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## Aristotle on natural slavery\*

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ABSTRACT: Aristotle's claim that natural slaves do not possess autonomous rationality (*Pol.* 1.5, 1254b20-23) cannot plausibly be interpreted in an unrestricted sense, since this would conflict with what Aristotle knew about non-Greek societies. Aristotle's argument requires only a lack of autonomous practical rationality. An impairment of the capacity for integrated practical deliberation, resulting from an environmentally induced excess or deficiency in *thumos* (*Pol.* 7.7, 1327b18-31), would be sufficient to make natural slaves incapable of *eudaimonia* without being obtrusively implausible relative to what Aristotle is likely to have believed about non-Greeks. Since Aristotle seems to have believed that the existence of people who can be enslaved without injustice is a hypothetical necessity, if those capable of *eudaimonia* are to achieve it, the existence of natural slaves has implications for our understanding of Aristotle's natural teleology.

KEYWORDS: Aristotle, slavery, deliberation, *thumos*, teleology

Aristotle believed that the majority of human beings may be enslaved without injustice, because they are slaves by nature. That belief has not endeared him to modern interpreters: John McDowell, for example, finds it 'embarrassing'.<sup>1</sup> Just as we tend to avert our gaze from embarrassing sights we pass in the street, so Aristotelian specialists seem reluctant to invest in the theory of natural slavery the boundless energy that has been devoted to making sense of, for example, *Metaphysics Z*. The theory is, indeed, easy to dismiss: we know that it is false; we can easily explain it away as a product of ideological bias;<sup>2</sup> and Aristotle gives a very inadequate account of it. The question of slavery arises in *Politics* 1, where it is incidental to his main concern, the diversity of political authority (*Pol.* 1.1, 1252a7-16);<sup>3</sup> he therefore offers no more than a sketch of the theory, full of gaps

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<sup>1</sup> McDowell 1995, 201: 'this embarrassing feature of Aristotle's thinking.' Cf. Schofield 1999, 115: 'Aristotle's views on slavery are an embarrassment to those who otherwise hold his philosophy in high regard'; Kraut 2002, 277: 'a deeply disturbing feature of his political thought.'

<sup>2</sup> Too easily for this to have much point. Schofield 1999 largely resists the temptation (216 n.43: 'I am not here concerned with praise or blame, but with understanding the theoretical framework within which the idea of natural slavery might come to seem inevitable'), but not entirely (133: 'Aristotle accepted that most slaves in his own society were natural slaves. No doubt his assumption is to be explained in ideological terms'). More illuminating explanations of the kind of error in question are suggested by empirically based cognitive and social psychology (see n.22 below).

<sup>3</sup> Deslauriers 2006.

and apparent inconsistencies. That is not unusual in Aristotle, and in other parts of the corpus scholars work hard to fill gaps and resolve inconsistencies. Here, ideological repugnance has proved a deterrent. But Aristotle has a good track-record for intelligent reasoning. If in this case he reasons intelligently from beliefs that I do not share to conclusions that I reject and deplore, I see no cause for embarrassment. In this paper I shall look for an interpretation of the theory of natural slavery that is credible, in the sense of being broadly coherent and plausible, relative to things that Aristotle is likely to have believed, and shall examine some of the theory's wider implications.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Diagnosis

### (a) A misdiagnosis: comprehensive failure of autonomous reason

I start from an interpretation that fails to meet that condition. Aristotle regards reason as distinctive to human beings, and he seems to state clearly that natural slaves 'are human and have a share in reason' (*Pol.* 1.13, 1259b27-8). But elsewhere he qualifies that statement: a natural slave 'shares in reason to the extent of understanding it, but does not have it himself' (*Pol.* 1.5, 1254b20-23). We know from the ethical treatises that in humans the non-rational part of the soul, the part which perceives and desires, is also in a sense rational: although it is not capable of reasoning, it can be responsive to reason (*NE* 1.13, 1102b30-3a3; *EE* 2.1, 1219b26-32). If this provides his model for natural slaves, then Aristotle's suggestion is that, though slaves can be responsive to the reasoned instructions of a master, they have no capacity for reasoning autonomously.<sup>5</sup> But that is not a credible interpretation. The problem is not that it conflicts with the facts: that can be said of many things that Aristotle believed. What is crucial is that it conflicts with what Aristotle must have taken to be the facts. Consistency with things that would have been perfectly obvious to Aristotle must provide a crucial constraint on the plausibility of any interpretation of his theory.

Aristotle believed that non-Greeks (βάρβαροι) are natural slaves (*Pol.* 1.2, 1252b5-9; 1.6, 1255a28-b2; 3.14, 1285a19-21).<sup>6</sup> Many purported facts about non-Greek peoples were recorded in the literature available to enquirers in Aristotle's day, and the subject is one which he researched: he wrote a work on non-Greek customs (νόμιμα βαρβαρικά), a subject which he regarded as useful for

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<sup>4</sup> Since the theory entails that I (as a Northern European) am a natural slave and may be enslaved without injustice, it should be needless to labour the point that I am not remotely tempted to accept the theory or to defend it in any larger sense. But, for the record, I do not believe that any human beings fit Aristotle's account of natural slaves as reconstructed here; nor do I believe that, if they did, it would be just to enslave them.

<sup>5</sup> Fortenbaugh 1977; Kraut 2002, 283. Despite the disagreements recorded below, I regard Kraut's discussion (277-305) as extremely helpful; it is also unusually generous in its acknowledgement that 'Aristotle's framework for thinking about this subject was internally consistent and even contained a limited amount of explanatory power' (278).

<sup>6</sup> It does not follow that this is true of every individual non-Greek, without exception. For Aristotle, natural processes are relatively robust tendencies, not exceptionless rules (e.g. *Pol.* 1.5, 1254b2734; 1.6, 1255b3-4). See Kraut 2002, 294 n.31.

legislative science (*Rhet.* 1.4, 1360a30-8).<sup>7</sup> Although that work is lost, his ethical and political writings contain numerous comments on non-Greek peoples. When he notes that some distant non-Greek peoples are by nature lacking in rationality (ἀλόγιστοι) and live by perception alone, like non-human animals (*NE* 7.5, 1149a9-11), he implicitly acknowledges the rationality of most non-Greeks, especially those nearest and most familiar. That is no surprise. Aristotle cannot have failed to be aware that, left to themselves, non-Greeks were able to organise societies that were viable, though defective.<sup>8</sup> Some of them could plan and execute logistically complex projects (such as Xerxes' invasion of Greece). Some of them had technologically advanced cultures. The Egyptians invented mathematics (*Met.* 1.1, 981b13-25);<sup>9</sup> they and the Babylonians were good astronomers (*DC* 2.12, 292a7-9). How could they manage any of these things, if they were wholly incapable of autonomous reasoning?

**(b) An impairment of *practical* reason**

So Aristotle could not have believed that natural slaves suffer from a comprehensive failure of autonomous rationality. But that leaves open the possibility of a more limited failure. Aristotle recognises different kinds of rationality. The evidence mentioned above shows that non-Greeks must be capable of technical and theoretical reasoning.<sup>10</sup> What about practical reason?<sup>11</sup> The distinction between practical and technical rationality is clarified by the distinction between practical wisdom (φρόνησις) and art (τέχνη) (*NE* 6.4-5).

<sup>7</sup> Periegetic literature, recommended here, is cited at *Pol.* 2.3, 1262a18-21.

<sup>8</sup> Viability might seem inconsistent with *Pol.* 1.2, 1252a30-34, which grounds the distinction between natural ruler and natural subject in the slave's lack of foresight with regard to *survival*. But the context refers to the earliest stages of social development, and we should be cautious about extrapolating these comments to larger social organisations. It is the establishment of self-sustaining communities that allows the horizon of human concern to extend beyond the mere preservation of life to living a *good* life (*Pol.* 1.2, 1252b27-30), i.e. a life of fine actions (*Pol.* 3.9, 1280b40-1a4). What is at stake for the isolated household with which Aristotle's account begins is survival, for which instrumental competence suffices. Practical wisdom can only come into question as a legitimating quality for the master-slave relationship when the household becomes a locus for the pursuit of the good life, i.e. when it is part of a *polis*.

<sup>9</sup> This invention was not, in Aristotle's view, driven by instrumental applications: it is because mathematics neither meets essential needs nor provides pleasurable luxuries that an advanced society able to sustain a leisured class (such as the Egyptian priests) was its precondition. Contrast Herodotus' conjecture (2.109) that geometry was invented in Egypt for application in land allocation and tax assessment.

<sup>10</sup> Since τέχνη in its strict definition involves rationality (*NE* 6.4, 1140a10; cf. *Met.* 1.1, 981a5-30), the claim that Asiatics are intelligent and 'technical' (*Pol.* 7.7, 1327b27-8) seems to provide explicit evidence that (some) non-Greeks are capable of technical rationality. Admittedly, τέχνη can be emulated by habitual skills acquired and exercised without understanding (what Aristotle calls ἐμπειρία: *Met.* 1.1, 981a12-15), or even by instinctive animal behaviour (*HA* 7.1, 588a28-31; cf. 8.11, 615a18-9; 8.13, 616a4-6; 8.37, 620b10-11; 8.38, 622b22-24). However, building pyramids and invading Greece are not like nesting or spinning a web: they are not 'a mere matter of finding instrumental means to simple ends', following 'fixed rules' that eliminate the need for 'adaptability and ingenuity' (Kraut 2002, 289). The complexity of such projects demands more than an instinct or tacit knack.

<sup>11</sup> For this tripartition: *Met.* 6.1, 1025b25; cf. *NE* 6.2, 1139a26-31; *EE* 1.1, 1214a8-12; *Top.* 6.6, 145a15-18.

Practical wisdom is concerned with action ( $\pi\rho\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$ ), art with production ( $\pi\acute{o}\iota\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ ). There are two differences. First, production is not intrinsically valuable, but derives whatever value it has from the product; by contrast, good action is intrinsically valuable (that is, chosen on account of itself: *NE* 2.4, 1105a31-2; 6.3, 1144a18-20; 10.6, 1176b6-10). Secondly, art does not tell you what you *should* do; it only tells you conditionally what you should do *if* you want to make the product. You must look elsewhere to determine whether the product is worth making. In fact, you must look to practical wisdom, which is (in Aristotle's term) 'architectonic' (*NE* 1.2, 1094a26-8;<sup>12</sup> 6.7, 1141b21-4; cf. *EE* 1.6, 1217a6-7): it provides overall guidance for life.

Aristotle says that natural slaves cannot achieve *eudaimonia*, the best kind of human life (*Pol.* 3.9, 1280a31-4). The reason they cannot do so is that *eudaimonia* consists in virtuous activity (*NE* 10.6, 1177a6-11). That places it beyond the scope of technical rationality. To explain an inability to live a virtuous human life, it is necessary to invoke a failure of 'architectonic' practical reason. So it is plausible to suppose that this is the kind of rationality that Aristotle denies to natural slaves. His apparently unrestricted formulations are shorthand expressions; there was no point in spelling out qualifications which are entailed by obvious facts about non-Greeks, and which are implied by a context in which only rationality in ethics is relevant. When Aristotle says that a natural slave 'shares in reason to the extent of understanding it, but does not have it himself', therefore, he is thinking specifically of *practical* reason.<sup>13</sup>

### (c) An impairment of *deliberation*

In what way is a natural slave's capacity for practical reason impaired? One possibility would be that he cannot formulate the right kind of concept: that conceptions of right and wrong have no meaning for him. But this, too, is something that Aristotle could not have believed. For Aristotle, an important distinction between humans and other animals is that, whereas other animals can communicate with each other about sources of pleasure and distress, only humans have an awareness of, and a capacity to communicate about, what is advantageous and harmful, right and wrong (*Pol.* 1.2, 1253a7-18). It would contradict the ethnographic data to deny that natural slaves can communicate about what is right and wrong. Even the barbarous Triballians have a concept of what is *kalon* (fine, noble, intrinsically worthwhile).<sup>14</sup> Admittedly, their conception is terribly flawed: they think it is *kalon* to sacrifice their fathers (*Top.* 2.11, 115b22-6). But they do have the concept, and are motivated by it.

<sup>12</sup> Referring to politics, which is the same  $\xi\acute{\xi}\iota\varsigma$  as practical wisdom, though different in being (*NE* 7.8, 1141b23-4).

<sup>13</sup> This restriction is recognised by Brunt 1993, 362; 'it is the power of deliberation that precedes moral choice... which a natural slave lacks'; Garver 1994, 178: 'Slaves have the reasoning ability necessary for *technê*, and so obviously deliberate well in a narrow sense of performing instrumental reasoning. A clever slave is no contradiction in terms.'

<sup>14</sup> *Rhet.* 1.9, 1366a33-4: 'whatever, being worthy of choice for itself, is praiseworthy, or whatever, being good, is pleasant because it is good' ( $\delta\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\ \delta\iota\ \acute{\alpha}\upsilon\tau\acute{o}\ \alpha\iota\acute{\rho}\epsilon\tau\acute{o}\nu\ \delta\upsilon\ \acute{\epsilon}\pi\alpha\iota\upsilon\epsilon\tau\acute{o}\nu\ \tilde{\eta}\tilde{\iota},\ \tilde{\eta}\ \delta\ \acute{\alpha}\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta\acute{o}\nu\ \delta\upsilon\ \acute{\eta}\delta\upsilon\ \tilde{\eta}\tilde{\iota},\ \acute{\omicron}\tau\iota\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\alpha\theta\acute{o}\nu$ ). Cf. *EE* 8.3, 1248b18-20.

The Triballian's conception of what is *kalon* is deeply misguided. Perhaps, then, the root of the slave's impairment lies in a profound dysfunction in the capacity to recognise ends: an incapacity to make properly reasoned judgements about right and wrong. How else could the Triballians have failed to identify their barbarous misconception about what is *kalon*? But Aristotle says something different. Natural slaves are incapable of *prohairesis* and *eudaimonia* (*Pol.* 3.9, 1280a31-4). These two incapacities are linked: there is no *eudaimonia* without virtuous action; and there is no virtuous action without *prohairesis* (for example, *NE* 2.6, 1106b36; 6.2, 1139a22-3; *EE* 3.7, 1234a23-6). *Prohairesis* is deliberated choice (for example, *NE* 3.3, 1113a9-12; 6.2, 1139a23; *EE* 2.10, 1226b13-23); and natural slaves lack the capacity for deliberation (*Pol.* 1.13, 1260a12). The slave's inability to achieve *eudaimonia* is therefore ultimately rooted in this deliberative incapacity. But *prohairesis* and deliberation are both concerned with 'the things directed towards the ends' (*NE* 3.3, 1112b11-15, 33-4; *EE* 2.10, 1226a7-13, b9-13, 27a7-24). So the natural slave's deliberative incapacity is not a failure of reasoned judgement about ends; ends are proposed by character, not by inferential reasoning (συλλογισμός: *EE* 2.11, 1227b22-5, b34-8a2; cf. *NE* 7.8, 1151a15-19).<sup>15</sup> Deliberative incapacity impairs reasoning from ends to their implementations.

Deliberation is reasoning back from a goal to the action required to implement that goal (*EE* 2.10, 1226b12-13). Reasoning of the form 'because of *that*, *this* is to be done' is a form of causal reasoning, in the sense that the goal explains the action; it is the final cause: it explains *why* that is the thing to do (*EE* 2.10, 1226b25-9). The behaviour of non-human animals can also be explained in terms of final causes. The peacock displays in order to mate with a peahen; the zebra runs in order to escape the lion. But the animal's behaviour is driven directly by the pleasure or distress which attends its perceptions (or expectations); it is not mediated by an understanding of the behaviour's (final) cause. Non-human animals do not understand causes, and therefore cannot engage in causal reasoning; the same is true of human children.<sup>16</sup> So neither is capable of deliberation or *prohairesis* (*EE* 2.10, 1226b21-5).

Children, unlike non-human animals, grow out of this incapacity. They become capable of deliberation. Or some of them do: when Aristotle contrasts children, who have a potential for deliberation which has not yet matured, with slaves, whose deliberative capacity is permanently impaired (*Pol.* 1.13, 1260a12-14), it goes without saying that naturally servile children grow up to become adults with the servile deliberative incapacity. But this does not mean that they

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<sup>15</sup> This is not, of course, the whole story. The relevant kinds of end are inaccessible to animals without reason (they are motivated solely by pleasure and distress). Moreover, the existence of the ethical treatises shows that inferential reasoning about ends is not pointless. However, Aristotle holds that argument is not necessary to discover the starting-points of action if one has a properly formed character (*NE* 1.4, 1095b3-8), and is useless if one does not (*NE* 2.4, 1105b12-18; 10.9, 1179b4-31); and there is a risk of being misled by bad arguments (*EE* 1.6, 1216b40-17a17). Relevant discussions include Tuozzo 1991; Smith 1996; Vasiliou 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Children resemble non-human animals: *NE* 3.2, 1111b6-10; 6.13, 1144b8-9; 7.12, 1153a30-35; *EE* 2.8, 1224a25-30; 2.10, 1226b21-5; *Phys.* 2.6, 197b5-8; *HA* 8.1, 588a31-b3.

remain in a childlike state.<sup>17</sup> The adult slave's incapacity differs from the child's in two ways. First, the adult 'shares in reason to the extent of understanding it', while small children are not yet able even to understand reason. Aristotle is quite clear about this difference: 'those who deny reason to slaves and say that one should only give orders are wrong: slaves should be admonished [νουθετητέον] more than children' (*Pol.* 1.5, 1260b5-7); by contrast, children's behaviour must be steered by pleasure and distress (*NE* 10.1, 1172a20-1). Though the slave needs a master's admonition to make up for his deliberative incapacity, that admonition is only of use to him because he is responsive to deliberative reasoning that he would be incapable of producing himself. The child is *not yet* able to deliberate; the adult slave is not able to deliberate *independently*. Secondly, natural slaves are capable of technical reason, which involves a form of deliberation.<sup>18</sup> Craftsmen may have to work out solutions to novel problems; Xerxes' generals had to solve the logistical problems involved in invading Greece. The child is incapable of *any kind* of deliberation; the adult slave is incapable of independent *practical* deliberation.

#### (d) An impairment of *global* deliberation

That may seem a puzzling incapacity. A clever Triballian craftsman spends all day in his workshop working out how to make a novelty pot to sell to Greek tourists; on his way home it occurs to him that he should do something fine and noble; he knows that sacrificing one's father is fine and noble; why should he not be able to work out how to do that? Why should causal reasoning of the form 'because of *that*, *this* is to be done' fail in one domain, but not another?

Consider a simple example of practical reasoning. I see a destitute person who is hungry and has nothing to eat. I recognise that it would be *kalon* to help him, and want to do so. How can I help? I could help by giving him food; and here is some food. So I shall give him this food. But perhaps that would be wrong. Here is some food, *but* the food belongs to someone else—and it would be disgraceful to steal. In that case I ought not give the food. I should pursue my goal by other means (perhaps by persuading the owner to donate the food, or finding other food which I have a right to dispose of). A practical reasoner must consider, not just what *can* be done to implement a goal, but what can be done consistently with the action still being fine, since virtuous action is performed because of (or for the sake of) *to kalon*.<sup>19</sup> Practical reasoning must integrate a multiplicity of morally relevant considerations.

Aristotle makes the following distinction with regard to deliberation: 'good deliberation in the unqualified sense... is what succeeds in relation to the end in

<sup>17</sup> 'Childlike' is used too freely in Schofield 1999, 124-8 (cf. 132: 'it was reasonable to try to identify a specific form of rule appropriate to the childlike').

<sup>18</sup> Kraut, though denying that natural slaves are 'helpless mental invalids' (2002, 283-4), thinks that they are incapable of technical as well as practical deliberation (285-90, 292; cf. 304 n.48 for theoretical reason). *Contra* n.10 above.

<sup>19</sup> *NE* 3.7, 1115b12-13, 20-4; 3.8, 1116b2-3, 1117a8-9, 17; 3.9, 1117b9, 13-15; 3.12, 1119b16; 4.1, 1120a23-9, 1121b3-5; 4.2, 1122b6-7; 4.3, 1123a24-5; 9.8, 1168a33-4; 10.8, 1178b12-13; *EE* 3.1, 1229a1-9, 30a26-32; 8.3, 1248b18-22, 34-7, 49a5-6, 13-14.

the unqualified sense, good deliberation in the particular sense in relation to some particular end' (*NE* 6.9, 1142b29-31). Practical wisdom involves unqualified deliberation, the ability 'to deliberate well about what is good and beneficial for [one]self, not in particular respects... but about what sorts of thing conduce to living a good life in general' (*NE* 6.5, 1140a25-8). Perhaps, then, what natural slaves lack is the capacity for that kind of global deliberation. They can plan steps to implement a particular moral goal, but they cannot build into that planning the sensitivity to a wide range of moral considerations that is necessary if one is to achieve the coherence of a life that is lived well in general. If that is right, then it is possible to see how there can be a deliberative incapacity that leaves the natural slave's technical ability unimpaired. Technical and practical deliberation differ in this respect: although technical reasoning may involve the integration of competing demands (trading off a structure's strength and weight, for example), it is not architectonic, and is therefore not subject to the same constraint of global integration.

**(e) The failure of executive control**

If natural slaves are unable to engage in global deliberation, their actions will not be guided by a stable architectonic conception of the good life. They will inevitably pursue a series of uncoordinated particular goals. But living without the guidance of a stable conception of the overall good is not unique to natural slaves: there are Greeks who live like that through their own fecklessness (*NE* 1.4, 1095a23-5; *EE* 1.2, 1214b6-11). These people do not provide a satisfactory model for the natural slave's impairment. Although their architectonic conception of the good life changes erratically, there is no reason to doubt that these feckless Greeks are able to deliberate in relation to whatever conception they happen to hold at a given time; natural slaves are not. So we must look deeper.

Consider a more radical folly: the failure to have any ultimate goal at all. If there is nothing that is chosen for itself, desire is rendered futile by an infinite regress: each thing is chosen for the sake of something else, which is in turn chosen for the sake of something else, and so on (*NE* 1.2, 1094a18-21). In the *Protrepticus* (F43 Düring = Iamblichus *Protr.* 52.16-53.14), Aristotle highlights the laughable ignorance of those who always ask 'what *use* is this?' We must come to rest in something that we choose, not because it leads to something else, but because it is intrinsically worth choosing. But suppose you are the kind of person who does always ask 'what *use* is this?' Nothing you do has intrinsic validity; everything is required to lead to an outcome that will supply it with extrinsic validation. This means that action ( $\pi\rho\acute{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$ ) collapses into production; all your deliberation becomes technical deliberation—which is within the powers of natural slaves. Unfortunately, because of the regress, the extrinsic validation you seek is never achieved, so your deliberation is rendered futile. If your decision-making resources are limited to technical deliberation that is not anchored by an architectonic conception of intrinsic value, you cannot live a meaningful life.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Aristotle does not claim that the addressees of the *Protrepticus* are actually in this predicament: if they were, his strategy for discrediting the objection that philosophy is useless would fail. Having pointed out that the objection cannot be generalised without absurdity, he goes on to show



Yet this too does not provide a satisfactory model. We have already seen that the natural slave need not lack a conception of intrinsic value: the well brought up Triballian sees sacrificing his father as *kalon*, and therefore worth choosing for itself. The problem, then, is not that he lacks this conception; it must be that it fails to anchor his deliberation. When Aristotle discusses weakness of will he shows that there are various ways in which judgements which a person holds, and can articulate, may become detached from executive control of behaviour (*NE* 7.3, 1146b31-47a24). If that detachment recurs persistently, we may doubt whether the person really understands what he is saying; perhaps he is just parroting the words. But that need not be the case. I persistently perform badly at the kind of test of spatial reasoning that involves identifying which of several drawings of three-dimensional objects is a rotation (or other transformation) of the object in a sample image. It is not that I do not understand the relevant spatial concepts; I just cannot apply them in practice.<sup>21</sup> But when I am shown the right answer, I have no problem in understanding why it is right. I am deficient in autonomous spatial reasoning, but am able to follow the guidance of a competent spatial reasoner. If solving such puzzles were the key to a worthwhile human life, I would be a natural slave.

#### (f) Conclusion

Natural slaves, then, suffer from an impairment that is limited in several ways: it is an impairment of the capacity for *practical* (not technical or theoretical) reasoning; it is an impairment of the capacity for *deliberation* (not a conceptual or motivational failure); it is an impairment of the capacity for *global* deliberation; and it is an impairment that disrupts deliberation by detaching an individual's conception of intrinsic value from executive control of his behaviour. Yet, though the impairment is limited in these ways, its consequences are profound. In every other respect a natural slave may be extremely intelligent; but he lacks the capacity to make reasoned judgements about what he should do consistently with his conception of living well in general. And this renders him incapable of living a worthwhile human life.<sup>22</sup>

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that the objectors are in fact motivated by intrinsic value in the absence of further instrumental advantage (F44 = Iamblichus 53.15-54.5). The final move is to suggest that the addressees' existing commitments to intrinsic value (as spectators of athletics and theatrical performances) actually point the way to the greater intrinsic value of philosophy.

<sup>21</sup> This incapacity is connected with my very weak visual imagination: I cannot manipulate the objects in thought and 'see' how they look.

<sup>22</sup> An impairment that is limited in scope, but profound in its effects, is just what is needed if we are to understand how it retained its credibility in Aristotle's eyes. The rest can be left to confirmation bias (e.g. Nickerson 1998) and attribution error (e.g. Ross and Anderson 1982; Gilbert and Malone 1995; cf. Brunt 1993, 379-80). The power of roles in a hierarchical relationship to bias the perception of traits has been demonstrated even under experimental conditions, when participants knew that roles had been assigned randomly (Humphrey 1985).

## 2. Aetiology

### (a) The influence of climate

How did the natural slave get that way? By living in the wrong place. Aristotle observes that Greeks are mid-way geographically between Europeans, who live in a cold climate, and Asiatics; and they are mid-way between them in terms of character and intelligence as well (*Pol.* 7.7, 1327b18-31). The clear implication is that the differences are caused by the climatic variations. Environmental explanations were certainly current in Aristotle's day.<sup>23</sup>

Greeks are spirited (ἔνθυμος) and intelligent (διανοητικός); Europeans are full of spirit, but lacking in intelligence and art; Asiatics are intelligent and technically-minded, but lacking in spirit (ἄθυμος). Thus the European climate produces over-stimulated spirit (*thumos*) while impairing intelligence; the Asiatic climate leaves intelligence unimpaired while producing under-stimulated spirit.<sup>24</sup> The unimpaired intelligence attributed to Asiatics must refer to technical and theoretical intelligence, since we have already recognised that *practical* intelligence is impaired in Asiatics and Europeans alike.

There is no reason why climate should not exercise a direct influence on reasoning capacity. Intellect (νοῦς) as such is not embodied (*DA* 2.1, 413a3-7; 3.4, 429a10-29), but thinking is. For thought is 'not without' *phantasia* (*DA* 1.1, 403a8-10; 3.7, 431a14-17; 3.8, 432a7-14); deliberation, in particular, involves 'deliberative' (as distinct from perceptual) *phantasia* (*DA* 3.11, 434a5-10; cf. 3.10, 433b29); and the faculty of *phantasia* is the same as the perceptual faculty (*Insomn.* 1, 459a14-22).<sup>25</sup> The exercise of human rationality therefore depends on the embodied capacities for perception and desire, and so is potentially sensitive to environmental effects on human physiology.<sup>26</sup> However, if the influence of climate on intelligence were direct, we might expect it to affect all forms of reasoning; yet in Asiatics, technical and theoretical reasoning are not impaired. We should therefore consider the possibility that the effect on intelligence is, in whole or part, an *indirect* consequence of the diverse effects of climate on *thumos*. If so, then the domain-specificity of the natural slave's cognitive impairment is

<sup>23</sup> Hippocrates *Airs, Waters, Places* 12-24. Hippocrates' account recognises a greater variety of factors, and is not based on a Greek/non-Greek polarity: see Jouanna 1999, 211-32; Thomas 2000, 86-98; Sassi 2001, 105-20; Isaac 2004, 56-82 (and on Aristotle's theory of slavery also 175-81, 211-3).

<sup>24</sup> The implication is that environmental conditions that deviate from the norm produce compensatory internal deviations: an excessively cold climate must be offset by excessive internal heat (requiring a hot, and therefore spirited, nature); an excessively hot climate suppresses internal heat (producing a cold, and therefore fearful, nature). Thus *Probl.* 4.15, 910a28-b8 (cf. 14.8, 909b9-15; 10.60, 898a4-8). Cf. *PA* 2.4, 650b35 for *thumos* as productive of heat; the whole chapter discusses the physiological basis of the association between heat and *thumos* on the one hand, and intelligence, fearfulness and cold on the other. Compare the contrast between young and old in *Rhet.* 2.12-13 (1389a17-19, 1389b29-32).

<sup>25</sup> It is a dysfunction of the faculty of *phantasia* that underlies my impaired spatial reasoning (n.21).

<sup>26</sup> On the embodiment of thought, and the physiological and environmental factors that affect it, see van der Eijk 1997.

explained by its two-stage aetiology: climate affects *thumos*, and *thumos* affects practical deliberation.

**(b) The role of *thumos***

*Thumos*, like appetitive desire (ἐπιθυμία), is a function of the non-rational part of the soul which we share with non-human animals (*NE* 3.2, 1111b11f.; *EE* 2.10, 1225b25-7; *DA* 3.9, 432b6). However, the non-reasoning part of the *human* soul is responsive to reason, and both *thumos* and appetite may arise in response to reasoned judgement. In non-human animals, appetitive desires are prompted by the perception that something is pleasant; in humans, desire may also be prompted by a reasoned judgement to the same effect. But what is it that evokes a spirited response? Aristotle's comments on *thumos* are sparse. It is associated with fear and anger (*Top.* 4.5, 126a8-10); with reactions to insult and injustice (*Pol.* 7.7, 1328a1-16; *NE* 7.6, 1149a32f.); it reacts with particular intensity to insult and injustice from friends—but, conversely, it also makes us affectionate towards those familiar to us (*Pol.* 7.7, 1327b36-8a1); and it equips us to rule over others, and to exercise our own independence (*Pol.* 7.7, 1328a6f.). This is, at first sight, a disparate set of functions. Their underlying coherence may be more readily apparent in the comparatively simple structure of a non-human primate society. A chimpanzee community is a network of vertical and horizontal relationships (dominance and subordination, alliance and rivalry) that are maintained by fear, which inhibits violations of those relationships, and anger, which punishes them, and by affiliative behaviours such as reciprocal grooming, which maintain positive relationships and avert—or aid recovery from—hostile interactions.<sup>27</sup> Fear, anger and affiliation are the impulses which regulate the social structure; and these are precisely the domain of *thumos* in Aristotle's account.<sup>28</sup> *Thumos* underpins a set of dispositions which are fundamental to maintaining the dynamic stability of a social network.

Among humans, obviously, reason can generate a more complex set of inputs into this set of dispositions. This may help us to understand what Aristotle means when he speaks of *thumos* 'as it were reasoning (συλλογισάμενος)' before reacting, so that in a sense it listens to reason in a way that appetitive desire does not (*NE* 7.6, 1149a24-b3). Appetitive desire may respond to reasoned judgements about pleasure, but that is a value that also exists for non-reasoning animals; *thumos*, by contrast, can respond to judgements about values that are dependent

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<sup>27</sup> A brief and vivid account in Boehm 1999, 16-29 (which, however, says little about affiliative interactions). For more detail see (e.g.) Goodall 1986; Boesch and Boesch-Achermann 1999; de Waal 1982, 1989.

<sup>28</sup> A community's internal cohesion may be reinforced by hostility towards outsiders. Isocrates reports that the Triballians are unique in their degree of internal solidarity, but exceptionally aggressive towards all outsiders (*Panath.* 227). Plato, concerned that his Guardians' spiritedness might make them aggressive towards fellow-citizens as well as strangers, commends the philosophical discrimination of dogs as a model (*Rep.* 2, 375b-6c). Aristotle, however, denies that fierceness towards strangers is a proper counterpart to affection towards familiars (*Pol.* 7.7, 1328a8-10). Hostile intergroup relations are characteristic of chimpanzees, though less so of the closely related bonobos (Wilson and Wrangham 2003).

on reason, including ethical values.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, *thumos* is not always correct in its response to reasoned input. Aristotle compares it to an over-eager servant who rushes to do your bidding before you have finished giving your instructions, and so ends up doing the wrong thing (*NE* 7.6, 1149a25-8). A spirited response may be impulsive, and thus pre-empt reasoned reflection. Yet *thumos* is indispensable. If people are to be easily guided towards virtue, they must be both naturally intelligent *and* spirited (*Pol.* 7.7, 1327b36-8). In fact, they need to be like Greeks, not like Europeans or Asiatics. Problems arise when *thumos* deviates from the mean in one direction or another; for if *thumos* adapts people to virtue, deviations will be maladaptive. On the interpretation I have outlined, they will be maladaptive by disrupting the capacity for practical deliberation.

### (c) The example of courage

If *thumos* is conducive to virtue in general (*Pol.* 7.7, 1327b36-8), one would expect it to be implicated in all virtues. But Aristotle does not spell out this involvement in most of his analyses of particular virtues. One case in which it is obvious is mildness (*πραότης*): the deviant dispositions react too little or too much to things that ought to evoke *thumos*-related distress, such as displays of contempt or insult (*EE* 3.3, 1231b6-15). The more complex example of courage may help to clarify the effect. You act with genuine courage if by deliberated choice you face things that are properly sources of fear (paradigmatically, death in battle) because it is *kalon* to do so.<sup>30</sup> Courage requires more than a rational acknowledgement that a certain act should be performed because of *to kalon*; the non-rational part of the soul must make a contribution: ‘brave men act because of *to kalon*, but *thumos* collaborates with them’ (*NE* 3.8, 1116b30-2). But the element of deliberated choice is essential. If someone is motivated to face dangers purely by *thumos*, that is not genuine courage (*NE* 3.8, 1116b23-7a9; *EE* 3.1, 1229b27-30). It would be courage with the addition of *prohairesis* and ‘that for the sake of which’ (*τὸ οὗ ἐνεκα*: *NE* 3.8, 1117a4f.). But since there is no deliberation, there is no *prohairesis*;<sup>31</sup> and if the action is not chosen, then of course it is not chosen for the sake of *to kalon* (*NE* 3.8, 1117a8f.).

One would expect Europeans to be prone to this kind of pseudo-courage. Their excessively stimulated *thumos* will make them generally impulsive: stopping to think is not their (I should, of course, say ‘our’) strong point. That explains their failure to display technical and theoretical rationality; it also makes it difficult for them to engage in practical reasoning. They will often not stop to

<sup>29</sup> I am cautious about the stronger correlation of *thumos* with *to kalon* proposed by Cooper 1996. There is *thumos*-motivated action which is not concerned with *to kalon* (see the discussion of courage below); *NE* 1.13 suggests that we should think of the non-reasoning part of the human soul as distinguished by an openness to, not a special focus on, reasoned values. Cooper’s position is rescued by a crucial qualification: ‘in the specific case of the morally virtuous person’ (266; cf. 276 ‘only for the morally virtuous person’). But this means that Cooper fails to provide a general account of Aristotelian *thumos*. Attempts to modify Cooper’s position so as to extend its scope can be found in Sihvola 1996; Lorenz 2006, 189-94.

<sup>30</sup> *NE* 3.7, 1115b12-13, 20-4; 3.8, 1116b2-3; 3.9, 1117b9, 13-15; 10.8, 1178b12-13; *EE* 3.1, 1229a1-9. On the role of *to kalon* in motivating courage see Rogers 1994.

<sup>31</sup> Acts motivated by *thumos* have least to do with *prohairesis* (*NE* 3.2, 1111b18-19).

deliberate at all, but they will find it particularly difficult to engage in the complex reasoning required for global deliberation, in which an interim conclusion (I should give the hungry person this food) must be sensitive to possibly conflicting considerations in a more global perspective (this food is not mine).

By contrast, Asiatics have no trouble stopping to think: they have not got enough *thumos* to get in the way. That is why they are good at technical and theoretical thinking. So one might predict that they would not be prone to *thumos*-motivated pseudo-courage. But Aristotle says that ‘*in general* non-Greek courage is with *thumos*’ (*EE* 3.1, 1229b29f.). This may mean simply that, since Asiatics are rarely willing to confront dangers, they contribute only a small minority of non-Greek acts of ‘courage’. Alternatively, it may be that they are rarely willing to do so unless their generally feeble *thumos* is sufficiently provoked. Fear is one of the things that reside in the spirited part of the soul, and fear can sustain aggressive action (as in the case of a cornered animal).<sup>32</sup> In any case, Aristotle recognises exceptions to his generalisation about non-Greek courage. When discussing another inferior analogue to courage, in which danger is endured to avoid legal penalty or public disapproval, or to gain honours, he refers to Homeric heroes, including the non-Greek Hector (*NE* 3.8, 1116a17-29; *EE* 3.1, 1229a12, 1230a16-21).<sup>33</sup> There is a subtle but crucial distinction here. If you do what is fine, and will therefore rightly be honoured, because it is fine, you are acting virtuously. If you do what is fine, and will therefore rightly be honoured, because it will be honoured, your action is instrumental—that is, it is motivated by something that it leads to, rather than by its intrinsic value. The collapse of practical into technical deliberation will be a particularly easy error for technically adept Asiatics to fall into.

### 3. Some implications

#### (a) Are natural slaves sub-human?

Aristotle’s theory is taken by some to imply that slaves are ‘subhuman’.<sup>34</sup> Aristotle does not agree: he is in no doubt that they are human (*Pol.* 1.4, 1254a14-17; *NE* 8.11, 1161b5f.); more specifically, they are human and possess rationality

<sup>32</sup> Note that natural courage is not the same as *thumos*-based courage. Animals such as lions have a stable natural disposition to act ‘courageously’; Aristotle distinguishes them from spirited animals that sporadically erupt in aggressive behaviour, such as wild boars. See esp. *HA* 1.1, 488b16-17. (ἐλευθέρια καὶ ἀνδρεία καὶ εὐγενή contrasted with θυμώδη καὶ ἐνστατικά). According to *Pol.* 8.4, 1338b17-19, animal courage is associated with gentle, lion-like characters, not with extreme ferocity.

<sup>33</sup> Diomedes is also mentioned: so this pseudo-courage is not uniquely non-Greek, but is perhaps the best that can be expected of non-Greeks. Aristotle attributes *Il.* 22.100 to Hector (1116a23, 1230a21), but also 2.391-3 (actually spoken by Agamemnon): presumably he had in mind Hector’s threat to Polydamas at 12.250 (cf. sch. bT *Il.* 13.95). For the assimilation of Homer’s Trojans to contemporary non-Greeks cf. Ar. F130 Rose = 386 Gigon (sch. T *Il.* 16.283); F151 Rose = 375 Gigon (Porphyry on *Il.* 4.88, sch. D *Il.* 4.88); Heraclides of Pontus F172 Wehrli = 100 Schütrumpf (Porphyry on *Il.* 3.236, 1.59.11-29).

<sup>34</sup> Schofield 1999, 139: ‘natural slaves are effectively conceived as subhuman’; Lear 1988, 199: ‘natural slaves are not fully human’; Garnsey 1996, 113: ‘It seems that natural slavery is some kind of subhuman condition.’

(*Pol.* 1.13, 1259b27f.). It is true that their rationality is impaired, but it is not Aristotle who draws the (surprising) inference from cognitive disability to subhumanity. It is also true that he correlates slaves with non-human animals (θηρία) in a series of analogies illustrating the existence of natural hierarchies (*Pol.* 1.5, 1254a26, b16-20). But there is no implication that the diverse relationships which supply these illustrations are identical in any other respect than being natural and hierarchical, nor that the subordinate terms are identical in any other respect than being naturally subordinate. Aristotle does say that slaves and domestic animals are similar (though not identical), but only in the way they are *used* (*Pol.* 1.5, 1254b24-6); and that is immediately after he has clearly distinguished slaves, who are responsive to reason, from non-human animals, which are not (1254b23f.).

Slaves are, indeed, animals (ζῷα). So are masters, for mankind is an animal species. Specifically, humans are ‘political animals’: that is (in Aristotle’s official definition of the term), group-living animals with a ‘shared’ activity (*HA* 1.1, 488a7-10). Not all political species have functionally differentiated subgroups: flocks of cranes have leaders and sentinels (*HA* 9.10, 614b18-30), and there is no reason to think that these are different kinds of crane. But such differentiation does occur, for example, in bees. It is therefore puzzling to read the complaint that ‘Aristotle, while raising the natural slave somewhat above the animal kingdom, has not yet found a category of human to whom he can be appropriately compared’.<sup>35</sup> For Aristotle, natural slave *is* a category of human. It would be hard to take seriously a complaint that no one has found a category of bee to which worker bees can be appropriately compared; and no one imagines that workers are sub-apian.<sup>36</sup>

### (b) Are natural slaves unnatural?

Non-Greeks are natural slaves because of a cognitive impairment caused by their environment. One might wonder, therefore, whether they are really natural: is the adverse environmental influence not an impediment preventing the realisation of the end to which human development naturally tends (*Phys.* 2.9, 199b15-18; cf. 2.2, 194a28-30)? If so, is natural servility not *contrary* to nature? The complexity of Aristotle’s use of ‘nature’ blocks that inference. He is willing to talk about someone congenitally blind as ‘blind by nature’ (*NE* 3.5, 1114a26). Though congenital blindness is contrary to nature in one sense (it is an impaired realisation of the human form), it results from the operation of natural causes (and

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<sup>35</sup> Garnsey 1996, 115.

<sup>36</sup> It might be objected that, since rationality is an *essential* human characteristic, its absence or impairment must compromise an individual’s humanity. But on the interpretation proposed here, natural slaves are rational. They share the reason-dependent capacity to grasp, be motivated by, and communicate about values other than pleasure and distress which makes humans more political than other animals (*Politics* 1.2, 1253a7-18). They are able to reason autonomously outside the domain of global practical deliberation. The defect which disrupts the exercise of rationality within that domain does not imply that intellect (νοῦς) itself is impaired: compare Aristotle’s comments on the effects of senescence and disease on mental and perceptual capacities (*DA* 1.4, 408b18-29).

not, for example, from trauma or disease).<sup>37</sup> Aristotle makes this distinction when he discusses deformed births, *terata*. A *teras* is contrary to nature as generality (ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ), but not to nature as invariant and necessary (ἀεὶ καὶ ἔξ ἀνάγκης); so what is contrary to nature in one sense (formal) is by nature in another (material). Hence people are less likely to speak of a *teras* if the deformity is frequently recurrent (*GA* 4.4, 770b9-27). Women are a case in point. Aristotle thinks that females are imperfectly formed. They are not deformities (*terata*), but being female is a ‘natural impairment’ (ἀναπηρία φυσική: *GA* 4.6, 775a15f.).<sup>38</sup>

### (c) The teleological dimension

Aristotle can explain the material conditions which necessitate the generation of a female rather than a male animal. He can also explain the existence of females teleologically: why it is good that there exist inferior females as well as superior males (*GA* 2.1, 731b18-24). One might think that the answer is obvious: both are needed for reproduction. But that is superficial: since there are species that reproduce asexually, it is sexual reproduction itself that needs to be explained.<sup>39</sup> A modern explanation would be evolutionary: it would try to show that sexual reproduction is advantageous under natural selection. But when Aristotle says that the division between males and females in sexually reproducing species exists because it is better that way, there is no suggestion that an asexually reproducing species would be less good at surviving. In Aristotle’s theory of reproduction, the male parent supplies form, the female parent supplies matter; form is superior to matter; and ‘it is better that the superior principle should be separated from the inferior’ (*GA* 2.1, 732a3-9).<sup>40</sup>

Women and slaves are both inferior; but they are not inferior in the same way. The fact that non-Greeks treat their wives as they treat their slaves is symptomatic of the impossibility of sustaining proper patterns of social relationships in communities consisting entirely of natural slaves (*Pol.* 1.2, 1252b5-9).<sup>41</sup> The normative husband-wife relationship is not despotic, like the relationship of master to slave, but constitutional (*Pol.* 1.12, 1259a39-b3), or more precisely aristocratic (*NE* 8.10, 1160b32-61a1; *EE* 7.9, 1241b27-32).<sup>42</sup> The difference

<sup>37</sup> Compare *NE* 7.5, 1149a9-11, contrasting the distant non-Greeks whose irrationality is congenital and natural (ἐκ φύσεως) with people whose irrationality is due to disease.

<sup>38</sup> MacDowell (n.1) is embarrassed by Aristotle’s views on women, too. Mayhew 2004 provides a more sympathetic discussion of Aristotle’s misconceptions; but note the justified reservations in Henry 2007.

<sup>39</sup> In *GA* 4.3, 767b8-10 Aristotle is addressing the problem of why offspring do not invariably take after their fathers. His solution is that there must be mechanisms to ensure that this happens, since the birth of females is (hypothetically) necessary for the continued existence of sexually reproducing species. Sexual reproduction is presupposed in this argument, and one must look elsewhere for the explanation.

<sup>40</sup> On this argument see Henry 2007, 273-8.

<sup>41</sup> Despotic treatment of wives is attributed to non-Greeks in general; despotic (rather than monarchical) treatment of sons is specifically Persian (*NE* 8.10, 1160b24-30). Perhaps spirited European sons would not submit to despotic rule.

<sup>42</sup> The constitutional model is not perfect: crucially, there is no exchange of roles in the husband-wife relationship, since the wife is perpetually subordinate. In this respect the aristocratic model is more satisfactory (cf. Schofield 1999, 140). It remains true that there is a sphere in which it is

between women and slaves reflects the fact that nature is not stingy: it does not provide one all-purpose tool, but a range of specialised tools (*Pol.* 1.2, 1252a34-b5). The existence of functionally differentiated human subgroups is therefore favoured by nature. But this implies that the existence of natural slaves is just as much due to nature's generosity as the existence of women, and equally open to teleological explanation.

Is that inference one that can be attributed to Aristotle? It is, on the face of it, consistent with his claim that both the hunting of animals and the subduing of natural slaves are natural forms of acquisition. This claim is made at the end of a passage (*Pol.* 1.9, 1256b7-26) whose teleological implications have proved controversial, even when the application to slavery is left out of account.<sup>43</sup> But the *prima facie* case for including slaves in nature's bounty seems strong. Aristotle's argument begins with nature's provision of sources of nutrition (for example, milk) for neonates as yet unable to fend for themselves. The second stage draws an analogy (ὥστε ὁμοίως b15) between this and nature's provision of plants as sources of food for animals, and of animals as sources of food, clothing and tools for humans. The final stage infers from this (διὸ b23) that hunting animals and subduing natural slaves are natural forms of acquisition. Aristotle shows no sign of regarding the analogy between the first and second stages as anything less than robust; and if it were not robust, the concluding inference to the naturalness of enslavement would be compromised. Yet the naturalness of enslavement is crucial to his defence of slavery. I am therefore not convinced that it is possible to reconcile the implications of this passage with a restrictive account of the scope of Aristotle's natural teleology.<sup>44</sup>

To the extent that restrictive readings are motivated by a sense of what *we* find 'quite bizarre... hard to find plausible',<sup>45</sup> they founder on Aristotle's manifest willingness to adopt positions that are, from our perspective, undeniably bizarre and implausible. The explanation of sexual reproduction in *GA* 2.1, 732a3-9 is a

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appropriate that the wife should exercise control and in which it would be wrong for the husband to seize control (*NE* 8.10, 1160b34-1a). Hence husband-wife relationships raise questions of justice (*NE* 8.12, 1162a29-31), which do not arise in the master-slave relationship (*NE* 8.11, 1161a32-b5; cf. *NE* 5.6, 1134b8-18). Aristotle adds the qualification that, although there is no justice towards the slave *qua* slave, there is *qua* human (*NE* 8.11, 1161b5-8). There is no contradiction here (as claimed by Schofield 1999, 124). A wife has entitlements *qua* wife that she does not have *qua* human; the slave has no such status-dependent entitlements, but does not lose the entitlements he has *qua* human. Aristotle, of course, does not believe that enslavement infringes the *human* rights of a natural slave: freedom is an entitlement that individuals possess *qua* naturally free, not *qua* human. But it is wrong to hunt humans for food or sacrifice *qua* humans (*Pol.* 7.2, 1324b39-41, noted by Kraut 1996, 759). Less dramatically, failing to honour a conditional promise made to a slave (e.g. of freedom in return for meritorious service) would be unjust, since in meeting the condition the slave would have acted as a party to a contract (συνθήκη: *NE* 8.11, 1106b6-7). Admittedly, Schofield denies that natural slaves can enter into contracts (1999, 139); but he is assuming a more radical incapacity for deliberation than (on my interpretation) Aristotle claims.

<sup>43</sup> Sedley 1991, 180 tactfully curtails the passage before the mention of slaves; so too Cooper 1982, 218. Owens 1968, 168-70 does take account of it.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. Judson 2005, 348 ('only to the generation, functioning, and parts of *natural substances*').

<sup>45</sup> Judson 2005, 341 (*exempli gratia*).



case in point. That is by no means the only occasion on which Aristotle appeals to ‘the better’ as an explanatory resource. A striking example is his thesis that nature assigns protective covering to the better and ‘more honourable’ side of an animal, unless the less honourable side needs more protection (*PA* 2.14, 658a19-24). In other words, hair is found on the back of quadrupeds because this confers a survival advantage; but hair on the front of humans is ‘better’, for reasons unrelated to survival. The human norm needs no further explanation; it is the fact that quadrupeds depart from the arrangement which is in principle ‘better’ that needs special explanation in terms of the constraints imposed by survival.<sup>46</sup> Cooper, having argued that ‘the principle of the preservation of the species’ is the key to Aristotle’s natural teleology, acknowledges that he is left with a residue of passages such as these in which ‘the good aimed at... is not any living thing’s good, in the sense of its survival or well-functioning’; he concludes that ‘we have to do here with two separate aspects of Aristotle’s philosophy of nature, and no unified account of them is presumably to be looked for’.<sup>47</sup> It is certainly impossible to integrate the residual passages into a teleology oriented exclusively towards survival, but if approached from the opposite direction the unification presents no problem. A teleology oriented towards ‘the better’ automatically subsumes survival. Mere survival is a necessary condition of the end, but is not itself the end. We live in order to live well.<sup>48</sup>

In the case of the division of sexes, Aristotle is able to explain the material conditions which necessitate the generation of a female rather than a male; but he also argues that the existence of humans who are naturally impaired in the way that women are is *better*. In the same way, he is able to explain the material conditions which necessitate the generation of a natural slave rather than a natural master. Given that human beings are distributed across the earth, and that different regions of the earth have different climates (as a consequence of the movements of the heavenly bodies), then it is inevitable that some humans will turn out as natural slaves. So it is not possible for all human beings to be natural masters. But even if it were possible, it would not be desirable. If servile labour could be automated there would be no need for slaves (*Pol.* 1.4, 1253b33-4a1); but in the

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<sup>46</sup> Similarly, the fact that up, front and right (cf. Lloyd 1962) are ‘better’ and ‘more honourable’ is used to explain the position of internal organs at *PA* 3.3, 665a22-6; 3.4, 665b18-23; 3.10, 672b19-24 (applied to the movement of the heavens at *DC* 2.5, 288a2-12). At *PA* 4.10, 687a8-19 the principle of the better is used to establish the explanatory priority of intelligence over hands, against Anaxagoras.

<sup>47</sup> Cooper 1982, 216, 220-1.

<sup>48</sup> Contrast the profoundly un-Aristotelian assumption that only survival is in question in Johnson 2005, 235: ‘Acquisition is natural insofar as it is necessary to provide for things needed in order to live. But it is not natural if it is not necessary for survival.’ Earlier on the same page, he had spoken more correctly of ‘survival and flourishing’. Strangely, the truncated formula appears immediately after Johnson has quoted Aristotle’s statement that natural acquisition provides ‘what is necessary for life and useful for the community of city or household’ (*Pol.* 1.8, 1256b26-30); but the city exists for the sake of living *well* (not just living): *Pol.* 1.2, 1252b29-30; 1.4, 1253b24-5; 3.9, 1280a31-2. Cf. *PA* 2.10, 656a6f.; *Protr.* F53.5 Düring = Iambl. 40.6-7. As Johnson notes a little later (239), the goal of living well is what differentiates the political existence of free humans from that of natural slaves and of nonhuman animals.

absence of satisfactory non-utopian substitutes for servile labour,<sup>49</sup> a world in which all humans were naturally masters would make it impossible for anyone to live a good human life. If no one was enslaved, then everyone would have to do their own labour, and no one would have the leisure needed to cultivate virtue (*Pol.* 7.9, 1329a1). But enslaving people who were not natural slaves would be unjust, creating an internal contradiction even more fundamentally subversive of the good life. So it would be reasonable for Aristotle to conclude that the existence of humans who are naturally impaired in the way that natural slaves are is *better*. Some humans have a capacity for living well that cannot be fully realised without the support of servile labour. If human excellence is to be achieved in its highest form, therefore, it is hypothetically necessary (*Phys.* 2.9, 199b34-200b8) that natural slaves exist. Without natural slaves, the masters' natural capacity for *eudaimonia* would be frustrated; and nature does nothing in vain (*Pol.* 1.9, 1256b20-1).<sup>50</sup>

**(d) How does the slave benefit from slavery?**

The existence of natural slaves, then, is for the better. That is to say, it is better for masters that natural slaves exist, because it makes it possible for them to live better lives. Is the existence of natural slaves also good for the slaves? Aristotle certainly thinks that *being enslaved* is good for natural slaves. He is not under the illusion that slavery exists *in order to* benefit natural slaves: the benefit which the slave gains from being enslaved is incidental (*Pol.* 3.6, 1278b32-37; cf. 1.5, 1254b39-5a2); but it is beneficial, even so. However, being enslaved is not the same as being a natural slave. Most natural slaves live in their own communities, in which everyone is a natural slave (*Pol.* 1.2, 1252b5-9); so they never gain the benefit of being enslaved to a natural master. The majority of natural slaves therefore suffer from an uncompensated impairment. So the answer to my question may seem self-evident: the existence of natural slaves is not good for the slaves. On the other hand, the advantages of being naturally free could not be realised if there were no natural slaves. So while any individual natural slave would have been better off if he had been born naturally free, he would not have been better off if everyone had been born naturally free. The existence of natural

<sup>49</sup> The implication (*Pol.* 1.2, 1252a26-31) that the master cannot exist without the slave is overstated: it is possible to rely on animal or family labour (*Pol.* 1.2, 1252b12; 6.8, 1323a5-6). But these are makeshifts available to the poor (πένητες, ἄποροι), not satisfactory substitutes.

<sup>50</sup> This teleology is 'anthropocentric' in one sense: 'man is the ultimate beneficiary' (Sedley 1991, 180)—more precisely, in the light of the present discussion, *some* human beings. But there is no implication that the natural order is wholly, primarily or exclusively for human benefit, as some of Sedley's critics have alleged (e.g. Judson 2005, 357, 361 n.66; Johnson 2005, 232-7). A 'cosmic' teleology (Kahn 1985) would be contestable if it required taking the cosmos as a single substance or beneficiary (Sedley 2000; cf. Matthen 2001). But for present purposes we need only suppose that different entities, each independently pursuing its own good, may through their interactions give rise to a higher-order good—namely, a natural order in which it is possible for those entities to achieve their respective goods; and it is reasonably clear that Aristotle believes that the cosmos does exemplify such an order, by virtue of the joint relationship of all its constituent entities to a single ultimate good (*Met.* 12.10, 1075a11-22). See further Bodnár 2005. It is worth noting that axiological explanation, though generally out of favour, does not entirely lack modern defenders: Rescher 2000, 149-79.

slaves is not good for the slaves; but the non-existence of natural slaves would not have been good for anyone.

How exactly does the natural slave benefit from enslavement? On the face of it, the advantage is all on the other side of the relationship. The slave is used to fulfil basic functions for the master (*Pol.* 1.5, 1254b28f.; 1.13, 1260a33f.); this frees the master from the burden of low-grade labour to supply what is merely necessary, and gives him time to devote himself to what is *kalon*—action that is intrinsically worthwhile. This might be a life centred on theoretical contemplation, which is the paradigm of human well-being (*NE* 10.8, 1178b33); or it might be a life centred on political activity, which Aristotle acknowledges as a secondary (though still genuine) kind of human well-being (*NE* 10.8, 1178a9f.).<sup>51</sup> From the master's point of view, therefore, the slave is instrumental in his living an intrinsically worthwhile life.

The natural slave is not capable of living such a life. Because he cannot deliberate globally in the domain of practical reason, he cannot live a life of intrinsically worthwhile activity chosen because of its intrinsic worth. At least, he cannot do this on his own: but though deficient in *autonomous* practical reason, the slave may be responsive to another's practical wisdom. So if he is enslaved to a natural master, he is capable of participating in and contributing to an intrinsically worthwhile life. He can contribute to the master's living of a good life; his own life thus becomes more worthwhile.

Aristotle speaks of the slave as a part of the master—even as a separated part of the master's body (*Pol.* 1.6, 1255b11f.). That sounds strange. But the slave is instrumental in the master's life, and it does not sound so strange to speak of a tool as an extension of the body—if, for example, I use a stick as a probe to explore an otherwise inaccessible space.<sup>52</sup> Prosthetic devices may be external or internal: my deficient eyesight is assisted by the lenses in my glasses, and by lenses implanted in my eyes. The implants have become part of my body; the functionally equivalent external lenses are separated parts of my body. From the master's point of view, then, the slave is 'as it were a part and detachable tool of the master' (*EE* 7.9, 1241b22f.);<sup>53</sup> specifically, he is a detached instrument for action ( $\pi\rho\tilde{\alpha}\xi\iota\varsigma$ : *Pol.* 1.4, 1254a1-17).

<sup>51</sup> *Pol.* 1.7, 1255b36-7: those who are able to do so devote themselves to philosophy or politics, devolving the management of the household to a steward. The steward is, of course, himself a slave. On the interpretation presented here, though he is dependent on his master's practical wisdom for overall guidance about household policy, he is capable of the technical reasoning needed to determine how the rest of the slaves should be directed so as to implement that policy. Like Xerxes' generals, he has to be able to solve logistical obstacles to the fulfilment of his master's project; unlike them, he is fortunate enough to have a master who is not himself a natural slave.

<sup>52</sup> *MA* 8, 702b4-6: 'It makes no difference whether the part is a continuous part of the body or not; the stick may be looked at as a detached part of the whole'. Cf. Polanyi 1958, 55-63 (59: 'Our subsidiary awareness of tools and probes can be regarded now as the act of making them form part of our own body').

<sup>53</sup> Aristotle can apply the term 'tool' to non-slave subordinates (*Pol.* 1.4, 1253b28-30). This way of speaking just marks the (obvious) fact that one human being can play an instrumental role in another human being's action. Contrast Garnsey 1996, 123: 'his living tool seems to have very

In a sense, that cuts both ways. From the slave's point of view, the master is like my glasses. The master's guidance compensates for the slave's impaired practical rationality; he is a kind of cognitive prosthesis.<sup>54</sup> But there is an asymmetry. Using the slave allows the master to exercise his own, unimpaired capacities for action; thereby, the master partially compensates for the slave's impairment. But it is the master who masterminds it all: the master uses the slave, the slave does not use the master. So it is correct to see the slave as part of the master, rather than the other way round (cf. *Pol.* 1.4, 1254a8-13). Nevertheless, if we take the notion of the slave as *part* of the master seriously (as Aristotle evidently did), the master-slave dyad is a single system. The slave becomes an enabling part of a system that lives a worthwhile human life. It is the master, not the slave, who is the proper subject of that life, but the slave by his instrumentality participates in it. His own life therefore becomes more worthwhile: he has benefited from enslavement.

**(e) How does the slave benefit from being freed?**

The slave's benefit is incidental: slavery does not exist for the sake of the slave. The master therefore has no obligation to improve a natural slave's lot by enslaving him. If servile labour were automated, there would be no need for slaves (*Pol.* 1.4, 1253b33-4a1), and there would be no reason to take natural slaves into captivity. Moreover, although it may seem obvious that, if enslavement is to the slave's benefit, freedom will be detrimental, the incidental nature of the benefit means that there is no obligation to keep a slave in slavery if it is in the master's interest to set him free. It may well be in the master's interest to do so. The slave probably does not realise that he is benefiting from being a slave, and the prospect of freedom will provide an incentive to serve his master well.<sup>55</sup> Yet in his will, Aristotle seems to regard freedom as a reward for meritorious slaves.<sup>56</sup> How can that be, if freedom is against the slave's interests?

Freedom in the ancient world did not necessarily imply complete autonomy: freed slaves typically retained a subordinate relationship to their manumitters.<sup>57</sup> So it is possible that a freedman will still gain the incidental benefit of being a subordinate part of a hierarchical relationship. But a deeper solution emerges if we consider the slave's whole life. A limited period of highly motivated and therefore superior engagement in a good life is more worthwhile than a longer, but less

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little that is human about it.' See also *NE* 5.6, 1134b10, where both property and children are 'part' of the father.

<sup>54</sup> Compare the 'active externalist' approach to cognition in Clark and Chalmers 1998. Background: Rowlands 2003.

<sup>55</sup> Schofield 1999, 217 n.47: 'natural slaves would usually prefer to be free. That being so, they are more likely to cooperate and to work hard if promised their freedom: that is why it is better to hold out the prospect—better for masters.'

<sup>56</sup> *D.L.* 5.15: 'Do not sell any of the slaves who took care of me, but employ them; and when they reach the appropriate age, set them free as they deserve.'

<sup>57</sup> Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005, 339: 'Although legally free, in social terms the manumitted slaves' actual position was... half way between slavery and freedom... (T)he manumitted slave is not a wholly free person. His or her function was to keep working for others; it was his or her natural [*sic*] social position to be dependent on others.'

motivated and inferior, contribution. The fact that the slave's enhanced service is in the master's interest means that it is also (incidentally) in the slave's interest, since it makes the slave's life (taken as a whole) objectively more worthwhile. So the Aristotelian slave-owner and his slave both believe that the slave's life will be better if he is offered the prospect of freedom, though for different reasons. The slave's judgement is likely to be swayed by considerations of his own subjective contentment. His master's judgement is informed by a recognition of the increased objective value conferred on the slave's life by enhanced participation in the master's deliberated ethical *praxis*.

## Conclusion

I have argued that Aristotle's cryptic comments on the natural slave's cognitive impairment can be interpreted in a way that is consistent and plausible, relative to things that Aristotle is likely to have believed. On the interpretation proposed, the impairment is limited in scope but profound in its effects—precisely the combination needed if it is to have the moral and political consequences which Aristotle infers, while remaining (from his perspective) empirically plausible. The different forms which this impairment take in different populations can be explained in terms of the mediation of climatic effects on deliberative reason by *thumos*. Finally, an examination of some of the implications of Aristotle's theory, thus reconstructed, suggests that it is more internally coherent than is usually acknowledged; it is also, not least in its teleological implications, much stranger.

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