

Aristotle and the End of Tyranny

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As form of rule, tyranny is broadly understood to consist of institutional deficits that leave a ruling party or actor unaccountable and unconstrained. As a figure in the history of political thought, the tyrant is characterized by his ethical immoderation and desire for gain. While scholars rightly identify Aristotle as a foundational theorist for this picture of tyranny and tyrant, I argue that they overlook the centrality Aristotle assigns to tyranny's guarded orientation to power, as well as the tyrant's anxieties regarding its potential loss. Taking as its point of departure Aristotle's claim in *Rhetoric* 1.8 that the end or goal (*telos*) of tyranny is self-preservation (*phulakē*), this dissertation illuminates the ethical and political conditions, constraints, and pressures that characterize the Aristotelian tyrant's defensiveness. Ruling over a regime populated by those whose sense of justice bristles at his disproportionate share of power, the Aristotelian tyrant, I argue, is driven by fear.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jordan Jochim received his undergraduate education at The University of Utah, where he majored in Political Science and Sociology. After receiving his Doctorate in Government at Cornell University, he will be joining the Society of Fellows at the University of Chicago as a Harper-Schmidt Fellow and a Collegiate Assistant Professor in the Social Sciences Core.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memories of Myrtle Jochim and Harvey Rogers.

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When I was deciding where to pursue my graduate studies, Mark Button gave me a gentle nudge in Cornell's favor, noting that their recent hiring of Jill Frank would ensure that I received a good training in the history of political thought. For that matter, he noted, she had written the best book on Aristotle in recent memory. It is unlikely that this dissertation on Aristotle will warrant praise of that sort. What is beyond question is that this conversation is at the forefront of the reasons I remain forever grateful to Mark.

Jill Frank's brilliance, integrity, and indefatigable generosity has impacted every stage of my career as a graduate student and every page of this dissertation. As the chair of my dissertation committee, Jill helped me keep in view both the forest and the trees, pushing me to retain clarity sentence to sentence while keeping the broader argumentative structure clearly in view. This was the case as I revised chapters into articles and articles back into chapters. Throughout this process she consistently encouraged me to remain focused on what *I* found important, reminding me of the problems that first motivated this project and why they mattered. Her mentorship has extended beyond this dissertation to include conference presentations, workshop comments, pedagogy, and the often-dispiriting realities of the academic job market. In addition to spending countless hours helping me prepare for interviews and offering line-edits, Jill remained consistently invested in my well-being, as she does for all of her students. Perhaps her greatest gift is the model she has provided as a mentor. There is not enough space here to adequately express my sense of gratitude and the profound debt I owe to her. It goes without saying—though it must be said—that all errors in the following are entirely my own.

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Since in all pursuits there are sources (*aitiai*) or causes (*archai*)... it is by way of our acquaintance with these that knowing and understanding come to us.

Aristotle, *Physics* (184a)

But one must look always at the end (*telos*) of everything—how it will come out finally. For to many the god has shown a glimpse of blessedness only to extirpate them in the end.

Herodotus, *Histories* (I.32)

Introduction
 Tyrannophobia

From the reading, I say, of such books, men have undertaken to kill their Kings, because the Greek and Latine writers, in their books, and discourses of Policy, make it lawful, and laudable, for any man to do so; provided before he do it, he call him a Tyrant.

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

Among the many infirmities Thomas Hobbes found in ailing commonwealths, the “Imitation of the Greeks and Romans” appeared especially pernicious.¹ Insofar as they counselled rebellion against arbitrary power and lent legitimacy to tyrannicide, texts from antiquity, Hobbes claimed, jeopardized the guardrails of civic order. For Hobbes, the “untied hands of that Man, or assembly of Men that hath the Sovereignty” served as the final guarantor of civil security, the singular power by which to capture subjects’ awe and thus to forestall the state of anarchy wrought by “masterlesse men.”² Insofar as, to Hobbes, “The name of Tyranny signifieth nothing more, nor lesse, than the name of Sovereignty,”³ to object to tyranny was to object to the preconditions of human security and jeopardize any possibility for commodious living. It was from “reading these Greek, and Latine writers” that people grew accustomed to “favouring tumult, and of licentious controlling the actions of their Sovereigns; and again of controlling those controllers, with the effusion of so much blood.” In Hobbes’ view, “there was never any thing so deerly bought, as these Western parts have bought the learning of the Greek and Latine tongues.”⁴

While primarily concerned with his contemporary republican critics of absolutist

¹ *Leviathan*, 170-171.

² *Ibid.*, 90 and 110.

³ *Ibid.*, 392.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

monarchy—who “grounded their Civill doctrine, on the opinions of the Romans”—Hobbes identified the “Errours of Aristotles *Politiques*” as the originary intellectual fount for the conflicts of his day, for having induced men, “as oft as they like not their Governours, to adhaere to those that call them Tyrants, and to think lawfull to raise warre against them.”⁵ Against the “Will and Appetite of the State”—what counted, for Hobbes, as the basis of Law—Aristotle posited “the Appetite of Private men” as the “measure” of justice.⁶ Hobbes went so far as to liken anti-tyrannicism to the “Hydrophobia” of rabies, and to credit the “Democraticall writers” who followed Aristotle with spreading an equally pathological “venime;” “it wanteth nothing more than a strong Monarch, which nevertheless out of a certain Tyrannophobia, or feare of being strongly goverened, when they have him, they abhore.”⁷ There was nothing “so repugnant to Government,” said Hobbes of Aristotle, “than much of that which hee hath said in his *Politiques*.”⁸

On Hobbes’ understanding, Aristotle advanced an account of tyranny that said more about the temperaments of the ruled than it did the forms of state power tyranny purported to name. Hobbes, of course, was participating in a radical redefinition of sovereign power that effectively recast the identity of the state along tyrannical lines, such that “the toleration of a professed hatred of Tyranny” became tantamount to “a Toleration of hatred of Common-wealth in generall.”⁹ As a structure of authority inimical to the separation of powers and mixed government, to an independent arbiter of law, or to any other sort of “chain” that could bind its necessarily “untied hands,” what Hobbes called sovereignty would undoubtedly today still be named tyranny.¹⁰

⁵ Ibid., 377-378

⁶ Ibid., 469.

⁷ Ibid., 226.

⁸ Ibid., 370.

⁹ Ibid., 392.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, chapter 29 for Hobbes’ discussion of the importance of the sovereign’s “Absolute power” and its incompatibility with various accountability mechanisms. As Hannah Arendt puts it, Hobbes was the first to “honor

This dissertation strives, among other things, to substantiate Hobbes' charges against Aristotle. Today, Aristotle's account of tyrannical rule has largely been collapsed into the neo-Roman republican tradition against which Hobbes also positioned himself, which associates tyranny with a form of social and political domination defined by the capacity for arbitrary rule.¹¹ Aristotle is a critic of such rule, to be sure. But he also advances a vision of tyranny that is conceptually bound to the aversions of tyranny's subjects to sites of concentrated political power, aversions grounded in those subjects' desires, or, in Hobbes' words, "appetites." I argue in the following that, for Aristotle, the analytic integrity of 'tyranny' cannot be divorced from the term's status as an instrument of political polemic—as a measure of peoples' dislike for their "governours," or their abhorrence of being too "strongly goverened." While Aristotle's insights into arbitrary rule survived Hobbes' attacks and continue to inform political-theoretical efforts to conceptualize the politics of tyranny, domination, and freedom, the centrality of tyranny's subjects to Aristotle's account remains underexamined.

Notably, as scholars of the republican tradition are keen to point out, while concerns over the dangers of arbitrary rule can be traced back to classical Greek authors like Herodotus, Plato, and Aristotle, its most influential critics in the modern period came from renaissance humanists drawing from texts focused on the early Roman republic.¹² It is authors like Cicero and Livy who perhaps most directly influenced those "Democraticall writers" at whom Hobbes was levelling his

with a philosophic foundation... a permanent government of tyranny," *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 144. See Kinch Hoesktra, *Tyrannus Rex VS. Leviathan* for discussion of Hobbes' remarks on tyranny and the tyrannical character of the Hobbesian sovereign.

¹¹ J.G.A. Pocock's *The Machiavellian Moment* influentially positioned a synthesis between Aristotle and Polybius' accounts of corruption and constitutional change as the foundation for the trans-Atlantic republican tradition. See Mary Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule: Slavery, Tyranny, and the Power of Life and Death* for a treatment of modern republicanism that identifies Aristotle as the originary theorist of tyranny as an arbitrary form of rule.

¹² See Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* and *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought Volume One: The Renaissance*.

ire. In contrast to other scholars who look to recover a distinctly Greek tradition of republicanism discernible in modernity, or who otherwise trace Aristotle's influence, this project aims to recover and activate a moment of reflection on the relationship between tyranny and fear prior to its occlusion by the hegemony of arbitrary rule.¹³ Hobbes correctly identifies in Aristotle a keen appreciation for the entwined polemical and conceptual status of tyranny that was eclipsed by a predominant focus on the arbitrary basis of tyrannical authority. This project aims to reconstruct this view on its own terms in Aristotle's political philosophy and with a view to the resources it offers for political theory today.

At the heart of this reconstruction is the figure of the Aristotelian tyrant and the distinctive moral psychology his drive for security constitutes. While historical tyrants feature in the chapters that follow, the figure of the Aristotelian tyrant is best understood as a composite sketch, based on Aristotle's attention to the specific aims and strategies tyrants employ in defending their power and the contexts of political conflict and repression that condition these efforts. The substantive and titular focus of this project comes specifically from the *Rhetoric*, where Aristotle identifies the end or goal (*telos*) of tyranny as self-preservation (*Rhet.* 1.8). In Hobbes' political thought, the tyranny of Leviathan aims for the security of its subjects and achieves this end by stoking their fear of each other and then redirecting that fear toward the sovereign by granting it absolute power. By contrast, the Aristotelian tyrant seeks to secure *himself* against his *subjects*, who are for him, as he is for them, an object of fear.

¹³ See Eric Nelson, *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought*, for an attempt to recover a distinctively Greek strand of republicanism in early-modern political thought. According to Nelson, this tradition is more focused on the distribution of property than the account of non-domination characteristic of the neo-Romans. For scholarship on tyranny in the history of political thought that traces Aristotle and others' influence on modern thinkers, see Roger Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny: Plato to Arendt*, Waller Newell, *Tyranny: A New Interpretation*, and Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule*.

Tyranny's Style of Rule

In spite of the republican tradition's more direct Roman influence, Aristotle's work is often cited as foundational to the prevailing account of tyranny as a form of arbitrary rule. Central to this view is what Philip Pettit calls the "capacity" for domination. As Pettit explains in his influential *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom*, conditions of domination emerge when actors and institutions lack impediments to exercising their authority discretionarily over those in a position of dependence, and dependents thus lack recourse to institutions or other means by which they can hold their dominators accountable.¹⁴ For early-modern thinkers drawing from the Roman *Digest*, the exemplar of freedom was the *liber*, or freeman, in definitional contrast to the unfreedom of the *servus*, the servant or slave. Insofar as those in a position of dependence live under the looming caprice or arbitrary will of another, such that they feel compelled to manage their conduct with a view to appeasing or otherwise avoiding the ire of the powerful, domination prevails. It matters less on this view whether those in a position of authority actively impede others' movement or willfully thwart their desires than that, at any moment, they *could*.

From this account flows a distinctive account of freedom as non-domination, which entails a commitment to ensuring the existence of bulwarks against arbitrary rule that free individuals from the overhanging cloud of tyrannical actors' passing whims. Institutional norms and practices like the rule of law and separation of powers as well as mechanisms of popular accountability and democratic influence are among the most familiar hedges against the tyranny of arbitrary rule.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Republicanism*, 31-35. See also Skinner, *Liberty Before Liberalism*, 69-74 for a discussion of the relationship between dependence and domination.

¹⁵ See Pettit, *Republicanism*, part II. Pettit expands his account of the role of democracy as a means to influence and track political authority and ensure against arbitrary rule in *On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy*.

More broadly, scholars have shown the breadth and depth of the republican account of domination and freedom by bringing its insights to bear on the international stage, the history of American populism and critiques of wage slavery, and on the despotism of the manager or boss. For thinkers following this line of inquiry, projects of decolonial worldmaking, working class solidarity, and the collective and democratic control of productive forces vouchsafe the freedom of non-domination as a horizon stretching from the international stage to the factory floor.¹⁶

These are important and valuable lines of inquiry. This dissertation offers another view of tyranny that emphasizes something other than the arbitrary rule emphasized in modern republicanism, though the approach I take is compatible with that view and supportive of it. For Aristotle, too, tyranny can be a matter of arbitrary rule. Still, in my view, Aristotle's account shifts tyranny's center of gravity away from an *arbitrary* style of rule and toward tyranny as a *fearful* style of rule. In foregrounding the figurative logic of tyrannical domination—that is, domination's relationship to the fear-laden efforts of the powerful to skirt retaliation and protect their power—we shift our focus away from the institutional preconditions for tyranny and toward the broader contexts of conflict and contention that motivate tyrannical actors to strive for unchallenged power. In other words, instead of focusing on the tyrant's *capacity* to dominate, Aristotle guides our attention to the *activities* of tyrannical domination, understood as the specific practices and strategies employed by tyrannical actors to defend their power. Aristotle thus brings into focus the situational logics James Scott associates with maintaining the aegis of unchallenged authority,

¹⁶ Adom Getachew links her recovery of decolonial projects of worldmaking and self-determination in Africa and the Caribbean to the republican tradition's focus on "external nondomination," *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall Self-Determination*, 23n.45. For treatments of labor republicanism in the American context, in the political thought of Karl Marx, and in socialist political thought more broadly, see respectively Alex Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth: Labor and Republican Liberty*, William Claire Roberts, *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital*, and Tom O' Shea "Socialist Republicanism."

namely, that if “subordination requires a credible performance of humility and deference, so domination seems to require a credible performance of haughtiness and mastery.”¹⁷ Where the discourse of arbitrary rule implies that tyrants enjoy a kind of power that is unchallenged or preeminent, Aristotle pulls back the curtain on the tyrant’s effort to project this kind of unfettered authority and lays bare the precarity that underwrites it.

Aristotelian Realism and the Politics of Justice

As I read him, Aristotle offers less in the way of specific institutional remedies to avoid tyranny than he does an analytic toolkit with which to understand tyranny’s political embeddedness and hence the power of his subjects to resist. The payoff of this reading is more diagnostic than normative. By encouraging reflection on the political desires and commitments of those over whom the tyrant aims to accumulate and exercise power and how those desires mediate their experiences of tyrannical subjection, Aristotle brings to light not only how tyrants dominate their subjects but also how anti-tyrannical actors can cultivate desires for power and rule themselves. Or so I argue, though the latter is not in any sense an argument or recommendation advanced by Aristotle.

Indeed, *pace* Hobbes, contemporary scholars often read Aristotle as an archconservative who unqualifiedly opposes any kind of collective resistance to established authority—indeed, as someone who would rather advise tyrants on how to retain their power than see them overthrown.¹⁸ This may well be the case. Less concerned with whether Aristotle is criticizing or counseling tyrants than with how Aristotle’s analysis of tyrannical authority privileges the

¹⁷ *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 11.

¹⁸ I discuss this literature more extensively in chapter four. See e.g. Richard Bodéüs, *The Political Dimension of Aristotle’s Ethics*, chapters three and four, Richard Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, chapter 10, and Bernard Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*, chapter four.

dynamics *between* tyrants and subjects, this dissertation brings to light the logics of self-preservation at work in tyrannical forms of authority, whose characteristic feature—across differing constitutions—is rule over unwilling subjects. I argue that Aristotle’s theory of tyranny encourages us to move away from formalistic accounts of tyrannical ‘regime-types’ and instead to reflect on the experiences, values, and judgments of tyrants and also of tyrannies’ subjects, for whom tyranny represents the rule of injustice.

My reading of Aristotle might then be understood as both building upon and departing from those who identify Aristotle as a prototypical “realist.” Aristotle is widely understood to favor what Karuna Mantena terms a “moderating political realism,” a practically grounded theoretical perspective that privileges “questions of stability, order, and moderation over and against, for example, justice and revolution.”¹⁹ I see Aristotle as engaging in a different strand of political realism, one which, to adopt Mantena’s reading of Gandhi, privileges the conduct and orientation of political actors on the ground and draws on “a moral psychology that emphasize[s] the causal force of affect—of pride and egotism—over reason and rationality in political conflict.”²⁰ In so doing, I argue, Aristotle chastens theoretical projects aiming to transcend interest-driven circumstances of conflict. He does so by drawing attention to the irreducibility of power, contention, and desire in politics.

In reconstructing Aristotle’s analyses of the passions of both the tyrant and the tyrannized, this project makes the politics of justice central in Aristotle’s thought. For scholars engaging with Aristotle’s treatments of political justice, his discussions of distributive justice in *Politics* 3 and

¹⁹ See Emma Cohen de Lara, “Aristotle’s Politics: Ethical Politics or Political Realism?” William Galston, “Realism in Political Theory,” 399-406, and Zoltán Gábor Szűcs. “Aristotle’s Realist Regime Theory.”

²⁰ “Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence,” 457.

Nicomachean Ethics 5 often serve as a point of entry.²¹ There, Aristotle identifies as a central task of political philosophy the assessment of various arguments concerning the basis of merit (*axia*) for distributing political rule: virtue, noble birth, wealth, equality. In the ideal theory of the early John Rawls, Aristotle's conception of distributive justice reflects a "specific sense" of justice that Rawls understood himself to be extending in his account of justice as fairness, namely, the importance of "refraining from *pleonexia*, that is, from gaining some advantage for oneself by seizing what belongs to another."²² This is a definition, explains Rawls, that presupposes a "conception of social justice" that accounts for "what properly belongs to a person and of what is due to him." Seizing on Aristotle's arguments in favor of the kingship of the virtuous, scholars such as David Riesbeck have identified Aristotle's "ideal theory" of justice as seemingly aristocratic in its commitment to meritocracy and apparently at odds with his conception of political community as grounded in the sharing of political power among those who are free and equal.²³ For others, Aristotle's discussion of the claim to merit (*axioma*) of the multitude (*plēthos*) evidences an attraction—if deeply ambivalent—to the virtue and wisdom of the *dēmos*, one that sometimes serves as inspiration for broader projects to uncover egalitarian underpinnings of collective judgment for contemporary democracies.²⁴ While the above interpretations diverge on a number of important points, they

²¹ For a thorough treatments of Aristotle on distributive justice as a philosophical problem, pace the moral-psychological account described below, see Richard Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, chapter 4 and David Riesbeck, *Aristotle on Political Community*.

²² *A Theory of Justice*, 11. See Teresa Bejan, "Rawls's Teaching and the 'Tradition' of Political Philosophy," 7-11 for further discussion of Rawls' use of Aristotle,

²³ Riesbeck, *Political Community*, 14 sets out to resolve this tension by arguing that Aristotle's monarchal attachments in his ideal theory aim to criticize actually existing claims in support of kingship and thus leaves room for collective deliberation.

²⁴ There is an extensive scholarship on what Jeremy Waldron calls Aristotle's "potluck" theory of wisdom, from "Wisdom of the Multitude: Some Reflections on Book 3, Chapter 11 of Aristotle's *Politics*." Also see Daniela Cammack, "Aristotle on the Virtue of the Multitude," Melissa Lane, "Claims to Rule: The Case of the Multitude," Josiah Ober, "Democracy's Wisdom: An Aristotelian Middle Way for Collective Judgment," and Melissa Schwartzberg, "Aristotle and the Judgment of the Many: Equality, not Collective Quality."

share a common interest in parsing Aristotle's own considered views on just distribution, understood as an overarching framework under which to subsume and evaluate competing claims regarding the justificatory basis for distributing political power and other kinds of divisible goods.

This project mines a related thread in Aristotle's treatment of political justice. While Aristotle is deeply concerned with investigating the relative merits of various conceptions of just distribution on their own terms—as a matter of philosophic reflection—he is equally concerned with the consequences of disagreements about justice as they play out within actually-existing *poleis*, as ongoing sources of conflict that affect every political community and rarely admit of any settled or permanent resolution—regardless of the strength of argument advanced on behalf of any one account. This is to say that Aristotle is equally concerned with citizens' subjective sense of merit and their corresponding and partial beliefs in what a just distribution should look like.²⁵ On this point, Hobbes was absolutely correct. Building on a growing body of scholarship attentive to the centrality of desire, perception, and passion in Aristotle's political philosophy, this dissertation examines how, for Aristotle, citizens and subjects' attachments to justice become enmeshed with the particularities of their habits and *arational* attachments.²⁶ Beliefs in justice inflect habits of perception (*aisthēsis*) that affect how the tyrant and the tyrannized come to terms with the distribution of power in political community, how it used, and how it is pursued. Instead of transcending citizens' partial and particularistic attachments to justice, Aristotle dwells on them and subjects to scrutiny their bearing on the conditions and practice of tyrannical authority.

²⁵ For treatments of the subjective dimensions of distributive justice in Aristotle, see Eckart Schütrumpf, "Little to do with Justice," Terrence Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*, 433-460, Antony Hatzistravou, "Faction," and Arlene Saxonhouse, "Aristotle on the Corruption of Regimes: Resentment and Injustice."

²⁶ E.g. see Jill Frank, "On *Logos* and Politics in Aristotle," Jessica Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good: Perception, Phantasia, Thought, and Desire*, Giles Pearson, *Aristotle on Desire*, and Marlene Sokolon, *Political Emotions: Aristotle and the Symphony of Reason and Emotion*.

Tyranny and Desire

In considering Aristotle's insights into the social and psychological interplay of justice and desire, this project offers a novel interpretation of both the figure of the tyrant and of the politics of desire in ancient political thought. In the fields of political theory, philosophy, and classical studies, the figure of the tyrant is widely understood as *eros* personified.²⁷ Drawing primarily from Plato, Waller Newell argues, in *Tyranny: A New Interpretation*, that the ancient figure of the tyrant was fundamentally defined by his "ontological" susceptibility to the promptings of desire. On this reading, ancient philosophers pursue the task of inculcating the virtue of moderation (*sophrosunē*) in would-be tyrants and sublimating their desire for political power (and, by extension, the material pleasures such power affords) into the pleasures of philosophy.²⁸ Following Leo Strauss, Newell's work charts a course from an ancient preoccupation with transforming the soul of the tyrant to a modern infatuation with tyrannical attempts to conquer nature "and in particular, human nature" through technology and ideology.²⁹

Through Aristotle, this project recasts the nature of the tyrant's desire and revises our understanding of tyranny's relationship with the problem of desire more broadly. While the Aristotelian tyrant's desire remains fixed on political power, on my reading, it is characterized more by the aversive force of fear than any erotic or material longing for pleasure. For scholars who highlight the tyrant's desire for material and bodily enjoyment, the analysis often focuses on why the tyrant enters the political fray in the first place—on the fantasies of unbridled pleasure and

²⁷ For discussion of the relationship between tyranny and desire in ancient Greek political theory and culture, see Ryan Balot, *Greed and Injustice in Classical Athens*, esp. chapter one, Jill Frank, *Poetic Justice*, chapter five, James McGlew, *Tyranny and Political Culture in Ancient Greece*, and Victoria Wohl, *Love Among the Ruins: The Erotics of Democracy in Classical Athens*, chapter 6.

²⁸ *Tyranny: A New Interpretation*, chapter one.

²⁹ Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny*, 23-27

mastery such political power might someday afford.³⁰ I argue that Aristotle brings to light how the tyrant's goals of pleasure, wealth, and unqualified gain ultimately give way to a focus on protection. The force of necessity strips the tyrant of all other attachments and reduces him to the preservation of his power or capacity (*dunamis*). We might think of the Aristotelian tyrant's character-formation as offering novel insight into the classical focus on the reciprocal and interdependent relationship between the city and the soul. The tyrant's education is an education in fear.

Thinking through how the tyrant's fear constitutes his character and practices of governance shifts the broader problem space of desire for the *polis* writ large. Even when tyranny is not their chief concern, scholars often highlight the importance among ancient Greek thinkers of reining in and educating the desires of the citizenry.³¹ For the tyrant, the desires of his subjects are unqualifiedly his gravest threat; insofar as they retain their desiderative attachments to a conception of justice at odds with his share of power, the tyrant has reason to stay on his guard. To the end of preserving himself and his power, the tyrant looks to the 'educative' effects of repression. A hallmark of Aristotle's conception of constitution (*politeia*) is the role of education (*paideia*) in inculcating the habits necessary for a given constitution's continuation over time. This dissertation recovers Aristotle's attention to the specific style of education pursued under tyranny. Eclipsing any investment in cultivating moderation under ordinary constitutional circumstances, the tyrant, I argue, aims to inculcate small-souledness (*mikropsuchia*), an ethical vice characterized by a diminished sense of one's own political and self-worth (*axia*) and correlatively diminished desires for a share of power which citizens might otherwise long. While other constitutions aim to

³⁰ E.g. see Wohl, *Love Among the Ruins* and Newell, *Tyranny: A New Interpretation*.

³¹ See Ryan Balot, "Aristotle's Critique of Phalaris" and Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*.

instill a sense of like-mindedness among citizens about the desirability of their constitution, the tyrant utilizes repression to vitiate his citizens' sense of justice and eradicate conditions of political friendship. Aristotle shows how the project of soulcraft was central to tyranny from antiquity. Extending out from the problem of tyranny's assault on desire, Aristotle suggests that a central task of anti-tyrannical resistance is the cultivation of those desires and egalitarian habits the tyrant looks to extirpate. I argue that in a political context organized around the vitiation of desire, citizens and specifically those Aristotle calls "comrades" turn to the practice and activity of solidarity as a space of counter-subject formation.

The End of Tyranny

For Aristotle, an agent's *telos* specifies the characteristic aim of their actions; it demonstrates what's distinctive about their character. A *telos* is also a cause, source, or rule (*archē*) of one's conduct; a *telos* is that-for-the-sake-of-which (*to tou heneka*) one acts (*Physics* 194b33). As Aristotle suggests in the epigraph from the *Physics* that opens this dissertation, it is by becoming acquainted with such sources that we come to understanding or knowledge. To understand tyranny is thus to investigate the social and political circumstances that move tyrants to fixate on the preservation of themselves and their power and that requires embedding the tyrant within a political terrain marked by conflicting and incommensurable desires. To know tyranny is, in this sense, to locate the marker of tyranny outside of the tyrant himself and outside the tyrant's office, that is, in the reception of the tyrant's authority among the tyrannized, and to grapple with how the tyrant's efforts to maneuver in relation to the hostility of his subjects constitutes him *qua* tyrant.

In the epigraph from Herodotus, Solon advises the Lydian tyrant Croesus to look to the end—the *telos*—in order to gauge any person's happiness. Vulnerable as we all are to the vicissitudes

of fortune, Herodotus's text advances a conception of human agency bound to a world whose complex interactions with human and non-human forces frustrate people's efforts to exercise sovereign control over their lives.³² For Croesus and the other tyrants that populate the *Histories*, the terminus of their stories signals the dangers of unbridled hubris in the face of the gods and of nature. While the sense of *telos* invoked by Aristotle in the *Rhetoric* refers more to the end of one's actions than it does their life, Aristotle's account also offers a lesson in the pitfalls of mastery and of the tyrant's location in the world. The tyrant's efforts to lay claim over the *polis* and those within it invariably courts all-too-human forces that frustrate his fantasies of total control and unconstrained power.

Over the course of this dissertation I consider how Aristotle embeds the tyrant in a world populated with others whose desires conflict with his own, and how those desires shift in character and focus as the tyrant comes to terms with the need to attain and retain his position of preeminence. Tracking the tyrant's efforts to protect his power offers insight into the logics of tyrannical domination and the worldly circumstances that shape them. While deflating the tyrant's fantasy of total power, this project also investigates the dangers wrought by tyrannical fear—both in terms of the tyrant's fear of his subjects and of the fear they have of him. Aristotle's account of tyranny does not suggest the inevitability of tyranny's downfall. It does, however, bring the tyrant back down to earth, casting light on the precarity of his rule, and bringing into focus the powers of the tyrannized.

In chapter one I consider how the tyrant's focus on material gain and pleasure gives way to his defining focus on self-preservation. Drawing from Aristotle's account of distributive justice, I

³² See Joel Alden Schlosser, *Herodotus in the Anthropocene*.

argue that the tyrant is constituted *qua* tyrant in virtue of his efforts to defend a share of power deemed disproportionate and thus unjust by those over whom it is exercised. Drawing from Aristotle's account of fear (*phobos*) in the *Rhetoric*, I consider how the tyrant's fear of losing power structures a horizon of perception attentive to how his injustices breed retaliatory passions among his subjects. I argue that while that fear informs tyrannical efforts to exercise restraint and thus avoid antipathy, Aristotle casts doubt on the potential success of such efforts. So long as the tyrant retains a share of power at odds with the desires of the ruled, restraint will likely give way to repression.

In chapter two I consider in detail Aristotle's account of what he calls the "three heads" of tyranny: those being the tyrant's efforts to rule over subjects who (1) have small thoughts, (2) are distrustful of one another, and (3) who lack the capacity for action. Putting Aristotle in conversation with Michel Foucault, I argue that Aristotle anticipates modern political thought's attention to the formative effects of domination. The tyrant's efforts to cultivate small souls—those who lack the bonds of trust and desires for justice necessary to move them to act against tyranny—bring together tyranny's "heads" and bring distinction to the centrality of tyrannical subject formation. Turning to Aristotle's account of perception, I consider how the tyrant's efforts to cultivate acquiescent habits risks normalizing the rule of the tyrant and rendering his injustice imperceptible.

In chapter three I link tyranny's downfall to Aristotle's account of the beginning of Athenian democracy. Incipient in Aristotle's discussion of tyranny's three heads, I argue, is an attention to the role of solidaristic associations like political clubs (*hetaireiai*) and the friendship of comrades (*hetairoi*) in fostering the habits of trust and thought inimical to tyranny. Placing

Aristotle's reflections on such associations in his historical and ethical writings within the context of Athenian social and political history, I argue that Aristotle advances an account of comradeship as an alternative to prevailing 4th-century celebrations of the individualistic figure of the tyrannicide. This chapter argues that comradeship, a vice, in Aristotle's view, under ordinary political circumstances, becomes a virtue in the context of tyranny.

I conclude in chapter four by turning to the defining analogy in the neo-Roman republican tradition's account of tyrannical domination: that to be a subject of tyranny is to be ruled 'like a slave.' While scholars argue that the Aristotelian tyrant's unaccountable and arbitrary power approximates the authority of a master over slaves, I argue that Aristotle offers a more dynamic account of the anxieties that attend mastery as a project of domination. In considering what it means to rule 'like a master' for Aristotle, this chapter examines the orienting preoccupation shared between the tyrant and the master of slaves (*despotēs*): managing and subjecting to discipline those who threaten to upend the master's location of preeminence atop political and social hierarchies. By tracing what I call a "logic of enslavement" across Aristotle's political, rhetorical, and economic writings, I demonstrate how this relation of mastery informs Aristotle's treatments of the despotic forms of tyranny, oligarchy, and also democracy. Spanning these disparate discussions is Aristotle's persistent attention to how conditions of political conflict regarding the distribution of power, regardless of regime, underlie despotic efforts to seize a disproportionate share, and how despotic actors turn to force and repression to nullify political rivals. This chapter illuminates the conceptual portability and breadth of Aristotle's insights into tyrannical domination, showing how efforts to attain mastery in relations of social and domestic domination, and in constitutions ruled by the many and the few, can take on a tyrannical cast.

Chapter One

A Fearful Style of Rule

In a recent volume devoted to the problem of evil or viciousness (*to kakon*) in Aristotle's philosophy, scholars highlight the tyrant Phalaris, whom Aristotle uses in *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.5 as an example of beastliness (*thēriotēs*), a form of character manifesting the dangers of a life poorly-lived.³³ "Notorious for his inventive cruelties," such as roasting his enemies alive in a bronze bull, eating newborn infants, and indulging "strange sexual pleasure[s]," the tyrant of Akragas exemplifies the pursuit of corrupt (and corrupting) somatic activities whose depravity "fall[s] outside the defining boundaries of vice" (*NE* 1149a16; 1149a1).³⁴ For Kant, Phalaris represents the refusal to heed one's duty to the moral law in favor of the low-sighted and self-interested pull of prudence (*Religion* 6:49).³⁵ For Aristotle, he personifies what Pavlos Kontos describes as the ultimate "price paid" for "accumulated and escalated ethical transgressions," that being the "total atrophy of practical reasoning," that is, pace Kant, the *absence* of prudence³⁶ In Aristotle's words, the beastly Phalaris is one "overpowered by desire (*epithumia*)." Like all those who fail to exercise their reason, the tyrant of Akragas is reduced to living "by sense perception (*aisthēsis*) alone" (*NE* 1149a10-16).

An extreme example, to be sure, Phalaris' manifold excesses represent a common point of scholarly focus. In the words of several scholars, the Aristotelian tyrant aims for the "final goal" of pleasure, which is the tyrant's "end," his very "essence."³⁷ Prominent in antiquity, the figure of the

³³ Pavlos Kontos, "Introduction," "Radical Evil in Aristotle's Ethics and Politics," and Giles Pearson, "Aristotle on Psychopathology," in *Evil in Aristotle*, 5, 77-78, 127.

³⁴ Bartlet and Collins, *NE*, 145n.7 and Pearson, "Aristotle on Psychopathology," 127n.9

³⁵ Kontos, "Introduction," 5

³⁶ Kontos, "Radical Evil," 78.

³⁷ Thomas W. Smith, *Revaluing Ethics*, 6, Ryan Balot, *Greed and Injustice in Classical Athens*, 53, and Ronald Polansky, "Aristotle on Political Change," 342.

hedonistic tyrant also travels across the western canon and surfaces in the margins of modern theorists like Locke and Montesquieu, who describe tyrants and despots as driven by “appetite,” and “lust,” whose lack of ethical self-restraint finds political expression in the dissolution of the rule of law and other mediating institutions.³⁸ Both ethically and politically, the figure of the hedonistic tyrant provides a timely reminder that “character matters.”³⁹

That Aristotle associates tyrants with the depredations of greed and hedonism is unquestionable, as is the seriousness of the ethical and political ills he associates with such conditions of soul. Nonetheless, we might wonder about other psychological forces at work in tyranny, and the hazards they may also pose to political community. Indeed, if all tyrants were so debased and irrational as Phalaris, we might wonder if there would really be that much to worry about. One unable to reason will surely face difficulties attaining and sustaining possession of a *polis*. However, as Aristotle notes, in spite of his beastliness, Phalaris was able to master his passions long enough to accumulate a significant share of political power.⁴⁰

In this chapter, I recuperate a less examined and, in my view, more fundamental motive force than hedonism for the Aristotelian tyrant: fear.⁴¹ Fantasies of pleasure and excess may spark tyrannical longings for power. However, once in possession of power, the tyrant, I argue, is best

³⁸ John Locke, *Second Treatise*, chapter 5, Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, 2:1. For treatments of the tyrant’s hedonism in antiquity, especially Plato, see: Cinzia Arruzza, *A Wolf in the City: Tyranny and the Tyrant in Plato’s Republic*, and Victoria Wohl, *Love Among the Ruins: The Erotics of Democracy in Classical Athens*, chapter 5. See Mary Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule: Slavery, Tyranny, and the Power of Life and Death*, for a treatment of this preoccupation that travels from Aristotle through modernity.

³⁹ Danielle Allen, “Donald Trump is a walking, talking example of the tyrannical soul,” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2016/10/08/donald-trump-is-a-walking-talking-example-of-the-tyrannical-soul/>

⁴⁰ In Giles Pearson’s words, Phalaris “could have hardly ruled his polis if, like [a beast], he lacked any capacity for reasoning whatsoever and lived just by his sense alone. Indeed, in *Politics V* 10 Aristotle tells us that he acquired his tyranny by holding great offices (1310b28-29), which is surely not easy to do without any rational faculties whatsoever (...although perhaps Trump...)”, “Aristotle on Psychopathology” 144

⁴¹ Marlene Sokolon, *Political Emotions*, 102 also highlights the centrality of fear for the tyrant, as I discuss below.

defined by his fear of losing it and his efforts to protect it. As I will show, there are good textual reasons for privileging fear in the psyche of the Aristotelian tyrant. There are good political reasons, too: by attending to the tyrant's fear, we get a clearer view of the tyrant as a situated and strategic political actor, whose dangers stem not only from the desires that led him to seek political power, but also from what he does with that power once he has it.

As we will see in the following, the Aristotelian tyrant is far from reduced to "sense perception (*aisthēsis*) alone." Indeed, the tyrant's capacity of perception is acute and discerning; the tyrant canvasses the conditions of his rule and the dangers the *polis*' cohabitants pose to his power. Moreover, he retains his reason, using it in a way that interacts "symphonically" with the "quasi-perceptual" workings of imagination (*phantasia*).⁴² Central to the tyrant's fear is his anticipation of how his injustices may generate passionate responses among his subjects. This is also to say that the tyrant's perceptions of the threats posed by his subjects are irrevocably related to how his subjects perceive him and his disproportionate possession of power. The sense of justice of the tyrannized informs how they perceive his abuses and how those perceptions elicit emotions like hate, anger, and envy.

Even as I decenter the tyrant's hedonism, however, I do not displace his desire. Considering the dangers posed by excessive desires for material and political gain, sovereignty, and other forms of social and psychic mastery, such a displacement would be unwarranted. I do, however, reposition and redistribute desire. Considering how the tyrant's fear emerges from, while also reinforcing, his possessive orientation to the *polis*, I reposition desire by locating the tyrant's

⁴² For the symphonic interaction of passion and reason in Aristotle, see Sokolon, *Politics Emotions*. See Jessica Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good: Perception, Phantasia, Thought, and Desire*, chapter 4, for the quasi-perceptual operations of imagination and fear.

overreach within his dynamic relationship with his subjects. I redistribute desire by dwelling not only on the tyrant's desire but also on the desires of those subjected to tyranny, reflecting on how *their* attachments to a just share of power augment their perceptions of the tyrant's injustice. So understood, the tyrant's fear speaks powerfully not only to his character but to the character of those over whom he rules.

Treatments of fear in political theory often center on the passions of the oppressed, and analyze how elites and despots utilize fear as a weapon of control and domination. Aristotle is well aware of this instrumental use of fear, as we will see in chapter two. Here I argue that by attending to the fear experienced by the tyrant we get a clearer view of the imaginative underpinnings of this repression. Not only does Aristotle possess an underappreciated understanding of the fearful moral psychology of tyrants, he also demonstrates how attending to fear can illuminate how those who are unjust and powerful assess sources of threat to their rule. In this way, he offers resources as well for those who would resist injustice.

I begin in section one by scrutinizing a passage in *Politics* 5.10 where Aristotle indicates that the tyrant's hedonism sometimes gives way to more prudential concerns for protection. Elaborating Aristotle's appreciation for the tyrant's defensiveness, I here make the case that the tyrant's protection of his power—specifically, from those unwillingly subjected to it—defines him *qua* tyrant. In order to clarify the psychological forces at play in the tyrant's ethical and political constitution, I turn in section two to the *Rhetoric*, where I mobilize Aristotle's account of fear (*phobos*) and his appreciation of the particular kind of fear experienced by those with power. For Aristotle, I argue, the fear of the powerful emerges as a possessive orientation to material and political goods characterized by an apprehensive watchfulness of rival claimants. Highlighting

Aristotle's account of the imaginative dimensions of fear—namely, how fear emerges from the anticipation of hostility and potential desires for retaliation—I turn in section three to Aristotle's discussion in *Politics* 5.11 of the “measured” tyrant. As an embodiment of tyrannical fear, this figure exemplifies strategies of deception through which unjust political actors seek to navigate the perceptions and passions of their subjects, who project an image of kingly rule outward even as they aim to disempower their subjects. I conclude by reflecting on the political stakes of tyrannical fear, and how Aristotle's account supplements entrenched associations of tyranny with unconstrained power.

From Possession to Protection

Of central importance to the Aristotelian tyrant is his insatiable desire for more, his greed or overreach (*pleonexia*). As Aristotle writes in *Politics* 5.10:

Tyranny, as has often been said, looks to nothing common, unless it is for the sake of private benefit (*idia ὀφηλεία*). The tyrant's target (*skopos*) is the pleasurable (*to hēdu*); the target (*skopos*), of a king is the noble (*to kalon*). Hence of the objects of greed (*pleonektēma*), material goods are characteristic of tyranny, what pertains to honor (*timē*) is characteristic of kingship. It is characteristic of kingship that its defense (*phulakē*), is carried out by citizens; of tyranny, that it is carried out by foreigners. (*Pol.* 1311a2-1311a9)

Situating Aristotle's remarks within an Athenian imaginary fixated on the association of tyranny with libidinal pleasure, Victoria Wohl comments on how, on Aristotle's telling, “the political field becomes coterminous with the tyrant's own body, and that is a body devoted to enjoyment... There is an ineradicable pleasure within the exercise of his tyranny, and the polis is the instrument of that pleasure.”⁴³

On inspection, however, Aristotle suggests that the tyrant's infamous pursuit of pleasure might turn out to be a fraught one. As Aristotle explains immediately following the above-quoted passage: “That tyranny has the evils both of democracy and of oligarchy is evident. Having wealth

⁴³ Wohl, *Love Among the Ruins*, 221-222.

as its end (*telos*) comes from oligarchy (for of necessity [*anangkaios*] it is only in this way able to sustain both protection [*phulakē*] and wantonness)... from democracy comes their war on the notables—doing away with them secretly and openly, and exiling them as rivals in the art of ruling and impediments to their rule” (*Pol.* 1311a9-19). Here Aristotle describes the tyrant, in spite of his target of pleasure, as splitting his focus between that aim and protection. According to Ryan Balot, the tyrant puts his plunder to defensive use in service of procuring greater satisfaction down the road.⁴⁴ If the tyrant’s preoccupation with protection is solely strategic his defensiveness might appear less important for understanding his character than his hedonism.

Aristotle also suggests, however, that protection ultimately becomes the tyrant’s most prominent focus. Where in *Politics* 5.10 Aristotle identifies wealth as tyranny’s end—itsself pursuant to the ends of both pleasure and protection—in *Rhetoric* 1.8, Aristotle assigns to tyranny the *telos* of protection (*phulakē*) alone (*Rhet.* 1366a).⁴⁵ The tyrant may or may not harbor fantasies of self-aggrandizement and pleasure, but here Aristotle signals that his defensiveness, more than his hedonism, tends to motivate his actions as a ruler.

Aristotle’s argument for the importance of attending to rulers’ ends clarifies the importance of the tyrant’s defensive pursuit. Describing in *Rhetoric* 1.8 how orators need to appeal to the ends customarily pursued by rulers of each constitution—in democracy: freedom, oligarchy: wealth, aristocracy: education and customary practices, tyranny: protection—Aristotle explains that a ruler’s character (*ēthos*) “can be grasped by way of these same ends, since one’s character is manifest or apparent (*phaneros*) in accordance with choice (*kata prohairesis*) and one’s choice is

⁴⁴ Balot, *Greed and Injustice*, 43.

⁴⁵ Of course, for Aristotle, most ends can be understood as means relative to the end of human beings generally, that being eudaimonia.

made in reference to one's end (*pros telos*)" (*Rhet.* 1366a10-20). If the tyrant manifests his character through his pursuit of protection, so too does he render legible his most pervasive concern. As Jill Frank puts it, Aristotelian actors, through their choices and actions, "reflect who they have been and therefore who they are."⁴⁶ What one chooses to do displays not only who one is, but also what one has done and will likely continue to do.

Aristotle revisits the formative effects of the tyrant's defensiveness in *Politics* 5.11. There, he describes two strategies tyrants might use to defend their rule—one overtly repressive, the other more dependent on deception—and assigns to them two corresponding forms of character. Aristotle describes the repressive tyrant as "in no way falling short in depravity (*mochthēria*)," a near synonym for vice (*kakia*) (*Pol.* 1314a14). The deceptive tyrant, on the other hand, who acts with greater moderateness or measure (*metrios*) "puts on a performance of a king," and thus exhibits a form of character "fine in relation to virtue" or, at minimum, "not base but half-base" (*Pol.* 1315b11). As the tyrant's focus on protection ebbs, so too does his relative viciousness.

In tracking how the half-base tyrant's performance reflects a more salutary form of character than his depraved counterpart, some scholars suggest that Aristotle may in fact be aiming to steer any would-be tyrants in his audience toward the (somewhat) better angels of their nature.⁴⁷ Others suggest that the moderate tyrant becomes a king—and his regime a kingship proper—over the course of his performance.⁴⁸ On my reading, Aristotle rejects the second of these transformational possibilities in no uncertain terms.

it is a source of preservation (*sōtēria*) for tyranny to make it more kingly, provided one thing is protected (*phullasein*)—his power (*dunamis*) so that he may rule not only willing persons, but also those who are unwilling (*mē boulemenon*); for if this is thrown away, so is the tyranny. This must remain as a presupposition (*hupothesis*). (*Pol.* 1314a35-39)

⁴⁶ *Democracy of Distinction*, 34.

⁴⁷ See Pierre Destrée, "Aristotle on Improving Imperfect Cities," 220-221.

⁴⁸ Mulgan, *Aristotle's Political Theory*, 133-134, cited in Balot, *Greed and Injustice*, 54.

There are several things of note in this passage. First, Aristotle makes clear that the measured tyrant, insofar as he retains his power to rule over willing and unwilling subjects alike, remains properly tyrannical despite his kingly performance. Importantly, preservation (*sōtēria*) designates specifically the preservation of a thing's identity or type over time, Aristotle's primary object of concern when discussing constitutions (*Rhet.* 1.8). In seeking the protection designated with *phulakē*, the tyrant preserves (*sōzein*) the character of his tyranny.

Secondly, Aristotle here designates the object of the tyrant's defensiveness as his power or capacity (*dunamis*). While the Aristotelian tyrant is surely concerned with *self*-protection, Aristotle is at pains to emphasize that the tyrant's defensiveness is also rooted in the protection of his capacity to impose his rule on the willing and unwilling. The tyrant evinces a notably zero-sum orientation on this front, as Aristotle also notes that the depraved tyrant seeks to render his subjects without power (*adunamis*) (*Pol.* 1314a25-30), i.e. without power to resist his power. Insofar as the Aristotelian tyrant is constituted by his efforts to protect his power, this protection appears to require the simultaneous disempowerment of his subjects. Aristotle's identification of (*phulakē*) as the *telos* of the tyrant is thus especially appropriate. In contrast to the self-referential *sōteria*, *phulakē* underscores a concern with external threats—those from which something is guarded—hence *phulakē*'s shared root with the Greek word for bodyguard (*phulax*). The tyrant's power exists at the expense of and in opposition to the power of those over whom it is exercised.

This leads to my third point. In *Politics* 5.11, as noted, Aristotle yokes the tyrant's protection of his power to the presupposition that he rules over subjects both willing *and unwilling*, or more precisely in this passage (if also more awkwardly) those 'not wishing'—*mē boulemenon*—being a participle of *boulesthai*, 'to wish'—to be so ruled. Hence the tyrant's guardedness: he must

protect his power (and himself) from his very own (unwilling) citizens. In keeping with the force-edged connotation of *phulakē*, the tyrant aims to protect his power from those who are involuntarily subjected to it. The constitution of tyranny is forged relationally, in the tyrant's defensive struggle for power over and with the tyrannized.

What might account for what Aristotle calls “the hypothesis or presupposition (*hupothesis*)” that the tyrant's power is maintained in opposition to the wishes of his subjects? As we saw in the *Politics* 5.10 passage, Aristotle maintains that the tyrant borrows evils not only from oligarchy, but also from democracy, insofar as he “wages war on the notables—doing away with them secretly and openly, and exiling them as rivals in the art of ruling and impediments to their rule” (*Pol.* 1311a16-19). Aristotle returns to the tyrant's war-like orientation shortly thereafter, in *Politics* 5.11, where he describes the depraved tyrant as at war with those who are equitable (*epieikeis*) “because they claim to merit (*axioun*) not being ruled in the fashion of a master (*despotikos*)” (*Pol.* 1314a20-22). The tyrant's martial orientation toward political rivals resonates with Aristotle account of fear in *Rhetoric* 2.5. There, Aristotle describes antagonists as an object of fear (*to phoberon*): “Those who are rivals for the same thing, that cannot be possessed (*endechesthai*) by both at the same time, are also feared, since people are always at war with those of that sort” (*Rhet.* 1382b10). As Aristotle observes in the *Metaphysics*, tyrants exemplify a manner of having (*echein*) the *polis* that is simultaneously possessive and corrupting: a tyrant has a *polis*, says Aristotle, in the same manner that human beings have clothes or an illness (*Met.* 1023a9-11). Insofar as the tyrant aims to lay claim to political community as if it were an object to be possessed he is himself corrupted.

On these terms, the tyrant refuses to acknowledge the nature of the *polis* as a community of “sharers,” a form of association that aims for a self-sufficiency requiring citizens to rule in turn

(*Pol.* 1261a1). The manner in which citizens share in the *polis*, particularly with reference to the distribution of political power, is, for Aristotle, a matter of proportional justice. As Aristotle argues in *NE* 5 and *Politics* 3, constitutions are distinguished by their (in Aristotle's view, often ill-judged) account of what is just in the distribution of power: democracy distributes power to all free people, oligarchy to the wealthy, etc. These self-understandings of just distribution accord with citizens' belief in the appropriate form of merit (*axia*) concerning who should share in the distribution of power and on what basis. As we saw in the case of the depraved tyrant, his war on equitable citizens turns on a dispute over merit.

In *Rhetoric* 1.8, Aristotle treats the account of justice that regulates the distribution of power not only as an object of concern for citizens—or, as Aristotle notes in *Politics* 3, an object of political philosophy—but also as the end at which various rulers aim in their efforts to preserve the identity of their constitution. Insofar as, for Aristotle, a constitution (*politeia*) refers both to the organization of offices as well as the way of life of a *polis* (*Pol.* 1295b1), rulers make decisions within the boundaries of what their citizens deem just in distribution.⁴⁹ As Aristotle observes in *Politics* 2, in order for a constitution to be preserved, “all of the parts” must wish it to continue on the same basis (*Pol.* 1270b21-22). Among the means suited to securing such preservation, Aristotle highlights those that permit citizens to take part or share (*metechlein*) in their constitution, often (though not always) through institutions that allot them some measure of political power (*Pol.*

⁴⁹ As Schütrumpf, “Little to do with justice,” 173, notes, even in the case of a king outstanding in virtue, Aristotle stresses the need to heed “subjective claims that express the dynamics within a society,” namely, “whether the subjects of such an outstanding rule will accept it.” Also see Terrence Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles*, 433-460, Eugene Garver, *Aristotle's Politics, Living Well and Living Together*, 140-141, Antony Hatzistravou, “Faction,” 287-295, and Arlene Saxonhouse, “Aristotle on the Corruption of Regimes: Resentment and Injustice,” 184-203, for treatments of justice in Aristotle that highlight citizens' subjective orientation to the problem of power's distribution, pace Aristotle's own considered judgments.

1272a14-22).⁵⁰

Tyranny entertains no such measure. In *Politics* 5.10 Aristotle distinguishes kings from tyrants based on their respective targets of nobility and pleasure. In *Rhetoric* 1.8, he observes that, whereas kingship (like aristocracy) rules with a view to “education and customary practices,” the tyrant’s rule is without boundary (*ahoristos*) (*Rhet.* 1366a). While *ahoristos* is sometimes taken here to represent the tyrant’s lack of legal accountability, Aristotle’s contrast is with kingship’s attention to tradition and education—which must itself heed the customs of a particular constitution (*Pol.* 1337a15). This suggests that Aristotle has in mind the attachments citizens have to the distribution of power in their *polis*, and in turn, the manner in which rulers are accountable to their citizens’ political commitments.⁵¹ Since Aristotle understands people to often pursue faction (*stasis*) in response to overreaching on the part of rulers with respect to citizens’ sense of justice, the tyrant, who is presumably alert to the perception of his overreach among the citizenry, has good reason to stay on his guard (*Pol.* 1302a26–27).

Of course, in practice, few constitutions are fully able to satisfy the entirety of their citizens. As Arlene Saxonhouse puts it, Aristotle understands most constitutions to be vulnerable to the destabilizing effects of citizens’ “psychology of resentment,” based on the frequent “imprecision of political justice.”⁵² Try as they might, statesmen can hardly seem to put an end to debates concerning the proper distribution of authority, insofar as some citizens “will always feel the prick of exclusion.”⁵³ Tyranny might be understood as a mode of rule constituted by how the tyrant, in virtue of his overreach, assumes such resentment as the basic condition of his regime. Far

⁵⁰ For further discussion see Jill Frank, “Constitution,” and Malcom Schofield, “Sharing in the Constitution.”

⁵¹ Kinch Hoekstra, “Athenian Democracy and Popular Tyranny,” 47-48

⁵² Saxonhouse, “Aristotle on the corruption of regimes,” 186.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 189.

exceeding the degree of “modest contention” found under ordinary political circumstances, tyrannies wage war against their own subjects, if not openly, through force, then through deceit (*Pol.* 1313a10).⁵⁴

Tyrannical rule is thus predicated on the tyrant’s defensive possession of a disproportionate share of power. As we’ve seen, Aristotle is explicit that, depending on how harshly the tyrant pursues his goal, he develops different forms of character. For Aristotle, one’s character reflects not only varying degrees of virtue and vice, but also, differing desires and perceptions of what is good and beneficial (*NE* 1114a38-39). Baked into the rule of tyranny, then, is a moral psychology—a mode of inhabiting, perceiving, and evaluating the world—constituted by the need to protect power from those hostile to that possession. I will next consider in more detail the psychology of fear Aristotle offers in the *Rhetoric* in relation to those he calls “the powerful.” As will become clear, I take his account of the fear of the powerful (the fear they have as well as the fear they instill) to explain the fear of the tyrant. My engagement with the *Rhetoric* thus sets the stage for a consideration of how fear guides both the depraved and measured tyrants’ protection of their power, and their navigations of the perceptions of their subjects.

The Fear of the Powerful

In *Rhetoric* 2.5 Aristotle describes fear as “a certain pain and agitation from the imagination, (*phantasia*) of an impending evil of a destructive and painful sort,” an evil that “does not appear, (*phainein*) far away,” but rather, “so near as about to happen, since people do not fear things that are exceedingly remote” (*Rhet.* 1382a). While sometimes approached as an undifferentiated

⁵⁴ See Bernard Yack, *Problems of a Political Animal*, for a treatment of Aristotle’s political thought that places contention and disagreement at the center of political life.

experience of helplessness,⁵⁵ fear for Aristotle is grounded in subjects' particular ethical characteristics and habits. As Aristotle observes, fear makes people deliberative (*bouleutikos*) (Rhet. 1383a10). What one fears, and how, also reflects a particular way of inhabiting the world. Aristotle is at pains in *Rhetoric* 2.5 to highlight the situated dimensions of fear: fear depends on preparing (*paraskeuazein*) for the fact that one is of the sort (*toioutos*) who will suffer, and that one will suffer at the hands of particular sort (*toioutoi*) (Rhet. 1383a15). "By necessity (*anangkē*) those who are afraid are people who do believe they will suffer some such thing, and they fear those by whom they believe they will suffer" (Rhet. 1382b30-a1).

Scrutinizing Aristotle's account of fear, David Konstan describes how fear involves "evaluating the relative balance of forces among opponents."⁵⁶ Konstan, like many other scholars of fear—both in Aristotle and more broadly—stresses the kind of fear felt by those with less power toward those with more.⁵⁷ Less commented upon, yet also of central concern for Aristotle, is the kind of fear experienced by those *with* power, and how their imagined losses spur them to commit ever greater injustices. According to Aristotle, among those who are unjust and powerful, fear often arises when they imagine how their repressions generate desires for short-, as well as longer-term retaliation among those subject to their rule, who may bide their time in waiting to strike back. Aristotle explains that not only are "those who have suffered injustice, or regard themselves as having suffered it... objects of fear, since they are always on the lookout for an opportunity" for vengeance, but so too are those "who have committed injustice... when they have power, since they are afraid of suffering retaliation" (Rhet. 1382b1-30; emphasis mine). With the resources and

⁵⁵ For example, see Martha C. Nussbaum's *The Monarchy of Fear*, chapter 2.

⁵⁶ Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature*, 149.

⁵⁷ Such as Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea*, 11.

enjoyments taken by force also comes preeminence, a remaining within the field of vision of those who would seek to limit one's overreach. Power is never simply one's own: it exists within a social context and is thus subject to competing appraisals of just and unjust accumulation and corresponding desires to balance the scales.

For Aristotle, the fear experienced by those who are unjust and powerful is thus inextricably linked to how they instill fear in the less powerful. Of central importance to Aristotle's account of this interplay are the unjust tendencies of those with power. As Aristotle remarks, the powerful (*hoi dunamenoī*) are often feared simply in virtue of their *ability* to commit injustice, "for many humans do wrong because they are capable (*dunamein*)" (*Rhet.* 1382b10). Once capacity has become actuality, there is even more reason to fear, since "injustice possessed of power (*dunamis*) is fearful, for the unjust man is unjust through choice (*prohairesis*)" (*Rhet.* 1382b). Alert to how their injustices might be received, the powerful become ensnared with their targets in a lethal back and forth of retaliation and preemption, until "there is no chance for those who have transgressed to set things right" (*Rhet.* 1382b20).

Aristotle's appreciation for the fearful and fear-inducing proclivities of the powerful anticipates his later, more sustained discussion of the *dunamenoī* in *Rhetoric* 2.17, which concludes a series of sections (12-17) whose nominal concern is how different sorts of character differ in respect to their experiences of passions, habits, and fortunes (*Rhet.* 1388a30). Central to Aristotle's account of fear in *Rhetoric* 2.5 is precisely this attention to the intersecting effects that character and fortune—such as agents' power—have on their experience of fear. In 2.17, Aristotle describes the powerful as especially circumspect, they are "compelled (*anankazomenoi*) to look out for what affects their power (*skopein ta peri tēn dunamin*)" (*Rhet.* 1391a30). Of course, not all powerful people

are tyrants, and not all forms of “looking out” for power entail wrongdoing and fear. Aristotle is clear, for instance, that the possession of power can sometime produce ethically salutary effects, such as a “mild” sense of dignity and piety. However, as Aristotle also notes, power can just as soon breed rudeness and hubris. The powerful who commit injustice tend to be “not petty criminals but villains on a grand scale” (*Rhet.* 1391a20-1391b10).

Aristotle hints at the source of power’s corrupting influence when he observes that power, when untethered from the “better” character traits like dignity and piety, carries with it many of the same character traits as wealth (*Rhet.* 1391a20). Seeing power as engendering viciousness in the same manner as affluence makes more legible the causes of power’s corrupting influence. As Aristotle notes in *Rhetoric* 2.5, those with good fortune, like political power or wealth, often experience a sense of invulnerability that compounds hubris and desires for gain (*Rhet.* 1382b). Aristotle voices similar insights regarding the hubristic tendencies of the ultra-wealthy in *Politics* 4, when he argues that they not only “tend to become hubristic and base on a grand scale” but also “never wish (*oute boulesthai*) to be ruled” by anyone, seeking, instead, to rule in the manner of a master (*despotēs*) (*Pol.* 1295b10-21). If the accumulation of excess power can generate hubris, it can also reinforce, if it not breed, a despotic and possessive cast of mind.⁵⁸ Aristotle echoes this tendency towards possessiveness in *Rhetoric* 2.16’s discussion of the wealthy, when he observes that they “suppose that other people are eager for the same things they are” (*Rhet.* 1391a1-10). This fearful tendency to project one’s own anxieties and attachments onto others will become especially important in the next section.

⁵⁸ See Mark Button, *Politics Vices*, chapter 2, for a sustained treatment of the dangers of hubris and its possessive inclinations. Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen*, 23, hits on a similar dynamic in her discussion of mastery and despotism, noting how despotic actors “treat as complex what is simple... who do not recognize that they are parts as well as wholes.” I consider the relationship between tyranny and mastery (*despotikē*) at length in chapter four.

The tyrant, discussed by Aristotle in *Politics* 5, exemplifies precisely this fearful mode of possession in his distinctively disproportionate and guarded orientation to power. As that discussion makes clear, Aristotle's line of thought concerning power, fear, and injustice does not assume that power breeds corruption *sui generis*. In other words, the mere fact of possessing power might not, by itself, lead to injustice. Always implicit within this process of enrichment, hubris, and injustice are those others whom the tyrant slights, treats unjustly, and robs, or, whom he otherwise *expects* to chafe at his myriad injustices. Acts of injustice or overreach might as often serve as pre-emptive measures—intended to help secure forms of political and material gain from those who are only, at that point, *presumed* to be hostile to such enrichment—as they serve reactively, as a response to dissent and resistance already underway. Considering a tyrant's tendency to hire bodyguards when they are merely plotting their tyrannies (*Rhet.* 1357b30), Aristotle underscores the conditions of danger that compel, seemingly by necessity (*anangkē*), the tyrant to be always on his guard.

As we've seen, in addition to these fear-driven compulsions of power and injustice, Aristotle is also acutely aware of how those experiencing fear scrutinize the potential perceptions and desires of those who are victims to their injustice, whether they feel anger (*orgē*) or some other form of hostility. This anticipation of another's potential or occurrent hostility is central to the fear of the powerful. Throughout much of *Rhetoric* 2.5 Aristotle focuses his attention on signs, (*sēmata*) of danger, such as when people are experiencing “hostility or anger, since it is apparent that they are willing able to do something,” or, as noted, when someone who is unjust has power, since “an unjust person is unjust by choice” (*Rhet.* 1382a30-b10). In these cases, Aristotle highlights percipients' assessment of the relative capacity, willingness, and likelihood of others to

do them harm. As we will see next, this imagination of others' passions rests at the heart of Aristotle's account of the depraved and measured tyrants of *Politics* 5.11.

Seeing Like a Tyrant

While Aristotle nowhere explicitly states that the tyrant is fearful, Marlene Sokolon is surely correct to claim that the tyrant's "fear of isolated or consolidated attack" rests at the heart of Aristotle's understanding of tyranny.⁵⁹ This is evident in the behavior of the depraved and measured tyrants of *Politics* 5.11. Where in *Rhetoric* 2.5 Aristotle observes that fear makes people deliberative (*bouleutikos*) (*Rhet.* 1383a10), in *Politics* 5.11 he outlines the depraved tyrant's deliberations (*bouelumata*), which aim to mitigate his fears by rendering his subjects distrustful of one another and incapable of action (*Pol.* 1314a15–25). If, according to Stephen Salkever, Aristotle's *Politics* is populated by several "imagined voice[s]" that are not Aristotle's own, but rather, "plausible horizons or opinions about politics and the best human life," *Politics* 5.11 describes and inhabits the fear-laden imaginations of two of the worst.⁶⁰

As recognized by a growing number of scholars, Aristotle's theory of the passions (*pathē*) turns fundamentally on the work of perception (*aisthēsis*) and imagination (*phantasia*), the experiences agents have of the world around them, and how these, in turn, inflect the representations and desires that go on to guide their actions within it.⁶¹ Over the remainder of this chapter and through the next I consider how the tyrants of *Politics* 5.11 embody two distinct instantiations of tyrannical fear and the particular perceptions that attend them. As we will see, in advising tyrants how to protect their rule, Aristotle offers a view into how they perceive and

⁵⁹ Sokolon, *Political Emotions*, 102.

⁶⁰ Salkever, "Whose Prayer? The Best Regime of Book 7 and the Lessons of Aristotle's *Politics*," 32

⁶¹ See fn. 10

imagine the dangers that might upend it. By drawing attention to how tyrants imagine the passions of the tyrannized, Aristotle also prompts questions about whether tyrants perceive such threats accurately, and whether their various strategies of deception and force are sufficient in quelling their subjects' passions. I begin my discussion with the measured tyrant, since Aristotle is more explicit regarding his imagination of the passions of the tyrannized. However, as will become clear in the following chapter, this imaginative dimension of fear is also legible in the case of his depraved counterpart.

As Aristotle concludes his account of the measured tyrant, who evinces a seemingly virtuous form of character, he observes that, in virtue of his kingly performance, the tyrant's rule will not only be "nobler and more enviable," but he will also avoid being "hated and feared," thus enjoying his power for longer (*Pol.* 1315b5-10). The measured tyrant's efforts to avoid provoking fear and hatred among his subjects might be understood to underwrite the broader aims of his strategy of preservation. Aristotle nowhere suggests that the half-base tyrant seeks to make his subjects afraid of him, though the measured tyrant does appear to rely on a different object of fear, namely, war. According to Aristotle, he is to cultivate reverence (*aidesthai*) rather than fear among his subjects by concerning himself with military virtue, or at least the reputation (*doxa*) of it. Aristotle appears to assume that this reputation will rest on action: the measured tyrant is presumed to spend time "campaigning away from [his] own territory," and will present himself as a good manager of public funds, assuming "they should be needed in times of war" (*Pol.* 1314b6-18). War and the fear that it engenders lurks in the backdrop of the measured tyrant's performance, even if he does not wage it as actively against his own people.

The moderate tyrant's kingly performance also might be directed at alleviating the potential

for hatred. As Aristotle notes in the *Rhetoric*, hate is directed towards those of a certain kind (*genos*) by contrast to anger, which is always directed at some particular person (*Rhet.* 1382a). Here Aristotle identifies thieves and informants as relevant objects of hate: that tyrants would fall under this category stands to reason. The moderate tyrant would have his subjects think him a king, even if he retains his constitutively tyrannical hold on power.

The moderate tyrant appears to be most concerned with the dangers posed by anger. Interspersed throughout Aristotle's advice to the moderate tyrant to care for public funds, wage war, and adorn the city are repeated exhortations to avoid various forms of slight or belittlement (*oligoria*), primarily, the slight of hubris, which Aristotle describes in the *Rhetoric* as the "activity, (*energeia*) of an opinion to the effect that something appears worthless," motivated by a gratuitous pleasure in bringing shame to another (*Rhet.* 1378b10-20). Anger emerges from the pain (*lupē*) of slight, "the apparent (*phainomenon*) belittling of oneself or something of one's own," and manifests as a desire (*orexis*) for retaliation (*timōria*) that continues until the initial wrong has been answered. Hubris is most infamously associated with acts like sexual assault, rape, and public forms of humiliation on the part of the hubristic, and a sense of "relative status" among those victim to their abuse, that is, their sense of merit or worthiness (*axios*).⁶² As Aristotle describes in detail in *Politics* 5.10, such noxious behaviors often spelled doom for tyrannical monarchs, especially among those fixated on their social status (*Pol.* 1311a22-b35). It makes sense, then, why in *Politics* 5.11 Aristotle advises the measured tyrant again and again to avoid these actions especially. Aristotle notes first that not only the tyrant, but also "those around him," should avoid acting hubristically toward "youths and girls" (*Pol.* 1314b24-27), explains later that, "above all the rest," he should not

⁶² For further discussion see Richard Kraut "The Political *Kakon*" 188, Wohl, 222, and Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness*, chapter 2.

engage in forms of hubris that involve “bodily harm and youths” (*Pol.* 1315a14-16), and, lastly, stresses the need to beware “of those who consider him to have behaved hubristically either toward themselves or toward those they cherish.” Aristotle concludes by emphasizing that those who retaliate for such deeds “out of spiritedness (*thumos*)” are “not sparing of themselves,” since, quoting Heraclitus, “‘it is hard to fight with spiritedness,’ as it ‘pays the price of the soul’” (*Pol.* 1315a22-31).⁶³ For Aristotle, anger hinges on one’s sense of worth or merit (*axia*), a fundamental feature, as we’ve seen, of one’s sense of justice and thus of their potential for anti-tyrannical action. Assuming the moderate tyrant is capable of restraining himself and those around him from engaging in the kinds of hubristic conduct that might provoke others into a murderous and potentially self-sacrificial rage, he may enjoy the longevity Aristotle associates with a king-like tyranny.

Aristotle also suggests that the measured tyrant needs to concern himself with other manifestations of hubris besides more brazen assaults. Expanding on the tyrant’s range of abuses, Aristotle explains: “A slight affecting their material goods bears heavily on the greedy, (*philochrematoi*); a slight involving dishonor bears heavily on the ambitious (*philotimoi*) and equitable (*epieikeis*) among human beings” (*Pol.* 1315a17-20). The tyrant must also, then, avoid enriching himself at the expense of those keen on their own possessions—as Aristotle observes in *Politics* 2, rendering “the wealthy poor” often has the effect of making them subversives (*Pol.* 1266b15-16)—as well as from insulting those especially enamored with their reputations. According to Aristotle, the ambitious often choose to court danger, not in pursuit of a monarchy of their own, but rather, in pursuit of fame, “just as in the case of any other extraordinary action from

⁶³ With Giles Pearson, *Aristotle on Desire*, chapter 5, I take *thumos* to represent the capacity for anger, and as largely interchangeable with *orgē* on Aristotle’s view.

which men acquire a name and become notable in the eyes of others” (*Pol.* 1312a25-32). To this end, the moderate tyrant avoids gratifying the ambitions of one person alone, instead elevating several, “as they will watch one another” (*Pol.* 1315a10). The tyrant, as it were, sets ambition against ambition.

While the measured tyrant is able to placate the ambitious by making use of their desires for esteem, it is not clear how he can avoid slighting the equitable. Aristotle’s silence on this point is worth attending to, for the figure of the equitable also emerges as an object of fear for the depraved tyrant. Fortunately, Aristotle expands on the reason for the depraved tyrant’s fear in an earlier discussion—quoted above—where he describes the depraved tyrant as waging war on the equitable “not merely because they claim to merit (*axioun*) not being ruled in the fashion of a master (*despotikos*), but also because they are trustworthy, both among themselves and with respect to others, and will not denounce one another or others” (*Pol.* 1314a20-23). The tendency of equitable people to retain bonds of trust, both among themselves and others, secures their status as objects of fear for the depraved tyrant, for whom breeding distrust is a central aim. The half-base tyrant appears less concerned with such forms of association.

I want to suggest, then, that the frightening status of the equitable for the depraved *and* measured tyrant might be understood to hinge on their desire to refuse others a despotic hold on power *on account of merit*, as opposed to fame. Broadly speaking, for Aristotle, equity represents a mode of corrective justice, usually aimed at accounting for oversights and harms involved in the general application of laws in particular circumstances (*NE* 1137b27).⁶⁴ While neither tyrant is bound by law, both might be understood to pursue an analogous generality in their possessive and

⁶⁴ For an extensive engagement with equity in Aristotle’s political thought and relevant citations, see Daniel Schillinger, “Aristotle, Equity, and Democracy.”

despotic orientation to political power. Tyranny is general and undifferentiated insofar as it remains unbound by the sense of justice of those over whom it rules, whatever that sense of justice may consist in. Insofar as the tyrant, as such, aims to protect his power from those who wish to rule or be ruled on a different basis, he effaces what his particular citizens might take themselves to merit. If, then, the ambitious approach objects of honor, like political power, as a matter of reputation, the equitable might be understood to approach power as a matter of merit, and thus might act against the tyrant in virtue of what they understand to be just in distribution, regardless of whether the tyrant elevates them in the eyes of others.

To this insistence on a just distribution of power, Aristotle, on my reading, gives the measured tyrant no answer. Aristotle signals why the tyrant's oversight on this issue might be important in the opening passages of *Politics* 5.11. At the outset of this chapter, Aristotle alludes to how the kingships of the Molossians and Spartans enjoyed power for longer in virtue of dividing their offices into various parts (*mera*). He singles out the Spartan king Theopompus for establishing the popular institution of the ephors: "By taking away [his] power (*dunamis*)" explains Aristotle, "he increased the duration of his kingship, and so in a certain manner made it not less but greater" (*Pol.* 1313a28-30).⁶⁵ Aristotle's prelude to his account of the depraved and measured tyrants appears on first pass to anticipate his main line of advice to come, "to draw the tyrant toward greater measure." As Aristotle explains, "For the fewer things over which kings have authority (*kurios*) the greater the period of time their rule as a whole will necessarily last: they themselves are less like masters and more equal in their characters and are less envied by those they rule (*Pol.*

⁶⁵ Importantly, Sparta's constitution remains only partially a kingship, as the ephors represent a democratic institution, and Aristotle also describes the Spartan constitution as tending towards oligarchy in *Politics* 2. So-distributed is power in Sparta that Aristotle can hardly keep track of its constitutional identity—the identity of the measured tyrant's tyranny, however, is never in question.

1313a18-23).

While Aristotle notes that the tyrant will become more measured in his life (*bios*) it does not appear, on inspection, that he will become more measured in his rule or power (*Pol.* 1313a20). Nowhere in Aristotle's advice does he encourage the tyrant to actually replicate the substantive institutional reforms represented in the Spartan constitution: to divide his power (*dunamis*) between various parts, or otherwise render himself less politically authoritative (*kurios*). He is to avoid appearing (*phainesthai*) as an "appropriator of the things of others" but it does not appear that he actually forfeits the most fundamental, and distinctively tyrannical, of possessions: his power over those not wishing to be his subjects (*Pol.* 1315b2). Recall, this is the presupposition that preserves the identity of his tyranny. The difference between him and the depraved tyrant is thus best understood as a matter of degree: it is goal of the measured tyrant's artifice to present himself, falsely, as different in kind.

Aristotle's attention to this tyrant's efforts to appease both the poor and wealthy warrants attention on this point. In contrast to the depraved tyrant, who uses slander to set wealthy and poor citizens against one another, Aristotle states that the half-base tyrant needs to ensure that "both [rich and poor] suppose (*hupolambanein*) that they are being preserved and that neither is being treated unjustly by the other on account of the tyrant's rule." At the same time, the tyrant should attach the stronger (*kreissōn*) of the two to his rule (*archē*) thus adding (*prostithēmēnon*) a part to his power (*dunamis*) (*Pol.* 1314b36-40). Aristotle here lays stress on the additive quality of the measured tyrant's efforts at class appeasement—as distinct from any redistribution or lessening of his own power—while flagging how the tyrant must ensure the taking up or assumption (*hupolambanein*) of just treatment. Consider this parsing alongside Aristotle's description of the so-

called “mixed regime” in *Politics* 3, which incorporates both democratic and oligarchic centers of power to such an extent that it appears from various perspectives to be a democracy or oligarchy. As Aristotle observes, this (imperfect) constitution remains politically stable because two otherwise warring factions experience or feel (*paschein*) the principles of their favored political orders to be “embodied in the mixed regime” (Pol. 1295b16).⁶⁶

It is highly significant that, as we’ve seen, Aristotle repeatedly reiterates the need for the measured tyrant to appear (*phainesthai*) or seem (*dokein*) stewardly, beneficent, pious, popular, etc., but he at no point indicates that the measures will be perceived (*aisthenesthai*) thusly by his subjects. As Aristotle notes in his discussion of perception in *De Anima*, in the case of hearing, “the actuality of what is capable of making a sound is sound or sounding, and the actuality of what is capable of hearing is hearing or listening. For hearing is twofold; and sound is twofold” (DA 426a5-7). The perception of every perceptible object implies a percipient, and vice versa. At the same time, Aristotle insists that they are not coequal, “For just as both acting and being affected are in what is affected, but not in the acting, so also is the actuality of the sensible object and of what is capable of perceiving in what is capable of perceiving” (DA 426a9-11).

On my view, Aristotle’s silence on the reception of the measured tyrant’s self-presentation reflects the ambitious character of the measured tyrant, who, like his competing *philotimoi*, indexes the honor of political power to fame as opposed to merit, and is thus unable to recognize those who perceive his share of power on grounds other than reputation. The tyrant presumes his subjects to be similarly (though likely not equally) enamored with fame, and thus sated by reputational benefits. He assumes that they are disinterested in justice because they, like him, view

⁶⁶ For discussion see Balot, “Aristotle on the Mixed Regime,” 108.

the political world in terms of reputation and the potential for being emulated by others. The ambitious character of the measured tyrant impairs his ability to imagine the views of those whose political commitments are grounded in what is just in the distribution of power. As we saw in the above discussion of fear, Aristotle takes fearful people like the wealthy and the powerful to project similar kinds of desires and values onto others.

Moreover, in spite of Aristotle's insistence on the greater longevity enjoyed by the measured tyrant, the *Constitution of the Athenians*' (hereafter *Ath. Pol.*) treatment of historical tyrants clearly suggests that his rule of deception and measure rarely lasts too long. While apparently decent autocrats like Peisistratus, who ruled with measure (*metrios*) and "more like a citizen (*politēs*) than a tyrant," enjoyed a stable reign (*Ath. Pol.* 16.1), his son, Hippias—who also ruled initially as a wise statesman (*politikos*)—eventually came to exemplify the worst traits of tyranny after his attempted assassination forced him to switch from moderation to repression (*Ath. Pol.* 19.1). Following Athens' loss to Sparta in the Peloponnesian War, the so-called Thirty Tyrants initially ruled in what Aristotle explicitly describes as a measured (*metrios*) manner, before their fear of the *dēmos* led to a year-long reign of terror (*Ath. Pol.* 35.1).⁶⁷

Notably, even without turning to the rule of force, Aristotle's account of Peisistratus in the *Ath. Pol.* suggests that some of tyranny's gravest ills are compatible with a measured approach to *phulakē*. Not only does Peisistratus' tumultuous rise traffic in both methods of force and deceit—feigning the blessings of Athena as he manipulated Athenian piety in one ploy to take power (*Ath. Pol.* 14.4), and enlisting armed guards in another of his attempts (*Ath. Pol.* 14.1)—but he also turns

⁶⁷ While scholars and translators such as P.J. Rhodes argue against Aristotle's authorship of the *Ath. Pol.*, I follow Frank and Monoson, "Lived Excellence in Aristotle's Constitution of Athens: Why the Encomium of Theramenes Matters," in treating Aristotle as the author. I provide evidence for this interpretation in chapter three.

to practices that Aristotle identifies as defining features of the depraved tyrant's approach, namely, the incapacitation of the *dēmos* through the confiscation of their arms and through surveillance (*Ath. Pol.* 15.3-5), and by seeing to it that the Athenians "would have neither the desire nor the leisure for public affairs" (*Ath. Pol.* 16.3).

On first pass, Aristotle's account of the measured tyrant appears to blur any meaningful distinction between king and tyrant, if not to soften the dangers of tyranny as such. On inspection, however, Aristotle suggests that such efforts to moderate the severity of tyrannical rule are not only inherently unstable—presupposing, as they do, the desires of the ruled to live, rule, or be ruled otherwise—but they might also mask some of the most pernicious dangers of tyrannical fear. It is to those dangers we will turn in the next chapter.

Conclusion

As Aristotle remarks in *Politics* 1.2, commenting on the nature of the polis as a community founded on sharing and interdependence, "One who is incapable of sharing or who is in need of nothing through being self-sufficient is no part of a city, and so is either a beast or a god" (*Pol.* 1253a28-30). While sometimes tending towards beastliness, the tyrant most often represents an all-too-human example of one who desires and claims more than his just share, and who is thus very much in, if not of, political life. In addition to his fantasies of unchecked desire, the tyrant himself is keen on projecting an image of god-like omnipotence unhampered by the desires of others. Aristotle dispels this projection, weakens the grip of tyrannical fantasy, and provides a needed reminder that, to the extent that the tyrant induces fear, it is because he is himself fearful. This is not to suggest that the fears of tyrant and tyrannized are symmetrical—far from it. What Aristotle's account of tyrannical fear does indicate, however, is the importance of tending to the tyrant's

embeddedness within social and political space, and how citizens' attachments to justice serve as the primary terrain of struggle, and space of perception, between tyrant and tyrannized.

Aristotle is not, of course, alone among antique authors in bringing to light how fear motivates tyrannical efforts to maintain control over potentially seditious subjects. Authors such as Sophocles, Xenophon, and Plato also offer depictions of tyrants who repress and deceive their subjects because, as Thucydides' Pericles puts it, while a tyranny may be "wrong to take," it nevertheless remains too "perilous to abandon" (II.63.2).⁶⁸ On Aristotle's view, the tyrant's fear remains illegible without assessing his embeddedness within a broader context of contention, perception, and injustice. To reflect on the tyrant's fear is not to displace politics by turning to psychology, but rather to throw into clearer relief the tyrant's own subjection to forces that, try as he might, often escape his control and escape detection.

⁶⁸ See Sophocles, *Antigone*, 280-300, Xenophon, *Hiero*, and Plato, *Republic*, Books 8-9

Chapter Two

The Small-Souled Subject

Political theorists from a diverse range of political and philosophic perspectives converge in identifying modern techniques of domination as habit-formative and psychologically invasive, in contrast to earlier, more blatantly coercive, forms of repression. To John Stuart Mill, for example, “the tyranny of the majority” has emerged as a “more formidable” kind of political oppression than that found in previous epochs, one that “leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself.”⁶⁹ According to Hannah Arendt, “the self-coercion of totalitarian logic destroys man’s capacity for [movement,] experience, and thought,” as well as his “capacity for action,” in a way that far exceeds earlier tyrannical investments in spreading conditions of “[i]solation and impotence.”⁷⁰ Leo Strauss claims that forms of technology and ideology have emerged as part of a “‘conquest of nature,’ and in particular of human nature” that risks “collectiviz[ing] human thought.”⁷¹ In tracing the obsolescence of the tyranny of arbitrary rule—a “constant, total, massive, non-analytical, unlimited relation of domination, established in the form of the individual will of the master, his ‘caprice’”—Michel Foucault draws attention to forms of disciplinary power that, making use of the “automatism of habit,” render the human subject “something that can be made,” as if shaped from “formless clay.”⁷²

Foucault’s work on the formative effects of power has had an especially pronounced impact on contemporary political theory, fundamentally transforming “the political theoretical landscape

⁶⁹ *On Liberty*, 10.

⁷⁰ *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 466; 474.

⁷¹ *On Tyranny*, 23-27. See also Waller Newell, *Tyranny: A New Interpretation*.

⁷² *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 137; 135.

of power”⁷³ and, in the view of some, “dissolv[ing] the bedrock of our social and political thought.”⁷⁴ In contrast to Foucault, ancient Greek political theorists like Aristotle are said to exemplify a “classical interpretation of tyranny,” beholden to an overly blunt and severely outdated “physicalist” view of power, as “something naked [and] forceful,” that “emerges out of a barrel of a gun or perhaps from the edge of a sword.”⁷⁵ For this reason, scholars maintain that thinkers from antiquity yield scant resources for helping contemporary citizens appreciate the “multiplicity of ways in which the subject is ‘tyrannized.’”⁷⁶

Without denying the existence of fundamental differences between ancient and modern forms of oppression—whether owing, among other things, to the rise of mass society, the invasiveness and scope of totalitarian regimes, or the modern imbrications of scientific knowledge and power—this chapter challenges the received view that the formative effects of power are a uniquely modern invention. As we saw in chapter one, the character of the tyrant and his perception of political life is fundamentally entwined with the fear he has of his subjects. Thrust first by his greed into a position where he must relentlessly defend his power from the unwilling, the fear experienced by the tyrant results in the formation of a “half-vicious” temperament, if not one that is characterized by ethical “depravity” (*Pol.* 1314a15). This chapter focuses on the orientation of the depraved tyrant. Having considered in the last chapter how fear forms the tyrant’s character and how that fear inflects the tyrant’s perception, this chapter considers how the tyrant turns to fear as a weapon of domination and subject formation through which to flatten his

⁷³ Wendy Brown, “Power After Foucault,” 75.

⁷⁴ Mark Philp, “Foucault on Power: A Problem in Radical Transition?,” 30.

⁷⁵ Simon Tormey, “What is ‘Tyranny’? Contesting the Contested Discourse of Domination in the Twenty-First Century,” 74; 69.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 78. Also see Blitz, “Tyrannies, Ancient and Modern,” 9-24, and Roger Boesche, “An Omission from Ancient and Early Modern Theories of Tyranny: Genocidal Tyrannies,” 33-52.

subjects' desires and render imperceptible his injustice.

Readers of Aristotle overwhelmingly focus on tyranny as a form of government or regime type. I argue that Aristotle analyzes tyrannical domination as, in Foucault's terms, a form of "governance," that is, a "relation of power" through which the tyrant "acts upon [the] actions" of his subjects in order to influence their conduct, such that they become who the tyrant would have them be.⁷⁷ If the language of 'government' captures the formal arrangement of power in a regime, 'governance' indexes how those in positions of political power navigate the dilemmas of defending their rule by structuring the broader context of action within their community. As I discuss below, where Foucault associates disciplinary forms of governance with the cultivation of "docile bodies,"⁷⁸ Aristotle illuminates how tyrannical forms of governance aim to produce the disposition of small-souledness (*mikropsuchia*) a form of character Aristotle associates with diminished desires (NE 1125a21-32).

As scholars note, Foucault is notoriously silent on the relationship between desire and power,⁷⁹ an omission especially significant considering attention by political theorists to the economic and political conditions of contemporary life that enervate desires for collective self-rule.⁸⁰ I consider Aristotle's most distinctive and perhaps most enduringly productive insights into tyrannical governance by attending to what it means for the tyrant to cultivate small souls. For Aristotle, to speak of one's soul is to invite attention to the interrelations between nominally 'inner' capacities for movement and action, such as desire, and their 'outer' use, habituation, and interaction with virtue and vice in social contexts. If a hallmark of Foucault's account is his

⁷⁷ Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 340.

⁷⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 138.

⁷⁹ See Brown, "Power After Foucault," 77 and Dreyfus and Rabinow, *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 109.

⁸⁰ See Jodi Dean, *Crowd and Party*, and Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 200.

attention to the microphysical, appearance-regulating techniques that govern a body's activities in time and space, Aristotle's insights are distinguished by his attention to how tyrannical governance operates in psychosocial registers to affect both body *and* soul, desire *and* activity. For Aristotle, I argue, this encompasses desire-driven durational activities in their dynamic relationship with orientations to the self, others, and justice.

Scholars have attended to the ways in which Aristotle's discussion of the depraved tyrant evinces the viciousness of the tyrant's soul,⁸¹ how the tyrant undermines intellectual and ethical conditions for human flourishing,⁸² and how Aristotle may have been influenced by earlier authors in describing the tyrant's techniques of repression.⁸³ Often remarked upon, but rarely subjected to sustained scrutiny, is what Ronald Polansky calls Aristotle's most "unique" contribution to antique accounts of tyranny, namely, the "reduction of these techniques to the three heads."⁸⁴ In Aristotle's words, the tyrant seeks to ensure 1) "that the ruled have small thoughts (*mikra phronein*)" 2) "that they distrust one another" and 3) that they have an "incapacity (*adunamia*) for deeds (*pragmata*)" (*Pol.* 1314a15-25).

Focusing less on Aristotle's theorization of the tyrant's character, this chapter explores Aristotle's account of the tyrant's situated and strategically defensive orientation of governance. I argue that, against the backdrop of the assumption that "all wish to overthrow him" (*Pol.* 1313b32), the depraved tyrant engages in distinctive forms of pre-emptive strike. Not merely repressing his subjects before they resist, the tyrant seeks to diminish their desires for what they

⁸¹ Ryan Balot, *Greed and Injustice in Classical Athens*, chapter 2, focuses on the tyrant's greed or overreach (*pleonexia*). For treatments that attend to the tyrant's display of insolence (*hubris*), see Mark Button, *Political Vices*, 52, and Richard Kraut, "The Political *Kakon*: The Lowest Forms of Constitutions," 188.

⁸² Roger Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny: From Plato to Arendt*, chapter 2, and Blitz, "Tyrannies, Ancient and Modern."

⁸³ David Keyt, "Commentary: Book V," 168-175 and W.L. Newman *The Politics of Aristotle* Vol. IV, 448-464.

¹⁷ Ronald Polansky, "Aristotle on Political Change," 324.

might take themselves to be politically due as citizens. In this way, the tyrant crafts subjects who are disinclined to resist in the first instance. The tyrant does this not only by undermining his subjects' capacities of trust and thought but also by humbling (*tapeinoein*) their desires for justice, understood as a proportionate distribution of power (*Pol.* 1315b7), by cultivating small souls. Elaborating the political, social, and ethical registers of the "three heads" of tyranny and their interaction with small-souledness, I demonstrate the importance of taking Aristotle's insights into domination seriously today.

The first section of this chapter focuses on Foucault's account of power, and specifically on the form of disciplinary power he associates with the Panopticon. Here I explore how Foucault theorizes the disempowering aims of domination, as well as discipline's specific concerns with association, visibility, and the production of docile bodies. I then consider how Aristotle's account of tyrannical repression draws similar attention to modes of disempowerment that humble the ruled by de-associating them and rendering them visible to the tyrant and his informers. I turn last to Aristotle's theorization of the distinct mode of subjectivity sought by the tyrant, that of small-souledness. Not only does small-souledness attenuate the desires of the tyrannized for justice, but it also risks attenuating their perceptions of injustice as such, rendering the abuses of the tyrant politically illegible and outside the bounds of outrage or anger (*orgē*). I conclude by considering the stakes of Aristotle's account of tyrannical governance with reference to the apparently singular figure of the tyrant, in contrast to Foucault's appreciation of the polymorphous workings of modern discipline.

The Governance of Discipline

In a 1980 interview, Foucault distanced himself from a more popular view of power as

something entirely “horrible and repressive for the individual,” observing how, in the terms of his research, this would imply “that preventing a child from scribbling on the walls would be an unbearable tyranny.” Insisting that “power is a relation. A relation in which one guides the behavior of others,” Foucault noted that “there’s no reason why this manner of guiding the behavior of others should not ultimately have results which are positive, valuable, interesting, and so on.”⁸⁵ This does not mean that power will never be oppressive, strategic, or tyrannical. In “The Subject and Power,” Foucault describes how power “governs” the conduct of subjects by structuring “their possible field of actions” in ways that settle into established self-sustaining “conduct of conduct.”⁸⁶ Noting that governance may often include violence, Foucault nonetheless maintains an analytic distinction between the effects of violence (“it forces, it bends, it breaks, it destroys”) and the desired effect of governance, which “opens up” a particular field of future possible actions.⁸⁷ Most crucial for our purposes is the form of governance involved in what Foucault describes as a “relation of confrontation,” wherein the oppressive party acts strategically in the sense that it 1) conducts itself instrumentally with respect to an end, 2) taking into account the potential resistance of the governed to that pursuit, while 3) striving to “deprive the opponent of the means of combat,”⁸⁸ thus reducing the governed to “total impotence.”⁸⁹

We can get a clearer view of this strategic, disempowering dynamic by turning to Foucault’s account of disciplinary governance in *Discipline and Punish*, where he describes “micro-physics” of subject formation found in modern institutions like the penitentiary, military camp, and factory

⁸⁵ Cited in Nancy Luxon, *Crisis of Authority: Politics, Trust, and Truth-Telling in Freud and Foucault*, frontispiece. See *ibid.*, and Paul Patton, “Foucault and the Strategic Model of Power” 14-27, for discussions of Foucault that explore the less-oppressive registers of his account of power and government.

⁸⁶ Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 341.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 346.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 347.

floor.⁹⁰ In this context, the relevant form of “impotence” follows from what Foucault refers to as the “ordering of human multiplicities” through which discipline undermines its subjects’ engagements in associations that might produce a form of “counter-power” resistant “to the power that wishes to dominate it: agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, coalition.”⁹¹

Repurposing its subjects by channeling their conduct in more fruitful directions, discipline aims to produce “‘docile’ bodies” in order to meet specified institutional and economic demands.⁹²

Central to the production of such docility is the “infinitesimal power” that discipline exerts over “the active body,” and how the effort to supervise and economize its activity “implies an uninterrupted, constant coercion” relative to its “time, space, and movement.”⁹³

One of the more famous of Foucault’s “apparatuses of control,” as Simon Tormey puts it,⁹⁴ or “dispositifs,” according to Davide Panagia,⁹⁵ is the Panopticon, which positions prisoners as always-potentially-surveilled subjects, such that subjects of panoptic surveillance become self-surveilling, and thus self-disciplining. As Foucault describes it, the Panopticon “induce[s] in the inmate a state of consciousness” that “assures the automatic functioning of power.” The Panopticon achieves such automation by ensuring that the source of power (though, importantly, not its actual exercise) is constantly “visible,” in the sense that the inmate constantly sees the architecture of his surveillance in his surroundings. The source of power is nevertheless “unverifiable,” insofar as the inmate knows that he *may* be being spied upon at any time, but he cannot know when this is actually the case.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 139.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 138.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁹⁴ Tormey, “What is ‘Tyranny?’” 75

⁹⁵ Davide Panagia. “On the Political Ontology of the *Dispositif* (Or, Foucault’s Modernism)”

⁹⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 201.

Foucault argues that the Panopticon breaks from how “[t]raditionally, power was what was seen,” which “found the principle of its force in the movement by which it deployed that force, [while t]hose on whom it was exercised could remain in the shade.”⁹⁷ Foucault distinguishes modern power relations from the practice of power in the ancient world: “Antiquity had been a civilization of spectacle,” whereas in modernity, society “is not one of spectacle but of surveillance. We are neither in the amphitheater, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine.”⁹⁸ With its focus on the visibility of its subjects, the Panopticon, according to Panagia, is an exemplary instance of a ‘dispositif,’ a term adopted by Foucault to better highlight “the relational dynamics between entities” and to illuminate how forms of power proceed through the “capacity to arrange spatialities.”⁹⁹ Panagia traces ‘dispositif’ to its etymological root in *dispositio*, and locates that term within the classical rhetorical tradition of which Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is the foundation, focusing specifically on rhetoric’s dependency on the “importance of the arrangement of parts” needed to persuade an audience.¹⁰⁰ As we have seen, for Foucault, the veiled (and simultaneously presupposed) exercise of power represents a sharp departure from ancient modes of domination. As will see next, however, the arrangement of parts and spatialities is also central to Aristotle’s account of the tyrant, for whom such arrangements underwrite his indirect efforts to cultivate the dispositions of his subjects.

The Governance of Tyranny

As discussed in the last chapter, for Aristotle, the characteristic end or goal (*telos*) of the tyrant is

⁹⁷ Ibid., 187

⁹⁸ Ibid., 216-217.

⁹⁹ Panagia, “On the Political Ontology of the *Dispositif*,” 2. Also see Herbert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 120-121.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 4.

self-preservation (*phulakē*). Noting in the Rhetoric that the methods of preserving constitutions are “investigated with precision in the *Politics*” (*Rhet.* 1366a20), Aristotle fills in the means to tyranny’s end in *Politics* 5.11:

Such things are, then, characteristic of tyrants and help preserve their rule—though in no respect do they fall short in depravity. All of these things are encompassed, so to speak, under three heads (*eidē*) For tyranny aims at three things: one, that the ruled have only small thoughts (*mikra phronein*) (for a small-souled person (*mikropsuchos*) will not conspire against anyone); second, that they distrust (*diapistein*) one another (for a tyranny will not be overthrown before some persons are able to trust one another—hence they make war on the equitable (*epiekeis*) as being harmful to their rule not merely because they do not claim to merit being ruled in the fashion of a master, but also because they are trustworthy, both among themselves and with respect to others, and will not denounce one another or others); and third, an incapacity (*adunamia*) for activities (*pragmata*) for no one will undertake something on behalf of those who are incapable (*adunatos*) so that not even a tyranny will be overthrown where the capacity, (*dunamis*) is lacking. The defining boundaries (*horoi*) to which the deliberations (*bouleumata*) of tyrants may be reduced are, then, these three. For one might reduce all things characteristic of tyranny to these presuppositions, (*hypothesesis*)—that they not trust one another, that they not be capable, that they have small thoughts. (*Pol.* 1314a13-29)

Mark Blitz notes that Aristotle largely “assumes the tyrant’s standpoint” in exploring these attempts at self-preservation.¹⁰¹ This is the case in more ways than one. In addition to detailing the rationale behind these aims, Aristotle explicitly identifies them as rationales by calling them deliberations (*bouleumata*) which refer, as he explains in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, to the contextual considerations pursuant to a given end (in the tyrant’s case, self-preservation) (*NE* 3.3).

In also calling these aims *hypothesesis*, Aristotle mobilizes a term he uses in his discussion of lawgivers in *Politics* 2, where he identifies the presuppositions undergirding the efforts of lawgivers to craft laws and institutions to intentional, character-formative effect (*Pol.* 1269a33). Aristotle’s use of *hypothesis* here flags a quite specific preoccupation: attention to the role of laws and other institutions in promoting certain modes of conduct and character. In the case of lawgivers, a presupposition must take into account habits and customs already present in the community (*Pol.*

¹⁰¹ Blitz, “Tyrannies, Ancient and Modern,” 13.

1269a24), otherwise, they risk provoking political instability and factional conflict.¹⁰² The presuppositions of the tyrant, by contrast, seek to impose a form on a community unidirectionally, through force or deception (*Pol.* 1313a10), and his deliberations, as we will see, comprise his efforts to navigate the blowback he provokes through such imposition. The tyrant, then, attempts to govern in the specific confrontational sense described by Foucault in “The Subject and Power”: as I show next, he is instrumentally teleological, adaptive to potential challenges, and bent on disempowering adversaries.

The Three Heads

I begin with incapacity because I take it to underwrite Aristotle’s understanding of the dynamics of tyrannical governance across associational and psychological registers. I am not alone in this. Even without attending, as I do below, to Aristotle’s own considered reflections on capacity (*dunamis*) which underscores the “power-to” achieve a goal or engage in a given activity, scholars key in on its importance to *Politics* 5.11 when they note that the tyrant aims to make his subjects “unable to conspire against him by making them too poor and mean-spirited and too distrustful of each other,”¹⁰³ that he seeks “to deprive anyone who might harbor such a wish [of overthrow] of the power to act on it,”¹⁰⁴ and that, “beyond preventing meetings and eliminating those with high thoughts,” the tyrant seems committed to ensuring that “high thoughts and trust never... emerge or [become] contemplated in the first place.”¹⁰⁵

The conceptual and practical flipside of *dunamis* is *energeia*, a mode of “activity” that

¹⁰² For helpful treatments on Aristotle with respect to this aspect of lawmaking, see Ryan Balot, “Aristotle’s Critique of Phaleas,” 32-44, Richard Bodéüs *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle’s Ethics*, Kraut, “The Political *Kakon*,” 170-174, Polansky, “Aristotle on Political Change” and Thomas W. Smith, *Revaluing*, chapter 1.

¹⁰³ Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle*, 448.

¹⁰⁴ Keyt, “Commentary,” 168-169

¹⁰⁵ Blitz, “Tyrannies, Ancient and Modern,” 14.

actualizes and develops capacity (*Meta.* 1066b5). The relationship between the two is far from straightforward.¹⁰⁶ On the one hand, capacities emerge *from* action, that is, through actualization, “like the capacity of playing the flute,” which “we must acquire by previous exercise” (*Meta.* 1047b33). At the same time, to actualize and thus develop a capacity, there must be some capacity prior to said activity (*Meta.* 1049b19). As the condition of possibility for acquiring a particular habit and virtue (*NE* 1103a27), the actualization (or lack thereof) of a capacity signals a consistent course of action already undertaken (or, conversely, left in abeyance). As Aristotle notes, particular habits follow from a history of particular activities: “it makes no small difference, then, whether one is habituated in this or that way straight from childhood but a very great difference” (*NE* 1103b22-25).

Ontologically, incapacities are a necessary counterpart to capacities (*Meta.* 1046a31-32). Practically speaking, if someone possesses an incapacity they suffer “a privation of capacity” where they would “usually” or “naturally have it” (*Meta.* 1046a33). Mirroring its actualization, a capacity might be enervated through lack of use (*NE* 1140b29): I may fall out of practice in flute playing; by acting with cowardice or timidity, any courage I have may weaken. Unlike the actualization of a capacity through activity, however, which relies on one’s “desire or choice” for “that which [one] has a capacity” (*Meta.* 1048a11-13), one can also become incapacitated through a “forceful taking away” (*Meta.* 1022b30; 1046a35). Aristotle’s example for this forceful mode of incapacitation in the *Metaphysics* is a eunuch (*Meta.* 1019b18-19). Another example is Aristotle’s psychosocial account of tyrannical incapacitation in *Politics* 5.11.

On Roger Boesche’s reading, the tyrant appears to “return” his subjects to something of a

¹⁰⁶ For an account of the “dynamic and reciprocal” relationship between *energeia* and *dunamis*, see Jill Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*, chapter 1.

“prepolitical state of dispersal, confining people to their private affairs and depriving them of all opportunity for public and political action.”¹⁰⁷ In my view, this project of dispersal operates according to two main strategies. First, the tyrant utilizes slander and surveillance in order to provoke feelings of animosity and suspicion among his subjects. On this front, the tyrant taps into preexisting asymmetries in power and authority in order to repurpose them to his advantage. Secondly, he pursues strategies of what I call “de-association” by undermining conditions that allow his subjects to gather for sustained periods of time.

Aristotle claims that the tyrant utilizes slander in order to “set friends at odds with friends, the people with the notables, and the wealthy with themselves” (*Pol.* 1313b16-20). Aristotle understands the wealthy to be already prone to factional conflict as a result of the habituating effects of their wealth (*Pol.* 4.11), and the tyrant is more than happy to stoke this tendency.¹⁰⁸ In keeping with his rise as a demagogue who manipulates latent divisions in the polis, the tyrant manipulates the hostility of those living in poverty towards (presumably wealthy) notables (*Pol.* 1310b13-15). On both fronts, then, the tyrant taps extant class tensions in order to secure his own hegemony.¹⁰⁹ Any pretensions to the contrary notwithstanding, the tyrant rules for his own interest, not in the interest of the ruled (*Pol.* 1295a22).

In other institutional settings, the tyrant also seeks to de-associate his subjects in order to undermine the development of modes of trust that might be especially threatening to his rule, specifically, the forms of trust conducive to the tight-knit bonds of those who might plan to engage

¹⁰⁷ Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny*, 74.

¹⁰⁸ For helpful discussions of Aristotle’s insights into the habituating effects of wealth, see Ryan Balot, “Aristotle’s Critique of Phaleas,” *Hermes* 32-44 and Kraut “The Political *Kakon*” 181-185.

¹⁰⁹ Aristotle highlights the productivity of the countervailing forces of the rich and poor in his discussion of the “mixed constitution,” in *Politics* 4.11.

in conspiracy. To that end, the tyrant bans “common messes, clubs, education, or anything of that sort” (*Pol.* 1313b1-3).¹¹⁰ After noting that the tyrant’s concerns regarding these forms of association revolve around their connection with leisure (*scholē*) Aristotle remarks that “everything is done to make all as ignorant of one another as possible, since knowledge tends to create trust in one another” (*Pol.* 1313b5-6). This preoccupation with the trust and thought-habituating effects of associational leisure motivates other attempts at de-association on the part of the tyrant as well. For example, the tyrant immiserates his subjects, both to ensure that they are unable to purchase weapons and armor, and also to see to it “that they’re so occupied with their daily needs that they lack the leisure to conspire” (*Pol.* 1313b22). A warmonger, the tyrant ensures that his subjects “will always be kept lacking in leisure” insofar as they must remain prepared for conflict (*Pol.* 1313b30). Finally, to further repurpose existing relations of suspicion and animosity, the tyrant turns his attention to the private realm. Aristotle notes how the tyrant inverts established hierarchies between husband and wife, and master and slave, in order to add more ears to his roster of informants by empowering women to rule over their husbands and encouraging laxness towards slaves (*Pol.* 1313b34-35). Through slander and surveillance, the tyrant alters the nature of these strained, if not already repressive, relationships so as to breed distrust.

Alluding to the tyrant’s preoccupation with “small thoughts,” scholars highlight the dangers he poses to practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) which Aristotle describes in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as the capacity to make judgments in variable and contingent circumstances regarding what is conducive to “living well” (*NE* 1140a27). The hazards tyranny poses to practical wisdom are worthy of attention. As Boesche point out—and as we have seen—Aristotle shows how, in order to protect

¹¹⁰ See Keyt, “Commentary,” 171-172 for discussion of these institutions.

his power, the tyrant eviscerates opportunities for sustained contact and association and, in so doing, undermines the spaces in which to “ask questions about how a society might attain a good life,” such that his subjects ultimately “[lose] the ability to ask practical questions, [and] to deliberate about the good life and how they might attain it.”¹¹¹

Less explored, however, is the specific register of incapacitation Aristotle foregrounds, namely, concerns regarding the elevation (*mega*) or diminution (*mikra*) of thought (*phronein*) also sometimes translated as high-mindedness, pride, or conviction.¹¹² I want to suggest that Aristotle draws attention to how the tyrant, seeking a monopoly on authority, orients to his subjects like a master over potentially rebellious slaves, seeking to bring them to heel through repression. Aristotle speaks to this dynamic when he observes that the tyrant attempts to do away with people who, in virtue of their willingness to challenge the tyrant by asserting a “rival dignity” and “spirit of freedom,” rob him of his “preeminence and element of mastery (*to despotikōn*)” (*Pol.* 1314a6-10). In turn, the tyrant sees to it that his subjects conduct themselves “slavishly” (*Pol.* 1313b9). As Aristotle notes, “for the tyrant alone claims to merit” being a master (*despotēs*) (*Pol.* 1314a8).¹¹³

Attempts to cement a singular position of authority and to generate acquiescence to that monopoly run through Aristotle’s insights into the tyrant’s attempts to incapacitate his subjects psychologically. Because the tyrant “does not delight” in subjects who, in virtue of their sense of dignity and freedom, challenge the tyrant’s monopolistic orientation to preeminence and mastery, the tyrant wages “war on the equitable,” those who refuse to heed his whims, and refuse to denounce their fellows (*Pol.* 1314a6). By doing away with equitable people the tyrant curtails the

¹¹¹ Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny*, 68-69.

¹¹² Which is not to say that *phronēma* might not entail *phronēsis*, either generally or in this case.

¹¹³ I discuss the relationship between tyranny and Aristotle’s account of mastery (*despotikē*) in chapter four.

appearance in the public realm of those who could challenge the veneer of his preeminence.

Aristotle observes in *Politics* 1 that rulers who occupy office on a rotational basis often make efforts to shore up their authority when they are in power: “when one rules, and the other is ruled, the ruler seeks to establish differences in external appearance, forms of address, and prerogatives” (*Pol.* 1259b7-10). By contrast, the tyrant seeks to make alternatives to his rule altogether invisible.¹¹⁴

The tyrant’s efforts to target equitable people are part of the same incapacitating strategy as his practices of de-association (*Pol.* 1313a35-b3). Insofar as the appearance of trustworthy and high-minded figures might inspire emulative conduct among the tyrant’s other subjects, we might imagine that the diminution of such figures would induce and reinforce small thoughts. By aiming to empty the public of examples of those who would bristle at the tyrant’s dominance and thwart his preeminence, and by providing constant reminders of the dangers of trying to thwart him, the tyrant seeks to ensure that his subjects will be less inclined to resist. As we will see in the next chapter, the tyrant’s preoccupation with the dangers posed by equitable people—which is also to say, the ethical characteristic and practice of equity (*epieikeia*)—is well-warranted.

In his efforts to rule a community with small thoughts, the tyrant aims deeper still, albeit *through* an engagement with the relational dynamics of public space. Aristotle’s account of tyrannical surveillance is worth quoting in full:

Also, residents of the city are made to be always in evidence and pass their time out of doors [of the tyrant’s palace]; in this way their activities would escape notice least of all, and they would become *habituated (ethizein) to having small thoughts through always acting like slaves*. And there are other such features of tyranny, in Persia and among the barbarians, which have the same power. Also, to attempt to let nothing that is done or said by any of those he rules to escape his notice, but to have spies, like the women called ‘inducers’ at Syracuse, and the ‘eavesdroppers’ Hiero sent out whenever there was some meeting or gathering (for *men speak less frankly when they fear (phoboumenoi), such persons, and if they do speak frankly they are less likely to escape notice*). (emphases added, *Pol.* 1313b6-17)

¹¹⁴ See Button, *Political Vices*, chapter two, for a sustained discussion of this dynamic with reference to the political vice of *hubris*.

Aristotle's description of the surveillance tactics of Persian and Syracusan tyrants is of particular interest, because of what he says, what he omits, and what he suggests. We might assume that these tyrants enforce publicity and plant informants in order to gather information and discourage conspiratorial gatherings. As we have seen, the existence of informants would surely stoke a fair amount of distrust.¹¹⁵ However, Aristotle here draws our attention, specifically, to the psychological incapacitation he identifies with small thoughts, suggesting that tyrants so constrain the conditions of communication that their subjects come to develop, *as a habit*, acquiescent and "slavish" forms of self-regard.¹¹⁶

In identifying how the implicitly trust-destroying circumstances of uncertain communication (not knowing whether your interlocutor is a friend or foe, ally or informant) undermine conditions of frank speech, Aristotle simultaneously suggests a link between the cultivation of small thoughts on a dispositional or psychic register and the public and interpersonal conditions that strain against the ability, and/or willingness, to speak frankly. This is to say that the tyrant achieves such incapacitation psychosocially. This habituation depends on the tyrant's use of fear, an emotion that Aristotle often highlights for its formative effects when it serves as a consistent backdrop of action, and which we identified in the last chapter as the defining force in the tyrant's ethical constitution. As Aristotle notes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is "by doing things in terrifying circumstances and by being habituated to feel fear or confidence, [that] some of us become courageous, and others cowards" (*NE* 1102b16-19).

As we've discussed at length in chapter one, Aristotle explains in the *Rhetoric* how people

¹¹⁵ See S. Sara Monoson. *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, 55 for a discussion of this dynamic.

¹¹⁶ Frank, *Democracy of Distinction*, 102, makes a similar point with reference to Aristotle's discussion of the purportedly slavish nature of Asian subjects of tyranny, a topic I explore in chapter four.

“do not fear things that are exceedingly remote,” such as the fact of mortality as such, but rather, immediate threats “so near as about to happen,” or, at least, “signs, of such things,” signs that might include the presence of unjust people in positions of power (*Rhet.* 1282a20-30). Not relying on the mere fact of his presence, the tyrant actively seeks to distribute signs of his power and sources of fear by, as we have seen, spreading informants and cutting down the notable. We might also imagine that the fact that the tyrant rules by decree (*Pol.* 1292a20), and thus makes it impossible for his subjects to know with any certainty what, precisely, is legal or forbidden, would compound their sense of insecurity.¹¹⁷ Fear is, as noted, an eminently *rational* emotion for Aristotle, and not merely because it is grounded in reliable sources of threat.¹¹⁸ Insofar as fear makes the tyrant deliberative (*bouleutikos*) (*Rhet.* 1383a10), so too does the fear wielded by the tyrant aim to ensure that, instead of deliberating about how to resist him, his subjects will deliberate about how best to avoid the threats he plants throughout the *polis*.

How might deliberation regarding the avoidance of tyranny exert such recursive effects? For Aristotle, the self-constituting effects of deliberation and action inhere in what he calls deliberative desire (*bouleutikos orexis*) (*NE* 1113a13). Aristotle adopts this term in order to flag the dynamic and processual interplay between the desire that moves one to act, and the practical considerations that accompany how one fulfills that desire, how, “in deciding something on the basis of having deliberated about it, we long for it in accord with our deliberation” (*NE* 1113a13-15). Desire precedes one’s deliberations insofar as one longs for an end prior to considering the means necessary to attain it. At the same time, Aristotle also suggests that the circumstances of that deliberation will rebound upon that initial desire, thus influencing one’s conduct going forward.

¹¹⁷ My thanks to Richard Bodéüs for bringing this dynamic to my attention.

¹¹⁸ See Robin, *Fear*, for treatments of the relationship between fear and rationality in a number of modern theorists.

The question of whether and to what extent one's deliberations will augment future desires depends ultimately on how persistent are the conditions under which one deliberates, and how strongly they influence that deliberation. With enough time, and under enough pressure, one's character can become slowly corrupted, as if by an "illness" (*NE* 1115a2).

Aristotle's discussion of the circumstantial effects of fear in *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.1 suggests that the tyrant's efforts might achieve just such a long-term effect. Considering the degree to which one might be forgiven or pitied for doing "shameful things" in fearful circumstances, Aristotle addresses tyrannical repression directly: "for example, if a tyrant should order someone to do something shameful while the tyrant has control over his parents and offspring, and if he should do it, they would be saved, and if not, they would be killed – whether this kind of thing is involuntary or voluntary admits of dispute" (*NE* 1110a5-9). While initially identifying such action as "mixed," Aristotle goes on to claim that any "shameful" actions performed would be "more voluntary [than involuntary], for they are choiceworthy at the time they are done and the end of the action accords with what is opportune at the moment" (*NE* 1110a10-12). As a matter of ethical judgment, Aristotle indicates that such conduct should be forgiven or pitied, that the actions of a parent whose child was abducted by a tyrant for the purposes of intimidation falls outside the pale of what is properly considered blameworthy (*Rhet.* 1382b20). As a matter of action's interaction with habit, however, the stakes remain the same. For Aristotle, the "most authoritative" features of action's ability to rebound and affect one's character are "those particular circumstances that constitute the action and the end for the sake of which it is done" (*NE* 1111a18-19). Such is the scope of deliberation. Depending on the routinization of fearful deliberation in his subjects' contexts of communication, the tyrant, in Foucault's phrase, conducts his subjects' conduct, and

thus conditions their character.

Small Souls

Boesche identifies as “Aristotle’s greatest contribution to theories of tyranny” his insight that “tyrants must depoliticize citizens by confining them and isolating them in the private household,” and undermining the spaces for “speculative deliberation about what constitutes the good life, until people cannot even raise questions about alternatives to the status quo.”¹¹⁹ I agree that tyrants aim to erode their subjects’ attachment to any political order other than tyranny. Central to this pursuit, I argue, is the production of small-souledness. Aristotle alludes to this vice only once in *Politics* 5.11, under the umbrella of the tyrant’s attempt to incapacitate thought, and this tyrannical pursuit receives barely a single mention in the literature on 5.11. In my view, however, the tyrant’s strategies of psychosocial incapacitation, from sowing distrust to bringing about small thoughts, converge in his efforts to promote small souls. On my reading, the small-souled person is “the subject” par excellence sought by tyrannical governance, and this subject is constituted by marrying the patterns of distrust and small thoughts sown by the tyrant to the very basis of the tyrant’s defensiveness, namely, his subjects’ desire for a more just constitution.

Where in *Politics* 5.11 Aristotle highlights that “a small-souled person will not conspire against anyone” (*Pol.* 1314a18), in his discussion of small souledness’ corollary virtue in *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.3, he highlights how those with greatness of soul (*megalopsuchia*) are prone to engage in frank speech. Most centrally, however, these habits of soul-estimation represent practiced, bicameral relations to the self and to justice. In other words, they reflect how one’s self-appraisal—how people view themselves and their standing within a community—interacts with and

¹¹⁹ Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny*, 83.

mediates whether one will pursue a particular “external good” he might be understood to merit (NE 1099a31-2).¹²⁰ In his discussion of great-souledness in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle focuses specifically on the sense of merit as it pertains to objects of honor (*timē*) including political office (NE 1123b20). Where the great-souled person “is in the middle of acting as one ought, since he deems himself worthy of what accords with his worth” (NE 1123b14-25), the small-souled person “is deficient in relation to himself” and, as a result, he “deprives himself” of those honors which he “otherwise would desire (*oregein*)” (NE 1125a21-32). On Aristotle’s telling, these differing measures of self-estimation promote—and as we will see, are recursively fortified by—consistent efforts (or failures) to seek one’s due. If, in Aristotle’s account of political justice in *Politics* 3.10-12, he broaches the question of justice regarding the appropriate terms of merit for political power by assessing the claims of virtue, noble birth, or wealth, in *Politics* 5.11 he highlights how the capacity to act in accordance with a given account of merit—as well as the very desire for it—might weaken through the effects of tyrannical governance.

Aristotle’s account of soul estimation in *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.3 suggests how capacities of trust and thought are bound up with one’s relationship to justice. In respect to the mastery-averse comportment of someone with big thoughts, Aristotle notes that one who is great-souled is “incapable of living with a view to another—except a friend—since doing so is slavish” (NE 1124b26-a1). It is precisely this aversion to potential diminution that motivates the commitment of one with a great soul to frank speech and his resistance to flattery and distrustful silence. The great-souled person is “necessarily open in both hate and love, for concealing these things is the

¹²⁰ For a helpful discussion of the virtue of greatness of soul, see Ryan Patrick Hanley, “Aristotle on the Greatness of Soul,” 1-20 and Ronald Polansky and James Stover, “Moral Virtue and Megalopsychia,” 351-359. My use of the masculine pronoun here follows Aristotle’s.

mark of a fearful person, as is caring less for the truth than for people's opinions," and he "speaks and acts in an open manner: he speaks freely because he is disposed to feeling contempt for others, and he is given to truthfulness" (NE 1124b26-29).

While small-souledness is a vice in the sense of a deficiency, Aristotle is clear that those with small souls "are not malefactors" (NE 1125a24-25). Rather, held or opined (*dokein*) to be "timid," if not "foolish," small-souled people conduct themselves under the weight of such opinion. Noting that others' opinions of the timidity of small-souled people—itsself an effect of small-souled people's apparent and enacted "ignorance" of their worth—"seems to make them even worse" (NE 1125a26), Aristotle suggests that the retroactive dynamics of having a small soul lead people to refrain not only from frankly demanding a proportionate measure of external goods, but also from "noble actions and pursuits" (NE 1125a27). In its interaction with the perceptions of the broader community, small-souledness is a mode of self-reinforcing and self-disciplining activity.

Aristotle expands on the repercussions of small-souledness in respect to trust and fear, as well as desire, in *Rhetoric* 2.14, when he discusses how the effects of a lifetime of bitter experience cultivates this vice among the old. Here, as in Aristotle's remarks about the desires of the young in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1, "the deficiency is not related to time," but rather to how one has lived, which is to say, what one has done and undergone (NE 1095a8). Older people have small souls because, having often been deceived and disappointed by others, they are prone to distrust (*apistis*) as they "expect the worse" of everyone around them (*Rhet.* 1389b20). They "follow the advice of Bias," Aristotle claims, in that they "love like people who are going to hate." In addition to their dispositional aversions to friendship and trust, Aristotle notes that they are weak in spirited desire (*thumos*) and "cowardly and afraid of everything before it happens" (*Rhet.* 1389a10; 1388b30).

Describing the temperaments of the old as “opposite” to those of the young, Aristotle observes that “they are chilled while the latter are heated, so that old age paves the way to cowardice because fear is also a kind of a chill.” The chilling effects of fear and the distrustfulness bred by past deceptions compound an enervated state of desire. “They are small-souled,” explains Aristotle, “on account of being humbled (*tapeinoein*) by life, for they desire (*epithumein*) nothing great or out of ordinary, but only the things that sustain life” (*Rhet.* 1389b20-39).

Against this backdrop, we might say that the tyrant ‘ages’ his subjects by humbling them through repression, compressing a lifetime of harsh experience into circumstances of governance that flatten his subjects’ desire. On this point, Aristotle’s use of *epithumia* in the context of small-souledness—a species of desire (*orexis*) often translated as ‘appetite’ (*De Anima* 432b4)—is worthy of note. The language of appetite makes sense insofar as Aristotle most often uses the word *epithumia* with reference to pleasures associated with the body (food, sex, etc.); for small-souled people specifically, those things that “sustain life.” However, as Giles Pearson points out, Aristotle also evinces a broader understanding of *epithumia* that includes not only “pleasures of the soul” (*NE* 11b1728), but also non-bodily goods, experiences, and states, such as money, victory, and honor (*NE* 1148a26).¹²¹ This is consistent with Aristotle’s discussion of the humbling effects of poverty in *Politics* 4.11, where he observes how those who are “excessively needy” with respect to money as well as other external goods “do not know how to rule but only how to be ruled, and then only to be ruled like a slave” (*Pol.* 1295b18-20).¹²² Aristotle’s discussion of those “humbled by life” in the *Rhetoric* suggests that those whose *epithumia* has been humbled by the tyrant experience attenuated desires for objects of honor that the tyrant has appropriated for himself, including political power.

¹²¹ Giles Pearson, *Aristotle on Desire*, 100-104.

¹²² See Kraut, “The Political *Kakon*,” 115, for further discussion of this passage.

Among the tyrant's incapacitating efforts, the diminishment of his subjects' desires as a source of movement and action inhering in the soul (*De Anima* 433b11)—from honor to necessity, from the pleasures of the soul to those of the body—cuts the deepest.

We will be best positioned to appreciate the tyrant's preoccupation with small-souledness, and its relationship to the desire of his subjects, by returning to the conditions of tyrant's defensiveness. To the extent that the tyrant comes to power in virtue of an overweening and unjust graspingness, he may be seen as a standing violation of a just distribution of power. In defending that graspingness through preemptive strikes against the desires of his subjects, the tyrant secures the objects of his desire by attenuating the desire of his subjects for their due, that is to say, the share of power they would otherwise identify as part of a just political order.

As Arlene Saxonhouse suggests, the tyrannized's capacity for anger may very well be at stake in the tyrant's pursuit of small-souledness. "[U]nless 'enraged' by the lavish actions of his tyrant," the tyrant's small-souled subjects, Saxonhouse argues, "will not feel resentment," and will thus be disinclined to challenge rule.¹²³ Indeed, as Aristotle makes clear in *Rhetoric* 2.14, "Their spirit (*thumos*) is sharp but weak, and their desire (*epithumia*) has either left off or lost strength, so they neither feel desire nor act in accordance with it, except for gain" (*Rhet.* 1390a10-20). For small souls, gains refer *not* to honors like political power, figured *qua* reputation or merit, but rather "things that sustain life" (*Rhet.* 1389b20-39). As Aristotle notes in his discussion of anger in *Rhetoric* 2.2, those who are "in the grip of unfulfilled desire (*epithumia*)" are more prone toward anger (*Rhet.* 1379a20). If the tyrant cannot stamp out anger entirely, he blunts its severity by diminishing the desires for power that might further enflame it.

¹²³ Saxonhouse, "Aristotle on the corruption of regimes," 200.

In this way, the deficiency of a small soul overlaps with what Aristotle identifies as the deficiency relevant to anger, which he describes as a form of “inirascibility (*aorgēsia*) or something else.” Aristotle’s description of this nameless (*anōnumos*) vice is worth quoting in full:

For those who do not get angry at the things that they ought are held to be foolish, as are those who do not get angry in the way they ought or when or with whom they ought. For such a person seems to lack perception (*ouk aisthanesthai*) and even not to feel pain (*oude lupeisthai*); since he does not get angry, he seems not apt to defend himself against an attack. Yet to hold back in this way after having been treated excessively (*hyperbolē*) and to overlook such treatment of one’s kin, is held to be servile (*andrapodōdēs*). (NE 1126a4-9)

Besides the obvious lack of anger itself, inirascibility shares other similarities with small-souledness, such as some form of foolishness and slavishness (NE 1123b4; 1125a1). As discussed above, Aristotle states that the depraved tyrant uses fear to promote slavish habits among his subjects, such that they avoid speaking frankly (Pol. 1313b6–17). Considering the tyrant’s outsized possession of power, we might imagine such speech to aim at denouncing his injustice and lack of merit.

In his discussion of indignation in *Rhetoric* 2.9, Aristotle expands on a similarly “slavish” form of acquiescence, here connecting such acquiescence to one’s sense of merit: “In general, those who believe that they themselves are worthy (*axiountes*) of things that others are unworthy of are inclined to be indignant toward those people about those things. Hence slavish, worthless, and unambitious people are not inclined to be indignant, since there is nothing they believe they are worthy of” (*Rhet.* 1387b10). Consider here the connection Aristotle traces between acquiescent forms of character and deficient beliefs in merit (*axia*). Aristotle assigns one’s sense of self-regard a mediating role in tendencies to undergo the passion of indignation. This same dynamic can be found in Aristotle’s discussion of anger in *Rhetoric* 2.2. Observing how forms of dishonor (*atimia*) can constitute hubris, Aristotle explains that people “believe they deserve to be shown great respect by those who are inferior to them,” for example, in the interactions between “a ruler over someone

ruled, and a person who thinks he deserves to rule, (*archein axios oiomenos*) over someone who deserves (*axiein*) to be ruled” (*Rhet.* 1379a). Aversions or tendencies toward anger remain bound explicitly to forms of self-regard that inflect how subjects respond to potential abuses.

It is especially significant, then, that in the above passage on inirascibility Aristotle notes that those who fail to experience anger do not perceive (*ouk aisthanesthai*) and do not feel pain, (*oude lypeisthai*) when faced with mistreatment. Thus far we’ve tracked how the deficiency of small-souledness shades into the deficiency of irascibility. With Aristotle’s gesture toward the aesthetic underpinnings of anger, we approach yet another distinct ethical deficiency, what Aristotle calls insensibility (*anaisthēsia*) literally, a privation or lack of *aisthēsis*. Described initially as a “boorish” characteristic involving the avoidance of “every pleasure” (*NE* 1104a24), insensibility refers to another nameless (*anōnumos*) condition, this time relative to the mean of moderation (*sophrosunē*) and opposite the extreme of licentiousness (*akolasia*) (*NE* 1107b8).

On the whole, insensibility receives scant attention from Aristotle. Focused primarily on the measured enjoyment of bodily pleasures like food, drink, and sex, he identifies the excess of licentiousness as the primary ethical hazard, bordering as it does on beastliness (*NE* 1118b5), and also more easy to slide into, since people mostly err “in one direction, namely towards what is too much” (*NE* 1118b16). Insensibility is both rarer and less ethically worrisome: it “has not obtained a name because [it] does not arise very often” (*NE* 1119a11).

While a relatively benign vice under ordinary circumstances, the characteristic of insensibility flags graver concerns when considered in relation to one’s sense of justice under tyranny. In this case, insensibility consists less of a disregard for pleasure than it does a numbness to pain. Pain, in this case, refers not only to the bodily perceptions highlighted by Aristotle in his

discussion of moderation, but also to the quasi-perceptual impression of injustice as a form of slight or insult (*oligoria*). Importantly, Aristotle observes that injustice, as such, is “least perceptible” when compared to the phenomenal experience of slights (*Rhet.* 1381b10). Following Aristotle’s appreciation for the mediating effects of one’s belief in merit, we might consider slights as the phenomenal impress of injustice, where injustice is matter (*hulē*) and insult its form (*eidos*). Just as a signet impresses upon hot wax not in virtue of its matter, bronze, injustice impresses in virtue of its active expression and impression as a slight, not *qua* injustice, but also as that without which the slight would otherwise be imperceptible (*DA* II.12).¹²⁴

Where the dangers of licentiousness flag the self-reinforcing dynamics of pursuing bodily pleasures, the hazards of political forms of insensibility represent how the steady diminution of desirous attachments to the honor of political power transforms one’s perception of political affairs. Political insensibility thus registers the durational effects of small-souledness. While Aristotle associates small souls with lessened desires for external goods, he is also at pains to flag the role of self-ignorance, foolishness, and reputations for timidity in both motivating acquiescence, as well as reinforcing it (*NE* 1125a20-30). Together, these manifestations of what Aristotle calls the “error” of small-souledness register a modest gap between how those with small souls act, and how they might act otherwise. In other words, they suggest how subjects might not have fully internalized the tyrant’s singular claim to merit, even if they have largely foregone or repressed desires to govern or be governed otherwise. In this way, the sense of justice of small souls has been incapacitated, but not entirely extinguished.

Aristotle’s attention to the possibility of political forms of insensibility opens a view on the

¹²⁴ See Jill Frank, *Poetic Justice*, 186-188 for an account of the co-actualization of perception and percipient that highlights their dynamic interdependence.

dangers of losing one's sense of justice, a condition wherein the injustices of tyrants would no longer register as such. Aristotle's observation regarding the rarity of somatic insensibility reassures that tyrannies only rarely reach such a point, and he is clear that tyrannies, when they come to pass, remain the most short-lived of regimes (*Pol.* 1315b12). And yet, if such a point were to be reached, it would follow in the tyrant's subjects the inverse of the path that leads to his licentiousness. Wherein the "activity (*energeia*) of the desire," when expressed outward, through action and the pursuit of pleasure in the tyrant's affairs "increases the innate desire" in turn, inactivity—the consistent refusal of desire and a life inactive in the pursuit of justice—facilitates vitiation (*NE* 1119b7-10).

The depraved tyrant represents a grave prospect, to be sure. However, like his measured counterpart, he is also not without blind spots. As we saw in the previous chapter, the measured tyrant is less attentive to evaluations of political power that are indexed to merit, *pace* reputation as an object of ambition, or *gain* for greed. The depraved tyrant appears alone and friendless, he has sycophants and flatterers, but, as Aristotle acknowledges, friends never flatter (*Pol.* 1314a4). He appears to assume that repression will lead his subjects to a condition of fear that, in this respect at least, resembles his own in its isolation: the difference being, of course, that the tyrant has power, and his subjects do not. However, as Aristotle notes earlier in *Politics* 5, fear does not always isolate, it can also bring even "the worst enemies" together in common (*Pol.* 1304b24). While attentive to the institutional sites that generate collectivities, "common messes, clubs, education, or anything of that sort" (*Pol.* 1313b1-3), the depraved tyrant does not anticipate how his repression might provoke forms of self-organization among his subjects. With enough time, and enough work, collectivities grow, and fear can thus give way to the confidence and courage needed to act (*Rhet.*

1383b). I turn in the next chapter to this dynamic, where I consider how those subject to tyrannical repression might generate power in the face of disempowerment and answer the tyrant's fear with equity and comradeship.

Conclusion

If Aristotle anticipates Foucault regarding the subject-formative effects of domination, there nevertheless remain significant differences between Aristotle and Foucault's broader views on power. Aristotle could not, of course, anticipate the emergence of "the disciplines" Foucault locates at the heart of modernity, nor the other entanglements of power, knowledge, and truth in respect to which Foucault remains one of our most important resources. What I have sought to show, however, is that Aristotle keys in on comparable relations of power when he attends to the tyrant's concerns regarding association and leisure, and the fear-inducing, habituating effects of actual and presumed surveillance. Within the span of several pages of *Politics* 5, Aristotle offers an account of tyrannical repression *qua* governance, a purportedly modern mode of domination, that depends as much on its indirect contextually-constraining effects on speech and movement as on its use of violence, as much on power's veiled or unverifiable use as on its overt display.

One of the most pressing differences between these two theorists of power for our purposes is how, for Foucault, sites of governance are polymorphous and diffuse—from the hospital, to the school, to the prison, we remain thoroughly and irrevocably embedded within relations of power—whereas, for Aristotle, tyrannical governance appears to be tied to the singular figure of the tyrant. This appearance may be somewhat deceiving, however, for, as we have seen, the tyrant similarly populates the polis with sites of habituation. On my reading, the stakes of tyrannical governance lie less in the singularity of the figure of the tyrant than in the singularity of tyranny's animating,

defensive logic of domination: in Aristotle's account, tyranny's *telos*—its immediate, short term and long term end—is, as elaborated across this dissertation, self-preservation, and that end drives the tyrant's efforts to structure the conduct of the tyrannized.

Foucault is sometimes criticized for jettisoning normative criteria for evaluating the relative justice or injustice of specific power relations, thus leaving citizens ill-equipped to differentiate among various sites of governance.¹²⁵ In Aristotle's view, it is precisely the tyrant's subjects' capacities to respond differentially to the tyrant's injustice—by counterposing the disproportionate share of power he has accumulated to the share of power they might otherwise desire—that tyrannical modes of governance aim to extirpate. In highlighting smallness of soul rather than bodily docility, Aristotle positions tyrannical governance in *media res*, showing how the tyrant's efforts to monopolize and secure his authority occupy a social and political terrain already and/or potentially populated by contending claims for power. In this way, Aristotle's treatment of tyranny issues a timely reminder of the dangers of a particular kind of ethico-political sight lowering, one that dominates by cultivating, through force and deceit, a diminished desire for a share of power. Instead of providing an external perspective from which to condemn tyranny, Aristotle highlights how sources of potential condemnation, as well as desires for being governed otherwise, are lodged at the heart of the tyrant's own stratagems of domination.

¹²⁵ For examples, see Michael Walzer, "The Politics of Michel Foucault," Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," and Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, chapters 9-10.

Chapter Three

On Comradeship

In 514 BCE two elite Athenian lovers, Aristogeiton and Harmodius, went down to the Panathenaic Festival to kill a tyrant. The assassins hoped that after seeing them “make the first move,” others in the crowd—even those “not privy to the plot”—would follow suit and “participate in their own liberation.” But that hope came to naught. The assassins met their end at the hands of the tyrant’s guards (Thucydides, *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians* 6.56.2-3). Despite their failure, the would-be tyrannicides became cherished ideological exempla. Symbolically and sculpturally recast as “civic heroes” and “founders” of the democracy, Aristogeiton and Harmodius came to serve myriad roles for generations of democratic citizens: as “touchstones” of civic beneficence, as representations of public spiritedness, and as reminders of the incompatibility of political equality with tyranny.¹²⁶

In their recent works on anti-tyranny legislation and authoritarian oligarchy in ancient Greece, David Teegarden and Matthew Simonton draw yet another lesson from the would-be tyrannicides. Building on Timur Kuran and Michael Suk-Young Chwe’s work on collective action dilemmas, Teegarden and Simonton argue that publicly visible “first strikes”—like the attempt by Aristogeiton and Harmodius—harbor the potential to produce a “knowledge cascade” among those who, but for their more courageous comrades, would remain ignorant of their shared preferences and thus disinclined to act. Central to ancient Greek views of anti-tyrannical resistance, they argue, are the conditions that permit the public dispersal and mutual acknowledgment of shared beliefs

¹²⁶ James McGlew, *Tyranny and Political Culture*, 153, Vincent Azoulay, *A Tale of Two Statues*, 122, Monoson, *Plato’s Democratic Entanglements*, 39, and Kurt Raaflaub, “Stick and Glue: The Function of Tyranny in Athenian Democracy,” 64.

among a wide range of actors, and how such “common knowledge” brings otherwise isolated individuals together in a revolutionary “bandwagon.”¹²⁷

Simonton and Teegarden are not the first to discern the work of such bandwagons in Athenian history. Both follow the work of Josiah Ober, whose pathbreaking essays on the Athenian revolution of 508/7 BCE describe how a seemingly “spontaneous riot” deposed the Spartan-backed ruler, Isagoras, and set the stage for the rise of the democracy.¹²⁸ Also drawing from Kuran, Ober, however, shines light on the revolutionary agency of the non-elite “mass” over the bravery of elites like Aristogeiton and Harmodius.¹²⁹ It was at this “moment,” Ober argues, that “the demos stepped onto the historical stage as a collective agent, a historical actor in its own right and under its own name.”¹³⁰ According to Ober, the *dēmos*’ “episteme-shattering-and-creating” emergence exemplifies a political dynamic often occluded by historiographic investments in the *longue durée* of historical change, namely, how “discrete events” and “moments of rupture” can provide long-lasting and “fundamental changes in both ideologies and institutions.”¹³¹

In scrutinizing these moments in classical Athens, Ober, Simonton, and Teegarden join company with a range of contemporary democratic theorists interested in the episodic and public-facing dimensions of dissent. According to Jacques Rancière, where dominant social orders police a “partition of the perceptible” that renders certain groups illegible, citizens nevertheless retain the ability to enact the equality those orders deny.¹³² Highlighting the ephemerality of such

¹²⁷ Matthew Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy: A Political History* 65, 156-158, 230, 246-247 and David Teegarden, *Death to Tyrants!: Ancient Greek Democracy and the Struggle Against Tyranny*, 32-43. See Chwe, *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge* and Kuran, *Private Truth, Public Lies*.

¹²⁸ Ober, *The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory*, 46 and “I Besieged that Man’: Democracy’s Revolutionary Start.”

¹²⁹ Ober “I Besieged that Man,” 103n.18.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹³¹ Ober, *The Athenian Revolution*, 89 and 32.

¹³² *Dis-Agreement*, 29.

enactments, Rancière maintains that a “political demonstration is... always of the moment,” and thus “always on the shore of its own disappearance.”¹³³ Judith Butler similarly highlights the “embodied performance” of dissent in “the visual field,” and how “unpredictable and transitory gathering[s]” demand attention to broader conditions of livability and interdependence.¹³⁴

Describing the “fugitive” experience of democratic action as “episodic” and “rare,” Sheldon Wolin draws attention to “a simple fact: that ordinary individuals are capable of creating new cultural patterns of commonality at any moment.”¹³⁵

Theorists of democratic disruption and collective action offer invaluable insights for citizens and scholars. They illuminate the exclusions that consolidate identitarian boundaries as well as how these boundaries are disrupted. They weaken the grip of millennia-long polemics against ‘the mob’ and enliven our sense of political possibility. In my view, however, their common focus on the visuality and novelty of demotic power unduly compresses the temporality of dissent, thus squeezing out the slower, less-perceptible work that often precedes and conditions apparently self-contained moments of rupture. They obscure, in short, what James Scott calls “infrapolitics,” which names forms of political action on the part of collectivities that, “like infrared rays,” may be less visible to “a social science attuned to the relatively open politics of liberal democracies and to loud, headline-grabbing protests,” but which nevertheless furnish “the cultural and structural underpinning of the more visible political action on which our attention has generally been focused.”¹³⁶

To draw out the infrapolitical dimensions of collective action, this chapter turns to

¹³³*Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, 39.

¹³⁴*Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 18-20.

¹³⁵“Norm and Form”, 100; “Fugitive Democracy”, 97-98.

¹³⁶ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 183-184.

Aristotle's treatments of the attempted tyrannicide of 514 BCE and the revolution of 508/7 BCE and returns once more his account of tyrannical repression in *Politics* 5. I argue that Aristotle offers insight into a scale and tempo of dissent underexplored by theorists of democratic disruption and revolutionary bandwagons. Aristotle alters the scale of anti-tyrannical dissent by privileging not heroic first movers but the conduct and power of solidaristic groups. He adjusts its tempo by treating anti-tyrannical resistance as emerging over time, specifically, in the cultivation within solidaristic groups of habits of conviction, desire, and trust. Aristotle thus brings into focus features of collective action that are irreducible to social epistemology and lurk behind moments of upheaval. Providing a new understanding of "the primal scene of democracy,"¹³⁷ I demonstrate that the scene staged by the tyrannicides and the Athenian revolution depends less on the heroism of elites or democratic masses than on the presence or absence of comradeship.¹³⁸ Jodi Dean has recently argued that, for all of the history of political thought's focus on the citizen, there is "no account of the comrade," one who, in partisanship, identifies with those "on the same side" of political struggle and eschews the state as their defining "frame of reference."¹³⁹ I maintain that Aristotle provides just such an account.

When it comes to dissent Aristotle might appear to be a strange interlocutor. Aristotle is widely considered to possess a "conservative cast of mind" that privileges political stability and tradition over revolutionary change,¹⁴⁰ and to reject political partisanship as a form of

¹³⁷ Cartledge, *Democracy: A Life*, 6.

¹³⁸ Drawing from different sources, other scholars mindful of the solidaristic dynamics of interest in this chapter include Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth*, chapter 5, Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted*, chapter 6, and Sally Scholz, *Political Solidarity*. While sometimes appearing to reduce democratic politics to moments of disruption, Wolin, *The Presence of the Past*, chapter 5 also draws out the kind of sustained and solidaristic forms of political work this chapter seeks to recover.

¹³⁹ *Comrade: An Essay on Political Belonging*, 61, 26, 72.

¹⁴⁰ Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, 354, Bodéüs, *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle's Ethics*, 124; cf. Lockwood, "Politics II: Political Critique, Political Theorizing, Political Innovation," 73.

“discriminatory elitism.”¹⁴¹ Highlighting virtues like equity (*epieikeia*) that can mitigate hostilities among those who rule and are ruled in turn, Aristotle is said to prefer forms of civic friendship that seek to “remedy” the dangers of factional conflict, and to attend to the modest contestation characteristic of “ordinary political life.”¹⁴² Scholars argue that Aristotle is so opposed to the destabilizing effects of dissent that he would prefer to see tyrants moderate and maintain their power than see their subjects overthrow them.¹⁴³ These scholars give good textual reasons to take Aristotle to be opposed to the “revolutionary term of address, ‘comrade.’”¹⁴⁴

There are good historical reasons as well. The antique designation of comrade (*hetairos*) is most commonly (though not exclusively) associated with the political clubs (*hetaireiai*) of democratic Athens, which served primarily as fraternity-like associations—populated by wealthy aristocrats who joined together for dinners and drinking parties—and patronage systems for prominent elites and their closest associates.¹⁴⁵ Most famous for their anti-democratic revolutionary pursuits, these clubs provided conspiratorial enclaves for Athenian elites and helped usurp the rule of the *dēmos* to found two oligarchies: the Four Hundred in 411 BCE (*War* 8.48.3-4); and the Thirty in 404/3 BCE (*Ath. Pol.* 34.3). Thucydides reports that the Four Hundred undermined trust, confidence, and outlets for political action among Athenian citizens (*War* 8.66). Indeed, Thucydides anticipated what we identified in the last chapter as the “three heads” of tyranny: the pursuit of small thoughts (*mikra phronein*) distrust (*diapistein*) and a powerlessness

¹⁴¹ Skultety, “Aristotle’s Theory of Partisanship.”

¹⁴² Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship Since Brown V. Board of Education*, 129-133, Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction: Aristotle and the Work of Politics*, 148, Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal: Community and Conflict in Aristotelian Political Thought*, 117.

¹⁴³ de Lara, “Aristotle’s Politics: Ethical Politics or Political Realism?,” 29-30, Destrée, “Aristotle on improving imperfect cities,” 218-223.

¹⁴⁴ Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal: Community and Conflict in Aristotelian Political Thought*, 123.

¹⁴⁵ Calhoun, “Athenian Clubs in Politics and Litigation,” Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens*, 25-32.

(*adunamia*) for deeds (*pragmata*) among the ruled (*Pol.* 1314a10-30).

Given comradeship's historical proclivity for engendering tyranny, it is especially puzzling that, as we saw last chapter, Aristotle also identifies political clubs as an exemplary associational form for those who aim to *upend* tyrannical regimes (*Pol.* 1313b1). Addressing this puzzle, I draw insights from across Aristotle's corpus that speak to how club-like associations engender habits of trust and thought feared by tyrants, as well as how comrades can avoid becoming tyrants themselves. The account of comradeship this chapter excavates from Aristotle is thus 'anti-tyrannical' in two senses: it explains the centrality of comradeship 1) to the pursuit of revolution under conditions of tyrannical repression, and 2) to minimizing the use of repression in that struggle and its aftermath.

In developing this account of anti-tyrannical comradeship I marshal no evidence that Aristotle advocated for revolutionary dissent. On this front, I align with scholars, referenced above, who take Aristotle to worry about faction-ridden polities and to see equity as mitigating political hostilities. While making no claims about Aristotle's argumentative intent, I show how otherwise countervailing insights in Aristotle's corpus, when brought together, speak to the dilemma of anti-tyrannical resistance. I do so by taking as my point of departure Aristotle's attention to the dangers posed to tyranny by club-like associations, and drawing a line through the history of antique comradeship to Aristotle's discussion of comradely (*hetairikos*) friendships in *Nicomachean* and *Eudemian Ethics* before returning to Athenian revolutionary history in *Ath. Pol.* My goal is to elucidate the embedded connections between historical practices of ancient Greek comrades and the structural features of solidary associations that Aristotle identifies as granting them anti-tyrannical potential in *Politics* 5.11. The tyrant's fears of his subjects' conviction (*phronēma*), trust

(*pistis*), and ability to rely on (*epitrepein*) one another, along with his fears of equitable people (*epieikeis*) and frank speech (*parrhēsia*), and his promotion of denunciation (*katagoreuein*), bring together my discussions of passages spanning Aristotle's political, ethical, and historical writings. Travelling a path for which Aristotle provides markings but did not himself explicitly explore, this chapter considers when and how comradeship, if sometimes a vice, becomes a virtue.

I begin, in section one, by providing a brief review of the circumstances of tyrannical repression described in *Politics* 5.11 which, I argue, target the tyrant's subjects who might seek to pursue revolution for the sake of a just share of power. As discussed in the last chapter, the tyrant's efforts to consolidate political power turn on extirpating conditions of trust and political desire. In this discussion I pay special attention to the specific associational conditions feared by the tyrant—especially that of political clubs—and the distinctively solidaristic habits of trust they represent. Section two explores the social and political history of comradeship in ancient Greece in order to assess the dangers clubs pose to tyranny as well as how, in Athens, they often turned to tyranny themselves. Section three gathers Aristotle's scattered discussions of comradely friendships, illuminates the interpersonal habits and virtues of such friends, and brings these to bear on anti-tyrannical struggles of power. Section four revisits the *Ath. Pol.*'s accounts of the failed tyrannicides of 514 BCE and the revolution of 508/7 BCE with which this chapter opened to argue that the former stages the failures of anti-tyrannical resistance in the absence of comradeship, and that the latter showcases comradeship's success. Comradeship, I conclude, is an important virtue under non-ideal circumstances, when political actors must rely on one another as resources of solidarity and refuges from oppression.

Tyrannical Repression and Solidary Association

As discussed in the last chapter, in *Politics* 5.11 Aristotle describes the tyrant's means of repression in terms of the "three heads" of tyranny. There Aristotle unpacks how the tyrant uses slander and surveillance in order to spread conditions of distrust and stamp out associations in which trust and conviction may be fostered, ultimately aiming to inculcate small-souledness (*mikropsuchia*) among his subjects (*Pol.* 1314a15-20), an ethical characteristic grounded in citizens' acceptance of a deficient share of "external goods," such as political power, which they might otherwise desire (*oregein*) and take themselves to merit (*axia*) (*NE* 1123b15-20, 1125a20-30). By cultivating small souls, the tyrant pursues a strategy of preventative repression that strikes at the psychological and desiderative capacities of would-be dissidents. According to Aristotle, citizens' argumentative "claims" regarding merit reflect considered beliefs that both mediate passional responses to injustice and motivate action on those beliefs' behalf (*Rhet.* 1379a1-20, 1387b10-20; *Pol.* 1312b25-35; Schofield 1996). Indeed, as indicated by Aristotle's insistence that the tyrant seeks to undermine *phronēma*— 'thought,' as well as 'high-mindedness,' 'pride,' or 'conviction'— (*Pol.* 1313a35-b5), the tyrant seeks to achieve more than promoting his subjects' "ignorance of one another's preferences," for such "preference falsification" leaves the beliefs of the tyrannized psychologically intact, if misrepresented or veiled in public.¹⁴⁶ The tyrant aims rather to transform those preferences entirely.¹⁴⁷ By influencing the deliberations of his subjects, the tyrant seeks to vitiate the substantive ends motivating dissent, namely, their beliefs in and desires for a just share.¹⁴⁸

Aristotle's attention to the disempowering effects of small-souledness shines a light on the

¹⁴⁶ Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy*, 65 and Kuran, *Private Truth, Public Lies*, 17.

¹⁴⁷ Kura, *Private Truths, Public Lies: The Social Consequences of Preference Falsification*, 16 identifies this transformative possibility as well.

¹⁴⁸ For further discussion of the formative effects of the tyrant's repression see Jochim (2020).

terrain of struggle between tyrant and tyrannized. The Aristotelian tyrant is infamous for his tendency to acquire and defend what his subjects take to be a disproportionate and unjust share of material and honorific goods, like political power (*NE* 1134a35-b5). The tyrant thus transgresses citizens' sense of merit as subjects of distributive justice (*NE* 5.3).¹⁴⁹ The tyrant's inculcation of small-souledness thus thwarts in advance his subjects' attempts at revolutionary mobilization, through which they would seek to transform the distribution of power that defines their constitution.¹⁵⁰ As Aristotle explains earlier, in *Politics* 5.10, citizens who object to such overreach often "pursue equality (*zētein isos*)" through revolution in order to restore or claim a just distribution of power (*Pol.* 1301b25-30). In *Politics* 5.11 Aristotle identifies those who are equitable (*epieikeis*) as particularly dangerous to the tyrant in this regard. They prove dangerous

not merely because they claim not to merit (*mē axioun*) being ruled in the fashion of a master but also because they are trustworthy, both among themselves and with respect to others, and will not denounce (*katagoreuein*) one another or others. (*Pol.* 1314a20-25)

As we saw in chapter two, the characteristics of equitable people surface as a significant hazard for the tyrant's efforts to monopolize power. I expand on those dangers and return to the relationship between equity and trustworthiness below. My points, for now, are that the tyrant's attention is squarely fixed on his subjects' sense of their political worth, and on how their self-estimation both reflects their considered beliefs about justice and motivates their hostility to the tyrant's mastery.

Of central importance to the tyrant's repressive efforts is fear (*phobos*), which he spreads throughout the *polis* in order to prevent his subjects from engaging in frank speech (*parrhēsia*) and to promote their social and political isolation (*Pol.* 1313b5–20). At the same time as the tyrant

¹⁴⁹ Balot, *Greed and Injustice in Classical Athens*, chapter 2 provides a sustained treatment of the Aristotelian tyrant's greed along these lines.

¹⁵⁰ See Saxonhouse "Aristotle on the Corruption of Regimes: Resentment and Justice" for a discussion of Aristotle's capacious understanding of revolutionary change (*metabolē*), which includes, but is not reducible to outright conflict.

intimidates his subjects, however, he also generates a “fundamental moral hazard” for his own security.¹⁵¹ As Aristotle notes in *Politics* 5.5, a “common fear (*koinos phobos*) can bring together even the worst enemies” (*Pol.* 1304b23-24). In spite of the tyrant’s fearful repression, or, perhaps, because of it, his subjects might move to form associations that threaten his rule.

Such associations pose a significant threat to the tyrant. As Aristotle notes, the tyrant outlaws “clubs, common messes, education, or anything of that sort, instead guarding against (*phulattein*) anything that generates two things, conviction and trust” (*Pol.* 1313b1-4). What do these associations have in common? Most notably, they all offer opportunities for sustained contact and familiarization, precisely the features of social life that the tyrant most aims to eviscerate by disallowing leisure (*scholē*) and informal gatherings (*sullogoi*) (*Pol.* 1313b3-4). The tyrant’s concern with leisure may be evidence of an anti-aristocratic orientation on his part, insofar as leisure, as well as clubs, were associated with elites.¹⁵² Importantly however, common messes were nominally democratic institutions (*Pol.* 1271a30-35), and *sullogoi* often refers specifically to gatherings of democratic citizens (*War* 2.22.1; 3.27.3).¹⁵³ What these myriad groupings—of different social strata—share is their capacity to generate habits of trust and conviction. Seeking to prevent people from relying on (*epitrepein*) one another, the tyrant does everything “to make all as ignorant of one another as possible, since familiarity tends to create trust (*pistis*) of one another” (*Pol.* 1313b5-7).

Aristotle elsewhere discusses common messes and education as institutions that (correctly instituted) help to preserve existing constitutions (*Pol.* 1271a25-40, 1264a5-10, 1337a10-20). While

¹⁵¹ Milan Svoblik, *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*, 124.

¹⁵² Ivan Jordović, “Aristotle on Extreme Democracy and Extreme Tyranny”, 47-51

¹⁵³ As discussed extensively by Schwarz, “Revisiting the Meaning of *Sullogos* at Thucydides 2.22.”

attentive in *Politics* 5.11 to their potential to disrupt tyranny, Aristotle nowhere elaborates on this possibility. Aristotle does not expand on this possibility for clubs either. However, unlike common messes and education, clubs are distinct in belonging to a rich revolutionary history. I turn next to the history of political clubs in Athens in order to clarify the structural dynamics that grant clubs—and club-like associations generally—their anti-tyrannical potential.

Comradeship in Antiquity

The term *hetairos*, comrade, appears first in Homer as a marker of solidarity among non-elite “masses and crowds,” in which the call of martial comradeship entailed that “each man counts and is taken seriously” in his responsibility for “the success of the whole group.”¹⁵⁴ As Oswyn Murray (2018) has shown, the *hetaireia*, political club, “begins to take on its classical political form” in the context of Archaic symposia, at which elite, all-male social groups sang drinking songs (*skolia*) and forged their own distinctive norms of in-group solidarity.¹⁵⁵ Frank speech (*parrhēsia*) was a central component of elite conviviality at symposia.¹⁵⁶ So too were interpersonal expectations of egalitarian treatment, which were enforced in order to prevent single individuals from monopolizing the conversation and “destroying sympotic equality.”¹⁵⁷ All expected and were given their opportunity to speak and were held accountable for their failures to meet this expectation.

The poetry of Theognis—a mainstay of sympotic recitations from the Archaic period onward—attests to the character of these elite friendships, as well as to the pressures they experienced during this time of aristocratic upheaval. On Theognis’ telling it was the trust (*pistis*)

¹⁵⁴ Raaflaub and Wallace, “People’s Power,” 25-26.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁵⁶ Marek Węcowski, *The Rise of the Greek Aristocratic Banquet*, 72.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 66-71.

among *hetairoi* that was their perhaps most cherished, and also endangered, value.¹⁵⁸ Theognis refers repeatedly to the disappearing trustworthy comrade (*Theognidea* 415-418, 1243-4), and the rarity of those who remain trustworthy in times of perplexity (*Theog.* 645-646), in matters of seriousness (*Theog.* 115-116, 641-644), misfortune and poverty (*Theog.* 857-860, 903-930), and in myriad other adverse circumstances. Faced with the potential “disintegration” of a “social universe once integrated by blood, affinal, and close personal ties,” Theognis appeals to time as the only sure measure of character and rues instances of misplaced judgment (*Theog.* 963-970).¹⁵⁹ “A *hetairos* is not good,” Theognis insists, “if he speaks smoothly with his tongue but thinks otherwise in his mind (*phronis*)” (*Theog.* 93-100). Theognis advocates for his own trustworthiness as well-founded, for he had been sufficiently tested (*paratribein*) and could thus be counted on to be steadfast (*Theog.* 415-418, 1104a-1106). As we can see, in reflecting on the erosion of elite friendships Theognis anticipates the solidaristic features feared by the tyrant in *Politics* 5.11, such as the commonality in mind and persistence in trust that inheres in solidaristic groups.

If the symposium served as a space of elite comity, it also represented a “form of political organization” hostile to the “emergent city-state [and] designed to perpetuate aristocratic control of the state against the *dēmos*.”¹⁶⁰ Insofar as these preoccupations with trust, time, and familiarity emerged in tandem with the eclipse of aristocracy and the emerging dominance of the *dēmos*, they also speak to a structural problem central to *Politics* 5.11: how political actors avoiding domination require a “social site... of comparative safety” within which to foster a “dissident subculture.”¹⁶¹ Indeed, while it might appear strange to liken victims of tyrannical oppression to aristocratic

¹⁵⁸ Donlan, “*Pistos, Philos, Hetairos*,” 226.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁶⁰ Murray, *The Symposium: Drinking Greek Style: Essays on Greek Pleasure*, 18-23.

¹⁶¹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 114.

reactionaries, Mirko Cavenaro (2017) homes in on why Aristotle might reach for the club as an exemplary safe haven for anti-tyrannists. Within classical Athens, “a society in which the [non-elite] masses had considerable control over the formal institutions of the state, it was elite culture rather than popular culture that tended to articulate itself in unofficial, ‘unauthorized’ forms.”¹⁶² As Socrates quips in Plato’s *Republic*, institutions like the club allow people to “escape detection” in private (365d), even as they pay lip service to the egalitarian ideology of the empowered *dēmos* in public.¹⁶³ This capacity to maneuver outside of the eyes of state power is of central importance in *Politics* 5.11, where Aristotle notes how the tyrant spreads informants and attempts to make his subjects remain “in evidence and pass their time out of doors,” such that they “escape notice least of all” (*Pol.* 1313b5-10).

Building on the solidarism of earlier symposia, the political clubs of Athens allowed citizens to conspire behind closed doors, to circumvent the domination of the *dēmos*, and to bend the system to self-serving ends. Among other things, clubs used bribery, intimidation, and jury packing in their efforts to back or oppose policies and other elites.¹⁶⁴ Sometimes members of clubs would preemptively pursue countersuits against fellow citizens planning a future prosecution. In a number of instances where prominent club members were brought to court, their comrades would provide testimony (likely often perjurious) or appear as advocates.¹⁶⁵ Referring to the dynamic interplay of extralegal associations and the day-to-day workings of the Athenian public sphere, Alex Gottesman describes Athenian clubs as an example of “politics in the street.”¹⁶⁶ In this way the

¹⁶² Cavenaro, “The Popular Culture of the Athenian Institutions: ‘Authorized’ Popular Culture and ‘Unauthorized’ Elite Culture in Classical Athens,” 63.

¹⁶³ Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*.

¹⁶⁴ Calhoun, “Athenian Clubs in Politics and Litigation”, 58-65.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 64-89.

¹⁶⁶ Gottesman, *Politics and the Street in Democratic Athens*, 9-11.

“social” or “expressive” activities of these private clubs were inextricable from their explicitly “political” or “instrumental” pursuits.¹⁶⁷ Insofar as members of clubs participated in institutions like the courts, their efficacy depended on a foundation of trust developed over time, behind doors, and without the authorization of the state. Such habits of trust, including the ability to hold steady under pressure and to refuse to denounce one’s fellows, are precisely the ones Aristotle identifies as significant threats to tyranny in *Politics* 5.11.

As noted, scholars often locate the origin of clubs in a “reactionary” response to the eclipse of the archaic aristocracy, when they organized for “definite political purposes” among those “element[s] which the new political order did not satisfy.”¹⁶⁸ As “ideological safe havens,” clubs provided spaces within which elites could foster their antipathy toward the prevailing political order as well as the trust necessary to put that hostility into action.¹⁶⁹ During the lead-up to the oligarchic revolution of 411 BCE, for example, the clubs promoted hostility to the popular constitution and served as a refuge for those who understood themselves to be “repudiated by democratic politics.”¹⁷⁰ The clubs thus provided opportunities for spirited ideological opposition. In this way, too, they fostered habits of mind which Aristotle marks as feared by the tyrant. As loci of trust, conviction, and oppositional revolutionary efficacy, the clubs thus provide resources for conceptualizing the characteristics of solidarity needed to depose a tyrant.

Clubs also housed decisively tyrannical proclivities. As recounted by Thucydides and Xenophon respectively, the oligarchic comrades of 411 and 404/3 BCE turned to repression as an

¹⁶⁷ Jones, *Associations of Classical Athens*, 227, Calhoun, “Athenian Clubs in Politics and Litigation,” 26, Gottesman, *Politics and the Street in Democratic Athens*, 49.

¹⁶⁸ Jones, *Associations of Classical Athens*, 294, Calhoun “Athenian Clubs in Politics and Litigation,” 10.

¹⁶⁹ Jones, *Associations of Classical Athens*, 295.

¹⁷⁰ Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens*, 197.

answer to the democratic attachments of the *dēmos*. For Thucydides, the repression of the Four Hundred stemmed from their knowledge that it would be “no easy matter” to rule citizens accustomed to freedom and lacking experience in subjection (*History* 8.68.4). Describing overtures made by Athenian oligarchs to the Spartan King Agis, Thucydides makes explicit his trepidation that Athenian citizens “would not so quickly surrender their ancient liberties,” and would thus need to be “cowed into submission,” regardless of their ruling oligarchs’ efforts to broker a truce (*War* 8.71.1). In Xenophon’s account of the Thirty, he recounts the defense of their reign of terror by Kritias, the hubristic ringleader, who maintained that “since the people have been nurtured in freedom for the longest time,” there’s no avoiding the fact that “a large number of citizens are and will remain hostile” to an oligarchy (*Hellenika* 2.3.24). Without “bring[ing] the state under the tyranny of a few men,” Kritias assumed that an oligarchy would be impossible for Athenians to bear (*Hell.* 2.3.48).

Aristotle was well aware of the tyrannical history of oligarchic coups in Athens. In an unmistakable foreshadowing of the tyrant’s use of “deceit (*apatē*) and force (*bia*)” against those not wishing (*mē boulomenon*) to be so ruled (*Pol.* 1313a10-15), Aristotle describes in *Politics* 5.4 how the oligarchic revolution of the Four Hundred relied on force (*bia*) and deceit (*apatē*) in imposing its rule over unwilling persons (*Pol.* 1304b8-20). Strikingly, the political context that Aristotle claims motivates the tyrant’s repression itself echoes Thucydides’ and Xenophon’s treatments of the Four Hundred and Thirty. According to Aristotle, the tyrant’s turn to repression is motivated by his knowledge that, under democratic conditions where no one person merits (*axioma*) a singular claim to power, force alone can secure his rule (*Pol.* 1313a8-10). Thucydides and Xenophon highlight precisely this consideration. Force emerges for these authors as a tyrannical response to

countervailing desires for a more just political order, namely, one that reflects citizens' beliefs regarding the proper distribution of power.

Even, then, as comrades might draw lessons from the solidaristic practices that granted oligarchs their dissident potential, anti-tyrannists would do well to avoid such a tyrannical reliance on repression, predicated, as it was, on the ideological hostility of the Athenian *dēmos* to oligarchic rule. It is not for nothing that Aristotle identifies tyrannies and oligarchies as among the most "short lived" of regimes (*Pol.* 1315b10-15). The sense of precarity underpinning the tyrant's rule and motivating his repression is on full display on the conduct of the Four Hundred and the Thirty. To avoid tyrannical violence, revolutionaries need to court, and perhaps expand, the desires of others instead of vitiating them.

Aristotle suggests in *Politics* 5.4 that such avoidance is possible. Instead of pursuing revolution tyrannically, over those who are unwilling, Aristotle indicates that revolutionaries can sometimes rely on persuasion, so that they rule over or alongside willing persons. Aristotle does not elaborate on what revolutionary persuasion entails, but he is clear that if revolutionaries are to secure the conditions of voluntary rule they must "both persuade at the beginning and maintain the persuasion later on" (*Pol.* 1304b10-20). Thus, revolutionaries, if they are to avoid tyranny, need sustained time not only to bolster their in-group relations, but also to establish requisite trust with non-solidary citizens. If persuasive speech would play a role in such efforts, so, too, would the qualities of character displayed by comrades during their protracted anti-tyrannical struggle. As Aristotle makes clear, echoing Theognis, central to garnering the trust of others is to show yourself to be trustworthy (*Rhet.* 1377b20-30). This is evidenced in your actions as well as your words (*Rhet.* 1366a1-20). It is to the actions among comrades to which I turn next, drawing on remarks

Aristotle makes regarding *hetairoi* across his writings on friendship.

The Politics of Comradeship

Aristotle discusses the form of friendship (*philia*) characteristic of *hetairoi* at several points in *Nicomachean Ethics* 8-9 and *Eudemian Ethics* 7. As we will see in the following, the features Aristotle associates with comradely friendships echo the aforementioned characteristics of sympotic comrades, such as their interpersonal egalitarianism, trust, and frankness. Aristotle also associates comradeship with equity, a central object of the tyrant's fear in *Politics* 5.11. As scholars rightfully note, comradeship for Aristotle appears to imply a degree of civic cohesion that Aristotle elsewhere identifies as far from "appropriate to all."¹⁷¹ "The intimacy of comrades," argues Bernard Yack "simply cannot be extended to a large number of individuals."¹⁷² Taken *in situ*, these passages seem of little political relevance: they evince bonds few citizens can share and appear largely cleansed of the "conflicts of desire" that ordinarily characterize political life.¹⁷³ However, as I will show, when interpreted with a view to the demands of anti-tyrannical struggle these passages offer guidance for elaborating the comrades' in-group relations—how they might practice equality, trust, and frankness as a feature of anti-tyrannical solidarity—as well as how equity might inform comrades' efforts to court the desires of other, non-solidary, members of the *polis*.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Lockwood, "Justice in Aristotle's Household and City," 14.

¹⁷² Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*, 119.

¹⁷³ Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 124.

¹⁷⁴ While not a form of friendship explicitly discussed by Aristotle, anti-tyrannical comradeship, as reconstructed in the following section, resets the terms that usually organize scholars' discussion of Aristotelian friendship. According to Yack (*Ibid.*), "comrades"—which he treats as equivalent to Aristotle's broader and apparently apolitical category of character friends—"come together because their intimacy allows them to see something distinctive and precious in each other," whereas more modestly acquainted political friends "come together because they can help each other achieve their goals." Comrades resisting tyranny require political intimacy precisely *because* their political goals demand it, without, perhaps, the affectional bonds distinctive to character friendship. Also see Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*, chapter 5.

Equality, Accountability, Frankness

In *EE* 7, Aristotle likens the friendship of comrades to friendships between brothers and those among democratic citizens. Aristotle's focus in these passages is on the interpersonal relations of comrades, and how their shared expectations and habits regulate their conduct. Comrades are akin to democrats, says Aristotle, insofar as both "use the same standard of measurement" in determining the nature of their equality (*EE* 1241b35-40). The equality characteristic of democratic citizens refers to how democracies distribute political power on an undifferentiated basis, to all freemen (*Pol.* 1318a5-10). In order to theorize the comradely character of equality—which Aristotle does not specify—I posit that, for anti-tyrannists, their egalitarianism might hinge on both the shared sense of merit that drives their revolutionary pursuits, as well as how their mutual obligations and practices of solidarity sustain it.

The brotherly characteristics Aristotle ascribes to comrades speak to such revolutionary potential. Noting in *EE* 7 that "the egalitarian relationship of brothers to one another is the most like comradeship," Aristotle quotes from a poetic fragment attributed to Sophocles:

For I was never shown by him to be illegitimate
But Zeus, my ruler, has been declared to be common father
To us both.

"This is a claim," Aristotle explains, "made by those who are seeking equality (*zētein isos*)" (*EE* 1242a36-40). As we saw above, Aristotle uses this formulation in identifying the pursuit of equality as a cause of revolution (*Pol.* 1301b29). Citing a common parentage in Zeus, Sophocles' characters reject their purported illegitimacy and asserts a common parentage, thus setting the stage for the pursuit of an equal share of political power.

Insofar as it is by pursuing our desires that we further develop them (*NE* 1119b5-15), we might imagine that comrades, in pursuing equality, will further develop those desires that first

motivated their dissent. This possibility is consistent with an insight that underwrites Aristotle's discussion of domestic relations in *EE* 7, where he notes that "it is in the household that we first see the causes (*archai*) and founts (*pēgai*) of friendship, constitutions, and justice" (*EE* 1242b1-2). With *archē* and *pēgē*, cause and fount respectively, Aristotle suggests that domestic contexts might serve as the 'fount' from which broader expectations and habits of just treatment initially flow. Aristotle makes explicit the habituating effects of comradeship in *NE* 8.12, when he observes that comrades are akin to brothers insofar as their similar ages and co-habitation (*sunēthein*) render them alike in character (*homoēthēs*), and similarly educated (*paideiuein homoiōs*) (*NE* 1161b30-1162a5, 1162a10-14). This dynamic was a familiar one to Athenians, for whom institutions like the demes served as a "gentle introduction" into political life, within which they "practiced being a citizen."¹⁷⁵ The association of comradeship might serve similarly as a school of dissident egalitarianism, one housed within a *polis* otherwise denied such outlets by the tyrant.

Through what practices, then, might comrades cultivate and pursue equality? Commenting in *NE* 8.12 on the effect of comrades' education, Aristotle observes that their "testing (*dokimasia*) over time" is the most steadfast (*NE* 1162a14-17). As Aristotle observes earlier, in *NE* 8.4, testing (*dokimazein*) "over a long time" secures friends against slander, such that, when greeted by slander, friends will insist on its inaccuracy, claiming "I trust him," or, "he would never commit injustice" (*NE* 1157a20-25). Grounded in their shared egalitarianism, but not necessarily in shared affection, comrades, too, should be able to resist the denunciation (*katagoreuein*) promoted by the tyrant's slander as described in *Politics* 5.11.

With *dokimasia*, Aristotle refers to a form of 'testing' or 'examination' carrying distinctive

¹⁷⁵ Jones, *Associations of Classical Athens*, 46, Whitehead, *The Demes of Attica 508/7-ca. 250 B.C.: A Political and Social Study*, 324, and Cartledge, *Democracy: A Life*, 27.

significance for his 4th-century Athenian audience. To undergo *dokimasia* in Athens was to be subject to questioning and interrogation before occupying positions of political power. Since democratic citizenship was predicated on the equality of all, the focus of examination was more on character than capacity for rule. In fact, as Mogens Herman Hansen points out, extant speeches from these examinations all focus on potential “oligarchic sympathies and complicity with the oligarchic regime of 404/3,” an unpunishable offence, but one that was surely disqualifying for candidates for public office.¹⁷⁶ Of considerable importance for examination, then, was the accountability of citizens for maintaining the distribution of power that defined their democratic regime.

The sense of purpose required in anti-tyrannical struggle thus suggests special significance for examination and accountability among comrades. If comrades come together in virtue of their political convictions, they need to ensure that they can trust one another not to falter in their joint pursuit. For comrades, of course, such testing would not take place in front of a jury. The trust of comrades would instead be forged and verified through their sustained time spent relying on each other. Such is the sense of ‘testing’ we saw Theognis invoke above, with *paratribein*. As Aristotle notes in his discussion of *hetairoi* in *EE* 7, comrades are distinct in their ability to entrust or turn to (*epitrepein*) one another in virtue of their familiarity with one another’s character (*EE* 1242b36-7). *Politics* 5.11 is explicit that the tyrant seeks to vitiate precisely those forms of trust that allow his subjects to entrust (*epitrepein*) one another. Comradeship thus provides both a refuge from repression and a site within which to cultivate mutual accountability.

¹⁷⁶ Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles, and Ideology*, 218-220. For further discussion see Euben, *Corrupting Youth*, 94-96, and Kierstead “Associations and Institutions in Athenian Citizenship Procedures.”

Aristotle's account of comrades' brotherly relations also provides resources for challenging the tyrant's suppression of frank speech. As Aristotle notes in *NE* 9.2, "comrades, like brothers, owe each other frank speech (*parrhēsia*) and the sharing of all things in common" (*NE* 1165a29-30). We have seen that frankness at symposia was a feature of elite comity. Aristotle's observation that comrades' frankness is akin to their "sharing of all things in common"—when interpreted with a view to the demands of anti-tyrannical comradeship—emphasizes a different set of expectations. Comrades challenging tyranny need to trust one another to put in the necessary work and to make good on their commitments. They need to be able to criticize one another when they falter. Such criticism was a hallmark of frankness in democratic Athens, and a symbol of the openness of democratic regimes in contrast to the "watched character of daily life" characteristic of tyrannies.¹⁷⁷ For comrades under tyrannical conditions, frankness might serve as an interstitial practice by which to bolster and secure one another's political commitments. This practice of *parrhēsia* departs sharply from Michel Foucault's perhaps more familiar focus on the capacity of courageous individuals to "throw the truth" in the face of tyrannical actors.¹⁷⁸ Comrades may find it necessary to rebuke the tyrant to his face, but this dynamic does not appear to be Aristotle's concern in *Politics* 5.11. More important, it appears, is the ability of anti-tyrannists to foster a political climate in their association within which frankness and honesty are the norm.¹⁷⁹ Collectivity—not individual boldness—anchors anti-tyrannical *parrhēsia*.

Equity and Outreach

To treat comradeship as a space of habituation is also to raise the question of whether comrades'

¹⁷⁷ Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, 54.

¹⁷⁸ Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others*, 54.

¹⁷⁹ Landauer, *Dangerous Counsel: Accountability and Advice in Ancient Greece*, 136 identifies this possibility in a discussion of autocratic modes of *parrhesia*.

solidary pursuits might cultivate some manner of virtue. Considering the tyrant's aim to cultivate small-souledness in particular, we might wonder if greatness of soul (*megalopsuchia*) could be of service for anti-tyrannists. It is notable, on this point, that Foucault identifies Aristotle's great-souled man (*megalopsuchos*) as a paradigmatic frank speaker, whose preference for "truth over opinion" is of a piece with his sense of political self-regard.¹⁸⁰ It is for similar reasons that Arlene Saxonhouse posits the virtue of great-souledness as most dangerous to the tyrant.¹⁸¹ In addition to their frankness, great-souled people are alert to their merit (*axia*) and able to hold ground against fear and intimidation (*NE* 1124b20-1125a1). Such characteristics are vital to anti-tyrannists under the conditions of repression described in *Politics* 5.11. As Aristotle also makes clear, however, those with great souls are alienated from other members of their community, as they are "ironic" toward the many, and are often held to be "haughty" (*NE* 1124b30-33, 1124a20). Great-souledness thus appears to obstruct, rather than foster, the broader relations of trust necessary to resist tyranny.

On Aristotle's telling, it is equity that emerges as the most important anti-tyrannical quality of character. Indeed, as discussed above, in *Politics* 5.11 Aristotle notes that equitable people refuse, by claiming not to "merit, *mē axioun*," the tyrant's mastery and refuse, too, to engage in flattery (*Pol.* 1314a1-5), which inclines them to frankness. Equity thus grants anti-tyrannists the ability to retain trust with those who are in their solidary circles *as well as with those who are not*. Tellingly, in *NE* 8.12 Aristotle associates equitable forms of character with the like-education (*paideueun homoiōs*) shared by comrades (*NE* 1162a10-15). Picking up on this feature of equity in *NE* 9.6, Aristotle notes that equitable people experience like-mindedness (*homonoiā*) such that "the objects of their wishing (*boulēmata*) remain constant and do not ebb and flow like a violent strait"

¹⁸⁰ Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, 67.

¹⁸¹ "Aristotle on the Corruption of Regimes: Resentment and Justice," 200.

(NE 1167b5-10). Whatever pressures the tyrant might exert in order to unsettle his subjects' desires for justice, comradeship provides a shield through solidarity.

In describing what it means for comrades to remain on the same page, Aristotle explains that “to be like-minded is not to have the same thing in mind... but to have it in mind in the same way—for example, when both the *dēmos* and the equitable have it in mind for the best persons to rule—since in this way what they aim at comes to pass for everyone” (NE 1167a33-b3). Equitable conduct thus speaks to features of “political solidarity” that encompass not only the fortification of in-group solidarity, but also the ability to make inroads with non-solidary political actors.¹⁸²

It is precisely this ability to adjudicate between what is owed to intimates and strangers that is a hallmark of those Aristotle calls “equitable friend[s],” whom he describes as associating “differently among people of worth (*axioma*) than among people at random.... assigning to each what is fitting and... guided by the consequences at stake” (NE 1126b20-1127a8). More broadly, equitable political actors, like legislators, aim for the “common advantage” by authoring laws that stymie intra-polis conflict (NE 1137b10-20, 1129b15-20).¹⁸³ Equitable people also exhibit habits of forbearance, and are disinclined to act viciously, such as overreaching in their demands, provoking internecine conflict, and forcing others to do otherwise than they wish (*mē boulomenon*) (NE 1167b10-16). Insofar as they are “not exacting to a fault about justice,” equitable people often “take less for [themselves] even though [they] have the law” on their side (NE 1137b32-1138a2).

¹⁸² Scholz, *Political Solidarity*, 2008, 92-109 and Avery Kolers, *A Moral Theory of Solidarity*, chapter 6 also offers an interpretation of the relationship between Aristotelian equity and solidarity, with several significant differences from my own. Kolers enlists Aristotle as a resource for a Kantian theory of moral solidarity that emphasizes the duty of those *joining* solidary groups to show deference to those who are disproportionately marginalized. My interpretation, which is more akin to Scholz's *Political Solidarity* work on political solidarity, foregrounds the consequentialist orientation of dissident actors *calling* for others' support under conditions of repression.

¹⁸³ Schillinger, “Aristotle, Equity, and Democracy,” provides a persuasive treatment of Aristotle's account of equity that emphasizes its orientation toward the common advantage, drawing on the cited passages.

These characteristics of equity speak to a central task of anti-tyrannical comradeship: how to retain one's animating political commitments, such as one's beliefs in political merit, while avoiding an exclusionary political project that risks engendering further conflict. Forms of political outreach—informed by equitable commitments to avoiding overreach, minimizing factional conflict, and promoting the common advantage—thus emerge as decisively important. We might imagine that comrades could grasp the importance of such efforts in the course of their anti-tyrannical struggle, as they consider the consequences of expanding their vision of just distribution in order to accrue support.

For an account of the content of comrades' outreach efforts, I turn to *NE* 8.12, where Aristotle identifies the constitution of timocracy— or 'polity' (*politeia*)—as both a model of comradeship and another site of comradely equity.¹⁸⁴ He describes citizens of polities as akin to comrades insofar as both “wish to be equals and equitable—to rule in turn, therefore, and on an equal basis” (*NE* 1161a28-30). Aristotle also notes that polities share a “defining feature” with democracies insofar as both regimes promote the rule of the majority (*plēthos*)—not the few (*NE* 1160b17-22).¹⁸⁵ We saw above how comrades are equal amongst themselves: this they achieve through their egalitarian trust and frankness. What resources does the majoritarianism of polities provide for giving content to the outreach efforts of comrades?

Aristotle's account of polities in the *Politics* offers insight on this point. There he praises

¹⁸⁴ Aristotle's favored term for this regime in *NE* is 'timocracy.' I use the more familiar 'polity' for reasons of clarity and in order to stress this discussion's consistency with related discussions in the *Politics*.

¹⁸⁵ Polities and democracies are majoritarian in different ways, however. While, as noted, democracies grant citizenship to all freemen, polities empower those who meet a minimal level of property requirements (*NE* 1160a30-36), such that they can afford Hoplite arms (*Pol.* 1279a37-b5). It is nevertheless striking that Aristotle identifies comradeship as approximating democratic characteristics. This is in decisive contrast with prevailing views of timocracy, which otherwise identified it as closer to—if not some variety of—oligarchy. See Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy*, 37 and Plato's *Republic* (547d).

polities for their ability to avoid not only intrapolis conflict—a hallmark of equitable political actors—but also the danger of tyranny such conflict harbors. Whereas tyrannies emerge from regimes unbridled in their class hostility (*Pol.* 1296a3-8, 1310b10-30), polities “tip the scales” in how they design institutions in order to avoid factional conflict and to allow citizens of different classes to experience the regime as their own (*Pol.* 1295b39-1296a5, 1294b14-20). Such for Aristotle constitutes an act of ‘mixing justly’ (*dikaiōs mignunai*), and a decisive vote in favor of institutional reforms that allow for the integration of potentially opposed parts of political community (*Pol.* 1297a35-40). The means of “political mixing” may include, for example, allowing citizens to audit or elect public officials, while otherwise retaining oligarchic or aristocratic standards of merit for ruling offices (see Lockwood 2006, 211). As Aristotle notes when discussing the Spartan constitution—an example of a polity-like mixed regime—even common messes can give citizens a way to share in the constitution (*Pol.* 1272a14-22). At the same time as Aristotle advocates for the mixing of democratic and oligarchic institutions, he also notes the greater longevity enjoyed by democracies in particular, since their citizens “have a greater part in the prerogatives” of office (*Pol.* 1296a10-17). Considering comrades’ need to broaden their political coalition, we might imagine that they would find democratic reforms especially useful as a means to enlist others’ support.

These examples give us a sense of the potential content of anti-tyrannical outreach on the parts of comrades. Like citizens within polities, comrades may well insist on distributing power based on their beliefs in political merit. Not everything, perhaps, will be up for debate. At the same time, comrades could also propose institutional and social reforms that make good on other members’ sense of political merit and/or material need in ways that are compatible with their

underlying sense of justice. Such efforts speak to the anti-tyrannical promise of equity, specifically, the ability to resist the destructive effects of overreach by sometimes taking less, or, giving more. As we know, equitable friends may comport themselves differently towards those they deem of worth but ultimately their sense of “fitting” treatment remains bound to a consequentialist commitment to the common advantage: a goal of constitutions that encompasses desiderative considerations, such that the laws and institutions of a *polis* allow a diverse citizenry to wish (*boulesthai*) for the constitution to continue on the same basis (*Pol.* 1270b20-23).

It is for this reason that much of comrades’ goals must be understood as context-dependent, and also why polities—which provide a helpful model for outreach—need not necessarily stand in for comrades’ desired post-revolutionary regime. For, as understood by Aristotle, wish (*boulēsis*) refers to a desire for something that appears good (*agathos*) to someone in virtue of their unique habits and character (*Rhet.* 1369a1-10, *NE* 1113a20-23).¹⁸⁶ The politically relevant habits within a community may well bear the imprint of any number of factors, such as the long-standing effects of economic inequality or their prior constitutional history (*Pol.* 1295b10-25, 1337a14-20). In the case of the oligarchies of the Four Hundred and the Thirty, their turn to repression assumed as its backdrop Athenians citizens’ entrenched commitments to their democratic constitution. For them, force served as a reactionary answer to countervailing desires for justice. For anti-tyrannical comrades, the desires of others might serve instead as a resource both for the stability of their future regime and as a source of popular revolutionary support.

The account of anti-tyrannical comradeship excavated thus far has been largely reconstructive. However, as I show next, Aristotle would have had historical grounds for being

¹⁸⁶ See Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good*, chapters 2 and 6 for discussions of the relationship between habituation and desire in Aristotle’s account of *boulēsis*.

attentive to the importance of these in- and out-group dynamics of comradeship. Against the backdrop of this account, we can discern in the *Ath. Pol.* how the absence and presence of comradeship underwrote the respective failures of the tyrannicides and the successes of the Athenian revolution.

Tyrannicide and Revolution

In the early years of the tyrant Hippias' rule, his younger brother, Thessalus, slighted Harmodius, a young member of the Athenian elite. So infuriated were Harmodius and his lover, Aristogeiton, that they, with "many participants," plotted to assassinate his ruling brother. As we saw at the start of this chapter, their attempt went poorly. After the would-be tyrannicides spotted one of their fellow conspirators "meeting Hippias in a friendly manner," they assumed that their plot had been revealed. Frightened, Aristogeiton and Harmodius ran down from the Acropolis "without waiting for others" and assassinated not Hippias but Hipparchus, another brother of Thessalus. Hippias' guards killed Harmodius and took Aristogeiton prisoner, where, "after being tortured for a long time," he denounced (*katēgorein*) the other participants. In contrast to "democratic" accounts that Aristogeiton tricked Hippias by denouncing the tyrant's allies, Aristotle reports that Aristogeiton may have betrayed his own (*Ath. Pol.* 18.1-6).

Teegarden and Simonton argue that these "paradigmatic tyrant killers" exemplify the dissident efficacy of the "bold individual" who, "on his own initiative, 'goes first'" and thus sparks the "metaknowledge" needed to produce a revolutionary bandwagon.¹⁸⁷ Their focus on "common knowledge" foregrounds the rational and environmental conditions facilitating collective action: how material and/or honorific rewards incentivize revolutionary "first movers" to act, as well as

¹⁸⁷ Teegarden, *Death to Tyrants!* 32-45 and Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy*, 230.

how the public “epistemic context” provided by occasions like festivals makes it possible that someone less brave “sees the act, knows that all of the others have seen it as well, and can therefore join in the attack with the knowledge that others will in all likelihood support him.” Aware of the reputational incentives associated with anti-tyrannical action, Aristotle, in the *Rhetoric*, identifies Aristogeiton and Harmodius as examples of how deeds exaggerated through public honors might provide lessons in character for others (*Rhet.* 1368a10-20).

As we know, Harmodius and Aristogeiton’s show of daring misfired. One explanation for this is that the success or failure of any revolutionary strike will always be deeply contingent.¹⁸⁸ However brave the first movers, they cannot control the reception of their act by others. At the same time, Aristotle’s description of the event points toward a more specific issue, namely, that the failure of the tyrannicides was a failure of comradeship. This reading becomes legible if we compare his account to that of Thucydides.

According to Thucydides, the attempt failed in large part due to a “sudden panic” brought on by Hippias’ conversation with one of the conspirators (*War* 6.59.1-2). Aristotle does not explicitly name a cause, but he supplements the story told by Thucydides by including Aristogeiton’s likely denunciation of his co-conspirators. Although there can be no guarantee against the pressures of physical or psychological torture, Aristotle, in emphasizing Aristogeiton’s denouncement (*katēgorein*), seems to be identifying a breach in the solidaristic trust characteristic of comradeship. Another difference between the accounts of Aristotle and Thucydides speaks to precisely this issue. Whereas Thucydides reports that there were not many conspirators (*War* 6.56.2-3), Aristotle says the opposite, that there were “many participants.” Sara Monoson argues

¹⁸⁸ Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy*, 246.

that Aristotle's revision might reflect his understanding that "opposition to the tyranny was brewing" among the broader public in advance of the festival.¹⁸⁹ It is also possible that Aristotle marks the high number of would-be assassins to underscore a deficit of trust within a large and unfamiliar group. Perhaps the lovers moved first because they assumed from the outset that their fellow conspirators would be unable to hold their tongues.

Additionally, while Thucydides and Aristotle similarly identify the origin of the plot in Thessalus' insult of Harmodius, only Thucydides highlights the lovers' more ambitious plot to ensure "the downfall of the tyranny" (*War* 6.54.3-4), and their assumption that witnesses would endeavor to regain their own liberty after the initial strike (*War* 6.56.3). Aristotle, by contrast, stresses the "private origination of the deed" (Monoson 2000, 49), noting in the *Politics* that the assassins acted against not a form of rule (*archē*) but a person or body (*soma*) (*Pol.* 1311a30-35). Silent on the attention of the assassins to the desires of others for freedom, Aristotle emphasizes instead their personal focus. By highlighting the lovers' inability to "[wait] for others," Aristotle casts a critical light on the revolutionary potential of first movers who act without collective support.

After concluding his account of the tyrannicides, Aristotle describes the increasingly repressive turn taken by Hippias, which sets the stage for his eventual overthrow by Sparta and the circumstances of the democratic revolution of 508/7 BCE. Identifying a state of conflict between the Spartan-appointed Isagoras, "a friend of the tyrants," and Cleisthenes, "of the Alcmaeonid family," Aristotle reports that Cleisthenes, "being lesser in respect to the political clubs (*hetaireiai*)," fared badly in the conflict until he "enlisted the *dēmos* on his side [by] offering to hand over the

¹⁸⁹ Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Entanglements*, 49.

constitution (*politeia*) to the majority (*plēthos*).” Cleisthenes’ ensuing upswell in support gave him the advantage over Isagoras, who, now fearing for his hold on power, turned for assistance to the Spartan king Cleomones, exiled an estimated 700 families—including Cleisthenes—and moved to disband the council and solidify his control by establishing a 300-person oligarchy. The council resisted, however, and, in the wake of their resistance the multitude mobilized, forcing Isagoras and his supporters to flee to the Acropolis for safety, where they were assailed by the *dēmos* for several days before being forced to surrender. The *dēmos* then returned Cleisthenes to Athens, where he ushered in a wave of democratizing reforms (*Ath. Pol.* 20.1-3).

Drawing on Ober, Simonton treats the *dēmos*’ siege of the acropolis as an example of the epistemic benefits provided by daring acts of public defiance, and thus as of a piece with the “blueprint” of anti-tyrannical action first provided by Harmodius and Aristogeiton.¹⁹⁰ While also drawing on Kuran’s account of revolutionary bandwagons, Ober grants more attention to the non-epistemic factors that have also been the focus of this chapter, associating Herodotus’ description of the *dēmos*—that they were “of one mind (*phronein*)”—with the spirited and long-cultivated form of conviction discussed above, regarding *phronēma* in *Politics* 5.11 (*Histories* 5.72.2), and attributing the mobilization of the *dēmos* to a complex “aetiology of desire” indebted to prior cultural reforms.¹⁹¹

Revealingly, despite insisting that Isagoras and Cleisthenes likely lacked recourse to “ideologically motivated *hetaireiai*” identified by Aristotle and Herodotus, Ober repeatedly appeals to the bonds characteristic of comradeship in describing the relationship between Cleisthenes and the Athenian *dēmos*, maintaining that “Athenian *hetairoi* were expected to help one another, and

¹⁹⁰ Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy*, 157.

¹⁹¹ Ober, *The Athenian Revolution*, 44, 51, and Ober, “I Besieged that Man,” 86.

to seek to harm their common enemies.”¹⁹² Ober speculates that Cleisthenes recognized that comradeship “was a two-way street” in making good on his prior offer of democratic citizenship. Acting “as a good *hetairos*, well deserving of the *pistis* (good faith) placed in him ([*Ath. Pol.*] 21.1) by his new mass *hetaireia*,” Cleisthenes, Ober maintains, “came up with a constitutional order that both framed and built upon the revolution that had started without him.”¹⁹³

Ober joins other scholars of the Athenian revolution in focusing on the sequence of events outlined above, which draw variously from the *Ath. Pol.* and Herodotus’ earlier discussion in the *Histories*.¹⁹⁴ While Ober (2007) is right to characterize Aristotle’s treatment as “largely (though not entirely) derivative” of Herodotus (85), from the perspective of the account of comradeship developed in this chapter, Aristotle adds details that are of great, if underexamined, significance. Most importantly, in the course of describing Hippias’ repression and Cleisthenes’ return to Athens following the siege, Aristotle interpolates two sympotic drinking songs (*skolia*) associated with the Alcmaeonids.¹⁹⁵ While Ober discerns in the revolution a comradely bond between Cleisthenes and the *dēmos*, his focus on recovering the agency of the latter remains bound to a mass-elite binary, which occludes the agency of comradely association represented by Cleisthenes’ family. If we recall the origins of comradeship in archaic symposia, as attested to in the poetry of Theognis discussed earlier, we can take Aristotle’s interpolations as assigning to comradeship a more significant role in the revolution than is generally thought.

¹⁹² Ober, *The Athenian Revolution*, 38, 51.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁹⁴ Anderson, *The Athenian Experiment: Building an Imagined Political Community in Ancient Attica, 508-490 B.C.*, 76-83, Cartledge, *Democracy: A Life*, 61-90, Forsdyke, *Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy*, 133-143, and Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy*, 20-25.

¹⁹⁵ To my knowledge, only Rhodes, *Ath. Pol.*, 18, notes the novelty of these interpolations, though he does not provide an explanation for their significance to the *Ath. Pol.*’s author. Rhodes maintains in his introduction to his translation that “there are not many signs of political theory in this history” and insists against Aristotle’s authorship. I hope to provide reasons to think otherwise, on both points.

Commenting on Hippias' expulsion of rivals following the assassination of Hipparchus, Aristotle identifies the Alcmaeonids as "chief among [the exiles]," who met with repeated failures in their efforts to return home (*Ath. Pol.* 19.3). Aristotle identifies as especially disastrous their expulsion from the fort of Lysidrium, and quotes from a drinking song that makes explicit the bonds of comradeship running through their defeats:

Alas, Lipydrion, betrayer of comrades (*prōdōsetairon*)
 What men you lost,
 Good warriors and well-born,
 Who showed then what stock they came of. (*Ath. Pol.* 19.3)

"After they had failed in everything else," Aristotle (again) emphasizes, the Alcmaeonids were finally able to enlist the support of Sparta, who helped expel Hippias with "support from the Athenians" (*Ath. Pol.* 19.4-5).

In the *Histories*, Herodotus reports that the Alcmaeonids has long been haters of tyranny, (*misoturranoi*) (*Hist.* 6.121.1), and suggests that this ideological motivation underwrote their protracted struggle for power (*dunamis*) since the rule of Peisistratus (*Hist.* 5.66.2). The *Ath. Pol.* aligns with this view but grants even greater significance to the revolutionary persistence of the Alcmaeonids. Consider Aristotle's closing remarks on the overthrow of Isagoras, and the embedded drinking song:

Thus the people obtained control of affairs (*ta pragmata*) and Cleisthenes became leader and champion of the people. The Alcmaeonids bore the greatest responsibility (*aitiotatoi*) for the expulsion of the tyrants, and had persisted in opposition to them for most of the time. Even earlier, Cedon of the Alcmaeonids had attacked the tyrants, and so too he was celebrated in drinking-songs (*skolia*):

Pour to Cedon also, steward, and forget him not,
 If wine is to be poured to valiant men.

For these causes (*aitiai*) the people placed their trust (*pisteiuein*) in Cleisthenes. (*Ath. Pol.* 20.4-21.1)

Ober locates the source of the *dēmos*' post-revolutionary trust in Cleisthenes' promises to grant

them citizenship.¹⁹⁶ As the above passage suggests, however, Aristotle does not so much emphasize Cleisthenes' own persuasive abilities as he does those of Cleisthenes' family, whose long anti-tyrannical struggle apparently convinced the majority of Athenians both of their trustworthiness and of the credibility of their anti-tyrannical commitments. With his invocation of the Alcmaeonid's encomium to the oft-forgotten Cleon, Aristotle underscores a register of political engagement whose duration and persistence is absent from, if not obscured by, preoccupations with tyrannicidal first movers.

Our preceding discussion of equity and outreach also casts fresh light on the institutional reforms pursued by Cleisthenes. As Aristotle notes in the *Politics*, the question of who should participate in the constitution—that is, the question of political justice—is at its most urgent “after a revolution,” such as when Cleisthenes enfranchised “many foreigners and alien slaves” (*Pol.* 1275b33-1276a5). Not only did Cleisthenes and his family show themselves to be responsive to emergent democratic desires—indeed on Aristotle's telling, they radically expanded them—but they also pursued reforms that allowed relations of trust to develop across the broader community, thus ensuring political stability. Aristotle illuminates how Cleisthenes achieved this goal: namely, by destroying and reorganizing the Athenian tribal system by mixing together (*anamisgein*) otherwise disparate parts of the *polis* (*Pol.* 1319b20-30). In this way Cleisthenes diffused dominant “social castes” that were likely hostile to the nascent democracy and facilitated a “regrouping of [the Athenian] population.”¹⁹⁷ Indeed, Aristotle's language of “mixing” here extends the logic of just mixing (*mignunai dikaiōs*) described above with reference to polities. The substantive upshot also

¹⁹⁶ Ober, *The Athenian Revolution*, 51-52.

¹⁹⁷ Lévêque and Vidal-Naquet, *Cleisthenes the Athenian: An Essay on the Representation of Space and Time in Greek Political Thought from the End of the Sixth Century to the Death of Plato*, 64.

remains the same: how certain institutional reforms might mitigate the potential for faction by joining together those who are otherwise separate and potentially opposed.¹⁹⁸

It is unlikely that the *Ath. Pol.* reflects an historically accurate view of the revolution. It is almost certain that Aristotle and Herodotus relayed exaggerated, if not false, details in emphasizing the anti-tyrannicism of the Alcmaeonids. Scholars have long debated to what extent the Alcmaeonids and their supporters sought to bolster their anti-tyrannical bona fides, in contrast with more popular oral traditions focused on the Harmodius and Aristogeiton.¹⁹⁹ During Aristotle's time, it was Harmodius' song that was sung.

We are now in a good position, however, to offer some additional reasons for why Aristotle may have sided with reports favoring the Alcmaeonids. The solidarity expressed in their drinking songs, the duration of their resistance, and their hatred of tyranny all embody aspects of comradeship that Aristotle identifies as threatening to tyranny in *Politics* 5.11. The affinities between these discussions across Aristotle's *Ath. Pol.* and *Politics* as well as with Herodotus' *Histories* are striking. Embedded in descriptions of political repression and struggle, passages in all three texts refer in parallel fashion to: dissident forms of thought (*phronēma/phronein*) (*Pol.* 1313b1-2; *Hist.* 5.72.2) trust (*pistis/pisteiuein*), (*Pol.* 1313b2-3, 1314a17-20; *Ath. Pol.* 21.1); political affairs

¹⁹⁸ In the latter passage Aristotle notes that Cleisthenes' democratizing reforms are akin to the conduct of nigh-tyrannical forms of democracy. We might also imagine that his breaking-up of aristocratic tribes could register as a tyrannical practice of de-association, as described in *Politics* 5.11. However, Aristotle is clear in *Ath. Pol.* and *Politics* that Athens did not become an "extreme democracy" until after the death of Pericles. See Barry Strauss, "On Aristotle's Critique of Athenian Democracy." As I read Aristotle, Cleisthenes' efforts may appear tyrant-like, but they served conciliatory as opposed to repressive purposes. An important implication, unexplored here, is how Aristotle's discussion of Cleisthenes in the *Politics* suggests a more complicated relationship between revolutionary force and persuasion than the one that frames my account of anti-tyrannical comradeship. Thanks to Bryan Garsten for raising this point.

¹⁹⁹ Azoulay, *A Tale of Two Statues*, 27-30, Forsdyke, *Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy*, 108; 121-123; 134; Jacoby, *Atthis, the Local Chronicles of Ancient Athens*, 149-226, Lavelle, *The Sorrow and the Pity: A Prolegomenon to a History of Athens under the Peisistratids*, c. 560-510 B.C., 87-125; Lévêque and Vidal-Naquet, *Cleisthenes the Athenian: An Essay on the Representation of Space and Time in Greek Political Thought from the End of the Sixth Century to the Death of Plato*, chapter 3, and Thomas, *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens*, 144-154, 238-282.

(*pragmata*) (*Pol.* 1314a23; *Ath. Pol.* 20.4); power and powerlessness (*dunamis/adunamia*) (*Pol.* 1314a23-25, 1314a29; *Hist.* 5.66.2); and political clubs (*hetaireiai*) (*Pol.* 1313b1; *Ath. Pol.* 20.1).

The *Ath. Pol.*'s inclusion of the Alcmaeonid drinking songs also offers substantial allusions to the politics of comradeship. We know from Aristotle's references to *hetairoi* in his ethical writings that he was likely aware of comrades' solidary characteristics, and *Politics* 5.11 speaks to their anti-tyrannical potential. These include the abilities of comrades to rely on (*epitrepein*) each other (*Pol.* 1313b5-7; *EE* 1242b36-8), to refuse to flatter and to speak frankly (*parrhēsia*) (*Pol.* 1314a1-5; *NE* 1165a29-33), and to refuse the temptation of denunciation (*katagoreuein*) (*Pol.* 1314a15-25; *NE* 1157a20-25, 1162a14-17). Unnamed but implicit in the tyrant's repression is his fear of revolutionaries' pursuit of equality (*zēteîn isos*) (*Pol.* 1301b25-30), a hallmark of comrades in Aristotle's thought (*EE* 1242a36-40) and of political actors who challenge domination and seek justice. Granting that revolutions "never just spontaneously 'happen,'" Simonton is surely right to stress that "[c]ollective action must begin somewhere, and this is with the choices of specific people" brave enough to serve as collective action's "immediate cause."²⁰⁰ Aristotle suggests that, in the absence of the mediating cause of comradeship, such immediate causes will often prove insufficient.

Conclusion

Reflecting on "incipient" tyranny in the contemporary United States and the prospect of more catastrophic forms of "political" and "ecological tyranny" in the future, George Kateb (2019) has recently warned citizens against clinging to forms of "ideology, patriotism, [and] partisanship" that might contribute to the "erosion and then destruction of [the U.S.'] democratic institutions."²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Simonton, *Classical Greek Oligarchy*, 246.

²⁰¹ Kateb, "Individuality and Loyalty to Truth under Tyranny," 608-610, 617, 629.

Living under the tyrannical oligarchies of 411 and 404/3, Athenians knew well the dangers posed by what Robert Putnam calls the “dark side of social capital.”²⁰² Riven as our own moment is by fears of democratic backsliding, we also have sound reasons to be wary of ideological extremism.²⁰³ So too did Aristotle.

If these dangers remain a permanent hazard for the politics of comradeship, the circumstances that make comradeship a necessity remain intractable as well. I have argued that Aristotle offers insight into what Marc Stears calls the burden of “non-ideal circumstances,” which requires discerning “the potential difference between the virtues required for struggle and the virtues required for the operation of a peaceful, stable, and just political order.”²⁰⁴ Aristotle helps to uncover how virtues associated with day-to-day civic life, like equity, frank speech, and accountability, might be repurposed by those who cannot rely on the authority of judges or the responsiveness of institutions. Comrades rely on one another—those whom they know and trust and with whom they pursue their just share—and grow their ranks.

Aristotle offers an account of solidaristic political action that remains, in its scale and tempo, a quotidian experience among movement actors, who often begin with “the solidarity of a small and provisional network of activists” before ultimately either “disappear[ing] or scall[ing] upward.”²⁰⁵ When faced with a tyrant using repression to structure the broader context of action and habituation within the polis, comradeship provides a space that evades the gaze of the tyrant and within which comrades can foster habits that militate against his efforts to cultivate small

²⁰² Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 350-362.

²⁰³ See Lieberman, Mettler, Pepinsky, and Roberts, “The Trump Presidency and American Democracy: A Historical and Comparative Analysis,” and Ziblatt and Levitsky, *How Democracies Die*.

²⁰⁴ *Demanding Democracy*, 217-218.

²⁰⁵ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 120 and 122.

souls. Since nothing less is at stake under tyranny than the vitiation of desire, the task of comrades is to hold each other to their commitments and to speak frankly to one another on those commitments' behalf. Instead of (or in addition to) defending existing institutions and norms, comrades gather around a shared political vision that calls for the reclamation and redistribution of power. Comrades not only enact their equality, they cultivate it.

Chapter Four
Like a Master

In the republican tradition of political thought, to be a subject of tyranny is to be ruled ‘like a slave.’ To the degree that tyranny is defined, in James Madison’s words, as “the accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many,” the tyrant’s position of total, arbitrary power is understood to resemble the unfettered authority of the slave master, whose subjects are forced to live under the cloud of their despot’s transitory whims.²⁰⁶ Highlighting this ongoing capacity of domination, scholars argue that the oppression characteristic of slavery inheres as much in the silence or restraint of the master as it does in their active repression and abuse. “The essence of what it means to be a slave,” writes Quentin Skinner, is to be “within the power of someone else.”²⁰⁷ Expounding tyranny as a form of political enslavement, articulated by republicans like Madison and others, Philip Pettit argues that “slavery is essentially characterized by domination, not by actual interference, even if the slave’s master proves to be entirely benign and permissive, he or she continues to dominate the slave.”²⁰⁸

Aristotle is often identified as a foundational figure in the republican tradition and of the view of tyranny sketched above.²⁰⁹ As a champion of the rule of law, Aristotle anticipates modern political thought’s wariness of unchallenged autocrats, identifying them as inimical to freedom and fundamentally intolerable (*Pol.* 1294b20-25). Keying in on the structural continuities between democracies, oligarchies, and monarchies that rule on a discretionary and arbitrary basis, Aristotle

²⁰⁶ James Madison, “Federalist 51,” as quoted by Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, 177-178.

²⁰⁷ Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, 41.

²⁰⁸ *Republicanism*, 32.

²⁰⁹ See Kinch Hoekstra, “Athenian Democracy and Popular Sovereignty”, J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, and Mary Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule*

highlights the analytic portability of ‘tyranny’ as a form of unchecked authority discernible across regime types, and thus open to possession by one, few, or many.²¹⁰ According to Aristotle, insofar as the ruling class in oligarchic and democratic communities become authoritative over the law, they also rule tyrannically, “like a master” (*Pol.* 1279a17-22). Like masters over slaves, the authority of tyrannical actors proceeds unimpeded—if not assisted—by the law or other external constraints.

If Aristotle helps to usher in some of the republican tradition’s chief insights, so too does he appear to bequeath us its vices. Not only does Aristotle appear to presuppose the necessity of an enslaved class of laborers as a precondition for political self-rule,²¹¹ but in aligning the rule of the tyrant with the rule of a slave master (*despotēs*), Aristotle appears to reify and polemicize the distinction between those “naturally” suited for political enslavement and those for whom slave-like treatment is an injustice. According to Mary Nyquist, “Political slavery’s polemical marker derives in no small part from an opposition between those for whom it would represent a demeaning, traumatic loss and those for whom it was supposed to be natural.”²¹² Arguing that Aristotle’s account of political despotism is indelibly linked to his account of the purported slavishness of non-Greek *barbaroi*, Melvin Richter claims that “It was from Aristotle that later generations learned how to dismiss those they regarded as barbarians as less than human, and to estimate their significance only as means to promoting the free life of their natural superiors. So understood, the concept of barbarism”—and, by extension, its association with despotism—“functions by negative denigration rather than by positive argument.”²¹³

²¹⁰ See Matthew Landauer, *Dangerous Counsel: Accountability and Advice in Ancient Greece*, for an account of how Classical Greek thinkers articulated a portable theory of arbitrary power across different constitutional forms.

²¹¹ See Alex Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth*, chapter one, for a discussion of the classical republican tradition’s persistent reliance on slavery and other forms of dependent labor and Aristotle’s place within it.

²¹² *Arbitrary Rule*, 26.

²¹³ “Aristotle and the Classical Greek Concept of Despotism,” 182.

Moreover, even as Aristotle seems to invoke the figure of the slave for understanding the abuses of tyranny, he takes for granted “the primacy of the master” as the privileged vantage point for understanding slavery writ large.²¹⁴ Warnings levelled at the broader republican tradition might thus apply to Aristotle as well. In turning too quickly to Aristotle or his followers, we risk adopting “a view of the nature of slavery borrowed directly from the legal forms and ideologies that helped legitimate it,” in addition to obscuring the agency and conditions of actually, and not only figuratively, enslaved people.²¹⁵ Insofar as it is the master’s voice we hear echoing from the archive, a turn to antiquity “tells far more about the ideology and psychology of the masters than it does about those of the slaves.”²¹⁶

Insofar as we remain deaf to the presence of the master’s voice, these charges remain a profound challenge to efforts, like mine, to enlist Aristotle as a resource for theorizing domination today. In addition to the risk of naturalizing social and political hierarchies we also risk mistaking a part for the whole, emphasizing the vantage point of the master as an exhaustive perspective on the realities of domination. However, as I argue in the following, refusing to take for granted the despotic vantage point and highlighting his actual—as opposed to figurative—relationship with slavery yields productive insights into what is distinct about what it means to rule ‘like a master,’ even if it cannot adequately speak to the realities of what it means to be enslaved. Against those who identify Aristotle as philosophically disinterested in the realities of slavery and as reducing the relationship of master and slave to one of proprietary ownership,²¹⁷ I argue that Aristotle draws our

²¹⁴ Page DuBois, *Slaves and Other Objects*, 205.

²¹⁵ Patchen Markell, “The Insufficiency of Non-Domination,” 12 and 27. Also see Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*, chapter one.

²¹⁶ Paul Cartledge, “Rebels and Sambos in Classical Greece: A Comparative View,” 25. Also see Moses Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, 185.

²¹⁷ See Millet, “Aristotle and Slavery in Athens,” 192 and Kostas Vlassopolous, “Greek Slavery: From Domination to Property and Back Again.”

attention to a more dynamic relation of active domination and presupposed resistance between master and slave, and tyrant and subject. The master-like domination characteristic of tyranny cannot be reduced to the arbitrary, appetitive, or capricious qualities often indexed to political enslavement. As I show, efforts to cement mastery require efforts to police and maintain positions of authority as a contingent and precariously held position of preeminence. To retain power over others is at one and the same time a project of keeping them down.

As I have shown throughout the course of this dissertation, the Aristotelian tyrant is ultimately characterized by his fearful hold on power, and how that fearful hold motivates practices of domination that variously aim to evade detection through deception or normalize subjection via repression. By way of conclusion, this chapter demonstrates how this dynamic account of fear and domination bears on Aristotle's account of the relationship between tyranny and slavery as well as the analytic portability of tyranny as a logic of domination discernible across non-monarchal regimes. This chapter revisits a number of passages discussed earlier in this dissertation in which the master (*despotēs*) and the slave (*doulos*) figured prominently, such as in *Politics* 5.11, where Aristotle identifies the tyrant's attempt to cement mastery (*despotikos*) and describes his efforts to cultivate slavish habits among his subjects, as well as references in the *Rhetoric* to slaves' disinclination from taking offense at the injustice of others. This chapter places these passages within a broader preoccupation in Aristotle's thought with the relationship between slavery and tyranny that runs through parallel discussions in the *Politics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Economics*, and which informs his treatment of despotic democracies and oligarchies.

In foregrounding the orientation of the slave master, this chapter sheds additional light on a number of terms that have featured prominently in our discussions thus far, especially the

dangers posed by conviction or high-mindedness (*phronēma*) to tyranny, as well as the tyrant's efforts to humble (*tapeinōein*) the ruled. I show here how these terms are embedded within a semantic field associated with the slave master's anxiety over the potential rebelliousness of enslaved people—indexed also by the language of spiritedness (*thumos*) and insolence (*hubris*). In light of this concern despotic actors attempt to humble their subjects in order to maintain and police a position of superiority or preeminence (*hyperochē*). The tyrant and slave master's focus on preeminence can be read as a correlative aim to tyrannical attempts to accumulate and defend a disproportionate share of power. To attain preeminence, from the vantage point of the tyrant, is to retain a position of dominance by way of the consistent diminishment of others. To keep an unjust share of power *from* the tyrannized requires maintaining a legible position of power *over* them. Such mastery, for tyrants and enslavers alike, is an achievement of repression, intimidation, and control.

In reconstructing what it means to rule 'like a master,' this chapter adopts an unconventional approach to analyzing the nature of mastery (*despotikē*) in Aristotle's thought. Instead of privileging Aristotle's formalistic account of slavery and despotic rule in *Politics* 1 and 3, as is prevalent,²¹⁸ I focus on the lexical and situational continuities spanning discussions of tyrannical repression and enslavement—both literal and figurative—that run through Aristotle's corpus. On my reading, Aristotle's invocation of slave mastery in his treatments of tyrannical monarchies, oligarchies, and democracies are of a piece with a legible but largely unelaborated analysis of the contentious bases of efforts to attain and maintain overbearing positions of authority. Instead of treating mastery as a formal type of rule, I consider it as *stance* and *practice* of

²¹⁸ E.g. see Roger Boesche, *Theories of Tyranny*, chapter two, Eugene Garver, *Aristotle's Politics: Living Well and Living Together*, chapter two, and Nyquist *Arbitrary Rule*, chapter one.

authority, which I describe as tyranny's logic of enslavement. As a stance, mastery encompasses a zero-sum focus on maintaining a position of preeminence over others who otherwise pose obstacles to that position, those who might unseat the master's dominance. Mastery, I show, entails ongoing efforts to lower and diminish others, to strip them of their sense of worth, so as to place the authority of the master beyond contestation.

Through an engagement with parallel passages in Aristotle's *Politics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Economics*, I demonstrate in part one of this chapter how a sense of precarity underlies the master's stance of authority and underwrites practices of disciplinary control and intimidation. After reconstructing this account of the logic of enslavement, I turn in subsequent sections to Aristotle's discussion of the despotic qualities of tyrannical democracies, and oligarchies. Through the course of these discussions, I attenuate the priority often given to the tyrant's lawlessness for understanding the analytic scope of Aristotle's concept of tyranny. While the juridical conditions of arbitrary rule remain deeply important for Aristotle, I show that the capacity of tyranny to travel across constitutions stems largely from dynamics of enslavement and factional conflict (*stasis*) that precede and condition the tyrannical accumulation of power. Indeed, I show that Aristotle is sometimes keen to discern practices of tyrannical domination within institutions that are part and parcel of a functioning legal and constitutional order. I conclude by examining Aristotle's discussion of elective and non-Greek monarchies, suggesting that charges of essentialism and xenophobia levelled at Aristotle are not only overdrawn, but that they risk obscuring Aristotle's consistent worries over the potentially formative and self-reproducing effects of repression

Becoming *Despotikos*

Numerous scholars appreciate the importance of mastery—*despotikē*—and the figure of the master—

despotēs—to Aristotle’s political thought. Introduced in *Politics* 1’s account of the varying kinds of rule, mastery, as broached there by Aristotle, appears to stand in for a “subpolitical” or “prepolitical” form of authority native to the domestic sphere, one exercised by freemen (*eleutheroi*) over slaves (*douloi*).²¹⁹ Aristotle’s apparent goal is to delimit the appropriate sphere of mastery so as to establish the grounds of the *Politics*’ primary subject matter: political rule.²²⁰ As Aristotle elaborates in *Politics* 3, where political rule refers to the rotational and partial exercise of power among those who are free and equal—in which those presently vested with authority aim for the shared advantage of the whole *polis*—mastery, by contrast, participates in the logic of possession and self-interest. To rule like a master is rule to the advantage of the master and rarely, and only incidentally, with a view to the interest of the slave (*Pol.* 1278b31-38).

While Aristotle is clear enough that political rule refers to a relation of authority distinct from that exercised over slaves, he also suggests that this understanding is far from widespread. As he notes at numerous points throughout the *Politics*, those in positions of political authority are frequently all too eager to abandon the garb of the *politikos* in favor of that of the *despotēs*. Not only tyrannies, but oligarchies and democracies, too, are guilty of ruling “like a master” insofar as they rule with a view to the benefit of the ruler, and not the ruled. Indeed, for Aristotle, it is their master-like focus on securing their own personal advantage over that of the common good that separates correct constitutions from deviant ones (*Pol.* 1279a17-22).

When considering Aristotle’s deployment of the language of mastery in the *Politics*, scholars sometimes focus on the formalistic qualities of these discussions. Insofar as mastery stands in for a

²¹⁹ Mary Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen*, 37 and Eugene Garver, *Living Well and Living Together*, 18.

²²⁰ See Kevin Cherry, *Plato, Aristotle, and the Purpose of Politics* for further discussion of Aristotle’s intervention, contra Plato, regarding the difference between political and despotic rule.

relationship of domination that is prior to and analytically distinct from the properly ‘political’ kind of rule, Aristotle is read as flagging a kind of “category mistake: the misapplication of a principle of domestic domination to the city,” on the part of deviant constitutions.²²¹ The tyrant’s “identification as *despotēs* signifies that he has fundamentally misconstrued both his position and the nature of the polis, a public arena in which free, adult men govern themselves by means of laws and equal, open discussion.”²²²

Not only a displacement of political form, the rule of the *despotēs*, according to Nyquist, is of a piece with the hierarchical logic of Aristotle’s broader political vision. By no means does Aristotle question the naturalness of chattel slavery as an institution, argues Nyquist. Rather, Aristotle insists on the existence of those for whom slavery is just and beneficial, who are slaves by nature (*Pol.* 1254b20). Identifying non-Greek *barbaroi*’s compliance with the political enslavement of their autocrats as evidence of their natural slavishness, Aristotle, according to Nyquist, “argues at one and the same time [for] the categorical *naturalness* of household slavery and the *unnaturalness* for Greeks of despotism in the political sphere, associating enslaved *barbaroi* with both.”²²³ On this understanding, Aristotle’s belief in the immutability of slave nature both grounds his critique of tyranny and his justification for chattel slavery. As naturally free and equal people, Greeks are both fit to exercise mastery over enslaved non-Greeks and categorically unfit to suffer either the despotism of actual enslavement or the figurative slavery of unchecked autocracy.

Setting aside for now Aristotle’s views on natural slavery, it is worth noting here that Aristotle appears far from certain about the fixity of the master’s authority, much less about the

²²¹ James McGlew, *Tyranny and Political Culture in Ancient Greece*, 28

²²² Nyquist, *Arbitrary Rule*, 33.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 49.

security of his position atop social and political hierarchies.²²⁴ Whatever the status in *Politics* 1 of *despotikē* as a taxonomically distinct kind of rule, in *Politics* 5.11, Aristotle describes how tyrannical actors aim to achieve an aura of mastery as a condition of their dominance. As we've seen throughout this dissertation, this chapter of the *Politics* contains a thoroughgoing account of the tyrant's efforts to protect his power via the simultaneous disempowerment of his subjects. Worth revisiting here is precisely how Aristotle invokes the *despotēs* in order to underline the fraught nature of the tyrant's authority and the quality of anxiety that attends it.

According to Aristotle, it is characteristic of the tyrant not to enjoy the company of anyone dignified (*semnos*) or free (*eleutheros*), “for the tyrant alone claims to merit (*axioun*) being such, and one who asserts a rival dignity or acts as a freeman (*eleutheriazēin*) takes away the preeminence (*huperochē*) and element of mastery (*despotikon*) of tyranny; hence these are hated as persons undermining (*kataluein*) the tyrant's rule” (*Pol.* 1314a6-10). Here, Aristotle assigns to the tyrant not the identity of a *despotēs*, but rather the *projection* of mastery or masterfulness (*despotikon*): a stance of authority that needs to be achieved and defended. The tyrant's status as a despotic actor requires careful maintenance, a “public ritual” potentially jeopardized by those who are free, as well as by those who act *as if* they were.²²⁵ So central to the tyrant is his ability to stand above his subjects—to maintain preeminence (*huperochē*)—that any cracks in this façade present themselves as harbingers of the dissolution of his rule; they quite literally threaten to undo or unravel (*luein*) down (*kata*) his regime.

²²⁴ See Jill Frank, *Democracy of Distinction: Aristotle on the Work of Politics*, chapter 1, for sustained treatment of the literature on Aristotle's discussions of natural slavery and for an alternative view to the one presented by Nyquist. Against those who see Aristotle as an apologist for slavery who appeals to nature as a pre-political justification for various hierarchies, Frank argues that Aristotle problematizes such foundationalist appeals and their role in justifications for slavery, instead advancing a dynamic account of nature. My account aligns with Frank's, as I discuss below.

²²⁵ James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 12.

This passage's counter-positioning of mastery (*despotikon*) and freedom (*eleutheria*) suggests that Aristotle is aware of the structural and ideological imbrications between slavery, freedom, and tyranny. As Aristotle notes in *Politics* 6.2, the defining work (*ergon*) of freedom (*eleutheria*) among democratic citizens revolves around the ability to "live as one wants... since not living as one wants is characteristic of a person who is enslaved (*douleumenos*)" (*Pol.* 1317b12-14). Aristotle is not only working within the oppositional ideological poles of freedom and slavery, however.²²⁶ *Politics* 5.11 is peppered with references to the grim, practical realities of enslavement. For example as discussed in chapter two, Aristotle notes that tyrants would have their subjects "become habituated (*eithizein*) to having small thoughts (*mikra phronein*) through always acting like slaves (*douleumenos*)" (*Pol.* 1313b8-10). The self-surveillance of slaves who wish to avoid the ire of enslavers serves as the model for tyrannical efforts to cement mastery as a condition of domination. Revealingly, Aristotle notes that under tyrannical regimes "laxness" towards slaves and women is often par for the course: the tyrant's grant to them of power (*kratos*) encourages their willingness to report on their domestic despots (*Pol.* 1313b33-35)—the domination they suffer at the hands of their masters and husbands—thus coming to the aid of the larger system of political enslavement. It is perhaps for this reason that Aristotle claims in *NE* 8 that the relation of authority between master and slave in the *oikos* follows the paradigm (*paradeigma*) of tyranny in the *polis* (*NE* 1160b22-32), and that the relation of slavery is one devoid of friendship (*NE* 1161b5). The relationship between master and slave is characterized by latent enmity.

As discussed at length in earlier chapters, the despotic desire to rule over small-thinking

²²⁶ For influential discussions of the relationship between Classical conceptions of freedom and the institution of slavery, see Orlando Patterson, *Freedom: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* and Kurt Raflaub, *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece*.

subjects, who lack the “high-mindedness” or “pride” (*phronēma*) that might incline them to rebel, surfaces prominently and repeatedly across *Politics* 5.11, with Aristotle insisting that, above all else, the tyrant guards against (*phulattein*) two things: “high thoughts (*phronēma*) and trust (*pistis*)” (*Pol.* 1313b1-5). These are two of what Aristotle calls the “three heads” of tyranny: that the tyrant aims to rule over those with small thoughts, who are distrustful of one another, and lack the capacity for deeds (*Pol.* 1314a15-25). While not immediately obvious in *Politics* 5.11, the tyrant’s preoccupation with the spirited and solidaristic characteristics of slaves also participates in the logic of *despotikos*. Discussing in *Politics* 7.8 the necessity for agricultural laborers in the so-called “city of prayer,” Aristotle claims that they should be comprised of “slaves who are neither all of the same nature (*homophulos*) nor of spirited ones (*thumoeidēs*), as in that way they would be useful with a view to the work and safe as regards their undertaking subversive activity; or second, that they should be barbarian subjects” (*Pol.* 1330a25-30). Here Aristotle has in mind people from Asia, whom he earlier describes as lacking spiritedness (*thumos*); “hence they remain ruled and enslaved” (*Pol.* 1327b25-29). As David Key notes, this concern over spiritedness, the insistence that slaves be not of the same race, and the ultimate goal of ensuring against subversion, mirror in logic and spirit the tyranny’s three heads: “He wants slaves who are spiritless and racially isolated for the same reason the repressive tyrant wants subjects who are demoralized and socially isolated. He wants to prevent slaves from seeking a new order.”²²⁷

While in *Politics* 7 Aristotle turns to the language of *thumos* instead of *phronēma*, the project of the *despotēs* remains the same as in *Politics* 5: how one maintains a position of authority

²²⁷ *Politics V: Commentary*, 170. See Cartledge, “Rebels and Sambos” for a discussion of how Greek slaveowners aimed to keep their slaves socially and culturally separated. For a canonical treatment of slavery as a form of “social death,” entailing the natal and cultural alienation of enslaved people from their families and communities, see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.

presumably hostile to those over whom it is exercised. In fact, the characteristics Aristotle assigns to *thumos* in his discussion of the purported spiritlessness of Asian people make even more explicit its dangers to the tyrant and slave master. In virtue of *thumos* there is both the capacity for rule and the capacity for freedom: “*thumos* is a thing expert at ruling and indomitable” (*Pol.* 1328a5-10). So too does *thumos* promote friendship (*Pol.* 1328a1-3) and thus the habits of mutual and solidaristic trust that stir up trouble for the *despotēs*.

Aristotle invokes the language of high-mindedness (*phronēma*) explicitly in reference to slavery in *Politics* 2. Criticizing Socrates for the organization of the kallipolis in Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle notes that the decision to allow laboring classes their possessions and to tax them will likely make them more difficult (*chalepos*) and prideful (*phronēma*) “than the helots or serfs that some hold today, or than slaves” (*Pol.* 1264a32-36). Not only does Aristotle implicitly ascribe acquiescent habits to these laboring classes, but his inclusion of the Helots—a group subject to notorious degrees of repression by Spartan citizens and who were, in turn, prone to rebel—drives home a decisive feature of mastery as a practice and stance of authority, domestic or political: mastery relies fundamentally on repression and the ability to bring to heel those who resent their location at the bottom of a hierarchy.²²⁸

Sophocles’ *Antigone* makes explicit the relationship between the *despotēs* and the *doulos*, and its bearing on the figure of the tyrant, which we have discerned in Aristotle. Lashing out after discovering Antigone attempting to bury her brother in defiance of his edict, Creon warns her that “the most fanatic spirits (*agan phronēma*) fall most of all.” He exclaims:

It is the toughest iron, / baked in the fire to hardness, you may see / most shattered, twisted, shivered to fragments. / I know hot horses are restrained / by a small curb. For he that is his neighbor’s slave cannot / be high in spirit (*mega*

²²⁸ For further discussion of the Helots as markedly rebellious class in Aristotle and Plato’s *Laws*, see Cartledge, “Rebels and Sambos,” 42-46, Millet, “Aristotle and Slavery,” 197-199, and Vlassopoulos, “Greek Slavery.”

phronein). This girl had established her *hubris* / before this, when she broke the established laws. / But here is still another *hubris* / in that she boasts of it, laughs at what she did. I swear I am no man and she the man / if she can win this and not pay for it (475-485)

Without flattening the capaciousness of Sophocles' text, we can hear how Creon anticipates Aristotle's presentation of the tyrant. For Sophocles' Creon and Aristotle's tyrant both, political power is an object of possession—something to be had (*echein*)—and defended from conspiracy (*Metaphysics* 1023a9-11; *Antigone* 730, 290). When encountering those who challenge this zero-sum logic, tyrannical actors take up the orientation of the enslaver. When despotism meets resistance, that resistance—Antigone's laughter, for example, as well as other assertions of freedom or dignity—is coded as fanaticism, high-mindedness, hubris, and a cause for outrage.

Aristotle speaks to this dynamic in the *Rhetoric*, where he identifies a cause of anger (*orgē*) for the master in the disobedient slave. Describing the *despotē's* anger after experiencing the insult (*oligoria*) of his slave's disobedience, Aristotle highlights circumstances under which household slaves (*oiketēs*) are subject to discipline or reprimand (*kolasis*): “we discipline more strongly those who talk back and deny what they have done, but our spirits stop being angry at those who admit they are being disciplined justly.” Noting that such signs of disobedience constitute a form of contempt, which imputes a lack of worth (*mē axioun*) to the master (*Rhet.* 1378b10-20), Aristotle explains that slaves who humble or lower (*tapeinōein*) themselves often enjoy leniency “because they admit to being in an inferior position” (*Rhet.* 1380a20). According to Aristotle, displays of anger like that of the outraged *despotēs* prey upon underlying insecurities: “these responses are far more intense when people secretly suspect that they do not really possess these things, either not at all or not very strongly, for whenever they firmly believe they are preeminent (*huperechein*) in those

things for which they are mocked, they pay no attention to it” (*Rhet.* 1379b).²²⁹

While Aristotle’s actual authorship is disputed, the Aristotelian *Economics* elaborates on the quest of the *despotēs* to secure preeminence over the potential spiritedness and hubris of his slaves.²³⁰ Interested in the relationship between the craft of household management and the domestic sphere’s relationship with larger communities, the *Economics* identifies the possession and use of slave labor as a central preoccupation of the master. Keying in on the subject of enslavement in *Economics* 1, Aristotle highlights the need for masters to address the character and habits of their slaves: “and since it is a matter of experience that the character of the young can be molded by education (*paideia*), when we require to charge slaves with tasks befitting the free, we have not only to procure the slaves, but to bring them up (*trephein*)” (*Econ.* 1344a26-28).

In elaborating the aims and strategies of enslavement as a purportedly educative practice, Aristotle counsels the *despotēs* to balance coercion with restraint, noting that they should neither tolerate *hubris* from their slaves “nor treat them with violence (*bia*).” “A share of honor (*timē*)” should be granted to slaves who engage in labor appropriate to freemen (*eleutheroi*), food to those who work with their hands, and wine to none at all, or, at most, on “rare occasions,” since the drinking of wine “renders even freemen *hubristos*.” The *despotēs* must also take care as to avoid excessive kindness. Along with their labor and food slaves must also receive discipline or chastisement (*kolasis*), for “if men are given food, but no chastisement,” Aristotle observes (once again) that “they will act with *hubris*” (*Econ.* 1344a28-36).

²²⁹See DuBois, *Slaves and Other Objects*, 213 on the prevalence in antique literature of anger as a passion flowing “from master to slave.”

²³⁰ As evident in the following, I am in agreement with Thornton Lockwood that “the contents of the first book [of the *Economics*] are unambiguously peripatetic and if not from Aristotle’s hand, then consistent with Aristotle’s other writings,” “Justice in Aristotle’s Household and City,” 9n.37. See note for additional literature on the question of Aristotle’s authorship of the *Economics*.

The potential for *hubris* among enslaved people surfaces as a central object of the *Economics'* *despotēs* and a primary malady to be eradicated through the *paideia* of enslavement, a project of habituation and discipline that requires ongoing surveillance (*skepsis*) and the appropriate distribution of rewards and punishments according to merit or worth (*axia*). “Both in word and deed,” Aristotle observes, “we must take for our model a physician’s power (*dunamis*) in prescribing his medicines; observing at the same time that food differs from medicine in that it needs to be constantly administered” (*Econ.* 1344b6-11). While appearing to attribute formative effects to enslavement, Aristotle also advises enslavers to be discerning in their selection of slaves. “The best laborers,” notes Aristotle, “will be furnished by those races of mankind which are neither cowardly (*deilos*) nor yet overly bold (*andrea agan*). Each extreme has its vice; the spiritless cannot endure hard labor, and the high-spirited (*thumoeidēs*) will not readily brook control.” So as to ensure the *despotēs'* ability to manage his slaves effectively, Aristotle argues that the “prize of freedom” should be set before their eyes as an end or goal (*telos*); “since having a prize to work for, and a time defined for its attainment, he will put his heart into his labors.” With the promise of manumission for the enslaved also comes a threat to their familial and communal bonds. “We should, moreover, take hostages for our slaves’ fidelity (*exomēreuein*) by allowing them to beget children; and avoid the practice of purchasing many slaves of the same ethnicity (*homoethneis*), as men avoid doing in towns” (*Econ.* 1344b11-19).

Here Aristotle brings to the fore not only a series of repressive tactics identified in the *Politics'* treatments of slavery, such as surveillance, the separation of slaves from their native communities, and the avoidance of enslaving those in possession of *thumos*, but also a practice of domination Aristotle associates with tyranny in *NE* 3.1, that being the hostage-taking (or at least

the threat thereof) of children (NE 1110a5-9). Aristotle is clear for his part that a comparison between the *despotēs* of *Economics* 1 and the figure of the tyrant is warranted. Highlighting in the *Economics* the importance of seeing to the protection (*phulakē*) of one's property, Aristotle recommends that the *despotēs* adopt the "Persian practice" of watchfulness, following the advice Dion recommended Dionysius, an infamous tyrant of Syracuse and one of Aristotle's favorite exemplars of tyrannical behavior (*Econ.* 1344b34-36, *Rhet.* 1357b30). As Aristotle notes in *Politics* 5.11, the practice of surveillance intended to ensure that the oppressed "become habituated to having small thoughts through always acting like slaves" numbered among the favored techniques of Syracusan tyrants as well as tyrannies "in Persia and among the barbarians" (*Pol.* 1314a13-13b5-10).

It is worth noting on this point the concern with protection (*phulakē*) Aristotle assigns to the *despotēs* of the *Economics*, yet another prominent feature binding the *despotēs* to the tyrant. Describing the regimen to be undertaken by the master and mistress of the home, Aristotle notes that they "would do well to rise earlier than their servants and to retire later; to treat their home as a city, and never leave it unguarded (*aphulaktos*)" (*Econ.* 1345a11-16). What Aristotle in this passage identifies as a "healthy habit" for the *despotēs* is also one of the defining features of mastery, and, indeed, tyranny. Describing "four qualities" necessary for heads of the household to possess in dealing with their property, Aristotle notes that that must have the power to acquire (*echein*) in addition to the power to protect (*phulattein*). "Thirdly and fourthly," Aristotle observes that "he must know how to adorn his property, and how to make use of it; since these are that-for-the-sake-of-which (*to tou heneka*) the powers of acquisition and of protection are sought" (*Econ.* 1344b25-27). For Aristotle, a *telos* is equivalent to that-for-the-sake-of-which (*to tou heneka*) one acts; together,

these terms refer to the horizon of action that constitutes one's character and identity (*Physics* 194b33). If protection is, for the *despotēs*, an intermediary goal for his broader aims of adornment and use, the tyrant's orientation to self-preservation as an end in itself signals, we've seen throughout this dissertation, how an authoritative position first predicated on exploitation and profit gives way to a monomaniacal focus on security. This is all to say that there is nothing arbitrary or capricious about how the enslaver uses his power. The authority of the *despotēs*, like that of the tyrant, is exercised purposively and strategically.

Thus understood, we can identify the relationship between mastery of slaves and tyranny as sharing in what Aristotle calls, in *Politics* 1, "the science of slavery," there described as a having "nothing great or dignified about it." There (as in *Economics* 1) attributed to "fellows in Syracuse" who instructed slaves in household chores, this so-called science boils down to the fact that "the master must know how to command the things the things the slave must know how to do" (*Pol.* 1255b30-40). For the slave to follow this model of command and obedience, Aristotle notes that the master should also be responsible for instilling a "sort of virtue in the slave; he is not merely someone possessing an art of mastery that instructs the slave in his work (*Pol.* 1260a40-b8). As evidenced by the above-discussed passages, such virtue is inculcated through an education in coercion, and turns on the elimination of *hubris* and *phronēma*, terms which designate, according to Douglass Cairns, a "subjective disposition" grounded in a "misguided and inflated conception of oneself and one's place in the world" that manifestly dishonor those aiming to police boundaries of honor and locations within hierarchy.²³¹ Throughout this dissertation we have considered how the ideological expansiveness and sense of conviction underscored by *phronēma*

²³¹ "Hybris, Dishonour, and Thinking Big," 1 and 8.

poses trouble for tyrants aiming to accumulate and defend their power. We are now in a position to see how this kind of conviction can register as a form of overreach or insolence by those aiming to police and defend a position of superiority that is fundamentally contingent and never, in the eyes of the enslaver, fully secure.

If, as Aristotle observes in *Rhetoric* 2, slavish people tend not to act from indignation or anger “because there is nothing they believe themselves worthy of (*mē axioun*)” (*Rhet.* 1387b10-20), this is surely due to the ability of despotic actors to diminish such dispositions, or to otherwise discourage their display. If the ceaselessness of the tyrant and master’s repression is any indication, such diminishment is never guaranteed. As Kostas Vlassopoulos writes of classical Greek slavery, “While legal forms remained the same, slaves tried, and in many cases managed, to negotiate their position, take advantage of external circumstances, make use of connections, avoid detection and even gain their freedom.” In Ira Berlin’s words—quoted by Vlassopoulos—“Slavery was never made, but instead was continually remade, for power—no matter how great—was never absolute, but always contingent.”²³²

On these terms, we might consider the linkages between the *despotēs* and the tyrant as reflecting Aristotle’s attention to what Paul Cartledge calls the “constant struggle” between enslavers and those they sought to enslave, with the former persistently working to “prevent the balance of power shifting in favour of the slaves.”²³³ Aristotle speaks to such struggle in *Politics* 4, in figurative terms, when he describes a city riven by economic inequality and fundamentally at war with itself, with despotic actors retaining dominance while invariably refusing to take their position for granted. Noting that those who are “preeminent in the goods of fortune—strength,

²³² “Greek Slavery,” 127.

²³³ “Rebels and Sambos,” 31.

wealth, friends, and the other things of this sort” live a life that both inflates their sense of worth and impedes them from being able to suffer the authority of another, Aristotle claims that “they do not know how to be ruled by any sort of rule, but only to rule like a master.” Such a *polis* “is a city not of free persons but of slaves and masters,” wherein the majority—being subject to the despotism of the wealthy and of poverty—become humbled (*tapeinōein*), and “do not know how to rule but only how to be ruled.” Describing the relationship between the wealthy and the poor as rife with envy and contempt, Aristotle notes that “nothing is further removed from affection and from a political community; for community involves the element of affection—enemies do not wish to even have a journey in common” (*Pol.* 1295b10-25).

Bearing in mind such antagonism and the posture of despotism that presides over it, we will now consider what light it casts on Aristotle’s account of extreme democracy and oligarchy, where civil conflict rends political community and inaugurates the tyrannies of the many and the few.

From Periander to Thrasybulus

In *Politics* 4.4 Aristotle describes several types of democracy, beginning with one that honors conditions of political equality and ending with an arrangement characterized by suspicion, domination, and despotism. “[P]articularly said to be based on equality,” the first kind of democratic constitution refuses preeminence (*huperochē*) to the poor and grants equal political standing to the well-off, thus allowing “all [to] share in the constitution as far as possible in similar fashion” (*Pol.* 129130-35). The second form of democracy defines citizenship through low property assessments and the third through parentage. It is with the fifth variety, according to Aristotle, that the multitude acquires tyrannical authority over the law. Coming to exercise authority “not as

individuals but altogether,” the *dēmos*’ increasingly personalistic, discretionary use of political power sets the stage for the emergence of demagogues and despotism both. Explains Aristotle:

At any rate, such a people, being a sort of monarch, seek to rule monarchically on account of their not being ruled by law, and become like a master: flatterers are held in honor, and this sort of rule of the people bears comparison with tyranny among the forms of monarchy: *both are like masters with respect to better persons*: the decrees of the one are like the edicts of the other. *These are particularly influential in each case, flatterers with tyrants and popular leaders with peoples of this sort.* [...] For [demagogues] become great through the people’s having authority in all matters, and through having authority themselves over the opinions of the people, since the multitude is persuaded by them. *Moreover, some bring accusations against certain persons holding offices and assert that the people should judge; the invitation is gladly accepted, and all the offices are thus overthrown.* (Pol. 1292a15-30, emphases added)

As Aristotle concludes his discussion, he observes how this kind of democracy lacks the most basic marker of constitutional community, observing that “where the law does not rule there is no constitution.” In fact, according to Aristotle, “such a system” doesn’t even warrant the name of democracy, seeing as its reliance on particularistic decrees prevents it from taking up general concerns (Pol. 1292a35-38).

As emphasized in the above passage, Aristotle identifies the despotic characteristics of tyrannical democracies with the antagonistic orientation the authoritative many (*plēthos*) take towards their betters (*beltion*). This antagonism is due to the role played by demagogues, who guide the authority (*kurios*) of the many through persuasion. Aristotle suggests that the despotic relation of antagonism plays no small part in the emergence of arbitrary power; demagogues bring up suits and the multitude accepts the invitation to undermine offices or other sites of rule (*archē*) that presumably challenge the multitude’s preeminence. That Aristotle would highlight the superior standing of the democratic *despotēs*’ rivals—that they are “better”—is notable on this point. We might imagine that a decisive feature of the tyrannical democracy’s reign is not only the many’s monarchical desires for preeminence, but also how those over whom they would lord their unchecked authority might desire to challenge it.

Aristotle suggests precisely this later, in *Politics* 5.10. Describing the final kind of democracy

and oligarchy as a “tyranny divided” (*Pol.* 1312b35-38), Aristotle pins down the decisive features joining tyrannical monarchies and democracies.

From democracy comes [tyranny’s] war on the notables—doing away with them secretly and openly, and exiling them as rivals in the art of ruling and impediments to their rule. For it is from these that conspiracies arise—both of those who wish to rule themselves and those who do not want to be enslaved. Hence the piece of advice that Periander gave to Thrasybulus, the lopping off of the preeminent ears, the assumption being that it is necessary always to eliminate the preeminent among the citizens. (*Pol.* 1311a10-25)

This brief passage casts light on the despotic qualities of extreme democracy and the nature of its tyrannical turn to power. Highlighting both the desire for rule and aversion to enslavement that might inform the conspiracies of the notables against the *plēthos*, Aristotle assigns to extreme democracy a war-like stance. By drawing our attention to this zero-sum orientation—which entails viewing other members of the *polis* as obstacles and rivals to be exiled for the sake of securing preeminence (*huperochē*)—Aristotle invokes the sense of precarity that underlies and informs the stance and practice of despotic authority identified in *Politics* 5.11.

The reference that closes this passage, in which Aristotle invokes the “piece of advice that Periander gave to Thrasybulus,” is significant on this point. Aristotle is here alluding to an earlier discussion in *Politics* 3.13, concerning how statesmen might contend with disputes over political honor (*timē*), and assess various claims to merit rule (*axioma archē*), based variously on wealth, family, or virtue. Aristotle’s invocation of Periander and Thrasybulus in *Politics* 3 addresses the specific question of how communities should deal with someone “so outstanding by his excess of virtue—or a number of persons, though not enough to provide a full complement to the city—that the virtue all the others and their political capacity is not commensurable to their own.” Noting that such an individual (or individuals) “can no longer be regarded as part of the city” in virtue of their excellence, and that they would be done an injustice “if it is claimed they merit equal things in spite of being unequal in virtue and political capacity,” Aristotle highlights how democracies

like Athens once addressed this problem.

Hence democratically run cities enact ostracism for this sort of reason. For these are surely held to pursue equality above all others, and so they used to ostracize and banish for fixed periods from the city those who were held to be preeminent in power or account of wealth or abundance of friends or some other kind of political strength. The tale is told that the argonauts left Heracles behind for this sort of reason: the Argos was unwilling to have him on board because he so exceeded the other sailors. Hence also those who criticize tyranny and the advice Periander gave to Thrasyboulus must not be supposed to be simply correct in their censure. It is reported that Periander said nothing by way of advice to the messenger who had been sent to him, but merely lopped off the preeminent ears of corn and so leveled the field. When the messenger, who was in ignorance of the reason behind what had happened, reported the incident, Thrasyboulus understood that he was to eliminate the preeminent men. (*Pol.* 1284a17-34)

Practiced in Athens from 506 BCE to the early years of the Peloponnesian War, ostracism served there as the practice of “democratic self-defense *par excellence*,” wherein citizens had routine opportunities to vote to exile prominent citizens from the city for a period of ten years.²³⁴ By invoking the tyrants Periander and Thrasybulus in this discussion of ostracism, Aristotle suggests how the logic and practice of tyrannical authority can find expression in what was, for Athens, an otherwise perfectly sound constitutional practice, one that might be understood as part and parcel of the city’s culture of accountability.²³⁵

Aristotle explains how ostracism expresses a logic of domination we might now find quite familiar. Describing ostracism as a means of pulling down the preeminent, Aristotle identifies this practice as sharing in the logic of other efforts by the Athenian and the Persian empires to cement imperial control over client *poleis* and other recently conquered communities. According to Aristotle, the Athenian empire engaged in such pulling-down in relation to the cities of Samos, Chios, and Lesbos, client-states of Athens following the Persian War. “[N]o sooner was their rule firm than [Athens] humbled (*tapeinōein*) those cities, contrary to the compacts they had with them” (*Pol.* 1284a36-40). Likewise, Aristotle notes that the Persian King, during his imperial pursuits

²³⁴ Anthoula Malkopoulou, “Ostracism and Democratic Self-Defense in Athens.”

²³⁵ For discussions of Athenian democracy’s culture of accountability and the practices that sustained it, see Peter Euben, *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture, and Political Theory*, chapter four and Landauer, *Dangerous Counsel*, chapter one.

earlier in the fifth century, similarly “pruned back the Medes and Babylonians and others who harbored high-thoughts (*phronēmatizesthai*) on account of once exercising [imperial] rule themselves” (*Pol.* 1284b1-3).

As indicated by Aristotle’s remark concerning the Persian King, a central concern in efforts to lower or humble (*tapeinōein*) subject cities—as well as subjects of domination more broadly—has to do with those subjects’ own experience with the practice of rule: the experience of possessing power presumably lends itself to an aversion toward subjection. Likewise, with the client-states of the Athenian empire, *their* relative autonomy may have encouraged disproportionate responses from Athens following episodes of revolt or disobedience. This was the case with Samos, which suffered exceptionally brutal retaliation after balking at an Athenian prohibition against their conflict with Miletus in 339 BCE.²³⁶ Such, as we’ve seen, is the danger of *phronēma* to the *despotēs*. Above all else, those looking to cement a position of overarching authority insist not only on obedience, but also consistent subservience. To act otherwise is to rob the *despotēs* of his preeminence.

Of course, as Aristotle notes in the quotation above, critics of practices like ostracism are not unqualifiedly (*haplos*) correct in their criticisms—though, as we’ll see, they often are. As Aristotle explains, likening legislation to various other “arts and sciences,”

For a painter would not allow himself to paint an animal with a foot that exceeded proportion, not even if it were outstandingly beautiful, nor would a shipbuilder permit himself to build a stern or any other part of a ship that exceeded proportion [...] So on this account there is nothing that prevents monarchs from being in consonance with their cities when they do this, provided their own rule is beneficial to their cities. Thus in connection with the generally agreed upon forms of preeminence the argument concerning ostracism involves a certain political justice. Now it is better if the legislator constitutes the regime from the beginning in such a way that it does not need this sort of healing; but the ‘second voyage,’ if the contingency should arise, is to try to correct the regime with some corrective of this sort. (*Pol.* 1284b9-20)

²³⁶ Donald Kagan, *Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War*, 173-6.

The broader context of this discussion—concerning conflicting claims regarding the basis of merit (*axia*) for the distribution of the honor (*timē*) of political power—fills in the gaps of Aristotle’s qualified defense of practices like ostracism and is of a piece with our discussion, in chapter one, of the basis of tyranny’s defensive approach. According to Aristotle, disagreements regarding what counts as the proper distribution of political power serve as a primary cause of civil strife (*stasis*) in political communities (*Pol.* 5.1). Even if someone supreme in virtue comes to power, Aristotle notes that there is no guarantee that their subjects will “gladly accept” their rule (*Pol.* 1284b33). They might serve, instead, as the disproportionate stern to the ship of state and thus a cause of contention. To exceed proportion in these terms means to concentrate political power in a manner deemed disproportionate and thus unjust by those robbed of it. To expel from the *polis* those whose claim to rule exceeds proportion is to forestall faction conflict between competing partisans and serve the common advantage.

Aristotle makes clear, however, that such was rarely the motivation in actual instances of ostracism. Instead of taking the extirpation of civil strife as the goal of ostracism Athenians turned to this practice as a means of extending it; “they did not look to the advantage of their own regime but instead used ostracisms for the purposes of factional conflict” (*Pol.* 1284b21-24). Hence why, in *Politics* 5.10’s discussion of extreme democracy, any praise (qualified or otherwise) of the advice granted Thrasybulus by Periander disappears. The many’s war against the notables there stands as one of the gravest harms binding extreme democracy to tyranny, and their tyrant-like attachment to pulling down the preeminent stands as an exemplum of tyranny’s logic of enslavement.

The Rule of the Powerful: Oligarchy and *Dunasteia*

As we saw with extreme democracy, a decisive factor in the emergence of political despotism is the

presence of conflict regarding the distribution of power, and how those in possession of a disproportionate share strive to defend it through means both legal and extralegal. While not invoking the language of *despotikos* explicitly, Aristotle draws attention to a similar dynamic in the case of the extreme form of oligarchy, what Aristotle also refers to as a *dunasteia*—a dynasty or, following Carnes Lord, “rule of the powerful”—what Thucydides earlier characterized as a form of government sitting “at the opposite extreme to the rule of law and moderation in government, indeed closer to tyranny,” whose rulers aim to “increase their personal power” while ruling “the people by force” (III 62.3).

After providing a brief description of four varieties of oligarchy in *Politics* 4.5, Aristotle returns to the topic in 4.6, where he provides a fuller account of how the rule of the wealthy becomes a *dunasteia*, “the counterpart among oligarchies to tyranny among monarchies” (*Pol.* 1292b10). Aristotle identifies the first variety of oligarchy as a relatively inclusive sort. Populated by a “large number” of property owners, this oligarchy makes political participation available to the majority, such that the law, as opposed to human beings, remain authoritative. It is with the second variety of oligarchy that Aristotle identifies “a claim to merit self-aggrandizement (*pleonexia*)” and a rejection of the first form’s adherence to property requirements, which instead fills offices by appointment while otherwise remaining “not yet strong enough to rule without law.” (*Pol.* 1293a10-20) Aristotle identifies the “third advance” in oligarchy with further narrowing in the legal basis of citizenship, this time to patrimonial descent. Aristotle does not yet identify this variety of oligarchy with the tyrannical *dunasteia*, however. This moniker he reserves for the fourth kind of oligarchy, which “tighten[s]” the boundaries of citizenship “excessively with respect to their properties and in the extent of their friendships,” in this way becoming “close to monarchy,” such

that “human beings rule rather than the law” (*Pol.* 1293a20-35).

While Aristotle would surely grant that oligarchies may take any number of paths in constitutional transformation, his narration of the four kinds of oligarchy in *Politics* 4 tracks a similar logic to that described in the case of democracy. Insofar as the first kind of oligarchy allows the majority to enjoy citizenship, the threat of *stasis* is held at bay. Once oligarchs grow in *pleonexia*—grasping after ever more money and power for themselves—we also witness a growing concern with their relative capacity to dominate, ever greater restrictions on citizenship, and the curtailment of friendship.

In *Politics* 5.3 Aristotle offers a now familiar discussion of the circumstances of political conflict that give rise to the tyrannical *dunasteia*. As Aristotle explains there, tyrannies and *dunasteiai* arise from circumstances of civil strife (*stasis*) regarding preeminence (*hyperochē*), and “when a certain person or persons are greater in power than accords with the city or the power of the governing body.” Recalling his discussion in *Politics* 3.6, Aristotle observes that it is for such reasons that *poleis* like Argos and Athens utilized ostracism, noting once more that it “is better to see to it from the beginning that no one is preeminent to such an extent, however, than to let them arise and to heal the ill afterwards” (*Pol.* 1302b15-20).

As Aristotle’s argument in this chapter continues, he returns to the dangers of maldistributions in political power. As Aristotle observes, revolutionary change (*metabolē*) often occurs because of a “disproportionate growth of a part” of the *polis*. Just as a “body is composed of parts which must increase in proportion if a balance is to be maintained, and if this does not happen it perishes” or changes into “the shape of another animal,” so too “is a city composed of parts,” changes in which may result in the destruction or transformation of the constitution (*Pol.*

1302b15-30). Aristotle notes that revolutionary change may sometimes be a chance occurrence, such as when ruling elites die in a military conflict, leaving authority to the *dēmos* and thus changing a polity to a democracy. They also change, notes Aristotle, through factional conflict (*stasis*), such as when *dunasteiai* come to power (*Pol.* 1303a14). It is not for nothing that in Aristotle's discussion of extreme oligarchies in *Politics* 5.10 he observes that tyrannical monarchies and tyrannical oligarchies share in common their "ill-treatment of the mass and its expulsion from town and resettlement" (*Pol.* 1311a11-15). As Andrew Lintott observes, such efforts at expulsion were commonplace among extreme oligarchies looking to secure their authority over recently conquered, and formerly democratic, communities, such as Athens in 404 BCE, following the imposition of a Spartan garrison and the reign of the so-called Thirty Tyrants—discussed in chapter three—and once again in 332 BCE, as Antipater disbanded the democracy.²³⁷

Kings and Tyrants

Aristotle tends to reserve the name of tyrant for the most "extreme" varieties of rule, namely, those which most fully conform to the practice of mastery as an attempt to secure preeminence and domination over conditions of political conflict. All of these features are evident in *Politics* 4.10, where Aristotle discusses the third variety of tyrannical monarchy, the one "most particularly held to be tyranny, being a sort of counterpart to absolute kingship."

Any monarchy must be a tyranny of this sort if it rules in an unchallenged fashion over persons who are all similar or better, and with a view to its own advantage and not that of the ruled. Hence it is rule over persons who are unwilling; for no free person would willingly tolerate this sort of rule. (*Pol.* 1295a19-25)

Here Aristotle stresses the conditions of animosity and latent conflict that characterize the most complete instantiation of tyrannical authority. Collapsing *despotikon* into the specific aversion of

²³⁷ Aristotle's *Political Philosophy in its Historical Context*, 141.

free people to this kind of unchallenged power, Aristotle draws attention to the tyrant's efforts to control those who deem such rule as intolerable. This tyrant rules over unwilling (*akon*) subjects, who take themselves to be equal or better in their claim to deserve to rule themselves.

In describing the other two varieties of tyrannical monarchy, Aristotle shifts tyranny and despotism's respective centers of conceptual gravity, variously teasing them apart or minimizing their standing as he assesses how unaccountable forms of political authority persist over communities who deem their existence legitimate. Glossing his previous discussion of these two varieties—the first being elected, proto-dictatorial rulers, the other being non-Greek, *barbaroi* autocrats—Aristotle observes that “both were kingly by the fact of being based on law and a monarchical rule over willing persons, and at the same time tyrannical by the rule being characteristic of a master and in accordance with their own will” (*Pol.* 1295a16-18).

While Aristotle associates the despotic qualities of these forms of tyranny with their unaccountable and discretionary power, we can nevertheless identify lurking patterns of civil conflict and repression. In discussing archaic Greek monarchs, who often assumed power through familial succession, Aristotle also identifies a form of “elective tyranny” that arose under conditions of political instability and conflict. As an example of the those elected to tyrant “for certain fixed periods of time or for the purpose of certain actions,” Aristotle considers Pittacus of Mytilene. He notes that the Mytilenaeans elected Pittacus “to defend them against the exiles headed by Antimenides and the poet Alcaeus,” and quotes the latter's “censure” of the Mytilenaeans' election in describing Pittacus: “they set up Pittacus, base of lineage, as a tyrant of a city lacking bile and heavy in doom, with great praise from the crowd” (*Pol.* 1285b1-b10). While Pittacus exemplifies a dictatorial, nigh-kingly tyrant in virtue of ruling over “willing persons,” as is

apparent, the same cannot be said of his relationship with Mytilene's former citizens and recent exiles. The status of "the crowd's" adulation is also fraught. As Sara Forsdyke notes, the poor of Mytilene were often compelled to support the political machinations of the wealthy as part of an essentially exploitive relationship. "If the poor had any role in electing Pittacus," she surmises, "this was likely as a result of a summons by their elite patrons, who sought to defend themselves against violent attack by a rival elite faction."²³⁸ While the historical record is limited, what does appear evident is Aristotle's attention to Pittacus' divisiveness: that he rose to power as a result of the people's anxieties over their exiled, former co-citizens, and that this fear of externalized threat likely gained traction through internal, class-based *stasis*.

What of the voluntary, kingly status of non-Greek tyrannies? Aristotle observes in reference to the non-Greek kingships that since "barbarians are more slavish in their character than Greeks (those in Asia more so than in Europe) they put up with a master's rule without making any difficulties" (*Pol.* 1285a20-24). As noted above, Aristotle associates Asian people with deficient spiritedness (*thumos*): the capacity for rule and freedom that Aristotle identifies as inimical to despotism and conducive to friendship. In this discussion of Asian people's purported servility, Aristotle attributes the cause of this deficiency to the warmer climate inhabited by those in the Middle East, presumably Persia in particular.

Jill Frank wonders whether the consistent repression associated with Persian despotism might also play a role in Aristotle's account of the relative 'willingness' of its subjects.²³⁹ Indeed, as we've seen in his discussion of the three heads of tyranny in *Politics* 5.11, Aristotle identifies the conduct characteristic of Persian autocrats, as well as the aforementioned Periander of Corinth, as

²³⁸ *Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy*, 47.

²³⁹ *Democracy of Distinction*, 32.

the fountainhead for the various strategies of domination described in the ensuing discussion (*Pol.* 1313a35-38). Aristotle had any number of other non-Greek examples to choose from for this account of tyrannical repression. Consider the Median ruler Deioces, who, according to Herodotus, was appointed by the Medes after displaying his “keenness of intellect” and capacity for “fair dealing” as a judge (*Histories* I.96). With his “grip on power secure,” Deicoes’ first command as king is to hire bodyguards and to erect the fortress Agbatana, “an immense and impregnable stronghold enclosed within a series of concentric walls,” a project “so demanding of [his subjects’] time and effort that everywhere else in Media was left to crumble in neglect” (*Hist.* I.98). Aristotle notes in reference to other tyrants who made use of public works that these efforts serve to rob subjects of the leisure necessary to conspire and pursue other deeds more threatening to the tyrant. Deioces then shields himself from those who “were not an iota his inferiors” by introducing a “system of etiquette” according to which messages to the king must pass through intermediaries, thus providing his rule a measure of “mystique” (*Hist.* I.99-100). In Aristotle’s terms, Deicoes’ measure may have been intended to ensure his rule over those with small thoughts. While guarding himself from the “gaze of his contemporaries,” Deioces implants spies throughout Media, forcing his subjects to remain under his “eyes and ears.” While ostensibly a matter of surveillance on Herodotus’ telling, Aristotle cites such conduct as a means through which tyrants sow distrust. As Richter notes, the “means calculated to breed mutual distrust among subjects, to make them incapable of joint action, and to break their spirit,” join the figures of the tyrant, the Persian autocrat, and the slave master for Aristotle.²⁴⁰

As discussed above and in chapter two, Aristotle is deeply attentive to the potentially

²⁴⁰ “Aristotle and the Classical Greek Concept of Despotism,” 179.

formative effects of enslavement—and especially surveillance—as a practice of despotic authority; like the civic education (*paideia*) provided under various constitutions, the enslaver aims to foster (*trephein*) in their slaves the appropriate disposition of servitude, just as tyrants aim to habituate (*ethizein*) small thoughts among the tyrannized. Insofar as Nyquist and others identify in Aristotle’s discussions of the purported slavishness of Asian subjects an inflexible and essentialized conception of slave nature, they belie these insights, as well as Aristotle’s explicit claim in *Politics* 7.8 that habits (*hexeis*) stemming from consistent activity may well calcify into one’s nature (*phusis*) (*Pol.* 1332a40-1332b-3). Jill Frank makes precisely this point in her account of the dynamic relationship between habit and nature in Aristotle’s thought, and the bearing of that dynamic on his account of non-Greek slavishness. As she puts it, for Aristotle, “human nature is as much a product of the regime under which one lives as it is a regime’s cause. Insofar as they have long been habituated to living under tyrannies and acting according to the habits fostered by tyrannies, Asian are naturally slavish and so acquiesce in and thereby reproduce the regime that produced them.”²⁴¹ Indeed, Aristotle’s attention to how tyrannies humble or lower (*tapeinōein*) their subjects—a key term, as we’ve seen, in enslavement’s semantic field—turns precisely on the diminishment of *thumos* as well as other registers of desire and character.

On these terms the attenuated status Aristotle grants Persian despotism is consistent with the analysis thus far, driving home two key points. First, Persian despots, as recorded by ancient Greek philosophers and historians, often maintain their authority through practices of domination that bear a family resemblance to those of slave masters. In their case, the apparent absence of resistance attenuates their status as a tyranny *tout court*. So understood, Aristotle’s

²⁴¹ *Democracy of Distinction*, 32.

account of non-Greek autocracy might be read not (or not only) as a marker of Greek xenophobia and orientalism but instead (or also) as an indication of the legitimate concerns nested within Aristotle's account of tyranny: how domination can shape souls, flatten aspirations, and, in so doing, reproduce itself over time.

This *apparent* lack of resistance is, however, worth underscoring. For, as any reader of Herodotus (which Aristotle almost certainly was), would know, his *Histories* are replete with instances when subjects of Persian despotism aim to unseat their rulers, most famously in the case of Darius, Otanes, and Megabyzus: conspirators who unseat a false king, engage in a famous debate concerning the relative merits of democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy, and opt to pursue the latter, monarchal constitution that preceded them (*Hist.* 3.80-82). Indeed, throughout the *Histories*, conflicts internal to Persian or other non-Greek societies rarely, if ever, aim to fundamentally change the nature of the constitution under which people live. When conflicts do emerge, they fixate on the specific moral pathologies of the tyrant. As Carolyn Dewald observes, for Herodotus, such conflicts exemplify dangers peculiar to autocracy, what she terms the “despotic template.” By this she refers to how attempts to wed a “legal system with teeth in it” to the imperialistic cast of mind of those who would aim to achieve unaccountable power ultimately fosters a sense of “distance between ruler and ruled and consequent oppression.”²⁴² On Dewald's reading, the difficult circumstances in which Herodotus' tyrants find themselves ultimately turn on a fundamental problem. “Each man or woman in Herodotus wants as much scope for following his or her personal objectives as he or she can get. Each one, however, is ultimately held in check by the existence of all the others and their competing and contradictory desires.”²⁴³

²⁴² “Form and Content: The Question of Tyranny in Herodotus,” 28.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 49.

This leads to the second point. As we've seen in Aristotle, tyranny's logic of enslavement finds expression not only in contexts of unchecked autocracy, but also in democracies and oligarchies, as well as in institutional practices like ostracism and sites of social domination like slavery that persist under ostensibly legitimate constitutional circumstances. For Aristotle, conflicts of desire are not restricted to monarchy, nor are they reducible to the lawlessness of arbitrary power. The issue for Aristotle is not, or not only, the hubris of tyrants but rather their perception of their *subjects'* hubris. Those subjects' refusal to accept domination, their sense of worth, and the animosity shared between tyrant and tyrannized, and master and slave, point to a different passion than greed and a different political problem than unaccountability. As demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the problem is one of injustice, and the passion to be reckoned upon is fear.

Conclusion

In Xenophon's dialogue *Hiero*, the titular monarch inveighs against any association between happiness and the life of the tyrant, who "knows well, lives night and day as one condemned by all human beings to die for his injustice" (7.10). Hiero's presentation of the horrors of tyranny for the ruler, if not the ruled, seem exceptional indeed: "to trust strangers more than citizens, barbarians more than Greeks; to desire to keep the free slaves, and be compelled to make the slaves free—do not all of these things," Hiero asks, "seem to you signs of a soul distracted by fears?" (6.5). If Xenophon's portrait of tyrannical fear was to garner any sympathy among his 4th century Athenian audience, it may well have achieved such an effect among those for whom the liberation of their slaves served as a gnawing anxiety. Hiero notes that, like tyrants with their bodyguards, "citizens act as a bodyguard to one another against slaves" (4.3). They, too, are mindful of "how many masters have died violently at the hands of their slaves" (10.4).

As we have seen, neither Aristotle's tyrant nor his *despotēs* appear able to rest easy in their capacity for domination. Consistently focused on the protection of his preeminence as much as his property, the *despotēs* sees insolence, pride, and subversion in disobedience: signs of character that threaten to upend a position of authority obsessed with domination and predicated upon diminution. Casting an eye towards democracies, oligarchies, and monarchies reliant upon repression, Aristotle sees political actors similarly at war with those who bristle at their efforts to render the city an object of possession. Emerging from conditions of factional conflict and variously upending or repurposing the legal machinery of their *poleis* to their interests, tyrannies of one, few, and many thus aim to rule like a master.

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