtues because he simply equates piety with the complete practice of intellectual virtue. Broadie's position is defensible, but it does not solve the puzzle of piety. The kind of philosophic piety Broadie describes is quite different from that which Aristotle includes in the best regime.

The fact that "traditional" piety, which is concerned with honoring the gods through sacred rituals and moral rectitude, is absent from the *Ethics* but present in the best regime of the *Politics* remains unexplained.

Like Broadie, Ann Charney discerns a subtle account of "true piety" in the *Ethics* (Charney 1988, 68). Unlike Broadie, Charney locates this account in Aristotle's discussion of the magnanimous man. Through a complicated set of meditations on courage, spiritedness, and gracious reciprocity in the *Ethics*, Charney attempts to show that dedication to "sustaining [the] balance" between "the good of the individual and the well-being of the city," which, she argues, is the role of the magnanimous man, "deserves the title of true piety" (Ibid, 67-8). Charney presents true piety as a sort of grand civic devotion, but, as in Broadie's account, this piety does not entail devotion to any god(s). Therefore, it does not explain the presence of traditional piety in the best regime. Charney responds to this difficulty by attempting to diminish the significance of piety in the best regime:

> There is, in all of Aristotle's discussions of virtue, no virtue of Piety. In keeping with this omission, there is little mention of the gods or the requirements of religion in other areas where they might be expected. Advice on the religious arrangements of the city in the *Politics* is minimal . . . [Aristotle] makes no mention of the form or content of these religious arrangements, still less connecting them with the ends of the city (Ibid, 73-4).

Charney's argument effectively denies the puzzle of piety by denying the importance of piety in Aristotle's best regime.

This is a misreading of Aristotle's treatment of piety in book 7 of the *Politics.* Aristotle's reticence to present every detail of the religious arrangements in the best regime hardly warrants the conclusion that he finds piety irrelevant to the end(s) or way of life of the best regime. On the contrary, Aristotle's decision not to reform or control

the content of the religion practiced by the citizens of the best regime suggests that he expects traditional piety to be a part of the way of life of those citizens. After all, he makes clear that the citizens of the best regime must be Greeks and that it is proper for them to worship the gods (*Politics,* 1327b19-38 and 1329a26-34). Since Aristotle does not introduce new gods or a new political theology into his best regime, he must expect that the traditional piety of the Greeks will remain a part of the way of life of the best regime.

This thesis seeks to explain why Aristotle considers piety a necessary component of the best regime. It meets the puzzle of piety head on by identifying in Aristotle's preface to the best regime (the *Politics* 7.1-3) a warrant for the presence of piety in the best regime that does not depend on discerning any covert account of piety in the *Ethics*. It will be argued that Aristotle includes piety in the best regime because the pious belief in divine providence, that is, divine reward for virtuous human beings and punishment for vicious human beings, provides an essential justification for moral virtue that enables the best regime to habituate its citizens in the practice of moral virtue without compelling them to deny their natural longing for happiness. Only this pious conception of divine providence enables the citizens of the best regime to be happy as they cope with the demands of moral virtue and citizenship. This argument offers a solution to the puzzle of piety in Aristotle's "philosophy of human affairs" without diminishing the force of the initial observation concerning piety's absence in the *Ethics* and presence in the best regime of the *Politics.*

1.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Aristotle's inclusion of piety in the best regime and his enigmatic designation of priestcraft as "fifth, but also first" has attracted scholarly attention (*Politics,* 1328b13). This section summarizes and evaluates two recent attempts by Mor Segev (2017) and Thomas Pangle (2013) to explain these aspects of the best regime and thereby shows the place of this thesis in the existing literature on Aristotle's best regime.

In his book *Aristotle on Religion*, Mor Segev endeavors to answer this question: why does Aristotle find "traditional religion . . . conditionally necessary for a *polis* to exist as such" (50)?[1] He argues that Aristotle thinks contact with traditional religion is necessary for any individual to acquire knowledge of philosophical first principles and that the political community should facilitate this acquisition by its citizens:

> Aristotle views traditional religion as necessary in order for the *polis* to exist as such because an acquaintance with its (false) conceptions of divinity is a necessary condition for arriving at the knowledge of first philosophy, which must be provided for in any *polis* that exists according to human nature and is hence directed at the flourishing lives of its individual citizens in keeping with their natural potential. (Segev 2017, 2-3)

On this view, the "educational program" of the best regime will (indirectly) aim to produce in its citizens knowledge of first philosophy, which deals with the "gods of Aristotle's metaphysics (primarily the unmoved movers of the heavenly bodies and spheres)," by exposing them to the mythical gods of what he calls "traditional religion" (Ibid, 6).

[1] Segev's formulation of the question is motivated by the language of the *Politics* 7.8, where Aristotle includes "care for the divine" among the elements "without which a city could not exist" (1328b2-22).

This theory dictates that role of the priests in the best regime is to engender "[an] initial, pre-philosophical sense of 'wonder' at the gods" in citizens and "future citizens" (Ibid, 52). Segev suggests that Aristotle expects this initial stage of wondering at the gods to lead some of the citizens, those with "the appropriate intellectual ability," to doubt the traditional conception of the gods and pursue a more rational conception of divinity, something like Aristotle's own conception of divinity presented in the *Metaphysics* (Ibid, 52). According to Segev, Aristotle believes that the entire purpose of the city is to create the conditions in which some citizens can complete this philosophical journey. In other words, Segev portrays Aristotle's best regime as one closely resembling the regime sketched in Plato's *Republic*, which Socrates constructs with a view to the education of philosophers. On Segev's interpretation, the problem of the philosopher's relationship to the city – the problem raised by the death of Socrates – vanishes, for the purpose of the city is simply stipulated to be the practice of philosophy. The entire religious apparatus of the city is understood to be subservient to this end.

In keeping with this peculiar account of "traditional religion," Segev contends that *all* the citizens of the best regime will almost certainly *reject* the mythical account of the gods at the center of their city's piety (Ibid, 51). Specifically, they will "reject anthropomorphism with regard to divinity," which includes belief in any "divine intention" or "action" vis-à-vis human beings, i.e. divine providence (Ibid, 19, 51). Segev bases this argument on the fact that Aristotle speaks "openly to the audience of his *Ethics*, people of good upbringing who are now on their path to becoming *phronimoi*, about the vanity of speaking about gods as engaging in any action attributable to human beings, with the exception of theoretical contemplation" (Ibid). In sum, Segev holds that the best

city will dutifully worship gods it does not believe in for the sake of a small number of citizens who begin to philosophize on account of their early introduction to the worship of anthropomorphic, providential gods. The city sanctions and supports the public worship of these traditional gods so that some of its citizens may come to contemplate a completely different and incompatible conception of divinity.

Segev arrives at this strange account of piety in Aristotle's best regime by attributing three specific theses to Aristotle that he subsequently treats as axioms. First, the purpose of the city is held to be enabling citizens to live the simply best way of life, i.e. the contemplative life (Ibid, 52). Second, the citizens of the best regime are held not to be pious, as noted above. Third, acquaintance with the false, pious conception of divinity is held to be a necessary starting point in the intellectual journey that culminates in contemplation of the unmoved movers of the cosmos. On this view, one cannot arrive at the second conception of divinity, which understands the gods as unmoved movers, without having previously "wondered" at the first conception, which understands them as providential agents (Ibid, 51).

Each of these axioms is highly dubious. The first axiom mistakes the "most choiceworthy way of life" of the citizens of the best regime for the simply best way of life described by Aristotle in book 10 of the *Ethics.* The second axiom rests on the assumption that the citizens of Aristotle's best regime must simply agree with Aristotle's *Ethics* (or Segev's interpretation of that text) on every point. Specifically, Segev assumes that if Aristotle doubts or denies the existence of providential gods, then the citizens of his best regime must share his view. This does not logically follow, and, as will be shown below, there is simply no evidence in Aristotle's account of the best regime that the

citizens of the regime will deny the existence of the gods they publicly worship. The third axiom, which is not as immediately relevant to the subsequent arguments of this thesis, rests on a tendentious reading of a passage from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* concerning the origins of philosophy.[2]

The substantive disagreements between Segev's analysis of the best regime and the argument of this thesis spring from a fundamentally different approach to the act of reading Aristotle's texts. Whereas Segev splices together isolated passages from the Aristotelian corpus to create a theory that justifies the inclusion of piety in the best regime, this thesis relies on a close reading of Aristotle's preface to the best regime, which subtly introduces perplexing puzzles of political philosophy even as it defends certain gentlemanly opinions. The role of piety in the best regime will be evaluated in light of those puzzles and Aristotle's manner of presenting them.

Thomas Pangle offers an illuminating defense of this exegetical approach to Aristotle's *Politics.* In an article entitled *The Rhetorical Strategy Governing Aristotle's Political Teaching,* Pangle explains that Aristotle's rhetorical strategy arose from the

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[2] The passage in question reads as follows:

> it is because of wondering at things that humans, both now and at first, began to do philosophy. At the start, they wondered at those of the puzzles that were close to hand, then, advancing little by little, they puzzled over greater issues, for example, about the attributes of the moon and about issues concerning the sun and stars, and how the universe comes to be. Someone who puzzles or wonders, however, thinks himself ignorant (it is because of this, indeed, that the philosopher is in a way a mythlover, since myth is composed of wonders). (*Metaphysics,* 982b12-16)

From this passage Segev concludes that "Aristotle takes inquiry about X to commence from 'wondering' at X" (Segev 2017, 52). Consequently, he argues that "[Aristotle] should think that in order to gain knowledge of 'first philosophy, which is concerned with (the) god(s), one must first have a sense of 'wonder' at gods" (Segev 2017, 52). Yet, the passage does not suggest that a dissatisfaction with the representations of divinity contained in "traditional religion" is the *only* path to philosophy. It does not specify which puzzles "that were close at hand" first caused human beings to wonder and engage in philosophy. The only puzzles it does mention concern natural phenomena, namely the moon, the sun and stars, and the existence of the universe itself. Does the passage not, then, suggest that observing natural phenomena is as likely as, if not more likely than, hearing traditional myths to spark speculation about first philosophy?

problem of philosophy's relationship to the political community, the problem which is non-existent on Segev's interpretation:

> [T]he liberation that philosophic questioning brings is unavoidably attended by grave risks of undermining beliefs that are the essential foundations of civil society. And the fate of Aristotle as well as Socrates vividly illustrates that the political community, becoming aware of this threat, is likely to react by deploying its coercive forces defensively, thus posing a menace to political philosophers . . . The political philosophers [respond] by crafting modes of communication, of speaking and of writing, that give safe and beneficial expression to their critical inquiry. (Pangle 2011, 85)

This means that Aristotle must tread carefully when discussing "crucial opinions . . . about morality, divinity, and civic duty" so as to "venerate" those opinions even while "delicately undertaking a critical inquiry into their basis in truth" (Ibid, 85). Political philosophy must seek the truth while understanding that "there is [an] intense and comprehensive need for lawful moral habituation *rooted in strongly held, shared, traditional beliefs,"* which cannot but include beliefs about the nature of the divine, especially divine providence (Ibid, 87, emphasis added). Although Aristotle interrogates pious beliefs philosophically, he does not argue that a political community can do without them (Bartlett 2001, 187).

Given the tense and potentially volatile relationship between the philosopher and the community, interpreters of Aristotle's texts must "become 'educated' in [Aristotle's] multilevel rhetorical strategy" and "learn to begin from a recognition of the power . . . of 'the mythic things and the things belonging to childhood' that are long established in and by the laws – unwritten even more than written" (Ibid, 94-5).[3] This approach, Pangle

[3] Respect for unwritten laws, especially in the ancient Greek context, is very often, if not always, a mark of piety, for the unwritten laws are those dearest to the gods. See, for instance, Antigone's famous defense of her choice to break the tyrant Creon's law in Sophocles' *Antigone*: "Of course I ['had the gall to break this law']. It wasn't Zeus, not in the least, who made this proclamation – not to me. Nor did that Justice, dwelling with the gods beneath the earth, ordain such laws for men. Nor did I think your edict had such

suggests, "gives one the key to unlocking the deepest level of the teaching of Aristotle's *Politics*" (Ibid, 95).

Pangle's exegetical approach is followed without qualification in the following analysis of Aristotle's best regime, so what improvement does this thesis purport to make over Pangle's analysis? It argues that Pangle does not in fact give piety and divine providence sufficient importance in Aristotle's discussion of the best regime. He does not, in the end, allow that Aristotle understands piety to be a necessary support for the way of life of the best regime. Pangle goes some way toward acknowledging the important role piety plays by noting that Aristotle, "[i]n his elaboration of the best regime in Books Seven and Eight . . . takes for granted worship of the traditional Greek gods" and claims that without the priesthood "there cannot be a city" (Ibid, 91). Nevertheless, Pangle seems unwilling to give these statements much theoretical weight and diminishes their significance in at least two ways. First, he suggests that "traditional *religious* instruction in household moral education" is "associated" by Aristotle "with quasi-primitive, Cyclopian abandonment of the legislative art" (Ibid, 88). On this view, the pious conception of providential gods is not a fiction necessary for the justification of moral virtue but rather an impediment to proper moral habituation.

Secondly, in his explanation of the deep teaching of Aristotle's *Politics*, Pangle argues that in the *Politics* 7.9 Aristotle "severely diminishe[s] the status of public religious worship in his best republic" (Pangle 2013, 248). What worship remains, on Pangle's view, might even (somehow) become hospitable to "a conception of divinity and

force that you, a mere mortal, could override the gods, *the great unwritten, unshakable traditions*. They are alive, not just today or yesterday: they live forever, from the first of time, and no one knows when they first saw the light (Trans. Robert Fagles, lines 499-508, emphasis added).

divine providence that approaches, and tolerates, the austere piety expressed in the philosophic concept of divinity stated in the 'preface' to the best regime" (Ibid). The idea that this philosophic conception of divinity, if accepted, would be a boon to the civic life of the community probably influences Pangle's subsequent claim that "the political philosopher must work with and around, he cannot pray away, sacred tradition with its divinely revealed laws and commands," since "these will always 'chance' to be present, *as a limiting factor* in every human founding, even of the best conceivable regime" (Ibid, 251, emphasis added). In other words, Pangle argues that sacred tradition hinders Aristotle's project of founding the best regime and that the philosopher silently wishes he could be rid of it altogether. Indeed, Pangle holds out hope that the philosopher might influence the piety of the city by nudging it away from its traditional conception of the gods. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that Aristotle sees the pious conception of divinity as playing an essential role in sustaining the best regime. The fact that the best regime, the highest peak that political life can hope to achieve, requires such pious beliefs is part of Aristotle's sober (or, as proponents of Enlightenment principles might hold, pessimistic) political teaching.

2.0 PIETY IN THE ANCIENT CITY

But what is the pious conception of divinity, and what was its role in the ancient city? Of course, the pious conception of divinity entails belief in providential gods who influence human affairs, but a more detailed account of piety in the ancient city will prepare the ground for an investigation of piety in Aristotle's best regime. The significance of the inclusion of piety in the best regime can only be fully understood if the basic tenets of Greek piety and its relationship to the ancient city are also understood, at least in outline. Moreover, these aspects of ancient political life must be understood from the vantage point of Aristotle's philosophy of human affairs, for this thesis holds that Aristotle includes piety in the best regime because of, not in spite of, the conclusions he reaches regarding moral virtue, happiness, and citizenship.

In ancient Greek cities, pious devotion to the gods "did more than just put a divine gloss on civic life. It impregnated each and every civic activity . . . [T]he Greek city . . . recognized no separation between the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular" (Zaidman and Pantel 1992, 92). Aristotle knew the pervasive influence of piety in the ancient political community even more thoroughly than do modern scholars of Greek religion. As Segev notes at the beginning of his book,

> In the fourth century B.C., the ubiquitous presence of religion in every civilization known to the Greek world was an observable fact. Greek *poleis* . . . invariably administered a wealth of religious practices, permeating virtually every facet of their citizens' lives. Festivals, sacrifices, libations, prayers, hymns, and statues in honor of the gods, as well as temples and altars operated by priests, civic and Panhellenic cults, divination, and oracles, were routine. . . As such a regular and prominent political phenomenon, traditional religion does not, indeed could not, escape Aristotle's notice. (Segev 2017, 1)

These pious practices sprang from a particular conception of the divine, as Peter Ahrensdorf explains: "The conviction that gods exist – and, specifically, that gods who reward the righteous and punish the wicked exist – was, in the Greeks' view, the foundation not only of their religious life, but of their political, moral, and family life as well" (Ahrensdorf 1995, 15).[4] Similarly, Sarah Broadie, in her discussion of the *theophilestatos* argument, which Aristotle presents as a modification of the traditional conception of divine providence, summarizes the traditional view as follows: "heaven rewards those who love the gods and are good" (Broadie 2003, 61-2).

It is important to understand, from Aristotle's perspective, the significance of the idea that the gods reward those who are good, the idea underlying the pious institutions of the ancient city. The rewards of piety were traditionally understood to include "thriving crops and herds, successful economic and social ventures, [and] a large healthy household," i.e. good fortune in one's endeavors (Ibid, 62). In the *Politics,* Aristotle calls such goods as these external and bodily goods, and in the *Ethics* he argues that "the many" equate the enjoyment of such blessings with *happiness* (*Politics*, 1323a25; *Ethics,* 1095a14-24). In other words, from Aristotle's perspective, those who believe in divine providence hold that the gods provide those they love with the prerequisites of happiness. As noted briefly above, Aristotle concludes his treatment of happiness in the *Ethics* with the *theophilestatos* argument. He argues that *if* the gods providentially care for human beings, as they are held (presumably by 'the many') to do, then those whom the gods love and (consequently) care for will be the "happiest" human beings (Broadie 2003, 62-3;

[4] Hugh Lloyd-Jones supports the view that traditional Greek morality depended on belief in divine providence. In one telling passage of *The Justice of Zeus*, Lloyd-Jones argues that Sophocles and Aeschylus believed that if offenders against justice could "go scot-free," then "this is the ruin of religion and morality" (Lloyd-Jones 1983, 110; cf. 128).

Ethics, 1179a23-33). Aristotle remains conspicuously non-committal about whether the gods actually care for human beings in this way and he suggests that intellectual, rather than moral, virtue is likely dearest to the gods (Ibid). Nevertheless, Aristotle clearly understands the pious conception of divine providence to be ultimately concerned with the happiness of pious persons. If the gods do not providentially care for human beings in this way, then the human motivation underlying pious practices such as prayer, sacrifice, and (arguably) virtuous conduct, evaporate. As Aristotle notes at the outset of the *Ethics,* "both the many and the refined" say that the highest good is happiness, and "they suppose that living well and acting well is the same as being happy" (*Ethics,* 1095a20).[5] On this view, which Aristotle attributes to the vast majority, if not all, of humanity, piety is good for human beings only if it brings happiness or the prerequisites of happiness. In sum, piety pervaded the ancient city, and this piety involved care for providential gods through practices such as prayer, sacrifice and the observance of divinely sanctioned moral norms – practices which the gods were believed to reward.

The idea of an afterlife represents a logical extension of the view of providence outlined above. In his authoritative treatise on justice in the Greek religious tradition, Hugh Lloyd-Jones mentions the development of the idea of an afterlife in the context of "two remarkable passages" from Theognis wherein the poet reproaches Zeus for "allowing the wicked to flourish while good men suffer poverty" and "complains of the god's injustice in visiting the sins of the guilty fathers upon the heads of their innocent children" (Lloyd-Jones 1983, 46). The passages are remarkable because they break with

[5] As Bartlett and Collins note in their translation of this passage, "the expression Aristotle here uses (*eu prattein*) means in the first place 'to act well,' but carries the extended meaning 'to fare well,' with the implication that those who act well will indeed fare well" (*Ethics,* 1095a20, fn. 18).

the more common understanding of Zeus as the protector of justice. Theognis dares to think that Zeus does not cause the righteous to flourish and the wicked to suffer. "It is significant," Lloyd-Jones writes, "that [these passages] were probably written just when the belief that men were punished in the next life for the sins of this was beginning to spread" (Ibid).[6] In other words, observing the suffering of the innocent can give rise to thoughts about the possibility that wrongs done in this life will be made right in the next life. Belief in the afterlife offers a way of reconciling the suffering of just persons on earth with the belief in divine providence. However, the idea of an afterlife can also coexist with the doctrine that the gods reward righteousness and punish wickedness on earth. For instance, the Greek rhetorician Isocrates apparently held that just men prosper in this life and in the next: "[t]hose living with piety and justice dwell safely in the present life and have more pleasant hopes for the whole of eternity" (Pangle 2013, 311, fn. 7). These pleasant hopes surely concern the possibility of happiness after death.

Aristotle himself was aware of such popular belief in the afterlife, since in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he examines opinions about the welfare of the deceased. In the *Ethics* 1.10, he grapples with the opinion that "both something bad and something good can befall the dead person . . . for example, honors and dishonors, and the faring well or the misfortunes of his offspring and descendants generally" (*Ethics,* 1100a20). Indeed, "no adequate account of happiness could proceed without acknowledging the existence of these opinions," which possess "great power," despite the fact that they appear, in Aristotle's words, "altogether strange, especially for us who say that happiness is a certain activity" (Bartlett 2008, 683; *Ethics,* 1100a14).

[6] Theognis was a Greek poet of the sixth century B.C.

These brief comments on divine providence and the afterlife prepare the ground for the following analysis of Aristotle's preface to the best regime. Aristotle's preface subtly deals with the relationship between providence and the afterlife and the way of life of the best regime.

3.0 ARISTOTLE'S PREFACE TO THE BEST REGIME

There are many scholarly expositions of Aristotle's "torturous" argument in 7.1-3 of the *Politics* (Lord, *Politics,* 187, fn. 2). The aim of the present treatment is to show that the first three chapters of book 7, which Aristotle calls a "preface" to his presentation of the best regime, reveal difficulties associated with moral virtue, happiness and citizenship that warrant the inclusion of piety in the best regime (1325b34). Indeed, Aristotle subtly draws attention to these difficulties, which may be summarized under two headings: mortality and misfortune. Neither the practice of moral virtue nor membership in a political community can protect human beings against these distressing aspects of the human experience. Therefore, the happiness that supervenes upon the practice of moral virtue by an individual or a community is never complete or finally secure. This weakness in the way of life that Aristotle advocates in his preface to the best regime warrants the inclusion of piety in best regime, for the pious conception of a cosmos ruled by providential gods allays the psychic angst that would otherwise arise for citizens who pursue happiness through the practice of moral virtue. As outlined in the last chapter, the promise of providence is that the gods protect the virtuous and punish the vicious in this life and, perhaps, in the next. Without the idea of providential gods, it is extremely difficult, not to say impossible, to demonstrate to the individual or the community the superiority of moral virtue to tyranny. By elucidating the link between divine providence and the way of life of the best regime, this thesis offers an alternative to the accounts of piety in the best regime given by Segev and Pangle.

Aristotle opens 7.1 by declaring that one must investigate "the most choiceworthy way of life" (αἱρετώτατος βίος) before investigating the best regime. Aristotle's decision to speak of the "most choiceworthy life" rather than "the best life" is striking given that he speaks freely of "the best way of life" in the *Ethics* and of "the best regime" in the *Politics*. Aristotle's word choice in first sentence of 7.1 presents readers with the possibility that the most choiceworthy way of life, which turns out to be the end of the best regime, is not the simply best way of life. Indeed, the phrase "most choiceworthy way of life" is reminiscent of Aristotle's claim in 10.8 of the *Ethics* that a contemplative person "*chooses* [αἱρεῖται] to do what accords with [moral] virtue" whenever he "lives together with a number of others," that is, in a community (*Ethics* 1178b6, emphasis added). The morally virtuous life apparently becomes choiceworthy for someone concerned with living well when that person is a member of a political community, but that does not make it the best possible life.

Aristotle posits that it is this choiceworthy way of life that clarifies the character of the best regime: "As long as this is unclear, the best regime must necessarily be unclear as well" (1323a15-17). The best regime derives its character from the character of the most choiceworthy way of life. If the way of life did not influence the regime in this way, then the character of the regime could be clarified without reference to the way of life. In fact, it is the essence of a regime to provide an authoritative interpretation of the most choiceworthy way of life for its citizens. The best regime *is* in a sense the most choiceworthy way of life, and its principal aim is to enable its citizens to live the most choiceworthy way of life (Lord 1978, 339). In the passage at hand, Aristotle offers a simple justification for first investigating the most choiceworthy way of life: "it is

appropriate for those who govern themselves best on the basis of what is available to them to act in the best manner" (1323a18-19). Those who would live under the best regime must understand what it means to act in the best manner, for such actions comprise the end of the regime.

This comment reveals two important aspects of the best regime. First, the regime is concerned with virtue or excellence, for "to act in the best manner" (ἀριστα . . . πράττειν) means to act with virtue (ἀρετή). However, there is an ambiguity in this formulation: "the expression . . . can be rendered as either 'to fare in the best manner' or 'to act in the best manner' . . . to fare well means to be satisfied with one's life; to do good things need not mean that at all" (Davis 1996, 122). The promise of the best regime is that it will simultaneously enable its citizens to act well and to fare well. At the very outset, then, Aristotle's language prompts the reader to wonder about the relationship between virtuous action and good fortune. Second, the best regime is a "republican" regime (Pangle 2013, 225). The citizens of the best regime "govern themselves" (Lord) or "carry on civic life" (Pangle). The phrase in question (τοὺς πολιτευομένους) indicates that the members of the best regime take an active part in the business of governing – preserving and operating the regime. They are not ruled by a permanent king. The life of the citizen in the best regime is, therefore, a political life. This fact should condition the following discussion of the most choiceworthy way of life. The most choiceworthy way of life that clarifies the best regime must be a political life, since it will be lived by the citizens of a republican regime.

Aristotle next divides the examination of the most choiceworthy way of life into two parts. He says that it is necessary to agree on "the most choiceworthy way of life for

all, so to speak, and after this, whether the same or a different way of life is choiceworthy for men in common and separately as individuals" (1323a21-22). What is meant by "the best way of life for all, so to speak?" Carnes Lord suggests that it means the best way of life for "men generally" (Lord 1978, 340). This is an adequate gloss in so far as it points to the fact that the way of life considered here can only be spoken of at a high level of abstraction. To speak of what is best for "men generally" means to ignore the differences in natural capacity among men; what is best for one person is not necessarily best for another person. As Aristotle later explains in the context of the distinction between the virtues of character and the virtues of intellect, "what is most choiceworthy for each individual always [is] to attain the highest thing possible for him," which is necessarily some measure of virtue (1333a27-30 and context). Thus, it seems reasonable to read the phrase in question in light of the arguments Aristotle proceeds to present in 7.1, the arguments for the preeminence of virtue over external and bodily goods. The most choiceworthy way of life "for all, so to speak" turns out to mean the life of virtue without any attention paid to the differences between intellectual and moral virtue. In this context, the second task Aristotle sets out to accomplish in his prefatory remarks – to determine "whether the same or a different way of life is choiceworthy for men in common and separately as individuals" – means to determine whether the virtuous life is choiceworthy for men in common and for men as individuals. Another way of conceiving of this question would be this: should political life – the life of men in common – aim at the goods of the soul, or must political life aim only to secure the bodily and external goods?

Aristotle's defense of virtue takes up the rest of 7.1. The philosopher offers a cursory defense of the idea that the most choiceworthy life must involve virtue. "[I]n

truth no one would dispute" that all three types of goods – external goods, bodily goods, and the goods of the soul (the virtues) – "ought to be available to the blessed," he declares (1323a24-26). As regards the goods of the soul, Aristotle mentions courage, moderation, justice, and prudence along with "the things connected with the mind" (τὰ περὶ τὴν διάνοιαν), which he does not enumerate (1323a27-32). He then considers a dispute over "how much of each type of good is desirable and their relative degree of preeminence" (1323a35-36). Aristotle then offers a series of short arguments for the preeminence of virtue. He uses observations about human deeds (διὰ τῶν ἔργων) and a reasoned argument (κατὰ τὸν λόγον) pertaining to the natures of the three types of goods to support his position. Aristotle declares that these arguments demonstrate a necessary connection between virtuous activity and happiness, but a close reading of them will reveal that this connection should only be expected to obtain in cosmos governed by divine providence.

Aristotle first defends the preeminence of virtue by observing that people safeguard external and bodily goods by means of the virtues. Yet, he offers no explanation or examples to support this observation, and readers may well ask whether the claim is not dubious. In his commentary on this passage, Peter Simpson sees no problem with Aristotle's claim:

> Aristotle does not bother to say what facts he has in mind, nor indeed need he. These facts were doubtless as obvious in his day as they still are in ours. So we have sayings like "a fool and his money are soon parted" and "pride comes before a fall," and we can point to numerous examples of the rich, famous, and powerful who have awful characters and are miserable, and to the moderate or poor, the obscure and powerless who have beautiful characters and are happy. (Simpson 1998, 198)

There are several problems with this interpretation. First, Aristotle has already argued that blessedness requires not only the goods of the soul, but also external and bodily

goods. The obscure and poor would not, according to him, be able to exercise moral virtue. They would therefore not be blessed or happy.

Second, the idea that there are many people with excellent characters who are poor and obscure *cuts against* Aristotle's claim that the moral virtues safeguard external goods. The testimony of virtuous individuals who are poor and obscure is that the virtues do *not* safeguard external goods. Aristotle confirms this latter view of virtue in the *Ethics.* For instance, the philosopher argues that behaving justly "is a difficult task," because it "does what is advantageous to another, either to a ruler or to someone who shares in the community" (*Ethics*, 1130a5-10). Justice is what is expected of the citizen, but not necessarily what protects the citizen's own interests. Even more telling are Aristotle's claims regarding the moral virtue of liberality. He argues that "it belongs to the liberal person more to give to whom he ought than to take from whom he ought . . . *since it belongs to virtue more to act well than to fare well*" (*Ethics*, 11120a10-20b6, emphasis added). Therefore, "it is not easy for a liberal person to be wealthy, since he is inclined neither to accept *nor to safeguard* money . . . Hence the accusation is leveled against chance that those who most deserve wealth are the least wealthy in fact" (*Ethics* 1120b14-18, emphasis added). In the *Ethics,* then, Aristotle argues that chance does not allot external goods on the basis of desert and that the virtues tend *not* to safeguard external goods.

When compared to the noble account of virtue given in the *Ethics*, which emphasized the sacrificial character of moral virtue, Aristotle's first defense of virtue in the *Politics* 7.1 appears crude indeed. As portrayed in the *Ethics,* the disposition of the morally virtuous person is to look out for the immediate welfare of others or the common

good of the community. Such persons therefore tend towards a deficiency, rather than an excess, of external goods. Persons without sufficient external goods are, according to Aristotle, not able to exercise complete moral virtue and persons with moral virtue tend not to safeguard the external goods that their virtuous activities require (cf. *Ethics,* 1122b1-35 and 1178a24-34). Aristotle's rhetoric in 7.1 makes morally virtuous behavior appear far more secure and self-sufficient than he in fact believes it to be.

The third and final indication that Aristotle's first argument from observation is not completely sincere comes in the next paragraph, where the philosopher essentially apologizes for speaking about the virtues as means to the end of acquisition (Bartlett 2001, 168). He qualifies his initial claim by saying, "*if* indeed one should attribute to [virtue] not only what is noble but what is useful as well" (*Politics,* 1323b13, emphasis added). Aristotle appears not to deem such an attribution appropriate, for he soon reverses the relationship between external goods and virtue by arguing that the goods of wealth and power are means to the end of virtue. It may thus be suggested that Aristotle's first argument from observation is more rhetorical than anything else. It suppresses the problem of how morally virtuous individuals will be provided with the supports they need to exercise their virtue.[7] Aristotle does not want thoughts about *acquiring* external goods to trouble the minds of his readers, but the problem cannot in truth be ignored.

Aristotle's second observation continues to downplay the importance of acquisition. He claims that "living happily . . . is available to those who have to excess the adornments of character and mind but behave moderately" in their acquisition of external and bodily goods (1323b1-4). The statement must be qualified by the

[7] In addition, it ignores the fact that the exercise of intellectual virtue requires far less external equipment than the exercise of moral virtue (*Ethics,* 1178a24-5).

observation made above: moral virtue tends to expend rather than conserve external goods. Moral virtue may therefore require the virtuous person to acquire far more than he would need if he lacked virtue.

The philosopher now proceeds to his reasoned argument for the preeminence of virtue. All useful things (property) become useless or harmful when possessed in excess, he contends. In contrast, no inherent limit attaches to virtue; excessive virtue only benefits the virtuous person. Aristotle himself qualifies this argument (as noted above) by observing that it may be sufficient to simply indicate the *nobility* of virtue (1323b8-13). In other words, Aristotle initially defends virtue in terms of its usefulness, but then he drops this defense and suggests that it is inappropriate to discuss moral virtue in terms of usefulness. The next stage of the reasoned argument in defense of virtue turns on the desirability of honor. "If the soul *is held to be more honorable* [τιμιώτερον] than both property and the body," then the best state of soul (virtue) will be held more honorable than the best state of property (wealth) and the best state of body (health, beauty). On this basis, Aristotle calls the life of virtue more choiceworthy than the life devoted to acquiring external or bodily goods.

This argument also involves serious difficulties. Once Aristotle hinted that virtue's real claim to preeminence rests on the nobility of virtuous action, he immediately turned to considerations of honor. Honor may be considered "the prize" deserved by excessively virtuous individuals, but, according to the *Ethics,* honor is itself an external good, albeit "the greatest of the external goods" (*Ethics,* 1123b36, 1123b20). Thus, although Aristotle defends virtue over and against acquisition, he still has recourse to an external good to strengthen his case for virtue. This fact is especially salient with respect to moral virtue,

since, unlike intellectual virtue, it is not “cherished for its own sake” (*Ethics*, 1177b1). If moral virtue is not to be purely sacrificial, that is, if it is to be for the good of the morally virtuous individual, then honor comes to light as the prize of moral virtue. It compensates the morally virtuous individual for any losses incurred through moral action. Unfortunately, however, recourse to honor may not be sufficient, for honor is not *the* human good. "Honor seems to reside more with those who bestow it than with him who receives it," and this is contrary to the character of *happiness*, which Aristotle identifies as *the* human good (Ibid, 1095b25-26). Although honor is a great good, it does not constitute blessedness or happiness. It may be this fact that motivates Aristotle's final argument for the preeminence of virtue, which relies on a specific conception of the divine.

Aristotle brings forth "the god" (τῷ θεῷ), who is "happy and blessed" while possessing nothing external to himself, as a witness for his argument that virtue is preeminent amongst the goods necessary for happiness (1323b24-27). It is important, especially in light of the theme of this thesis, to notice the character of the god used here to support the preeminence of virtue. This god should remind readers of the god of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* who, for lack of a better word, "governs" the world by being the object of attraction towards which all things somehow strive, i.e. not through direct providential care (DeFilipo 1994, 400-1; *Metaphysics* 1076a1-5; cf. *Politics* 1326a30-32). Although Aristotle likens this god to a king in the *Metaphysics,* the god is clearly quite different from Zeus, the protector of justice, whom Aristotle referred to in the *Politics* 1.2 (1252b20-26). Apart from the difference concerning providence, Aristotle here assumes that this self-sufficient god, as opposed to Zeus, actually exists.

Aristotle presents the nature of “the god” to support two conclusions. First, "the same amount of happiness falls to each person as of virtue and prudence and action in accordance with these," and second, happiness differs from good fortune (1323b23-29). However, it is not so clear that the presentation of the god simply bolsters Aristotle's case for virtue. Indeed, the god's reliance on nothing external to itself stands in marked contrast to the reliance of morally virtuous human beings on possessions (the prerequisites of morally virtuous action) and on other human beings (for honor, among other things). Indeed, the second conclusion Aristotle sets forth seems to undermine the first when considered with reference to the god and the previous arguments. The god is happy and blessed without relying on any external thing, but Aristotle has already declared that everyone would include all three types of good among the attributes of blessed human beings (1323a25). Human happiness or blessedness depends upon the possession of external and bodily goods (not to mention upon the welfare of "friends and fellow citizens" and family), and Aristotle here attributes those goods to the operation of blind "chance and fortune" (*Ethics* 1097b7-17, *Politics* 1323b29; cf. *Ethics* 1101a15-23 and 1178a24-b7). Thus, although more than a little virtue may be necessary for happiness, blessed human beings, unlike the god, still depend decisively upon fortune for their blessed and happy lives.

The introduction of the god to the discussion of virtue and happiness in 7.1 highlights the dependence of human beings upon fortune but does nothing to suggest that fortune – or the god – distributes external or bodily goods in accordance with virtue. It is conceivable, on this view, that there is no causal relationship between virtue and the goods of fortune. Certain virtuous souls might suffer deprivation and/or obscurity (lack of

honor), and certain vicious souls might enjoy the goods of fortune, including honor.[8] Aristotle's first mention of the divine in book 7 describes a god that in no way serves as a providential agent. If this is the true view of divinity, as Aristotle suggests, then it precludes the providential relationship between gods and human beings that underwrote Greek piety and formed the traditional basis for morality. The dangerous doctrine implied by this view of divinity is that there is in fact no sanction attached to cleverly executed acts of vice. The truth of this doctrine would also undermine Aristotle's own apparent conclusion that "the same amount of happiness falls to each person as of virtue and prudence" (1323b23). This conclusion, rather than following directly from Aristotle's arguments, would be plausible only given the pious conception of providential gods. Such gods were believed to ensure that bad fortune would not befall truly virtuous individuals. Only on this assumption could one conclude that happiness invariably accompanies virtue. What remains is to determine the political implications of this fact. How will Aristotle deal with the apparent need for providence when he comes to describing the best regime? At this point, of course, Aristotle does not deal with this question, because, although the weaknesses in his argument points to the need for providence, he does not speak of providence explicitly.

On the surface, the purpose Aristotle's argument in the conclusion of 7.1 is to answer the question posed earlier as to whether the best way of life for all individuals is in fact the best life for men in common, that is, for a citizen body. Aristotle answers in

[8] Alasdair MacIntyre, a renowned Aristotelian philosopher, puts the point starkly: "Excellence and winning, it is scarcely necessary to repeat, are not the same. But it is in fact to winning, and only to excellence on the occasions when it does in fact produce victory, that a certain kind of reward is attached, a reward by which, ostensibly at least, excellence is to be *honored.* Rewards of this kind – let us call them *external rewards* – are such goods as those of riches, power, status, and prestige, goods which can be and are objects of desire by human beings prior to and independently of any desire for excellence" (MacIntyre 1988, 31-2, emphasis added).

the affirmative. The ostensible fact that virtue is of preeminent importance for the attainment of individual happiness apparently proves sufficiently that it is also best for men in common.[9] Here Aristotle emphasizes the importance of noble actions, declaring reasonably that "there is no noble deed either of a man or of a city that is separate from virtue and prudence" (1323b33-34). However, when it comes to enumerating the virtues characteristic of a noble city and the virtues characteristic of a noble man, Aristotle does not offer the same list. He posits that "the courage, justice, and prudence of a city have the same power and form as" the justice, prudence, and moderation of an individual (1323b35-37). Characteristic of the city, then, is courage, while moderation replaces courage in the list of individual virtues.

Consideration of the discrepancy in Aristotle's list brings the reader once again into contact with a difficulty associated with Aristotle's attempt to unite moral virtue and happiness in the best regime. This difficulty arises specifically from the peculiar nature of courage and the ugly facts about the human condition that the necessity of courage for political communities brings out. Human beings cannot escape completely their exposedness to the aggression of others. Individuals in isolation experience their exposure acutely; in isolation, human beings must possess courage and power, if they wish to survive. Indeed, the ever-present possibility of violence against isolated individuals means that anyone desirous of such isolation "has by this fact a desire for war" and a brutal nature incompatible with complete virtue and happiness (1253a7). Political communities offer citizens distance from and protection against violence and the threat of violence, and they educate citizens through law and custom away from the

[9] That "the city" in these passages is equivalent to "men in common" or "citizen body" is supported by Aristotle earlier in the *Politics*: "the city is a certain multitude of citizens" (1275a1).

desire for war. However, these communities must also on occasion defend themselves against aggression from other communities (1328b10). They must therefore train citizens to fight on their behalf. Thus, although the community initially offers distance from the necessity of war, it sometimes requires citizens to enter willingly into war in its defense. In these situations, the political community asks citizens to risk losing all the benefits of civilized life for the community's sake.

One might argue that courage is justifiable in so far as the courageous citizen prizes his family or community above even his own life. Yet, in Aristotle's taxonomy of the virtues in the *Ethics*, neither loyalty to a political community nor concern for select members of the community motivates the truly courageous citizen-soldier. The courageous citizen, the archetype of courage for Aristotle, "endures" the burden of war and readiness for war "for the sake of the noble, for this is the end of virtue" (*Ethics,* 1115b14-24, 1116a23). The citizen-soldier, due to successful habituation in political community, fears shame more than death (1116b20-25). Even so, one cannot easily escape the fact that "the more [the courageous citizen] possesses complete virtue and the happier he is, the more he will be pained at the prospect of death" (1117b11). This is, of course, because death "is a limit [or end], and there seems to be nothing else for the dead, nothing either good or bad" (1115a25).

Meditating on courage with this perspective on death brings to light the great peculiarity of courage, arguably the quintessential political virtue, for courage can bring out a tension between nobility and happiness. The courageous citizen-soldier aims at nobility but understands that the noblest possible action, the sacrifice of his life for the common good of the political community, entails sacrificing his own happiness. With

respect to the theme of divine providence, then, this meditation on courage indicates that without the possibility of an afterlife in which courageous, heroic actions are rewarded, there is a serious tension between the community's desire to render its citizens happy and its desire to render them courageous and noble. But it is precisely the combination of nobility and happiness that Aristotle wants to effect in the best city: "the best city is happy and acts nobly" (1323b30). As in the case of his statement about the god, Aristotle's statement about the virtues of individuals and cities obliquely offers a warrant for the inclusion of piety in the best regime. If heroic soldiers are rewarded in an afterlife on "the islands of the blessed," as Aristotle suggests certain poets believed, then a citizen could be both courageous and happy (1334a33-4). To a soldier with this view of the afterlife, death would not appear to be the end; such a soldier could see courage as compatible with his own (ultimate) good, despite its daunting demands. Is it possible that the art of priestcraft, which deals with the possibility of an afterlife, becomes especially necessary in a community that seeks to habituate citizens to be courageous? Belief in divine providence and the possibility of an afterlife appears to be the only way to resolve the dilemma of the citizen-soldier and to allay the anxiety attending that role in a political community that prizes happiness as much as, if not more than, nobility.

Aristotle concludes chapter 7.1 by pointing out that all the relevant arguments, perhaps including those pertaining to providence, have not been made. Nevertheless, the philosopher decides to move on, because it is not feasible to exhaust all the arguments pertaining to happiness and virtue (1323b36-40). He concludes 7.1 with two further admissions. First, he admits that the arguments for the superiority of virtue may not persuade all his listeners. As Pangle argues, one can easily conceive of "thoughtful

hedonistic objectors," who would defend the goods of the body or external goods over the virtues (Pangle 2013, 228). Nevertheless, Aristotle posits the choice-worthiness of virtue as the fundamental assumption underlying the remaining discussion of the best regime. Second, Aristotle once again calls our attention to the fact that the exercise of virtue requires external equipment (1324a1-2). Virtue may be preeminent, but it is not self-sufficient. At the end of 7.1, readers are again caused to wonder about the possible union of virtue and happiness, given the dependence of virtue, especially moral virtue, on fortune.

Aristotle introduces the themes of tyranny and philosophy into his preface to the best regime in 7.2. A review of this chapter demonstrates the inadequacy of Segev's account of piety in the best regime, for the philosophical life cannot be the end of the best regime. The chapter begins by positing that happiness, like virtue, may be predicated of the city in the same way as it is predicated of the individual (cf. Simpson 1998, 202). Early in the *Politics*, Aristotle informed his readers that the happiness of a city depends upon the happiness of its parts (1264b20). The city cannot be happy unless the citizens themselves are happy. Of course, no city has citizens that are uniformly of a specific disposition, but the city with a critical mass of happy citizens can be called happy. This is attested to by the fact that those who "ascribe living well to wealth in the case of a single person" also call the wealthy city blessed, just as those who "honor tyranny" call the tyrannical city happiest and those who call the virtuous individual happy "also assert" that the "more serious city" (πόλιν . . . τὴν σπουδαιοτέραν) is happy (1324a5-13).[10]

[10] The lack of parallelism in this passage may be intended to highlight the fact that only the proponents of virtue concern themselves with living seriously, though all people are concerned with living happily.

Aristotle then raises and quickly sets aside the possibility that sharing in a city is not choiceworthy for all people. Perhaps certain individuals would benefit from a life divorced from the political community (τῆς πολιτικῆς κοινωνίας ἀπολελυμένος), but inquiring into this point is not Aristotle's main concern in his discussion of the best regime. An interpretive question nevertheless arises as to what Aristotle means by a life divorced from political community.[11] One interpretation holds that Aristotle here raises the question of the superiority of intellectual to moral virtue, a question treated also in 10.7-8 of the *Ethics.*[12] Another interpretation holds that Aristotle here questions the superiority of life inside a political community to life outside a political community altogether, a possibility he dismissed in the *Politics* 1.2. The first interpretation appears closer to the truth. The second reading ignores the fact that Aristotle refers here to the life of a foreigner (ὁ ξενικός), a designation most likely referring to the class of resident aliens at Athens. Aristotle does not, in other words, recur to the discussion already concluded in book 1 about the desirability of political community for human beings.[13] In speaking of the foreigner Aristotle speaks of a life unfettered by political duty, not a life wholly independent of political community.

[11] For references to both of the following interpretations, see Simpson 1998, 203.

[12] Pangle notes that Aristotle's language here recalls the language Socrates uses to describe the philosopher's liberation from "the cave of political responsibilities" (Pangle 2013, 312, fn. 12).

[13] Contra Simpson 1998, 203. The issue in question here is the most choiceworthy life for an individual in relation to the political community. We know that Aristotle posits life in a political community to be superior to life outside a political community altogether (1253a1-19). Thus, when Aristotle suggests that the life of a foreigner might be better than the life of a citizen, he must mean the life of a foreigner who still exists in the confines of a political community, i.e. a resident alien. This amounts to suggesting that there might be a way of life more serious than that of a citizen, a way of life in accordance with virtue understood differently than the political community understands it.

The passage raises as a question the possibility that the life of active participation in the political community is not best for all men. But why does Aristotle point to the fact that the choiceworthy political life encouraged by the best regime might not be the simply best way of life? This possibility continues to clarify the nature of the best regime by hinting that the object of the best regime is not and cannot be to secure for its citizens what Aristotle sees as the simply best way of life, the contemplative life, in direct contradiction of Segev's argument. Indeed, Aristotle declares that determining "what is choiceworthy for the individual" is not "a task for political thought and study" (1324a20-23). In other words, Aristotle leads us to believe that the remainder of the preface to the best regime will consider specifically the most choiceworthy way of life for men in common.

Accordingly, Aristotle now returns to considering the best regime, but he simultaneously continues to force his readers to think about the contemplative life. He first reaffirms that the best regime seeks to enable its citizens to act virtuously and live blessedly: "the best regime must necessarily be that arrangement under which anyone [ὁστισουν] might act in the best manner and live blessedly" (1324a24). Perhaps resident aliens enjoy the best opportunity for living happily, but Aristotle clearly believes that the best regime enables citizens to enjoy some measure of virtue and happiness. Throughout the rest of Aristotle's preface to the best regime, the choice-worthiness of virtue is taken as given, as the fundamental assumption underlying his discussion of the best regime. But what sort of virtue will be exercised by the citizens of the best regime? Aristotle showed in chapter 7.1 that the blessed life involves virtue equipped with the goods of body and property, and he emphasized the moral virtues of both individuals and citizens (1323b30-

35). He now presents a dispute among those who agree about the preeminence of virtue, but disagree about the preeminent virtue.

The dispute pits the life of philosophical virtue against the life of political virtue, "for it is evident that these two ways of life are the ones intentionally chosen by those human beings who are most ambitious with a view to virtue, both in former times and at the present" (1324a24-33). The philosophic life as represented here is that "divorced from all externals" (1324a27). Aristotle sportively suggests that the quarrel between the proponents of political virtue and philosophic virtue concerns the best regime, since "a sensible person . . . must necessarily organize matters with a view to the better aim both in the case of human beings individually and for the regime in common" (1324a33-35). Aristotle cannot mean to suggest that a regime could in principle be organized for or "with a view to" (πρὸς) the philosophic way of life, which is an alternative to the political life. Every regime requires that some of its citizens, presumably those most honored in the city, operate the regime and thereby engage in political life. A philosophic regime, one divorced from political life, would be a contradiction in terms. As Pangle rhetorically asks,

> Is a city an organism with a mind that can think, let alone devote itself to theorizing as an end in itself? On the other hand: if the city leads the theoretical life only inasmuch as its individual members lead that life, what sort of civic community can there be, composed of individuals each of whom lives in spiritual independence, by himself and for himself, engaged chiefly in theorizing? (Pangle 2013, 239)

Thus, even as he reorients the discussion to consider exclusively the choiceworthy political life that characterizes the best regime, Aristotle reminds his audience that this choiceworthy life may not be the simply best life. The dichotomy between the

philosophic life and the political life presents this possibility starkly, since the philosophical life is necessarily private.

Since the discussion of 7.2 is fundamentally political, Aristotle does not adjudicate directly between the claims made by the proponents of the political and philosophic lives. Instead, he recounts a sampling of arguments for and against the political life and drops direct discussion of the philosophic life. There are some who criticize "rul[ing] over one's neighbors" on the grounds that it impedes the well-being of the ruler, presumably because the ruler is preoccupied by serving the interests of others and therefore unable to pursue his own happiness. Some defenders of the political life retort that "the active and political life" is the only one for a true man (ἀνήρ). Finally, there are those who defend tyranny on the grounds that it is the only happy life (1324a36-24b4). Among the three views of the political life, only the advocates of the tyrannical life claim that participating in political life brings happiness. The defenders of non-tyrannical rule defend it on grounds other than the happiness, while the critics of political rule argue that it impedes the pursuit of happiness. This is a serious difficulty for Aristotle, since the best regime involves political rule by all the citizens in turn *and* seeks to make its citizens happy (1332a34-35). Aristotle specifies at this point in 7.2 that the best regime is superior to all other regimes precisely because its political life is not concerned above all with acquiring dominion over its neighbors, that is, pursuing the happiness potentially available through tyranny (1324b6-24).

In any event, Aristotle has yet to clearly defend the possibility of uniting happiness with non-tyrannical political rule. To this point no argument has been adduced to show that such political activity does not impede the pursuit of happiness. According

to the first advocates of political rule discussed in 7.2, political life is manly, but not necessarily happy. This position is in fact consistent with Aristotle's suggestion in 7.1 that courage is the essential political virtue. At that point, the mention of courage seemed to point to the need for providential gods to solve for the potential deficit in happiness that comes along with the sacrifices of the manly, political life. The present passage reinforces that point. If political rule is defended solely on account of its manliness, the gods are less immediately necessary, since citizens might conceivably show their manliness in suffering. However, if the political life is said to be compatible with happiness, as in the best regime, then the need for providential gods reappears.

The question of 7.2 becomes this: on what basis does Aristotle advocate for the choice-worthiness of non-tyrannical political rule over tyrannical rule? Although it is unclear whether Aristotle makes this argument in his own name, the only grounds of superiority given for the former in 7.2 are based on justice and nature. "It is possible to conquer others unjustly," Aristotle declares, and tyrannical rule, which seeks to rule as widely as possible, contravenes justice by seeking to master those who do not, by nature, deserve to be mastered. The conclusion is that "one should not try to exercise mastery over all things but only over those that are to be mastered, just as one would not hunt human beings for a feast or sacrifice." The goodness of justice is taken as given on the ground that "most people . . . among themselves seek just rule" (1324b29-40).[14] On the basis of what has been said so far, it appears that there are two options for demonstrating the superiority of non-tyrannical rule to tyrannical rule: first, the disregard for justice that

[14] That this argument cannot be Aristotle's true reason for rejecting tyrannical rule is attested to by the fact that his best regime will in fact need to engage in the very action that he here condemns as a breach of natural justice, *viz.* mastering those who do not deserve by nature to be mastered (*Politics,* 1329a26, 1330a35).

accompanies tyrannical rule may simply be too repulsive to consider, or second, despite the claims of the tyrannical apologists, nobly engaging in the internal political life of a community may in fact be more conducive to happiness than is tyranny. Aristotle's conclusion to chapter 7.2 shows that considerations of happiness cannot be abandoned: "[i]t belongs to the excellent legislator to see how a city . . . will share in the good life and the happiness that is possible for them" (1325a10). The debate between tyranny and non-tyrannical political rule must be resolved with a view to happiness. However, at this point, only Aristotle's argument for virtue in 7.1 stands to gainsay the advocate of tyranny, an argument which, according to Aristotle himself, was not complete or probably persuasive to everyone. Nevertheless, Aristotle has made a solid, if not dispositive, argument for the idea that happiness requires all three types of goods. Virtue may not be self-sufficient, but Aristotle's arguments did suggest that virtue is a substantial, perhaps the preeminent, component of happiness. At the end of 7.2, it appears that the case against tyranny depends on the idea that "engaging in politics in a noble manner" is a surer route to happiness than pursuing dominion (τοῦ κρατεῖν) (1325a4; cf. 1324b6-7).

However, an even more fundamental question immediately arises: is the height of *nobility* achieved in and through decent republican politics or in and through dominion? If in fact the tyrannical life is noblest, then it would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to prove that the alternative form of political life is more choiceworthy for an individual or a regime. The importance of noble action reasserts itself as an essential criterion by which to determine the most choiceworthy way of life. Both nobility and happiness must be considered.

Consequently, Aristotle begins chapter 7.3 by defending decent republican politics on the grounds that tyranny is incompatible with true nobility. He argues that "actions can no longer be noble for one who does not differ as much from those he rules as husband differs from wife . . . or master from slaves" (1325b3-5). In other words, the tyrant acts ignobly by attempting to rule over those whom he does not by nature deserve to rule. Unfortunately, this argument against tyranny "is not as definitive as one might hope;" it does not in fact demonstrate that dominion is not noble for the truly best regime or conducive to its happiness (Pangle 2013, 237). The argument would be compelling if there were no standard with which to rank human beings or regimes, but Aristotle clearly believes that such a standard exists. His inquiry into the best regime depends upon the possibility of demonstrating the superiority of certain regimes and ways of life to others. Specifically, it depends upon the idea that supremely virtuous individuals have a just claim to rule (1325b10-13). The same argument supports the claim of the best regime to rule. It would be just and natural for the best city ruled by the best regime to rule its neighbors. As Pangle argues, "a benevolently imperialist vector is intrinsic to the proposition that the political life, as the life of just rule, is the most choiceworthy because happiest" (Ibid). Tyrannical rule, though absolute, may still be benevolent. This sort of tyranny might more accurately be called by the name of "empire," tyranny's "politer guise" (Bartlett 2001, 168).

The weakness of Aristotle's initial argument against tyranny leads him in the conclusion of 7.3 to defend non-tyrannical political rule indirectly. He begins by suggesting that the most active life may not involve rule at all. A preference for action need not lead to a preference for political life, for there is such a thing as intellectual

activity. Aristotle contends that this sort of activity, which involves "the sorts of studies and thoughts that are for their own sake," is in fact "much more" active than political activity (1325b16-21). This answer to the problem of tyranny recalls a similar passage from the *Politics* 2.7. There Aristotle held that "if certain persons should want *enjoyment through themselves alone*, they should not seek a remedy except in connection with philosophy" (1267a4-15, emphasis added). Philosophy then, provides the answer to the tyrant who would engage in tyranny out of a concern for his own happiness. Yet, this argument loses much of its force when applied to regimes, for there cannot truly be a philosophic regime. Regimes cannot engage in contemplation. Aristotle contends that the "communities" in the city can interact with each other to produce self-contained, inward-looking political activity, but this activity is only loosely analogous to the philosophic life available to individuals (1325b27).

The concluding mention of "the god" reinforces this fact. Aristotle holds that self-contained activity "is possible in a similar way for any individual human being . . . For otherwise the god and the entire universe could hardly be in a fine condition, since they have no external actions beyond those that are proper to themselves" (1325b26-31). The philosopher has recourse to the nature of the god to prove that individuals can engage in self-contained activity, but he makes no attempt to do the same on behalf of the regime. As the following chapters of book 7 clearly show, the best regime must concern itself with external affairs including commerce and defense (Bartlett 2001, 170). The preface to the best regime does not clearly refute the tyrannical or imperial tendency of regimes, even (or, perhaps, especially) those organized with a view to moral virtue and happiness. The natural human desire for happiness tempts all regimes and certain ambitious

individuals to pursue dominion. When Aristotle confronts this problem, he ultimately answers it with an appeal to the satisfaction available in and through philosophy or, in the case of the regime, a political substitute for philosophy. However, since the philosophic life cannot form the basis of a common way of life, the best regime must provide its citizens with another alternative to tyranny. It must give them reason to believe that happiness is available in and through the choiceworthy political way of life described by Aristotle in 7.1, which is characterized especially by the moral virtues of justice and courage (1323b34).

This chapter on Aristotle's preface to the best regime has produced three conclusions. First, the claim that moral virtue produces happiness is hollow unless it is accompanied by the further claim that providential gods ensure the prosperity of morally virtuous individuals. This conclusion undergirds the theory that Aristotle includes piety in the city governed by the best regime to help habituate the citizens of the best regime in moral virtue. Such habituation requires that the citizens understand their morally virtuous actions to be conducive to their own good, since "everyone does everything for the sake of what is held to be good" (1252a2-3). Second, the philosophic life, despite its impressive claims to be the most choiceworthy life for an individual, cannot serve as the basis for the common way of life of the best regime. Therefore, the regime cannot be devoted to the education of philosophers, for example, as Segev claims. Third, there is a strong tyrannical impulse in political life that may tempt citizens away from the choiceworthy political life offered by the best regime, just as it may tempt the regime itself to pursue dominion over its neighbors. The philosophic answer to this impulse

given by Aristotle is not available to the best regime. The regime must be able to make the case that happiness is available in and through the virtuous political life it fosters.

4.0 ARISTOTLE'S BEST REGIME

Aristotle never states outright his reason for including piety in the best regime. However, the previous chapter showed that his preface to the best regime reveals an ineradicable tension at the heart of the most choiceworthy way of life that informs the best regime: the tension between moral virtue, which aims at nobility, and happiness. Belief in divine providence ameliorates this tension by promising that those who act well will also fare well. If the citizens of the best regime believe in divine providence, they will in principle see no tension between their commitment to moral virtue and their natural concern for their own happiness. Since the city "must be regarded . . . as being for the sake of noble actions" and the individual naturally aims at happiness, only the concept of divine providence can harmonize the end of the city, which citizens accept as a result of habituation, with their natural end as individuals (1281a2). Therefore, from the standpoint of the best regime or the skilled legislator, who founds the best regime in speech, the institution of priestcraft and the piety it fosters serve a necessary function: they make plausible the city's claim to offer the noblest *and* happiest way of life. The purpose of this chapter is to determine how well this argument explains Aristotle's explicit statements about priestcraft and the worship of the gods in his discussion of the best regime. If it accounts for what Aristotle says about these aspects of the best regime more clearly and completely than the theories of Segev and Pangle, then it should be considered vindicated.

Chapters 7.4-7 of the *Politics* form an account of the material prerequisites of the best regime. In 7.4, Aristotle treats of the proper size for the regime's population. It is

extremely difficult, not to say impossible, for "a city too populous to be well managed" or well governed (εὐνομεῖσθαι), because "law [νόμος] is a certain sort of order, and good governance [τὴν εὐνομίαν] must of necessity involve good order [εὐταξίαν]." Indeed, only "divine power, which is what holds together the whole itself," could bring good order to an excessively large population (1326a26-33). This passage offers more insight into the nature of the regime and into its relationship to the divine. As Lord observes in a footnote to his translation of the passage, "the term 'good governance' is etymologically related to the term 'law,' but is suggestive of a condition of orderliness going beyond the observance of legal norms as such" (*Politics,* 195, fn. 19). The passage indicates, then, that the best regime will aim to organize the population through law, but the success of the law depends upon the existence of good order in the community. This order will not simply be a product of the laws imposed by the regime. The difference between mere law and good law is good order. Only the very god, which in some sense orders the whole (τὸ πᾶν), could produce good order in an excessively large community. Apart from prescribing a moderate size for the best city, Aristotle does not clarify the necessary conditions for good order in a properly sized community. However, such good order almost certainly includes shared moral norms and religious practices. From this perspective, it becomes clear that the god mentioned in 7.1-4 provides little or no foundation for such norms and practices. The reference to the god in 7.4 suggests that the best regime will not rely on the power of the god to produce good order in its community. The god may order the whole cosmos, but it does not apparently have any special relationship to the city. If the city is to have any relationship to the divine or derive its

good order partially from its beliefs about the divine, it must possess a conception of the divine very different from that which Aristotle utilizes in 7.1-4.

In the next two chapters, Aristotle speaks of the size of the best regime's territory and its access to the sea. These chapters reveal the centrality of leisure (σχολή) in the way of life of the best regime. In chapter 7.5, Aristotle argues that the territory "should be large enough so that the inhabitants are able to live at leisure in the fashion of free men and at the same time with moderation" (1326b30-32). Although leisure is not mentioned specifically in chapter 7.6, it remains an important underlying consideration. Aristotle concedes that the city will need a "sea-faring mass" to serve as rowers in its navy, but he distinguishes this mass from the "marine element" – heavily armed troops who serve as "marines" aboard warships and "dominate" the rowers (1327b1-14). These marines will be free men, that is, they will be drawn from the inhabitants of the city possessed of leisure. Aristotle distinguishes the marines from the sea-faring element partly to show that the city's proximity to the sea will not compel its free and leisured citizens to engage in trade or rowing or compel the city to recognize merchants or rowers as citizens (cf. 1329a1-3).

Chapter 7.7 directly treats the subject of citizenship by describing the "quality of persons" fit to live the free and leisured political life of a citizen in the best regime. Those fit to become citizens must be "readily guided to virtue," and this requires that they be "endowed with thought and spirited in their nature" (1327b37). Legislation in the best regime will be aimed at guiding the citizens toward virtue, and spiritedness comes to light as a natural capacity or power (δύναμις) necessary for the successful education in and practice of virtue (cf. 1328a1). Aristotle follows this claim with an intriguing analysis of

spiritedness. According to his argument, spiritedness is "the capacity of soul by which we feel affection" (1328a1-6). The fact that "spiritedness is more aroused against imitates and friends than against unknown persons" shows the link between spiritedness and affection, while the fact that spiritedness is most aroused "when it considers itself slighted," that is, treated unjustly, is an indication of the close connection between spiritedness and moral virtue (1328a1-3). Although spiritedness in its uneducated form may be violently aroused by a variety of experiences other than moral slights (such as encountering strangers or enemies), education in moral virtue trains spiritedness to flare up only at instances of injustice. As Aristotle says, "nor are magnanimous persons savage in their nature, except toward those behaving unjustly" (1328a10-11). Intense anger at injustice appears to be an ineradicable concomitant of a magnanimous soul. The citizens of the best regime, who will be educated to be "just unqualifiedly," will undoubtedly retain this propensity to treat anyone acting unjustly with harshness (1328b37-41). Aristotle's conclusion to the chapter suggests that these virtuous citizens will be especially concerned with whether *they themselves* are treated justly. They will be more than willing to provide noble benefactions to their fellow citizens, but they will also suppose that their fellows are obligated to return the benefactions (1328a13). Their ire at injustice will be particularly aroused when "they consider themselves deprived" of such reciprocation by family or fellow citizens (1328a14-15). The dedication of the citizens of the best regime to moral virtue could cause harsh disputes among them whenever one or more feels unjustly treated.

Pangle's commentary on Aristotle's treatment of spiritedness draws out the implications of that treatment for the education appropriate to the citizens of the best regime.

> [T]he philosopher here reveals that moral virtue at its peak, centered psychologically on spiritedness, is susceptible to intense moral indignation and harsh punitiveness toward friends and comrades as a result of the moral soul's passionate conviction that it has a just claim to major compensations believed to be deserved on account of the loss or cost to oneself incurred in taking the trouble to benefit others. It would appear doubtful whether moral virtue by itself is sufficient counter to, or education of, spiritedness. (Pangle 2013, 245)

Aristotle's treatment of spiritedness illuminates the way the citizens of the best regime will understand their commitment to moral virtue. They will understand moral virtue to be compatible with their own good. They will not see their virtuous actions in purely sacrificial terms. Rather, they will expect compensation for their acts of moral virtue. When citizens perceive discrepancies between their merit and reward, their spiritedness may lead them toward harshness or retribution. For this reason, an additional hedge against such behavior may be necessary. Belief in divine providence appears well suited to act as this additional hedge, for it offers a way of diffusing the impulse to revenge. If the citizens of the best regime believe that the gods punish offences against justice or remedy all discrepancies between merit and reward in an afterlife, then they may be less inclined to respond harshly or vengefully when they feel themselves slighted.

These considerations prepare the ground for Aristotle's discussion of the regime itself, which the philosopher takes up in 7.8-9. At the outset of 7.8, Aristotle begins a search for the "parts" of the city, the functions to be carried out by the citizens of the best regime, and their proper ordering. The parts of the city cannot be those things that belong to it of necessity, for the necessary elements of the city are for the sake of the functions

proper to the citizens of the city. To illustrate this abstract point, Aristotle offers the example of a house and a housebuilder: the work of the housebuilder is for the sake of the house. As applied to the city, the analogy leads to the following conclusion: "while cities need property, property is no part of the city," and "many animate things are part of property" (1328a34-35). The city, however, is not made up of property. The city "is a community of similar persons, for the sake of a life that is the best possible" (1328b35-36). The best possible life is the happiest possible life, "since happiness is the best thing" (1328a37). In practice, all cities seek happiness, Aristotle stipulates, and their different manners of seeking "create ways of life and regimes that differ" (1328b1). As noted in the analysis of 7.1, the purpose of the best regime is to make possible the most choiceworthy way of life, which provides the happiest possible political life to its citizens. Thus, the best regime will succeed, Aristotle indicates, where other regimes fail in this regard.

How will the best regime provide for the happiness of its citizens? Aristotle begins his answer by explaining that the best regime will succeed in cultivating virtue among its citizens, for happiness "is the actualization of virtue and a certain complete practice of it" (1328a37-8). Although this formulation does not contradict the arguments pertaining to happiness and virtue in 7.1, close inspection of that chapter showed that happiness does not necessarily follow upon the practice of moral virtue (since moral virtue cannot forestall death or control fortune). Does Aristotle now gloss over this difficulty by stating that happiness simply is the actualization of virtue? The language of this claim recalls Aristotle's discussion of virtue and happiness in book 1 of the *Ethics* (1098b32-35). Does that text provide different justifications for the life of moral virtue?

Does it show that happiness and moral virtue are more easily reconciled than the arguments of the *Politics* 7.1 appeared to show?

It does not. In fact, Aristotle points to the same two difficulties (mortality and misfortune) even more clearly in the *Ethics* 1.8-10 than he does in the *Politics* 7.1. As for fortune, Aristotle draws attention in the *Ethics* to the fact that good fortune provides the prerequisites of moral virtue, while misfortune can ruin the happiness of even the most prosperous and virtuous person. Since the noble deeds of virtue require "equipment," a measure of "external prosperity in addition" to a virtuous disposition is necessary to attain happiness through morally virtuous action (1099a32-99b7). Since these prerequisites come to human beings through fortune, the actualization of moral virtue is shown to be dependent on good fortune. It is not self-sufficient. Happiness and good fortune are therefore so intimately linked that "some make good fortune equivalent to happiness" (*Ethics,* 1099b1-8). Although Aristotle declines to simply equate good fortune and happiness, these passages from the *Ethics* highlight the dependence of virtue (and, therefore, happiness) on good fortune. Aristotle powerfully illustrates how fickle fortune can be by referencing the legendary Priam of Troy, who, despite his wealth, power, and virtue, could not evade crushing misfortune (*Ethics* 1101a1-8). Good fortune brought Priam everything necessary for the actualization of virtue, but misfortune subsequently ruined his happiness. Even men with virtue and its prerequisites are still subject to the vicissitudes of fortune. It is principally for this reason that Aristotle cannot even call happy "someone who is active in accord with complete virtue and who is adequately equipped with external goods . . . in a complete life." Rather, such a person would be only a "blessed human being." "Since the future is immanifest to us," misfortune always

threatens to disrupt the happiness of even the most secure human being (*Ethics* 1101a15-21).

The reference to blessed *human beings* also highlights human mortality, the second obstacle to happiness. The certainty of death means that human beings eventually lose any happiness they obtain through good fortune and virtue. Knowledge of the vicissitudes of fortune and the certainty of death ultimately renders the deepest human "hope for happiness unrealizable" (Bartlett 2008, 684). Death and chance appear to comprise insuperable obstacles to self-sufficient happiness.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Aristotle suggests in the *Ethics* that the difficulties associated with the human attempt to gain happiness have caused some to think that happiness must be a gift from the gods. As he tellingly reports after observing the dependence of virtue on external equipment, "this is also why the perplexity arises as to whether happiness is something that can be gained through learning or habituation . . . or whether it comes to be present in accord with a sort of divine allotment " (1099b9-11). Aristotle gives this latter view some respect when he says, "[i]f there is in fact anything that is a gift of the gods to human beings, it is reasonable that happiness is god given" (1099b12).[15] Indeed, "the premise that happiness is a gift from the gods to human beings . . . is the most serious part of Aristotle's official response to the problem of happiness, it being also the necessary premise of the view that the virtuous live on after death and know then a happiness that cannot be undone" (Bartlett 2008, 684-5). In sum, both the *Politics* 7.1 and the *Ethics* 1.8-10 provide a warrant for including the worship of

[15] However, Aristotle's statement is "compatible with the gods giving no gifts whatsoever to human beings," and the philosopher "immediately entertains the view that happiness is *not* god-sent"(Bartlett 2008, 685).

providential gods in the best regime. Without recourse to such gods, the regime will not be able to make a coherent claim that its citizens will be happy through the practice of moral virtue in political community.

In the latter half of the *Politics* 7.8, Aristotle lists the essential personnel that must be present in the best regime to support its way of life (1328b2-14). He enumerates these personnel in an intriguing order. First are the farmers, for "sustenance" is essential for any city to survive. Second are the artisans, for the city will need many tools and instruments to carry on the business of life. Third are soldiers. Aristotle pauses to note that the best regime needs soldiers only for "ruling . . . those who disobey" and for defending against "outsiders who attempt to do . . . injustice" to its citizens. Fourth are the wealthy citizens, for the regime will need wealth to provide for its domestic and military needs.

Fifth are those who “care for the divine,” that is, engage in “priestcraft” (ἱερατείαν) (1328b12). The label priestcraft is not apparently essential, for Aristotle remarks that it is "they" (presumably 'the many') who refer to care for the divine in this manner. Although the term Aristotle uses for "the divine" (τὸ θεῖον) does not immediately reveal the character of the gods to be worshipped in the best regime, the fact that the priests will *care* (τὴν . . . ἐπιμέλειαν) for the divine suggests that these gods will be the traditional gods of the Greeks. Institutionalized care for the self-sufficient god mentioned three times in the *Politics* 7.1-4, which apparently takes no interest in justice among human beings, makes little sense. Only the traditional gods could require such institutionalized care from human beings. This interpretation receives further support in chapter 7.9.

Of course, the priests are not only fifth in rank among the essential personnel in the best regime; they are also "first" (πρῶτον), or, as C.D.C. Reeve renders the word in this context, "of primary importance" (Reeve 1998, 204). Aristotle goes out of his way to indicate the importance of the priests in the city. The numbered list of necessary personnel proceeds without interruption between the first and fifth tasks, but Aristotle breaks this smooth progression to draw attention to the status of the priests by calling them "fifth, but also first." Aristotle could simply have called priestcraft fifth among the necessary tasks without obviously demeaning its importance. Instead, he calls attention to its status as first and thereby elevates it.

It remains to understand *why* Aristotle does this. Simpson echoes Reeve's translation and offers the beginning of a rationale for Aristotle's ranking of priestcraft. According to Simpson, priestcraft is "primary or first in importance, since all things depend on the gods, especially in the city according to prayer," i.e. the city that prefers engaging in internal political life to dominating its neighbors (Simpson 1998, 220). Of course, Aristotle will eventually state clearly that the coming to be of the best city depends on "chance," not the gods (1331b22). The form or organization of the city is, moreover, "a product of constructive rational art," for, "despite the emphatic reference[s] to prayer, Aristotle is silent on any need for the lawgiver to begin by praying for divine assistance or guidance or approval or protection" (Pangle 2013, 240). In other words, although Simpson's justification for the priest's primary importance cannot be true from Aristotle's perspective, it accurately describes the viewpoint of the pious citizens of the best regime. The citizens will see the gods as decisively, although not solely, responsible

for their own happiness, for the pious conception of the divine holds that the gods protect virtuous persons from misfortune.

An examination of the idea of self-sufficiency also supports this interpretation of the place of priestcraft in the best regime. Simpson correctly observes that all of the tasks enumerated in 7.8 are necessary "if the city is to be self-sufficient" (Simpson 1998, 220). What does this mean? Aristotle provides a clear definition of the self-sufficient life in chapter 3.10 of the *Politics*: "A city is the community of families and villages in a complete and self-sufficient life. This, we assert, is living happily and nobly" (1280b40-1281a1). Together the necessary tasks in the best regime enable the citizens to live happily and nobly. As argued above, belief in divine providence is necessary for such a combination to be possible in theory and in practice for morally serious individuals. If priestcraft and the piety it presupposes and fosters were absent from the city, the happiness available to the citizens of the best regime would be undermined by their awareness of its fragility. The choiceworthy way of life of the best regime would become suspect. Thus, the argument of this thesis neatly explains Aristotle's claim that "if *any* of [the necessary tasks] happens to be omitted, it is impossible for this community to be simply self-sufficient" (1328b17-18, emphasis added).

Sixth and finally, Aristotle comes to the "most necessary" personnel of all, the politicians, who engage in "decision concerning things advantageous and just in relation to one another" (1328b14). By ranking the politicians sixth, Aristotle separates them from the priests. Aristotle's description of the political task reveals that the priests will not rule. Decision concerning justice and advantage appears as something altogether different from care for the divine. Though the priests may claim superior knowledge of the gods,

decision concerning justice amongst the people and the advantage of the community will not be part of their job description. The primary importance of the priests does not translate into political rule; the best regime will not be a theocracy.[16]

Before turning to chapter 7.9, it is important to show that the argument of this thesis explains the logic underlying chapter 7.8 better than Segev's theory. Philosophers are nowhere mentioned as essential persons in the self-sufficient political community. Farmers, artisans, soldiers, wealthy persons, priests, and politicians are each named, and it is strongly implied that the activity of these persons is *sufficient* to secure the happy and noble life at which the community aims (1328b15-22). This fact contradicts Segev's contention that "Aristotle's account of the *polis,* whose staying in existence is for the sake of the flourishing lives of its citizens, 'must . . . include the provision that among [its people] will be a group of citizens who live the contemplative life" (Segev 2017, 6). If such contemplative persons were to arise in the best city, it would not be because the city provided in any intentional way for their existence or understood them to be necessary for its way of life. According to chapter 7.8, the self-sufficient communal life of the citizens of the best regime does not require that they live philosophical lives or associate with philosophers.[17]

These considerations also undermine an interpretation put forward by Simpson, which resembles Segev's. Although his commentary was cited above to explain the sense

[16] This comports with Aristotle's earlier statements about priestcraft in book 4 of the *Politics.* There Aristotle listed the priests among the "functionaries" (ἐπιστατῶν) required by the political community, a role he clearly separated from the "political officials" (τὰς πολιτικὰς ἀρχὰς) (1299α14-18).

[17] According to the *Ethics,* the happiness available through intellectual virtue is not the only sort of happiness available to human beings. There is another, albeit "secondary" (δευτέρως), happiness available through the practice of moral virtue (*Ethics,* 1178a9). Aristotle's preface to the best regime also indicated as much when it showed that the philosophical life is not the foundation for the choiceworthy life of the citizens of the best regime.

in which the priests are "first," Simpson appears mistaken in his attempt to explain the presence of the priests in the city by reference to philosophy. He argues that the priests make the list of necessary personnel in the city because "piety to the gods must be part of the best life just as theology is part of philosophy . . . and philosophy is the main virtue of leisure in the best city" (Simpson 1998, 220). The first part of Simpson's comment refers to a passage in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* where the philosopher holds that "[t]here must . . . be three theoretical philosophies, mathematical, natural, and theological" (1026a17-22). Although piety is a part of the most choiceworthy way of life, the syllogism that Simpson attempts to communicate by referring to Aristotle's theology is not clear.

Two straightforward points may be adduced in answer to Simpson's interpretation. First, Aristotle does not include piety among the exhaustive list of eleven moral virtues in the *Ethics.* If piety were indeed necessary to live the best life, one would expect Aristotle to explain this virtue in his treatise on the best life. Moreover, the preface to the best regime revealed that Aristotle does not consider the choiceworthy life of the citizens of the best regime to be the best life simply.

Second, Simpson's interpretation does not account for the difference between the theology appropriate to the priests under the best regime and the theology presented by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics.* The latter concerns deities reminiscent of those referred to in the *Politics* 7.1-4. However, the priests in the best regime will care for the providential gods of the traditional Greek pantheon. The piety that the priests' presence implies would be undermined to the extent that the citizens of the best regime came to believe in another conception of the divine. Thus, something opposite of Simpson's argument appears to be closer to the truth: the priests are part of the best regime because the gods of Aristotle's

Metaphysics are not officially recognized in the city. The choiceworthy life of the citizens in the best regime entails a belief in providential gods. Therefore, the analogy to Aristotle's theology cannot shed light on his reasons for including the priests in the best city.

In chapter 7.9, Aristotle clarifies the ordering of communal roles set out in 7.8 by distinguishing the roles that should be filled by non-citizens in the best regime from those appropriate to citizens. The tasks required of workers, merchants, or farmers are "ignoble and contrary to virtue," Aristotle declares, and should consequently be filled by non-citizens (1328b41). The citizens of the best regime must possess "leisure" for "the creation of virtue," because happiness, which the best regime enables its citizens to achieve, "cannot be present apart from virtue" (1328b37-29a2). In effect, this means that the citizens will fulfill the military and political functions in the best regime, since these tasks, which "inhere in the city and are evidently parts of it above all," are compatible with nobility and leisure (1329a5). But should the same citizens act as soldiers and as politicians? Aristotle concludes in the affirmative, but he provides one caveat: the same citizens should fulfill each role at a different stage of life. Since "each of these tasks belongs to a different prime of life" – politics to the older, more prudent prime of life and war to the younger, more powerful prime of life – Aristotle stipulates that younger citizens should be soldiers and older citizens, politicians (1329a6-10). Although Aristotle suggests that this arrangement accords roughly with "merit," he admits that merit is not the primary justification for allotting military and political roles on the basis of age. The underlying consideration is the safety of the regime, for "those who are capable of using compulsion and preventing its being used against them" – the soldiers – will not put up

with always being ruled (1329a10-17). Soldiers must expect that their military service will eventually translate into political power.[18]

Lastly, Aristotle comes to the priests. Although care for the divine may not "inhere in the city" to the same degree as the military and political tasks, the gods are associated with the life of the citizens of the best regime, not the workers, merchants, or farmers. As Aristotle succinctly explains, "it is proper for the gods to be honored by citizens."[19] The city's gods could not very well be served by non-citizens, who are not properly parts of the city. Moreover, the gods support the justice of the city. Any "finely governed" city requires citizens who are "just unqualifiedly," and only cognizance of the ever-watchful, providential gods ensures that citizens *always* have a motivation to act justly, even when they might escape the notice of their fellow citizens (1328b37-8).

The question now becomes, which citizens should serve as priests? Aristotle assigns the priesthood to the oldest of the citizens, those older even than the political rulers. Once again, Aristotle simply asserts the propriety of his proposed arrangement: "[i]t is proper that those worn out with age should both render worship to the gods and find rest for themselves" (1329a30-4). This justification masks the radical nature of Aristotle's proposal. Aristotle breaks substantially with "Greek religious practice and orthodoxy" by allowing only the oldest citizens, those without political responsibilities, to serve as priests in the best regime (Pangle 2013, 247, fn. 36). This provision introduces into the best regime a necessary separation between religious leaders and political

[18] Cf. the *Politics,* 1332b36-40: "No one chafes at being ruled on the basis of age or considers himself superior, particularly when he is going to recover his contribution when he attains the age to come."

[19] Aristotle clearly expects the citizens to be the most active participants in the city's communal piety. In 7.17 he recommends that the law allow men "of a suitable age to do homage to the gods on behalf of themselves, their offspring, and their women" (1336b19-20). In other words, it is not only or even principally the non-citizens whom Aristotle expects to believe in and worship the city's gods.

officials that was not recognized in the ancient city. Aristotle's unwillingness to banish piety from the best regime should not be understood as an uncritical concession to the customs of his time, because he is willing to innovate when it comes to the institutional structure of piety in the best regime.

Aristotle's innovation guards against two political problems. First, it ensures that rulers who have become too feeble minded to fulfill their duties have a place to retire without disgrace. Apparently, Sparta experienced trouble on this score, because the Spartans allowed their senators to serve lifetime appointments (*Politics,* 1270b38-1271a1). Second, the innovation ensures that the number of citizens with rightful claims to political office never outgrows the number of available offices.[20] The life of the citizen of the best regime begins with military service, transitions to participation in political rule, and ends with "rest" (ἀνάπαυσιν) and service to the gods (cf. Davis 1996, 127). At each stage the citizen fulfills his present duty while looking forward to the next stage of service to the community. Just as the soldiers look forward to rule, so the rulers look forward to the rest accompanying care for the divine. Indeed, rest should appear eminently desirable to a well-educated citizen of the best regime. As Aristotle suggests in his treatment of the best regime's educational program, "rest must necessarily be pleasant, as it is a sort of healing from the pain coming from exertions" (1339b15). For citizens of the best regime, the activity of priestcraft offers the opportunity to heal from the exertions of military and political life. Even from their youth, the citizens would be prepared to appreciate the rest permanently available only to retired citizens. By supplying the rulers

[20] One historian of ancient Rome helps to highlight the problem at issue here: "The real troublemakers in the late republic were the men who refused to shuffle off their mortal coils on schedule: men like Sulla, Marius – and Caesar . . . It wasn't decadence or luxury or social evils that brought the republic to its knees: it was grumpy old men" (Tatum 2008, 148).

with an attractive alternative to political life, the priesthood helps to ensure peaceful political transitions as younger soldiers enter the political offices and older politicians enter the priesthood.

Although the separation of the political and religious roles in the best city represents a significant innovation, chapter 7.9 reinforces the view that Aristotle does not innovate when it comes to the conception of the divine that will be sanctioned by the best regime. There are two indications that the priests will serve the gods of traditional Greek religion. First, instead of speaking of "care for the divine," Aristotle now specifies that the priests will "give worship to the gods," a phrase which bespeaks traditional worship (1329a34). The gods are spoken of in the plural, and the word for worship or service (θεραπείαν) is commonly used to describe traditional religious practice in Greek cities. Indeed, it is one of the central words in Plato's *Euthyphro,* wherein Socrates seeks to uncover the essence of piety. At one point in that dialogue, Euthyphro defines piety in terms very similar to those Aristotle uses to describe the activities of the priests in his best regime. Euthyphro suggests that piety is that part of justice "concerned with worship of the gods" (τὸ περὶ τὴν τῶν θεῶν θεραπείαν) (12e8). The fact that Aristotle describes the priest's duties in similar terms suggests that they will engage in and preside over the activities comprising traditional piety.

Aristotle's first new concern in chapter 7.10 is the institution of the "common messes," which he shows to be very ancient. The philosopher includes this ancient practice in his best regime, presumably to build solidarity and familiarity among its citizens (1330a4-5). Like the common messes, the religious practices of the citizens in the best regime will also be communal. Aristotle gives two indications of this. First, he

declares that "expenditures relating to the gods should be common to the entire city" (1330a9). Although the priests may be the only class of citizens entirely devoted to care for the divine, every citizen will be called upon to support the city's public worship. Second, the philosopher sets down that "part of the common territory should be for public service relating to the gods" (1330a13). Aristotle's language connotes formal, organized worship of the gods.[21] Such worship will clearly be an integral part of the public, if not the specifically political, life of the best regime. In sum, 7.10 reveals that significant portions of the wealth and land of the best regime will be devoted to the worship of the gods.

In 7.11, Aristotle turns to the "position [of the city] relative to itself," which turns out to mean the arrangement of the city's military defenses, its fortifications and walls (133037). He begins with the dubious claim that, when it comes to fortifications, "what is advantageous is not the same for all regimes:" whereas a "fortified height is characteristic" of oligarchies and monarchies, "levelness is characteristic of democracy," he posits (1330b18-2o). Similarly, "a number of strong places" is characteristic of aristocracy (1330b21). Clearly, this argument is not strictly motivated by military strategy, since democracies, no less than monarchies or aristocracies, would likely benefit from access to strong, fortified heights in times of conflict. Aristotle's treatment of fortifications speaks more to the political way of life practiced in the various regimes than to their military advantage. Whereas aristocracies tend to have a number of powerful persons or families, democracies pride themselves on equality, i.e. levelness. Aristotle does not specifically state what fortifications are appropriate to the best regime. His final

[21] The English word "liturgy" is derived from the Greek word that Aristotle here uses to designate "public service" (λειτουργιάς).

statement in the paragraph reveals his main concern vis-à-vis the defensive arrangements in the best city: these should be “in a noble condition with a view to safety as well as ordered beauty” (1330b32). Indeed, the walls surrounding the city should be constructed with a view to "order and beauty” as well as to "military requirements" (1331a13-4). The noble appearance of the city’s walls should inspire the citizens to behave nobly, even as those same walls protect the city from enemies.

The discussion of the city’s walls is worthy of further comment, for it reinforces, perhaps unexpectedly, the argument of this thesis by showing that moral virtue requires external support. The treatment of defensive walls in 7.11 reveals that Aristotle, despite his emphasis on moral virtue, is alive to the fact that the virtuous city “must attend to the nuts and bolts of its own defense: to rely on merely ‘human virtue’ (1330b39) is not enough” (Bartlett 1994, 387). Indeed, Aristotle argues that eschewing defensive walls for the sake of virtue “is like not having walls for private houses on the grounds that the inhabitants will become unmanly” (1331a6). Simply stated, the argument against defensive walls is foolish, “since it happens – and is [always] possible – that the preeminence of the attackers is greater than virtue that is [only] human and resident in a few [who make up the citizen body]” (1330b38-40). Courage and excellence in battle will not protect the virtuous city against overwhelming numbers or technological superiority (1331a2-3). Virtue requires the support of defensive walls. This argument is made at the level of the political community, but something similar applies at the level of the individual or citizen. Moral virtue looks to the good of another and thereby exposes the virtuous individual to potential injury or misfortune. Because the individual citizen, unlike the city, cannot avail himself of defensive walls, the need for a different sort of

external protection, namely divine providence, becomes acute. The discussion of defensive walls thereby reinforces the view that Aristotle includes piety in the best regime so that the regime can provide its citizens with a justification for their moral virtue, despite the vulnerability that accompanies it.

Chapter 7.12 deals extensively with the arrangement of the religious buildings in the city governed by the best regime. Aristotle begins by declaring that "the buildings assigned to divine matters" should be located close to the common messes for "the most authoritative official boards" or magistrates, i.e. the political rulers (1331a25-6). Simpson offers the most plausible rationale for this arrangement: “those who judge and deliberate about the useful and the just should be ever mindful of the gods, who are the guardians of justice” (Simpson 1998, 229). Aristotle makes use of this aspect of Greek piety by keeping the political officials close to the visual reminders of the divine providence.

There is, however, an important exception to Aristotle’s rule about the location of temples, one which only reinforces the significance of piety in Aristotle’s best city: those temples specifically marked off by the law or "some prophecy of the Delphic oracle" will not be located near the common messes of the magistrates (1331a27-8). Aristotle’s deference to the Delphic oracle is telling. He expects the best regime to recognize both man-made law and prophetic utterances as authoritative sources of instruction in matters of the divine. Aristotle does not attempt to undermine or set aside the authority of the traditional sources of divine wisdom. He defers to the oracle in this instance, even though it may pronounce exceptions to his own principle. This fact strongly suggests that the principle itself depends on the piety of the citizens of the best regime. If Aristotle locates

temples near the offices of the magistrates to remind them of the justice of the gods, then it makes sense that he would do nothing to undermine the authority of those gods.

This passage clearly shows the difference between Aristotle's philosophical views and the views of the citizens in the best regime. Indeed, "these gods who issue prophetic utterances are very different indeed from 'the god' or 'whatever it is that keeps this All together . . . who requires no external goods – for example, burnt offerings – in order to be happy" (Bartlett, 2001, 175). The conception of divinity most compatible with Aristotle's rational philosophy is not the conception most beneficial to the political life of the best regime. Aristotle's deference to the oracle suggests that there is nothing in the organization of the religious institutions in the best city that would tend to lead the citizens toward a more philosophic conception of divinity.[22] The citizens of the best regime will likely agree with Simpson's gloss on this passage: "revelations from the gods themselves obviously take precedence over human wisdom and tradition" on the matters they concern (Simpson 1998, 229). Although Aristotle reforms the institution of the priesthood, he is unwilling to reform the conception of the divine sanctioned by the political community.

Aristotle's final word on the institutions of civic piety in the best regime reveals that the temples in the best regime, like the priests who operate within them, will be "first" among the buildings in the best city. All those temples whose locations are not determined by the law or an oracle should be located somewhere "adequate for making their virtue manifest" (1331a29). The high and prominent placement of the temples is a visual representation of the status of the priests and the gods. Specifically, these temples

[22] Cf. the *Politics,* 1336b15-20. There Aristotle makes another religious exception to a general principle. He banishes "unseemly paintings or stories . . . except in the case of the temples of certain gods."

will be located directly above the free market, the area where the free citizens of the best regime spend their "leisure" (1331b14). As Aristotle explains, only the citizens will be permitted to make use of this space. In their leisure the citizens of the best regime will be frequently reminded of the presence of providential gods watching over their activities. As Simpson argues, "this external arrangement of things on a slope . . . corresponds perfectly to the internal hierarchy of the city itself [where] the 'higher things' are really physically higher" (Simpson 1998, 130). The free and leisured life of the citizens in the best regime will be conducted under the shadow, as it were, of providential gods.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis has been to uncover and explicate the *reason* for Aristotle's clear inclusion of piety in the best regime. It has been argued that Aristotle's treatment of the most choiceworthy way of life – the way of life that informs the best regime – reveals that the practice of moral virtue, while noble, is not in itself sufficient to ensure the happiness of the citizens of the best regime. Communal piety, which entails belief in providential gods, offers a necessary justification and support for moral virtue, for it allays in the minds of the citizens of the best regime the vulnerability of moral virtue that Aristotle highlights in his preface to the best regime.

The argument of this thesis should not only be of interest to scholars of Aristotle. In my estimation, no modern student of political thought can afford to forget that "a large part of the history and struggle for democracy, often ignored in retrospective reflections on the subject, is how to resolve the question of religion's role in the polis" (Hashemi 2013, 72). This question has played a prominent role in the development of political institutions and ideas, such as "the separation of church and state" and "toleration," in the historically Christian West, and "Muslim societies have . . . recently begun to grapple with this topic on a mass level" (Ibid). In my estimation, Aristotle offers a compelling account of the proper role of piety in *any* healthy political community. On the one hand, he strictly separates the priests from the political officials in the best regime, a radical reform of ancient practice. This innovation communicates the principle that "religion should not rule." The priests in the best regime, even though they were at one point political men, are not granted authority on questions pertaining to the advantage of the

political community or its internal justice. On the other hand, however, Aristotle is careful to preserve intact pious beliefs about divine providence for the sake of moral virtue. Aristotle's best regime habituates its citizens to be just and courageous without teaching them to forsake their natural longing for their own happiness. The philosopher's inclusion of piety in the best regime may thus suggest to us that any regime encouraging its citizens in "the pursuit of happiness" will find itself in need of a strong communal piety, unless of course it is resolved to promote the pursuit of happiness at the expense of civic duty and moral excellence.

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