THE POLITICS OF ENVY:
ENVY IN ARISTOTLE'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

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By

TINA RUPČIĆ, B.A.

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

of Master of Arts

McMaster University

MASTER OF ARTS (2000) McMaster University
(Political Science) Hamilton Ontario

TITLE: The Politics of Envy: Envy in Aristotle's Political Thought

AUTHOR: Tina Rupčić, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Thomas J. Lewis

NUMBER OF PAGES: V, 106

ABSTRACT

Political theorists have identified envy to be of political concern. While it is generally agreed that certain forms of envy are socially disruptive, there is relatively little agreement as to the nature of this threat, and how to address it. This difference seems to stem from different understandings of the nature of the emotion itself. This thesis examines the place of envy within the context of Aristotle's political philosophy. Aristotle, it is argued, has an accurate understanding of the nature of envy and he offers a political arrangement that seems to successfully undermine the most socially dangerous forms of envy, without compromising the potential for social progress. Aristotle recognizes that envy arises when one is insecure or anxious with respect to their own self-worth. He presents a political arrangement that is designed to engender a more secure basis for individual self-worth, which is also feasible among those who lack this security.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my supervisor and teacher Dr. Thomas J. Lewis for his help and judicious guidance. His contributions have made the writing of this thesis a smooth and fruitful experience. I also wish to thank the other members of my committee; Dr. John W. Seaman for the many thought provoking discussions, and Dr. Karen Bird for her insightful comments. My greatest debt is most certainly to my family who have not only graciously endured some of my most sustained discussions on the subject of this thesis, but who have also been a continual source of support and encouragement. To my parents, I wish to express my deepest gratitude; it is with sincere respect and admiration that I dedicate this work to them.

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Introduction

> Envy's face was sickly pale, her whole body lean and wasted, and she squinted horribly; her teeth were discolored and decayed, her poisonous breast of a greenish hue, her tongue dripped venom. Only the sight of suffering could bring a smile to her lips. She never knew the comfort of sleep, but was kept constantly awake by care and anxiety, looked with dismay on men's good fortune, and grew thin at the sight. Gnawing at others, and being gnawed, she was herself her own torment.[1]

So the goddess Envy appears to Minerva in Ovid's account of their meeting. This striking scene takes place at Envy's house, a filthy and foul place "hidden away in the depths of the valleys, where the sun never penetrates, where no wind blows through."[2] In an acute contradistinction to herself, Minerva, upon striking open the doors of the hovel, finds Envy eating a meal of snake's flesh. Envy rises from her meal to see Minerva the warrior maiden, goddess of wisdom, invention, and the arts, standing before her "in all the brilliance of her beauty, in her flashing armour."[3] Their meeting is marked by a mutual aversion. Minerva, according to Ovid, loathes Envy; she is so repulsed by the sight of Envy feeding that she must avert her eyes. Envy is in turn distressed and pained by the sight of Minerva. One is repelled by the others total lack of goodness and beauty, the other by the very presence of such excellence.

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[1] Ovid, Metamorphoses, trans. and with an introduction by Mary M. Innes (London: Penguin Books, 1955), 2.759-805.

[2] Ibid., 2.760-62.

[3] Ibid., 2.773.

Ovid's account of this meeting offers a very vivid depiction of what is arguably the darkest of human emotions. In addition, Ovid successfully captures both the internal and external affects of this emotion. On the one hand he presents envy as a gnawing torment that is experienced on account of another person's good fortune. Envy, Ovid states, "could scarcely refrain from weeping when she saw no cause for tears."[4] On the other hand he draws attention to the interpersonal affects of envy. For Envy is not restricted to her hovel, she may travel among men instilling her poison into their hearts: "wherever she went she trampled down the flowery fields, withered up the grass, seared the treetops, and with her breath tainted the peoples, their cities and their homes...."[5] This emotion is of interpersonal significance, for the torment that the envious person suffers may drive them to act in ways that are dangerous for others and themselves.

Helmut Schoeck makes the bold assertion that envy has always been recognized as a problem of human existence:

> Throughout history, in all stages of cultural development, in most languages and as members of widely differing societies, men have recognized a fundamental problem of their existence and have given it specific names: the feeling of envy and of being envied.[6]

Political philosophers, having recognized the political relevance of this emotion, have attempted to provide solutions for the problems posed by envy. This thesis will not attempt to compare different proposals for dealing with the problem of envy. The difficulty with such an approach is that there is relatively little agreement as to the nature

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[4] Ibid., 2.795-96.
[5] Ibid., 2.791-93.

of envy, and there is much diversity among proposals that address the emotion's negative implications. I will restrict myself to the work of Aristotle, who, I believe, has an accurate understanding of both the nature of envy, and a feasible solution to its political threat. He presents a political arrangement that can successfully undermine the most socially dangerous forms of envy, without compromising the potential for social progress. The first part of this thesis will be concerned with explicating Aristotle's conception of envy, and its political relevance. The second part of this thesis will describe the wisdom of Aristotle's proposed political arrangement.

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[6] Helmut Schoeck, Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, Inc., 1987), 3.

Chapter One

Human Emotion and Politics

Although envy has often been recognized as an important factor in interpersonal relations, only rarely has envy been treated as a significant factor in politics. Part of the wisdom of Aristotle's political philosophy is that it recognizes that human emotion, which serves as a determinant of individual activity, has important political ramifications. Before discussing envy and its political implications, I think it useful to begin by establishing the political relevance of human emotion in general. This chapter will explain the extent to which Aristotle is concerned with human emotion, and why he is so concerned. Firstly, I will attempt to explain the significance of human emotion for Aristotle's political philosophy. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle suggests that the political relevance of human psychology is implied by the ends of politics. I will show how these ends imply the relevance of human psychology in general, and human emotion in particular. My intention in so doing is not simply to show that the end of politics implies the relevance of human psychology, but to show the extent to which it does so. The latter part of this chapter will provide further context for the Aristotelian position by looking at the structure of the Greek *polis*. There I will argue that the lack of order-enforcing agencies within the *polis*, and the lack of differentiation between its political institutions and populace, renders the concern with human psychology necessary.

Emotion in Aristotle's Political Philosophy

According to Aristotle, emotions (*pathē*) are one of three things that are found in the human soul: "there are three kinds of modification that are found in the soul, viz. feelings [*pathē*], faculties, and dispositions."[1] One of Aristotle's key concerns in the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is to establish the human soul as an appropriate object of political concern. That Aristotle considers human psychology to be politically relevant is clear. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* he explicitly states that the statesman ought to have an understanding of human psychology.[2] In making this point Aristotle draws an analogy between the statesman and the doctor, arguing that: "the statesman ought to have some acquaintance with psychology, just as a doctor who intends to treat the eye must have a knowledge of the body as a whole."[3]

In the context of the *Nicomachean Ethics* the term psychology is being used in a very particular sense. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the modern usage of the term refers to: "the science of the nature, functions, and phenomena of the human mind."[4] Used in the modern sense this term has a much narrower meaning than when it is used in translations of Aristotle. In the Aristotelian context this term is used to refer to the study of the human soul, or *psuchē*, and not simply to the human mind. The p*suchē*

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[1] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nicomachean Ethics, rev. ed., trans. J.A.K. Thomson, revised with notes and appendices by Hugh Tredennick, introduction and bibliography by Jonathan Barnes (Allen & Unwin, 1953; Harmondsworth, New York: Penguin Books, 1976) 98 (1105b2-26). Page references are to the revised edition, the bracketed Bekker pages are taken from the top of each page of this edition.

[2] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 88 (1102a2-3).

[3] Ibid., 88 (1102a18-20).

[4] Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., S.V. "psychology."

was considered to be the source of life and activity. This view of the soul is expressed in a fragment by Anaximenes: "just as our soul, being air, holds us together and controls us, so do breath and air surround the whole KOSMOS."[5] In a commentary on this passage Richard McKirahan states:

> [This passage] identifies the soul with air, following a well-attested prephilosophical view that the air we breathe is our soul or vital principle, that which distinguishes the living from the nonliving and from the dead. When we stop breathing not only do we die, but also our body decomposes. Thus, the air which is our soul maintains us in existence, it "holds us together." It also "controls us," though just what it controls and how it exercises control are unclear.[6]

For Aristotle the p*suchē* is also the vital principle of a living thing. He does, however, offer a more sophisticated account of its function. In the *De Anima* Aristotle defines the soul as the form of a living thing.[7] Aristotle distinguishes between three different kinds of substances: "(1) one kind...we regard as matter, which taken by itself is not a *this*, (2) another as *shape* and form, in virtue of which something is directly called "a *this*", (3) and a third, the composite of the above two kinds."[8] Aristotle argues that the soul is a substance in the second sense.[9] That is, the soul is that which makes a particular heap of matter, not only alive, but also into a particular thing. For example, it is because a heap of matter possesses a canine soul, that the resulting composite (of matter and canine soul)

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[5] H. Diels and W. Kranz, Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, 6th ed., (Berlin, 1951), 13b2, quoted in Richard D. McKirahan, Philosophy Before Socrates, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 54.

[6] Richard D. McKirahan, Philosophy Before Socrates, 54.

[7] Aristotle, Aristotle's On The Soul, Translated with Commentaries and Glossary By Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell: The Peripatetic Press, 1981), 412a20.

[8] Ibid., 412a5-10.

[9] Ibid., 412a20-412b10.

is said to be a dog. The kind of soul that a living thing possesses is important because it defines the kind of being that it is. According to Aristotle, not all souls are the same, for different kinds of souls have different powers: "of the soul's powers mentioned above, namely, those of nutrition, desire, sensation, locomotion, and *thinking,* some living things possess all, as we said, others some, and others only one."[10] Therefore, in order to understand a living thing, one must have an understanding of that which distinguishes them from other kinds of beings, namely, their soul.[11] In stating that the statesman needs to have a knowledge of psychology Aristotle is asserting that the statesman needs to have an understanding of the *kinds* of beings humans are. This means that the statesman should understand, for example, what we as human beings desire, how we interact with our environment, whether we are beings that judge and think, and, if so, how we judge and think.

According to the analogy, the statesman ought to have a knowledge of human psychology just as the oculist ought to have a knowledge of the human body. In the case of the doctor, it is obvious that a knowledge of the body is useful for the purpose of treating the eye; a doctor who understands the body as a whole is in a better position to treat its parts. Clearly, a doctor who understands how the body regulates fluid pressure is in a better position to treat a glaucoma than one who does not. In addition, a knowledge of the body is also useful since what may appear to be wrong with they eye may actually be a symptom of some other bodily illness. In which case it is not the eye that the doctor

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[10] Ibid., 414a30-31.
[11] Ibid., 413b32.

should be treating but the flu which is causing it to itch. While it is clear that such knowledge is useful, it is crucial to note that Aristotle does not base his argument for the importance of possessing knowledge of this kind on a recognition of its utility. For Aristotle, the possession of such knowledge is *necessary*; the doctor, he states, *must* have a knowledge of the body. Taking the analogy further, one may argue that a knowledge of the body is necessary because the eye is a part of the body—the two are mutually dependent. The doctor's aim of treating the eye requires that he have a knowledge of the body because the health of the eye is dependent upon the health of the body, and vice versa. Medicine is not simply a matter of diagnosing the eye and treating it, but understanding and preserving the relationship between the eye and the body. The doctor does not treat the eye without a view to the effects that his treatment will have on the body, nor does the doctor disregard the eye when he treats the body.[12] According to this interpretation the doctor's aim of treating the eye requires that he have a knowledge of the human body as a whole because the health of the eye depends upon the health of the body. According to this interpretation of the analogy, the statesman, similarly, *must* have a knowledge of human psychology.

It is important to acknowledge that I have interpreted this analogy more strongly than its presentation may suggest. First, Aristotle states only that the statesman needs to have some acquaintance with psychology. Furthermore, he proceeds to qualify this statement by asserting that statesman needs to engage in the study of human psychology

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[12] That the treatment of the eye may on occasion call for its removal only further demonstrates that the health of the eye cannot be understood outside of the context of the

"with a view to politics, and only so far as is sufficient for the questions that we are investigating."[13] Despite the equivocal presentation of this analogy, it will be argued that the analogy, as interpreted, holds. It will be argued that the significance of human psychology is implied by the end of politics. This requires, firstly, an understanding of the end of politics.

Aristotle begins the argument of the *Nicomachean Ethics* by describing the purposeful nature of all human activity: "every art and every investigation, and similarly every action and pursuit, is considered to aim at some good."[14] Although all activities are said to aim at some good, this does not imply that all goods or that all activities are equal. Aristotle argues that a hierarchy exists among activities and the ends at which they aim. Politics is established as the "most authoritative and directive" science on the grounds that it determines what other activities are to be pursued, for what reasons they are to be pursued, and to what extent they are to be pursued:

> For it is political science that prescribes what subjects are to be taught in states, and which of these the different sections of the community are to learn, and up to what point. We see also that under this science come those faculties which are most highly esteemed; e.g. the arts of war, property management, and of public speaking.[15]

Having established politics as the highest or most directive human activity, Aristotle then proceeds to define the ultimate end of all activity. The ultimate end of human activity is that at which all activities aim. Aristotle identifies politics as the most authoritative and

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body.

[13] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 88 (1102a24-27).

[14] Ibid., 63 (1094a1-2).

[15] Ibid., 64 (1094b1-5).

directive human activity, because politics prescribes what is to be taught in a state, it makes use of the other arts, and further it "lays down what we should do and from what we should refrain."[16] The statesman, according to Aristotle, engages in these activities for the sake of some end. In the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* it is intimated that this end is happiness:

> Since all knowledge and every pursuit aims at some good, what do we take to be the end of political science—what is the highest of all practical goods? Well, so far as the name goes there is pretty general agreement. 'It is happiness', say both ordinary and cultured people....[17]

Within the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes politics as the highest form of human activity, and happiness as the highest good and ultimate end of all human activity.

The first definition of happiness presented in the *Nicomachean Ethics* suggests that happiness is largely a matter of human activity. Aristotle defines happiness as: "an activity of soul in accordance with virtue, or if there are more kinds of virtue than one, in accordance with the best and most perfect kind."[18] This definition is the product of Aristotle's first attempt to provide a more distinctive account of the nature of happiness. It is important to note that this definition only an "outline account" of the supreme good or happiness.[19] There are, according to Aristotle, a number of additional things that are

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[16] Ibid., 64 (1094b5-6).
[17] Ibid., 66 (1095a15-20).
[18] Ibid., 76 (1098a16-17).
[19] Ibid., 76 (1098a21-23).

needed if one is to be happy.[20] Happiness requires external goods, for without sufficient external goods it would be difficult or even impossible for one to engage in virtuous activity.[21] In addition to needing friends, wealth, and political influence, one needs certain other advantages which only fortune can bestow:

> There are also certain advantages, such as a good ancestry or children, or personal beauty, the lack of which mars our felicity; for a man is scarcely happy if he is very ugly to look at, or of low birth, or solitary and childless; and presumably less so if he has children or friends who are quite worthless, or if he had good ones who are now dead.[22]

Aristotle's articulation of the role of fortune in human happiness does not stop here; he goes even further and argues that happiness is not assured even for the virtuous individual who possesses the necessary external goods. For besides all of this, happiness requires a life that has, generally, been spared fortune's lash. According to Aristotle, even the virtuous man may be dislodged from felicity if "he falls in with fortunes like those of Priam."[23]

Although the complete attainment of happiness may ultimately depend upon chance, some of the prerequisites for happiness fall within the scope of things realizable through human activity. Specifically, the development of human virtue, and some of its requisite external goods, may be secured through human activity. The statesman aims, as far as possible, to achieve the highest good: "we suggested that the end of political

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[20] For a more in depth account of what is needed for happiness see: Martha C. Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 343-372.

[21] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 79-80 (1099a7-1099b20).

[22] Ibid., 80 (1099a32-b20).

[23] Ibid., 84 (1100b27-1101a20).

science is the highest good; and the chief concern of this science is to endue the citizens with certain qualities namely virtue and the readiness to do fine deeds."[24] Insofar as the statesman is concerned with encouraging virtue, and the readiness to do fine deeds, it is clear why he needs to have a knowledge of human psychology.

According to Aristotle, virtue is a particular state of the human soul. He argues that there are three kinds of things that are found in the human soul; these three kinds of things are emotions, faculties, and dispositions.[25] Virtue involves a particular kind of disposition towards emotion:

> By dispositions I mean conditions in virtue of which we are well or ill disposed in respect of the feelings concerned. We have, for instance, a bad disposition towards anger if our tendency is too strong or too weak, and a good one if our tendency is moderate. Similarly with the other feelings.[26]

Virtue is what the statesman seeks to effect, but in order to do so he needs a knowledge of human emotion. The statesman needs to understand why it is that different people experience different kinds of emotions when in identical situations. This is important because emotions drive people to act in particular kinds of ways. If one is consistently too angry, or too fearful, then it is likely that they will act in an inappropriate manner. Activity is crucial to the development of virtue, for according to Aristotle, virtue is engendered through activity: "in a word, then, like activities produce like dispositions. Hence we must give our activities a certain quality, because it is their characteristics that

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[24] Ibid., 81 (1099b21-1100a9).
[25] Ibid., 98 (1105b2-26).
[26] Ibid., 98-99 (1105b2-1106a20).

determine the resulting dispositions."[27] The statesman needs, therefore, to understand what emotions are, and how to deal with them. A knowledge of psychology, which is the study of the whole of the human soul, is to virtue as a knowledge of the body is to the eye. The statesman is concerned with the health of one part of the human soul, namely, the part responsible for virtuous activity, but he needs a knowledge of the whole soul in order to achieve that end.

The chief aim of the statesman, it was argued, is to create a citizenry that is disposed to act appropriately. One's ability to engage in virtuous activity depends upon whether one has sufficient external resources:[28]

> Each of the human excellences requires some external resources and necessary conditions. Each also requires, more intimately, external objects that will receive the excellent activity. Generosity involves giving to others, who must be there to receive; moderation involves the appropriate relation, in action, to objects (food, drink, sexual partners) who can fail to be present, either altogether or in the appropriate way. Even intellectual contemplation requires the presence of suitable objects for thought.[29]

If it is the aim of the statesman to endue his citizens with virtue, he must also be concerned with securing those things that are needed if one is to be enabled to live a life of virtue. Without these external goods virtue is impossible. Virtue may only be fully realized within the context of the *polis*. For the *polis* is, according to Aristotle, the only fully self-sufficient arrangement: "when we come to the final and perfect association, formed from a number of villages, we have already reached the height of full self-

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[27] Ibid., 92 (1103b1-25).

[28] Ibid., 84 (1100b27-1101a20).

[29] Martha C. Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy, 543.

sufficiency."[30] The *polis* is the highest and most perfect form of human association; while it grows for mere life, it exists for the sake of the good life.[31] It is within the *polis*, and only within the *polis*, that the individual may find all of the external goods that are necessary to live the good life.

For Aristotle, the fully human life does not exist outside of the *polis*: "the man who is isolated—who is unable to share in the benefits of political association, or has no need to share because he is already self-sufficient is not part of the polis, and must therefore be either a beast or a god."[32] It is important to note that while the *polis* exists so that its members may partake in the life of virtue, the existence of the *polis* nonetheless depends upon the virtue of its citizens. The individual who is without virtue is "a most unholy and savage being, and worse than all others in the indulgence of lust and gluttony."[33] Aristotle refers to such a person as a *being*, not a man, and one that is worse than all others. The person who lacks virtue is the beast who is *unable* to share in the benefits of political association. The relationship between the individual and the *polis* is like that of the eye to the body, it is an organic relationship between part and whole. An eye must be a part of a living body if it is to successfully fulfill its function of sight. Similarly, if an individual is to live virtuously they need to participate in the *polis*. The eye, like the individual, is incapable of performing its activity in isolation because it lacks

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[30] Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, edited and translated by Ernest Barker, (Clarendon Press, 1946; reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 4 (1252b9-1253a9). The bracketed Bekker pages are taken from the top of each page of this edition.

[31] Ibid., 4 (1252b9-1253a9).

[32] Ibid., 6 (1253a9-38).

[33] Ibid., 6 (1253a9-38).

self-sufficiency. In the *Politics* Aristotle refers to individuals as parts dependent upon a whole: "not being self-sufficient when they are isolated, all individuals are so many parts all equally depending on the whole [which alone can bring about self-sufficiency]." [34] Both the eye and the individual are dependent upon the larger bodies of which they are a part. Given that the relationship is an organic one, this also works the other way. A body with excellent vision is better able to go about fulfilling its function, than is a body that lacks good vision. Similarly, a *polis* that is made up of virtuous individuals is better able to go about its end, namely, the good human life. Virtue is therefore desirable not just for the individual but also for the *polis*. Virtue, or even more specifically, justice, which is complete virtue, is what allows all of the different parts to hang together. A *polis* of the just nurtures justice in the individual, and the just individual is the bedrock of the *polis*.

The concern with virtue is therefore crucial for the statesman. The statesman needs to be concerned with human virtue not only for the sake of promoting the individual good life, but also for the sake of the society as a whole. For a society cannot be formed out of those wholly lacking in virtue and, thereby, humanity. Such an individual is like a diseased eye that threatens the health of the entire organism. The activity of such an eye is in tension with the activity of the body of which it is a part—it is this tension which is dangerous. The tension between the activity of vicious individual and the just *polis*, or the virtuous person and the unjust *polis*, is similarly dangerous. For such a relationship is not sustainable; one part will need to be purged, the lot falling to the weaker. Aristotle's solution is to avoid this tension. This requires that the statesman

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[34] Ibid., 6 (1253a9-38). Brackets are from the text.

concern himself with the virtue of his citizens, and by implication their emotions, in order to ensure that the aims of the individual are in line, and compatible with, the whole and vice versa. A failure to negotiate a harmony between the part and the whole has significant implications for both.

If envy is destructive of such harmony, it is then a first order political concern. In which case it would be a serious matter if the statesman were to misjudge the significance of this emotion, and fail to take it sufficiently into account. To ask whether or not Aristotle has misjudged with respect to how he handles envy is therefore not only a relevant question, but also one of some significance given Aristotle's emphasis on the importance of psychology for politics.

The Ancient Greek *Polis* and Human Character

That Aristotle thought psychology to be important is one thing, but why he thought so is still not entirely clear. It may be argued that Aristotle over-emphasized the extent to which the statesman needs to be concerned with human psychology. One could argue that force, on the part of the legislator, is sufficient to secure civil stability and the observance of law. In this case, fear or the threat of punishment, rather than a moral education, would serve as the instrument for maintaining a civil society. The difficulty with such an assertion is that it assumes that force was an instrument that was available to the ancient statesman. The key to understanding Aristotle's concern with human psychology is the structure of the *polis* itself. It is only within the context of ancient Greek society that one may fully understand why politics, for Aristotle, demanded an

engagement with human psychology. A look at the structure of the ancient *polis* reveals the extent to which character and emotion could impact the society as a whole.

The argument that force is a sufficient tool for ensuring political stability and the observance of law simply does not make sense in the context of the Greek *polis*. It does not make sense to speak of force as a possible political instrument because the *polis* lacked the means for exerting such force. This point is effectively argued by Moshe Berent in "Hobbes and the 'Greek Tongues.'" He explains that:

> Contrary to what has been assumed from Hobbes's time down to this day, the Greek *polis* was not a State, or what Hobbes called a Common-wealth, but rather what anthropologists call a stateless community. The latter is characterized by the absence of coercive apparatuses, which means that the ability to apply force is more or less evenly distributed among the armed, or potentially armed, members of the community.[35]

Berent contrasts the stateless society with the "state-society." The state-society is characterized by order enforcing institutions. In his explanation of what a state is Berent cites the definitions offered by Hobbes, Max Weber, and Ernest Gellner.[36] Gellner argues that, "the state exists where specialized order-enforcing agencies, such as police forces and courts, have separated out from the rest of social life. They are the state."[37] Berent asserts that not only were the "order-enforcing agencies" of the *polis* insufficiently separated from social life, but that the extent of the development of such agencies was

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[35] Moshe Berent, "Hobbes and the 'Greek Tongues,'" History of Political Thought 17 (spring 1996): 37.

[36] Ibid., 38-39.

[37] Ernest Gellener, Nations and Nationalism (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 5, quoted in Moshe Berent, "Hobbes and the 'Greek Tongues'", 39.

rudimentary. The following discussion will attempt to explain in further detail the stateless nature of Greek society.

According to Gellner, a state has "specialized order-enforcing agencies, such as police forces and courts," the *polis*, it will be argued, lacked both of these. To begin with, the Greek *polis* did not have a police force as one would understand it today.[38] If a crime was committed there was no organized police force responsible for apprehending the wrongdoer. In Plato's *Euthyphro*, it was Euthyphro who decided to prosecute his father for the murder of a slave.[39] The "state" did not send anyone in search of his father, it was Euthyphro who brought the matter to the attention of the Athenian court. Berent points out that the only thing resembling a police force were the Eleven; "who had charge of the prison and executions and who, like most Athenian magistrates, were ordinary citizens chosen by lot for one year."[40] However, the existence of the Eleven did not really affect the self-help nature of the system, for prisoners still had to be brought to the Eleven.[41] It was not the responsibility of the Eleven to seek out wrongdoers, this was left to the individual initiative of the wronged party, or someone acting on behalf of the wronged party.

Not only did the *polis* lack an organized police force, its courts also lacked a public element to their prosecution system. There was no public prosecution system as one would understand it today. There were two possible ways in which one could be

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[38] Moshe Berent, "Hobbes and the 'Greek Tongues,'" 40.

[39] Plato, "Euthyphro," in Five Dialogues, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981) 4b-e.

[40] Moshe Berent, "Hobbes and the 'Greek Tongues,'", 41.

brought to court. One could be brought to court by either the wronged party, or some other interested party:

> It appears that under Athens first law code, that of Draco (621-0), it was invariably left to the injured party or his kin to seek redress for an injury. Solon allowed prosecution by any citizen in full possession of his rights on a certain range of 'public' charges...while others remained 'private' and limited to the injured party and his kin...[42]

Despite the use of the term "public" in the above passage, this kind of prosecution would be considered private in modern society. The reason for this is that the person who is laying the charge is a private individual. There was no state prosecutor who charged individuals on behalf of the state. Not only was the initial prosecution left to the initiative of private citizens, so too was the enforcement of court decisions. Court orders were not carried out by state officials but "by the interested parties or volunteers, sometimes by self-help."[43] The only exceptions were cases of capital punishment, for which the Eleven were responsible.[44]

Given the fact that the *polis* lacked order enforcing agencies, and a public prosecution system, the maintenance of civil stability was largely dependent upon individual initiative. The onus was upon the wronged party to seek recompense, and impose punishment upon the lawbreaker, enlisting the help of family and friends if necessary. In such a society there is little, beyond the threat posed by an individual and their kinship group, to deter the potential wrongdoer. Nonetheless, such a deterrent can

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[41] Ibid., 41.

[42] P.J. Rhodes, The Greek City States: A Source Book (Kent: Croom Helm Ltd., 1986), 141.

[43] Moshe Berent, "Hobbes and the 'Greek Tongues,'" 40.

be formidable. If an individual and his kinship group are strong, and, more importantly, if they are known to be the kind of people who will defend one another and impose punishment they will likely deter wrongdoers. But, ultimately the strength of this deterrent depends upon the character of the individuals involved. If this kind of character is socially pervasive, that is if individuals are aware that the law will be enforced and that punishment will be exacted, then this may be sufficient to ensure civil obedience. It is important to note that the encouragement of such a character is useful not only for ensuring that the law is enforced, but it may also encourage obedience to the law in the first place.

Apart from the lack of order enforcing agencies, the *polis* was also characterized by its lack of marked divisions between the state and the citizen. Berent notes the lack of distinction between the political institutions of Athens and the *demos*: "Athens' political institutions, the Assembly (*ekklesia*), the Council (*boule*) and the Law-courts (*dikasteria*), were popular, not differentiated from the demos."[45] In addition, Berent explains that the different political offices were almost all chosen by lot and held for short periods of time.[46] The popular nature of Athenian political institutions, and the transience of political office, served to further blur the line between the individual and the state. Victor Ehrenberg asserts that the citizens actually were the state: "(t)he *Polis* was the state of the

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[44] Ibid., 41.
[45] Ibid., 42
[46] Ibid., 43.

politai, the citizens...*Andres gar polis*...it is the men who are the *Polis*. There were no subjects."[47]

The character of the citizen is so vitally important within the context of the *polis*, precisely because there is no distinction between the citizen and the state. In the *polis* the citizens are the state. It is the citizens who make decisions with respect to legislation and arbitration. If the citizens are responsible for governing the *polis*, it is therefore imperative that their characters are suited for the task. If one is to govern well they need, among other things, to be in control of their emotions. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that this tendency to follow emotion is precisely what makes the youthful man not suited for the study of politics.[48] The young are not suited for politics because they are "passionate, hot-tempered, and carried away by impulse, and unable to control their passion."[49] The young, as a result of this disposition are hindered in their ability to judge and discern with respect to the practical matters of life. This is in sharp contrast to the man in the prime of life: "at this age, men are neither over-confident, which would show rashness, nor too fearful, but preserving the right attitude in regard to both, neither trusting nor distrusting at all, but judging rather in accordance with actual facts."[50] The individual in the prime of life correctly handles his emotions; he allows his emotions neither too much rein nor too little. A person who is enslaved by his passions becomes

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[47] Victor Ehrenberg, The Greek State (Oxford: Blackwell, 1960), 88-9, quoted in Moshe Berent, "Hobbes and the 'Greek Tongues,'" 43.

[48] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 65-6 (1094b13-1095a7).

[49] Aristotle, The "Art"of Rhetoric, trans. J.H. Freese, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926; reprint, Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1994), 1389a4-5.

unable to participate in political life in a way that is useful to society. Swept up by emotion, such individuals approach the practical matters of human life like one whose judgment is impaired by a fever. Whether one is deliberating about legislation, arbitration, or even about social interaction, one needs the ability to discern and judge the facts of the situation; this requires that one respond to their emotions appropriately.

Conclusion

If one takes into account the general lack of coercive apparatus available to the statesman, and the extent of the citizen's participation in politics, the urgency of Aristotle's concern with human psychology becomes clear. Aristotle needs to be concerned with human psychology because of the degree of individual involvement in political life. The structure of the *polis* necessitated a concern with human character, and by extension human emotion. The extent of the significance of human character within the polis is exemplified in the kind of attack that Aischines leveled against this rival Timarchos:

> And though Aischines,...does talk of 'shameful pleasures', what he is primarily concerned to prove is not that his rival, Timarchos, had a taste for food and sex, but that Timarchos' indulgence in those pleasures was so great that he was incapable of directing his actions toward any other goal...They had become his masters; he their slave. Who could then trust such a man? He had forfeited his independence, his ability to determine what was right and good, and his ability to purse what a free man should.[51]

Timarchos, according to Aischines, could not be trusted because he was the slave, and not the master, of his own passions—such an individual is a threat not only to himself and his

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[50] Ibid., 1390a34-1390b.

[51] Just Roger, Women in Athenian Law and Life (London: Routledge, 1989), 173.

kinship group, but even to the society as a whole. The envious person it will be argued poses a similar threat.

Chapter Two

Aristotle on Envy

In "Faces of Envy," Leslie Farber attests to the enduring meaning of envy:

> Unlike most words having to do with the human condition, the definitions of envy I have seen are remarkably similar. And unlike other moral terms in the West whose meanings shift with the temper of the times, the etymology of envy has stayed unusually constant. Envy had the same meaning for Plato that it had for Sullivan.[1]

The usual definition of envy, as presented by Farber, is almost identical to the definition used by Aristotle. According to Farber: "stressing its subjective nature, the usual definition of envy is 'chagrin or discontent at the excellence or good fortune of another.'"[2] Aristotle generally defines envy as pain at the good fortune of one's neighbors.[3] Although research reveals that Farber's assertion holds true in numerous other cases as well, one should be wary of overestimating the usefulness of the usual definitions. These definitions do little more than superficially describe the phenomenon of envy; as they stand they do not provide insight into the envious mind. To truly understand envy one needs to understand its causes. That is, one needs to understand why it is that some people are pained by another's excellence or good fortune, and why it is that others are not. This requires the identification of that which causes the envious

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[1] Leslie Farber, "Faces of Envy," Review of Existential Psychology & Psychiatry 6, no. 2 (1961): 131.

[2] Ibid., 131.

person to feel pain. The consensus surrounding the etymology of envy thins considerably as one begins to probe the causes of this emotion.

To assess the political implications of envy, and any proposals for managing envy, one needs an accurate conception of the emotion in question. That is, one needs to understand as precisely as possible the factors contributing to the envious response. In this chapter I will examine Aristotle's treatment of envy. This is a somewhat involved task given that Aristotle's discussions of envy are both brief and scattered through a number of different works. Therefore, any attempt to address Aristotle's thoughts on envy will involve interpretation as much as it does explication.

Moral Virtue and Vice

An engagement with the greater philosophical context within which Aristotle's treatment of envy occurs is essential if one is to make sense of the few passages in which Aristotle discusses envy directly. Without this context, Aristotle's rather reticent definitions of envy will prove to be unyielding. Therefore, the first task must be the description of the necessary philosophical background. Aristotle's condemnation of envy as an emotion whose name directly connotes depravity is based upon his conception of envy as a moral vice that precludes its possessor from acting in accordance with excellence.[4] This discussion will begin by explaining both what moral virtue and vice are, and how they determine human activity.

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[3] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 106 (1108a18-b9).
[4] Ibid., 102 (1107a1-27).

The notions of virtue and vice are, for Aristotle, closely connected to activity. In fact, Aristotle defines virtue as excellence in activity.[5] However, virtue is not merely excellence in any activity, but excellence in that specific activity which is definitive of a thing. An activity that is definitive of a particular kind of thing is said to be the function of that thing. In book two of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle suggests that human beings as a species have a particular function (or activity), just as flautists, shoemakers, or harpists are said to have a function. When a thing fulfills its function in accordance with excellence, that thing is said to be virtuous. For example, a shoemaker is said to be a virtuous shoemaker if he makes good shoes. It does not make sense to call a shoemaker, *qua* shoemaker, virtuous for sweeping floors or cutting hair; for such activities do not describe what it is to be a shoemaker. A shoemaker makes shoes, it is this activity which defines the class of individuals to which he belongs.[6] This of course, does not preclude the possibility that this shoemaker, *qua* father or *qua* citizen, may have other functions. Aristotle is seeking precision. To know whether or not a thing is virtuous, one needs first to know what the purpose, function, or activity of that thing is. Only then is it possible for one to determine if that thing is fulfilling its function in accordance with excellence. The term 'thing' has been used because virtue may be predicated, not only of human beings, but of all other living things, parts of living things and even artifacts.[7]

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[5] Ibid., 76 (1098a8-b12).

[6] Ibid., 75 (1097b22-1098a8).

[7] That is, virtue (*aret□*) understood as excellence in the fulfillment of a things function. Therefore, any thing with a function may be described as possessing or lacking virtue in this sense. See the Greek at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1106a10-25.

Aristotle's distinction between moral and intellectual virtue is based upon the fact that he considers them to be the excellences of different parts of the human soul. The soul, according to Aristotle, may be divided into two parts: the rational and the irrational.[8] Moral virtue is an excellence of the irrational soul. While moral virtue corresponds to the irrational soul, moral virtue is only predicated of a particular part of the irrational soul. The reason for this is that not all parts of the irrational soul are responsible for, or participate in, human goodness. The vegetative part of the irrational soul, which is responsible for nutrition and growth, cannot be the seat of moral virtue because one cannot differentiate between a good character and a bad character based upon the activity of the vegetative soul alone.[9] For this part of the soul is active during sleep when, Aristotle argues, "the good and the bad are least easy to distinguish."[10] In the first book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle argues that the part of the soul that determines moral virtue and vice is the "desiderative [epithumetikon], and generally the appetitive part [orektikon]."[11] The appetitive part of the human soul has the power of desiring.[12] This part of the human soul is, in a sense, responsible for setting the ends that human beings aim for in that it enjoins one to pursue or avoid a particular object or situation.[13] Aristotle

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[8] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 88 (1102a17-b6).

[9] Ibid., 88 (1102a17-b6).

[10] Ibid., 89 (1102b6-28).

[11] Ibid., 90 (11028-1103a10).

[12] Aristotle, Aristotle's On The Soul, 414a30-414b19 and Apostle's Glossary p. 206.

[13] Ibid., 433a30, cf. 432b28-29.

argues that the appetitive part of the soul may be mistaken as to whether something is good or not.[14] As a result, one's appetites may urge one to act wrongly:

> For it is with pleasures and pains that moral goodness is concerned. Pleasure induces us to behave badly, and pain to shrink from fine actions. Hence the importance...of having been trained in some way from infancy to feel joy and grief at the right things: true education is precisely this.[15]

For Aristotle, the virtue of the appetitive part of the human soul consists in it being obedient to the soul's rational element. The difference between the continent and the incontinent person is that in the case of the former the appetitive part of the soul is obedient to reason, while "the impulses of the incontinent take them in the contrary direction."[16] In the case of the morally virtuous individual, the appetitive part is not merely *obedient* to reason, but in complete harmony with it:

> Probably we should believe nevertheless that the soul too contains an irrational element which opposes and runs counter to reason—in what sense it is a separate element does not matter at all. But this too, as we said, seems to be receptive of reason; at any rate in the continent man it is obedient to reason, and is presumably still more amenable in the temperate and in the brave man, because in them it is in complete harmony with the rational principle.[17]

In other words, the morally virtuous individual actually desires the very things that right principle would prescribe.

To identify moral virtue as the excellence of the appetitive part of the human soul is not yet to offer a definition of virtue. This is similar to asserting that good vision is the excellence of the eye; while such an assertion may account for the particular part of the

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[14] Ibid., 433a26-30.
[15] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 95 (1104a33-b20).
[16] Ibid., 89 (1102b6-28).

body good vision is the excellence of, it does not explain what vision—much less good vision—is. According to Aristotle, to define virtue one needs first to state what it is generically.[18] Aristotle begins this process of definition by differentiating among three kinds of things that are found in the soul: feelings, faculties, and dispositions. Moral virtue and vice are, for Aristotle, kinds of dispositions. Dispositions are:

> Conditions in virtue of which we are all well or ill disposed in respect of the feelings concerned. We have, for instance, a bad disposition towards anger if our tendency is too strong or too weak, and a good one if our tendency is moderate. Similarly with the other feelings.[19]

It is not the emotions per se but one's disposition towards emotion that is the basis for moral approbation and disapprobation. One is not praised or blamed for being angry, but for being angry in a certain way.[20] What differentiates moral virtue and vice is that the possessor of virtue is rendered good on account of it: "let us assert, then, that any kind of excellence renders that of which it is the excellence *good*, and makes it perform its function *well*."[21]

While Aristotle argues that virtue belongs to the genus of dispositions, he also, on a number of occasions, describes virtue as being concerned with feelings and actions.[22] These are two kinds of assertions and they need to be differentiated. To state what virtue is generically is to state what *kind* of thing virtue is; virtue is a *kind* of disposition. A

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[17] Ibid., 89 (1102b6-28).
[18] Ibid., 98-99 (1105b2-26).
[19] Ibid., 98-99 (1105b2-26).
[20] Ibid., 99 (1105b26-1106a20).
[21] Ibid., 99 (1105b26-1106a20).
[22] Ibid., 92 (1103b1-25); 95(1104a33-b20); 101(1106b9-1107a1); 102 (1107a1-27); 108 (1108b33-1109a25).

disposition describes one's tendency to experience an emotion in a particular way. Dispositions are not emotions, but they have to do with emotion. Similarly, virtues are not particular actions, but they have something to do with action. Virtue is concerned with emotions and actions in the sense that virtue, or one's lack there of, determines ones' feelings and actions. For example, one's disposition towards fear will determine how, and when, and to what degree they will experience that particular emotion. This in turn will affect how one is likely to act in that particular situation. Emotions are described as conditions of the soul that are attended by pleasure or pain.[23] It is these attendant pleasures and pains which may determine human action: "pleasure and pain are also the standards by which—to a greater or lesser extent—we regulate our actions."[24] Moral virtue is not, strictly speaking, a feeling or an action or a combination of the two. Strictly speaking, moral virtue is a kind of disposition. It is important to recall that moral virtue, in Aristotle's words, renders its possessor good and makes him perform his function well. Human goodness involves having certain kinds of feelings and actions; it is important when treating this subject to maintain the distinction between dispositions, and the kinds of actions and emotions that arise out of them.

In one sense, virtue is concerned with feelings and actions in that moral virtue is generically 'concerned' with such things. However, virtue may also be understood to be concerned with emotions and actions in another, yet correlated, sense. In this second sense, moral virtue is concerned with emotions and actions, because they can determine

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[23] Ibid., 98 (1105b2-26).
[24] Ibid., 96 (1104b20-1105a9).

moral virtue. The relationship between emotions and actions on the one hand, and virtue on the other, is a reciprocal one. Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is based upon the principle that "the causes or means that bring about any form of excellence are the same as those that destroy it."[25] Aristotle states:

> Now this holds good also of the virtues. It is the way that we behave in our dealings with other people that makes us just or unjust, and the way that we behave in the face of danger, accustoming ourselves to be timid or confident, that makes us brave or cowardly....In a word, then, like activities produce like dispositions.[26]

It is because the development of moral virtue is so dependent upon how and when one acts and feels, that Aristotle stresses the importance of habit. The statesman needs therefore to tailor the legislation and the education of the *polis*, as well as his rhetoric, to achieve this end. While emotions and actions are significant, it is important to clearly grasp why they are significant. In the present context, emotions and actions are significant because they are the only means through which moral virtue may be engendered. One does not become virtuous by committing a moral maxim to memory, but by acting virtuously; just as one does not become healthy by listening to the advice of a doctor, but by following it.[27]

The doctrine of the mean is concerned with describing the "quality" that ones' actions and emotions should have if virtue is to be engendered and preserved.[28] According to Aristotle, each kind of activity is characterized by two extremes, one of

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[25] Ibid., 92 (1103b1-25).
[26] Ibid., 92 (1103b1-25).
[27] Ibid., 98 (1105b2-26).
[28] Ibid., 92 (1103b1-25).

excess and the other a deficiency—the same is true of human emotion. Acting or feeling in accordance with one of these extremes is dangerous to moral virtue; just as exercising too much or too little, or eating and drinking too much or too little, is deleterious for the body.[29] There is, however, an intensity of exercise and an amount of food that will both increase and preserve one's health. Aristotle argues that the same is true for moral virtue.[30] Virtue he states: "is a mean between two kinds of vice, one of excess and the other deficiency; and also for this reason, that whereas these vices fall short or exceed the right measure in both feelings and actions, virtue discovers the mean and chooses it."[31] Having given a general description of the doctrine of the mean Aristotle then proceeds to apply this theory to particular cases of human conduct. It is in this discussion that envy is found.

Before turning to Aristotle's discussion of envy, it is useful to provide a survey of the terrain covered thus far. Thus far what has been established is that moral virtue is the excellence of the appetitive part of the soul. If virtue is that which "renders that of which it is the excellence *good*, and makes it perform its function *well*,"[32] then moral virtue will render the appetitive part of the soul good and enable it to perform its function well. The appetitive part of the soul is responsible for our desires; if this part of the soul is possessed of virtue then one will have the right kinds of desires. Aristotle states that:

> Every disposition has its own appreciation of what is fine and pleasant; and probably what makes the man of good character stand out furthest is

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[29] Ibid., 94 (1104a11-32).
[30] Ibid., 101 (1106b9-1107a1).
[31] Ibid., 102 (1107a1-27).
[32] Ibid., 99 (1105b26-1106a20).

> the fact that he sees the truth in every kind of situation: he is a sort of standard and yardstick of what is fine and pleasant. Most people seem to owe their deception to pleasure, which appears to them to be a good although it is not; consequently they choose what is pleasant as a good, and avoid pain as an evil.[33]

The morally virtuous individual is able to correctly distinguish between different types of pleasure and pain. As a result, such a person will have a tendency to hit the mean with respect to their actions and their emotions. This brief presentation of the relevant philosophical background does not presume to be exhaustive. Its aim is merely to set the stage for the discussion of Aristotle's treatment of envy.

Envy in the *Nicomachean Ethics*

In the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle presents envy as an extreme in the sphere of indignation. The following diagram may serve as a representation of this sphere.[34]

Sphere of Action or Feeling	**Excess**	**Mean**	**Deficiency**
Indignation	Envy	Righteous Indignation	Malicious Enjoyment

According to Aristotle, righteous indignation, envy, and spite are "all concerned with feelings of pleasure or pain at the experiences of our neighbours."[35] The person who is righteously indignant feels pain or distress at the undeserved good fortune of his

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[33] Ibid., 121-122 (1113a12-1113b21).

[34] The representation is based upon the table of virtues and vices found in: Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 104.

neighbors. This is the mean state, and therefore to have such an emotion is, for Aristotle, a mark of virtue. The envious person feels pain not only at instances of undeserved good fortune but also at instances of deserved good fortune; the envious person is pained "at any good fortune."[36] While envy is described by Aristotle as an excess, it is very difficult to say just what envy is the excess of. The spiteful person, who characterizes the other extreme, is described as one who is "so far from feeling distress that he actually rejoices."[37] Beyond this rather short treatment, there is no further discussion of the sphere of indignation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Aristotle's presentation of this sphere has proved to be a source of perplexity for interpreters of his doctrine of the mean. Many have considered the placement of envy, righteous indignation, and spite (or malicious enjoyment) on the same continuum to be an error on Aristotle's part. J.O. Urmson is among those who argue that this triad poses a particular source of difficulty for Aristotle; the triad, he argues, is a false one.[38] Urmson's primary criticism of this sphere is that there does not seem to be any particular emotion that holds this sphere together: "if we consider envy to be regret at neighbors' good fortune and spitefulness to be rejoicing in their bad fortune, neither seems to be particularly in excess or deficient with regard to any common feeling or emotion."[39] This, he argues, is in contrast to the other spheres, where the mean expresses a proper

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[35] Ibid., 106; 1108a18-b9.
[36] Ibid., 106; 1108a18-b9.
[37] Ibid., 106; 1108a18-b9.
[38] J.O. Urmson, "Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean," in Essays on Aristotle's Ethics, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 157-170.

disposition towards an emotion, and the extremes are presented as either excesses or deficiencies with respect to that emotion. Urmson goes on to argue that: "it is...a reasonable hypothesis that the bogus trilogy is also not one of excellence and related defects of character."[40] He suggests that perhaps the sphere of indignation falls under the disclaimer that Aristotle pairs with his immediately preceding treatment of shame. With respect to the sphere of shame, in which modesty holds the mean position, Aristotle explicitly states that modesty is not a virtue.[41] Whether it was Aristotle's carelessness, or a deliberate attempt to bolster the doctrine of the mean, an artificial opposition seems to have been imposed upon envy and malicious enjoyment resulting in an unworkable triad.

The sphere of indignation clearly has a number of difficulties, and ultimately it may even be unworkable. Nonetheless, one would be too hasty to discount the usefulness of this triad altogether. The main criticism that Urmson levels against Aristotle's presentation of this sphere is that it lacks an emotion to hold it together. It is worth seriously entertaining the possibility that there is not a workable emotion for this triad. Perhaps Urmson's search for a workable emotion is bound to be fruitless because he is looking for something that not only is not, but cannot, be there. A careful look at the difficulties associated with Urmson's position is useful if the *Nicomachean Ethics* is to be at all helpful in understanding Aristotle's conception of envy.

Urmson makes two important moves that ultimately lead him to search for the emotion that underwrites the sphere of indignation. The first move, and probably the

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[39] Ibid., 167.
[40] Ibid., 168.

most significant, is Urmson's interpretation of Aristotle's assertion that excellence of character is concerned with both emotions and actions. He emphasizes two points that need to be kept in mind:

> These two points are that (1) excellence of character is concerned with both emotions (*pathe*, passions) and actions, not with actions alone. In the *Eudemian Ethics*, indeed, Aristotle says simply that it is concerned with emotions, without mentioning actions (e.g., EE 1106b16); (2) excellence of character is concerned with likes and dislikes (*hedonai* and *lupai*, traditionally translated as "pleasures and pains").[42]

Having made this assertion, Urmson goes on to argue that it is wrong to conceive of human excellence as consisting of two spheres. Instead he argues, that when one "acts in a way that displays character" one will be manifesting some emotion.[43] Simply put, Urmson argues that excellences of character involve both emotion and action. Urmson's second move builds upon this position concluding that: "for each specific excellence of character that we recognize there will be some specific emotion whose field it is." [44] Therefore, if righteous indignation is an excellence of character there will be some specific emotion whose field it is. Thus begins Urmson's search for the emotion that would tie together the sphere of indignation.

It is Urmson's interpretive approach to moral virtue that leads him to treat the sphere of indignation as he would the other spheres, when there is good reason to believe that it is significantly different. Urmson treats righteous indignation as if it were an

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[41] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 106 (1108a18-b9).
[42] J.O. Urmson, "Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean," 159.
[43] Ibid., 159.
[44] Ibid., 193.

activity, and therefore proceeds to search for the emotion that it manifests.[45] Indeed, almost all of the first nine excellences of character that Aristotle lists in book two involve human action. The sphere of fear and confidence, for example, is concerned with describing how one acts in a dangerous situation. The rash person is one who acts too hastily, while the coward fails to act altogether. Aristotle, as Urmson argues, does explain this triad with reference to an emotion. The difficulty with the rash person is that they feel too little fear. The difficulty with the coward is that the are too fearful. The rash person, like the coward, acts the wrong way because they feel the wrong way. In the case of this sphere there is an emotion to tie it together. The sphere of indignation, however, does not fit this formula. The reason is that envy, indignation and malicious enjoyment are not actions but emotions; envy, indignation, and malicious enjoyment are *pathē*. Aristotle even indicates a departure before turning to discuss shame and indignation by saying that: "there are mean states also in the sphere of feelings and emotions."[46] Following this statement Aristotle discusses only the spheres of shame and indignation, and in both cases the language that is used in the description of these two spheres stresses

[45] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 103-106 (1107a28-1108b9). I hesitate to say that *all* of the excellences involve human action, because of the difficulty posed by the sphere of anger. For, it is unclear whether or not there are actions involved. Is the irascible person one who feels and acts angry? If so, this would fit with the other spheres, for the irascible person is not merely feeling an emotion but also acting upon it. This interpretation would fit the account given in book four where Aristotle describes the irascible person as one who is quick to vent his anger (*Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 161, 1125b34-1126a24).

[46] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 106 (1108a18-b9).

their emotional aspect.[47] The difficulty with Urmson's approach is that he treats envy as if it were a kind of action, and so proceeds to look for the emotional cause of that action.[48] Urmson seems to be looking for the particular emotion that causes envy—the emotion that causes the emotion—this does not make sense.

What is at issue in the sphere of indignation is not why one acts enviously, but why one feels envious in the first place. What has been dubbed Aristotle's error may in fact be of great help in interpreting the doctrine of the mean. The sphere of envy, not having been described in terms of actions and emotions, forces the interpreter to recall that it is the dispositions which are of most significance in discussing moral virtue. Generically virtues are dispositions. Emotions and actions are their differentia. The sphere of indignation forces one to recognize that they cannot stray too far from what virtue is generically.[49] In the case of this sphere Aristotle has chosen, for some reason, not to describe the kinds of actions that may be caused by the different degrees of

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[47] Aristotle describes the modest man as one who feels the right amount of shame. Aristotle describes righteous indignation as something that one feels: "the man who feels righteous indignation." Ibid., 106 (1108a18-b9).

[48] In this context the term 'action' refers to those kinds of activities in which one is said to be an agent, such as fleeing battle or expending money. L.A. Kosman refers to action in this sense as a mode of *praxis*. Kosman argues for a broader interpretation of the notion of activity, one which covers not only modes of *praxis*—in which the individual is said to be acting—but also those situations in which the individual is being acted upon. This broader notion of activity would include envy as "a mode of a subject's being acted upon." L.A. Kosman, "Being Properly Affected: Virtues and Feelings in Aristotle's Ethics," in Essays on Aristotle's Ethics, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 104-105.

[49] "There is here no indication that these moral virtues defined in terms of feelings are dispositions toward some range of actions appropriate in light of these feelings, and, on the contrary, every indication that they are dispositions toward appropriate feelings themselves." L.A. Kosman, "Being Properly Affected," 109.

indignation. Had Aristotle explained the sphere of indignation using both actions and emotions, this would have pulled this sphere in line with the others. However, the triad in question has not been presented in this way and therefore cannot be explained in such terms. This does not mean that the triad cannot be explained at all. The difference is that this sphere needs to explained in different terms. In the case of this sphere one needs to explain why it is that some people feel envy and others do not. This is akin to explaining why some people have a tendency to feel fear in certain situations while others do not. How then does one account for these different emotional responses? Certainly, one would be correct in arguing that a difference in disposition would account for these different emotional responses, but such an answer serves only to bring the discussion back to its starting point. What is needed is an understanding of the very disposition itself. It is with this end in view that this discussion will, in Aristotelian fashion, make a fresh start.

Reconstructing the Sphere of Indignation

The starting point for this discussion will be the passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which Aristotle describes the sphere of indignation. It is worth citing the entire section in which Aristotle addresses this subject:

> Righteous Indignation is a mean between Envy and Spite, and they are all concerned with feelings of pain or pleasure at the experiences of our neighbours. The man who feels righteous indignation is distressed at instances of undeserved good fortune, but the envious man goes further

> and is distressed at *any* good fortune, while the spiteful man is so far from feeling distress that he actually rejoices.[50]

Righteous indignation , envy and spite constitute one sphere of emotion because all three of these emotions are concerned with the experiences of one's neighbors. What is significant about the mean state is that it involves a feeling of pain, but only in certain very specific circumstances. The righteously indignant person feels pain only when his neighbors good fortune is undeserved. The envious man is described as one who *goes further* and is distressed at any good fortune. The envious person feels pain in a much wider set of circumstances than does the righteously indignant person. The presentation seems to suggest that the envious person feels pain not only at instances of undeserved but also of deserved good fortune. The discussion of spite will be set aside for the time being.

The crucial difference between the envious person and the righteously indignant person is that they have different emotional responses to the same kind of situation. When a neighbor receives deserved good fortune the envious person is pained while the righteously indignant person is not. The righteously indignant person feels pain only when the good fortune is undeserved. The envious person, on the other hand, is pained by all instances of good fortune—such an individual either does not or cannot distinguish between deserved and undeserved good fortune. While it is possible that both characters feel pain at the same situation, such as the undeserved good fortune of a neighbor, this does not mean that the two characters are having a similar emotional response. Unless an

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[50] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 106 (1108a18-b9).

emotion arises out of a particular kind of character, for the right reasons and in the right way, it cannot be considered to be a virtuous response.[51] The entire ethical difficulty lies in precisely this: the envious person is pained by the wrong things. What needs to be accounted for is why this is the case. One thing is clear, it is not the fact of another's good fortune which causes these differences in response. For otherwise all people would have the same emotional response when in the same situation. The difference cannot be accounted for by the situation itself. Specifically, what needs to be accounted for is why some people feel pain in a certain situation and why another person, in the same situation, does not. If the difference cannot be accounted for by the situation then the difference must lie with the individuals themselves. That is to say, the source of the difference is not in the situation but in the individual's perception of that situation.

If the difference between the envious and the righteously indignant response is one of perception, then this perception needs to be accounted for. The most basic kind of perception is sense-perception. While simple sense perception has little to do with the difference between the envious and the non-envious response, a look at how Aristotle addresses the issue of sense-perception is nonetheless a useful starting point for the present discussion. In the *De Anima*, Aristotle describes how one senses different temperatures.[52] Aristotle argues that the sense of touch may distinguish between temperatures that are either colder or warmer than the temperature of one's body at the time of perception. For example, the hand will perceive a thing with a temperature that is

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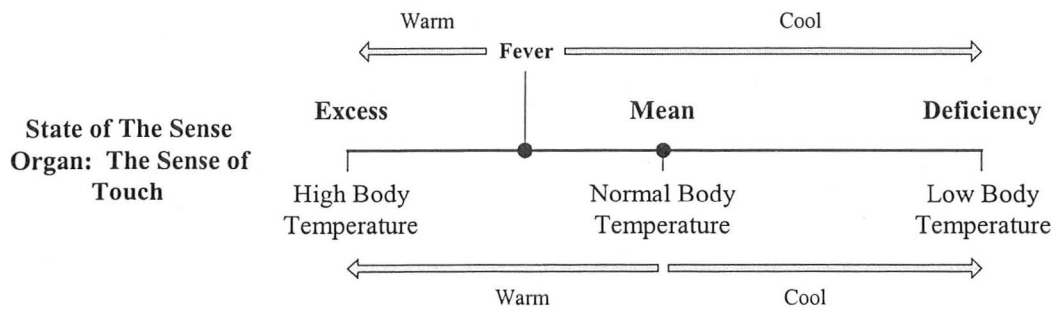
[51] Ibid., 97 (1105a9-b2).

[52] Aristotle, Aristotle's On The Soul, 424a4-8.

lower than its own temperature to be cool. The hot stove is much hotter than ones body temperature and so one perceives it as such. One's ability to distinguish between different temperatures depends upon the state of the corresponding sense organ.

Given that human beings all have a body temperature in a similar range, almost everyone will distinguish between temperatures in a similar way. There are however situations in which two people may differ as to whether something is warm or cold. If, for example, one person has a fever this would cause them to discern temperature in a different way. This may be represented on a diagram:



What to the feverish person feels cold, to the healthy person feels warm. The reason for this is that the state of the feverish person's body temperature is different from that of the healthy person; in other words, their sense organ is in a different state. In the *De Anima*, Aristotle describes the sense organ as a kind of a "mean between contraries among sensible objects." [53] How one will distinguish between different temperatures is determined by the state of their sense organ at the time of perception.

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[53] Ibid., 424a5. What is interesting is that Aristotle argues that only beings with a "mean" may discern or discriminate. A plant, for example, has no mean; its temperature changes along with the weather, the plant therefore cannot discern.

The perception of temperature is a simple case. It involves only one sense (touch) and its respective sensible (temperature). This is also a case in which there will be the least amount of difference between people given that people all tend to have similar body temperatures. It is therefore reasonable to assert that all human beings will pull their hands away from a hot stove. Everyone with a functioning sense organ will feel pain when they place their hand in contact with a hot stove; all would pull their hand back automatically. In such instances there is little difference between the pleasures and pains that people experience. Human beings are on a daily basis faced with situations that call for the proper discernment between pleasure and pain; these situations range in complexity from the hot stove to a battlefield or even a conversation. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle is concerned with the more complex situations that require discernment. It is precisely in this more complex realm that among human beings there are the greatest differences in perception.

A more complex situation, such as the battlefield cannot be sensed by one sense alone. The sense of touch, for example, senses only specific things. The same is true for vision and hearing and all of the other senses: "...vision is of color, the sense of hearing is of sound, and the sense of taste is of flavor."[54] The senses alone can only give us a fragmentary picture of the world. The sense of touch provides us with texture, vision with colors and shapes, and hearing with various kinds of sounds. According to Aristotle, it is the imagination (phantasia) which allows one to pull all of these discrete images of

[54] Ibid., 418a10-15.

the world together. Dorothea Frede explains the distinction between simple sense perception and the imagination. She states:

> Because of the emphasis on the singleness of each act of perception and on the need for the presence of its object, it is doubtful that for Aristotle we can have something like a 'panoramic' view of a whole situation, for he does not seem to include anything like a 'field of vision' in his explanations. This would suggest that when I let my eyes glide over the different books on my bookshelves there is always just the piecemeal vision of this or that colored object; the *overall impression* of all the different books (including those behind my back) would then be already a *phantasia*, a synthesis of what I perceive right now and what I have perceived a second ago an so on.[55]

Each of the senses provides what information it can, and then all of this is integrated and combined by the imagination which provides us with an image of the whole.

These images are very important for, according to Aristotle, the soul needs them in order to think.[56] The role of images for thought is akin to the role of sense impressions for sensation.[57] In sense perception, when one touches a stove their hand will receive a particular sense impression. As I have argued, whether or not one experiences that sense impression as hot, warm, or cold, depends upon the particular state of the sense organ. The sense organ acts as a mean, distinguishing between different sense impressions. The imagination presents the thinking part of the soul with a sense impression, albeit a more complex one. It is the thinking part of the soul which distinguishes between these

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[55] Dorothea Frede, "The Cognitive Role of Phantasia," in Essays on Aristotle's *DE ANIMA*, ed. Martha C. Nussbaum and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 283.

[56] Apostle, Aristotle's On The Soul, 431a16.

[57] Ibid., 431a15.

different impressions, affirming or denying them as good or bad.[58] So, on the battlefield the imagination offers the thinking part of the soul an image of the situation, the thinking part of the soul assesses the situation as, to put it simply, one that ought to be pursued or avoided. The particular state of the thinking part of one's soul, like the state of one's sense organ, determines whether any given set of circumstances will be experienced as good and desirable, or as bad and undesirable. Given that there is much more variation in the way that people think than there is with their body temperature, the way in which one perceives a particular situation can vary wildly from person to person.

I have spoken of the thinking part of the soul, but I have yet to explain precisely what part of the soul I am referring to, and just how this part of the soul works. I am referring to the part of the human soul that combines concepts.[59] To use Aristotle's example, when we say that Cleon is white we are combining the concepts of "Cleon" and "white."[60] According to Aristotle, the thinking part of the soul uses the images provided by the imagination and combines them, the result being an assertion that may be either true or false:

> The thinking of indivisibles is among things concerning which there can be no falsity; but objects to which truth or falsity may belong are combinations of concepts already formed, like unities of things, and as Empedocles said: "where sprang into being many neckless heads", which were then put together by *Friendship*.[61]

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[58] Ibid., 431a15.

[59] Here I using Apostle's terminology, see his glossary. Ibid., 219.

[60] Ibid., 430b5.

[61] Ibid., 430a25-30. "Fr. 20, 57. According to Empedocles, various unities or elements were the first to come into existence, then combinations of them were formed by *Friendship*, a principle posited by him as a moving cause." Apostle, "Commentaries on the Soul," in Aristotle's On The Soul, p.169, n.4.

How an individual assesses a situation depends upon how they combine the information that they are receiving from their senses into judgments about that situation. The different ways in which people combine concepts, and the different judgments which result, depends upon, among other things, an individuals disposition of mind.

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle identifies disposition of mind as a determinant of our emotional response to a situation. He argues that there are three things which need to be understood with respect to each emotion: "for instance, in regard to anger, the disposition of mind which makes men angry, the persons with whom they are usually angry, and the occasions which give rise to anger."[62] In Aristotle's account of disposition of mind found in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle seems to be referring to one's tendency to conceive of a situation in a particular way. Aristotle defines anger as "a longing, accompanied by pain, for a real or apparent slight, affecting a man himself or one of his friends, when such a slight is undeserved."[63] According to this definition one is likely to be angry if they are—or think they are—being slighted undeservedly. A number of different judgments are involved in, or are constitutive of, the thought that one has been slighted. For example, A is likely to consider themselves to be slighted by B, if A thinks that B is deliberately preventing him from attaining what he desires, or if A thinks that he has a right to be treated well by B. How one conceives of a situation, and hence one's emotional response to that situation, is dependent upon the kinds of judgments that one makes about that situation. An individual who is disposed to conceive of things in a certain way, for

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[62] Aristotle, The "Art of Rhetoric, 1378a27-30.

example one who generally considers himself to be deserving of honor, will be angered when they believe that they are not being honored. Hence ones disposition of mind is a determinant of how one perceives a situation and by extension how one responds emotionally.

This discussion began with the assertion that what is at issue in the sphere of indignation is not what emotion underlies envy, indignation, and spite, but why one feels these emotions in the first place. If it is one's perception of a situation that determines what kinds of emotions they will experience, then in order to understand the sphere of indignation one needs to understand any difference between how the thought of the righteously indignant person and the envious person is brought to bear on a situation. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle describes the difference between the mindset of the envious and the indignant person. In order to understand the causes of the envious response one needs to understand its mindset.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle distinguishes between righteous indignation and envy on the grounds that the envious person is pained at all instances of their neighbors good fortune. The righteously indignant person is presented as one who is more discerning, feeling pain only at instances of undeserved good fortune. The envious person is unable to distinguish between deserved and undeserved good fortune. The critical faculty of the envious person, as in the case of the feverish individual, is not in the correct state; the critical faculty is in some way being thrown off. The difference between those disposed to envy and those who are not, is that the former are prone to perceive

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[63] Ibid., 1378a32-34.

their neighbor's advantage in a manner that induces them to feel pain. This interpretation of Aristotle's work presents envy as an extremely subjective emotion less dependent upon the fact of a neighbor's advantage than upon one's subjective perception of that fact. The key is understanding the mindset of the envious person, that is understanding how the state of the envious mindset is different from the indignant persons mindset, thereby accounting for the envious persons inability to distinguish between deserved and undeserved good fortune.

Firstly it is important to be clear about the ways in which the indignant person and the envious person are similar. Both the indignant person and the envious person are concerned with the same kinds of things; both are concerned with other people's good fortune. Aristotle clearly asserts that the pain associated with indignation and envy is simply on account of the other person's prosperity:

> Now, all who feel envy and indignation must have this in common, that they are disturbed, not because they think that any harm will happen to themselves, but on account of their neighbour; for it will cease to be indignation and envy, but will be fear, if the pain and disturbance arise form the idea that harm may come to themselves from another's good fortune.[64]

Both the indignant person and the envious person are concerned with the same kinds of things, just as the brave man and the coward are both concerned with similar kinds of things, namely, fearful situations.

There is one further point of similarity between the indignant individual and the envious individual. In order to feel either of these emotions an individual needs to have a

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[64] Ibid., 1386b22-25.

minimum sense of self-worth: "the servile and worthless and unambitious are not inclined to indignation; for there is nothing of which they think themselves worthy."[65] Although Aristotle does not so explicitly assert that the envious person needs a minimum sense of self-worth this is clearly implied in his description of the envious state of mind. In his description of the envious frame of mind Aristotle asserts that among those who are prone to feel envy are: those who think themselves deserving of a particular good, the ambitious and those who think themselves wise. In psychoanalytic literature on the subject there is some agreement with the Aristotelian position. Envy, psychoanalysts have argued, is a narcissistic wound: "this is the most consistent and crucial aspect of envy. It may be expressed in varying degrees of severity and intensity. There is a sense of lacking something which is connected with feelings of inferiority, smallness, or injured self-esteem."[66] Allan D. Rosenblatt most explicitly emphasizes the significance of self-worth in experiences of envy:

> It may be argued that a certain minimum sense of entitlement is a necessary prerequisite for the feeling of envy...Individuals with a severe impairment of their sense of entitlement (or impairment of "normal narcissism"), whether as a result of developmental narcissistic defect or neurotic guilt, do not, in my experience, consciously experience envy.[67]

Whether one desires to speak in terms of narcissism or entitlement, the implication seems to be that in order for one to experience an injury there needs to be something which is

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[65] Ibid., 1987b15.

[66] Philip M. Spielman, "Envy and Jealousy: an attempt at Clarification," Psychoanalytic Quarterly 40, no. 1 (Jan 1971): 77.

[67] Allan D. Rosenblatt, "Envy, Identification, And Pride," Psychoanalytic Quarterly 57, no. 1 (January 1988): 60.

being injured. That is to say one needs a degree of narcissism or a notion of entitlement that is being threatened.

For Aristotle what distinguishes the indignant person and the envious person is not an issue of self-esteem; the difference is not that the one has, and that the other lacks, a sense of self-worth. Aristotle does not characterize the envious person as one who is lacking in a sense of self-worth, but rather as one who is anxious or insecure about their self-worth. A look at the mindset of each of these characters reveals the difference between their respective senses of self-worth.

The indignant person is concerned with whether certain kinds of advantages are proportionate or suitable for a particular kind of person.[68] Such an individual is pained by undeserved good fortune: "for that which happens beyond a man's desserts is unjust, wherefore we attribute this feeling even to gods."[69] According to Aristotle the indignant individual will "rejoice or will at least not be pained" at the sight of those who deserve their good fortune. Aristotle lists three different types of individuals who are prone to indignation:

> First, if they happen to deserve or possess the greatest advantages, for it is not just that those who do not resemble them should be deemed worthy of the same advantages; secondly, if they happen to be virtuous and worthy, for they both judge correctly and hate what is unjust. And those who are ambitious and long for certain positions, especially if they are those which others, although unworthy, have obtained. And, in general, those who think themselves worthy of advantages of which they consider others unworthy, are inclined to be indignant with the latter.[70]

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[68] Aristotle, The "Art" of Rhetoric, 1387a-b.
[69] Ibid., 1386b14.
[70] Ibid., 1387b4-13.

In general Aristotle asserts that "those who think themselves worthy of advantages of which they consider others unworthy, are inclined to be indignant with the latter."[71] All of these individuals have a clear sense of worth or merit and are pained when advantages are distributed in any other way. If they are a virtuous individual and hate what is unjust, they will be pained by unmerited good fortune on the grounds that it offends their sense of justice.

In contrast to the indignant individual, the envious person is pained by the good fortune of others, specifically, the good fortune of their neighbors. While the indignant person is concerned with whether one's good fortune is merited, the envious person seems to be concerned by the very fact their neighbors good fortune. The nature of the envious person's concern is revealed in Aristotle's description of the kinds of people who are prone to envy. Aristotle states:

> Those men will be envious who have, or seem to have, others "like" them....And those will be envious who possess all but one of these advantages; that is why those who attempt great things and succeed are envious, because they think that everyone is trying to deprive them of their own. And those who are honoured for some special reason, especially for wisdom or happiness. And the ambitious are more envious than the unambitious. And those who are wise in their own conceit, for they are ambitious of a reputation for wisdom; and in general, those who wish to be distinguished in anything are envious in regard to it. And the little minded, because everything appears to them to be great.[72]

Aristotle's description of the individuals that are prone to envy reveals that the pain of envy has little to do with the worth—or lack thereof—of the person with the advantage. Rather the pain seems to be primarily on account of the similarity, or comparability, of

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[71] Ibid., 1387b14.

the fortunate individual. One feels envy, according to Aristotle, when an "equal' gains an advantage where one has failed or has had difficulty, and when one believes that they deserve or have a claim to that advantage.[73] The envious person cannot bear any discrepancy between their situation and their neighbor's situation; the envious person interprets this discrepancy as a reproach to himself.[74] In such situations, Aristotle states, "it is clear that it is their own fault that they do not obtain the same advantage, so that this pains and causes envy."[75] The pain that the envious person feels is on account of a diminished sense of self-worth resulting from an unfavorable comparison with one's neighbor. The result is that the envious person begrudges their neighbor these goods and rejoices at the loss of these goods.[76]

To say that the envious person's pain is on account of a diminished sense of self-worth may explain the source of the pain, but it does not account for the difference between envious and the indignant response. What still needs to be accounted for is what it is that renders the envious person incapable of distinguishing between deserved and undeserved good fortune. The problem seems to be that the envious person's sense of self-worth is too closely involved in his experience of the good fortune of others. The envious person looks at the advantages of a neighbor and feels it to be a reproach to himself. The problem seems to be that the envious person has a particularly fragile sense of self-worth that is overly dependent on how they fare in comparison with others; as a

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[72] Ibid., 239.1387b25-37.
[73] Ibid., 1388a19.
[74] Ibid., 1388a20.
[75] Ibid., 1388a20-21.

result at every instance of a neighbor's good fortune the envious person feels pain. Aristotle does not characterize the envious person as one who is lacking in a sense of self-worth, but rather as one who is anxious or insecure about their self-worth. This is why those who are ambitious and those who "wish to be distinguished in anything" are particularly susceptible to feeling envy.[77]

Psychological studies have found that people are more likely to feel envy when another is possessed of something that they desire or consider to be important.[78] To put it differently, studies have found that when something is particularly relevant for one's self-worth, one is more likely to experience envy if they are surpassed by another person in this respect. This is the first prerequisite for anxiety. One is unlikely to envy those who are superior in areas that one is unconcerned about. Salovey and Rodin found that:

> Rating any domain as important was often associated with envy and jealousy across domains, although the highest correlations were generally in important domains. The fact that all such correlations tended to be positive, however, suggests that a cognitive set whereby *everything* in life is thought to be important may predispose individuals to jealousy and envy.[79]

This finding is particularly interesting because it suggests that the predisposition to envy is related one's tendency to attach importance to things in general, rather one particular kind of thing.

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[76] Ibid., 1378a2.

[77] Ibid., 1387b35.

[78] Peter, Salovey and Judith Rodin, "Provoking Jealousy and Envy: Domain Relevance and Self-Esteem Threat," Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology 10, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 395-413.

[79] Ibid., 409.

It has also been shown that envy is contingent upon the degree to which one is satisfied with their particular lot. Smith, Deiner and Garonzik have found that individuals who are satisfied with their particular situation are less likely to feel envy, even when faced with another's superiority.[80] They argue that one will not necessarily feel envy if they are surpassed by someone in an area that is important to them. One of the factors contributing to the envious response is the degree to which one is satisfied with their situation. If one is not satisfied they will be more likely to be envious of those who possess more of the desired good. Not only has envy been found to arise when one is dissatisfied with their position in a field important to them, but it has also been found that the greater the difference between one's expected outcome and their achieved outcome predisposes one to envy.[81] For example, if a person who is dissatisfied with their achievements as a student, having achieved less then they had hoped, is likely to envy those who are closer to attaining the hoped for level of achievement.

Conclusion

Envy is not caused simply by the fact that one experiences the good fortune of others. The difference between the envious person and the indignant person is that the former is excessively concerned with their own worth. As a result of this anxiety, the envious individual has a tendency to conceive of a situation as threatening to their own self worth.

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[80] Richard H. Smith, De Diener, Ron Garonzik, "The Roles of Outcome Satisfaction and Comparison Alternatives in Envy," British Journal of Social Psychology 29, no. 3 (September 1990): 252.

[81] Ibid., 252.

As a result the envious person is unable to correctly ascertain the worth of any other person, because they are incapable of taking their own self and their own anxiety out of the situation. In the following chapter I will attempt to show why this anxiety, and the envious feelings that it gives rise to, are politically significant.

Chapter Three

The Political Relevance of Envy

> All producers—weavers, for instance, or shipwrights—must have the materials proper to their particular branch of production; the better prepared these materials are, the better will be the products of their skill.[1]

In the *Politics* Aristotle states that: "like other producers, the statesman and the law-maker must have their proper materials, and they must have them in a condition which is suited to their needs."[2] The primary material of the statesman is, according to Aristotle, the human material.[3] Just as a shipwright needs wood of a certain quality if he is to build a ship that will safely carry its cargo through calm and rough seas, so the statesman needs citizens of a certain quality if he is to build a well functioning society. The statesman therefore wants to "endue the citizens with certain qualities namely virtue and the readiness to do fine deeds."[4] The statesman needs a virtuous citizenry, for the kinds of activities that virtuous individuals engage in is conducive to the overall well being of the society. In contrast, a vicious character is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the statesman to work with. Individuals with such character are ill suited to the aims of the statesman.

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[1] Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, 291 (1325b33-1326b2).
[2] Ibid., 291 (1325b33-1326b2).
[3] Ibid., 290 (1325b33-1326b2).
[4] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 81 (1099b21-1100a9).

It will be argued that envious individuals are particularly dangerous to society. Specifically, it will be argued that the envious person poses a threat to the success of a political association because envy strains against justice—that which holds the entire social structure together. While righteous indignation is pain at an unjust advantage, envy, unable to discern between deserved and undeserved good fortune, is pain at any advantage. While justice requires that each individual receive their due, the demands of envy run in a very different direction. While righteous indignation upholds a society's principle of justice, envy erodes these same principles. This is of particular political significance in a society in which the obedience to law may only be secured through habit.[5] The discussion of this chapter has three parts. The first part of this chapter describes the manner in which justice acts as the social glue. Then the attempt will then be made to demonstrate how envy undermines justice. The third part of this chapter will attempt to further spell out the social implications of envy; in particular, stressing the implications of envy for one's capacity to be ruled and one's ability to rule.

Justice

In the first chapter it was argued that, for Aristotle, the good human life depends upon virtuous individuals and a virtuous state. Justice, it was suggested, is the virtue that allows both the individual and society to fulfill their respective functions in accordance

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[5] "To change the practice of an art is not the same as to change the operation of a law. It is from habit, and only from habit, that law derives the validity which secures obedience. But habit can be created only by the passage of time; and a readiness to

with excellence; the result being the flourishing of both part and whole. Justice is not merely that which is needed for the excellence of both the part and the whole, it is also, and more importantly, a prerequisite to any such interaction. Justice is, for Aristotle, a minimum requirement for the existence of a society. The following section will be concerned with explaining this assertion in more detail.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that the terms justice and injustice are ambiguous.[6] The ambiguity is on account the different senses of the terms justice and injustice. The problem is that the different senses in which the terms justice and injustice are used are quite close together. By contrast, the use of the term 'key' to describe both the collarbone of an animal and the implement we use to unlock doors poses no such difficulty.[7] The reason for this is that the two contexts in which this term is used are sufficiently different that it is unlikely that there will be any confusion as to the intended sense of the term. In the case of the different senses of the term justice, this is not the case. The equivocation of this term is not as clear given the similarity of contexts in which this term is used. Aristotle distinguishes between two different senses of the term justice, namely, the lawful and the fair: "let us begin, then, by taking the various senses in which a man is said to be unjust. Well, the word is considered to describe both one who breaks the law and one who takes advantage of another, i.e. acts unfairly."[8] While the situations in which the term 'justice' is used are quite similar, for in each case the

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change from existing to new and different laws will accordingly tend to weaken the general power of law." Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, 73 (1268b21-1269a28).

[6] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 172 (1129a21-b6).

[7] Ibid., 172 (1129a21-b6).

term is used to describe how one acts in relation to another, Aristotle maintains that there is a distinction between the two senses of the term.[9]

Justice in the first sense means 'lawful.' Justice in this sense is complete virtue in relation to another person: "it is complete virtue in the fullest sense, because it is the active exercise of complete virtue; and it is complete because its possessor can exercise it in relation to another person, and not only by himself."[10] According to Aristotle this universal justice is the whole of virtue.[11] All of the particular virtues such as courage, temperance and patience are parts of this whole.[12] The laws of a society according to Aristotle, prescribe for all aspects of life:

> The laws prescribe for all departments of life, aiming at the common advantage either of all the citizens or of the best of them, or of the ruling class, or on some other such basis. So in one sense we call just anything that tends to produce or conserve the happiness (and the constituents of the happiness) of a political association. Besides this the law enjoins brave conduct—e.g. not to leave one's post, or to take flight, or throw way one's weapons—and temperate conduct—e.g. not to commit adultery or assault—and patient conduct—e.g. to refrain from blows or abuse—and similarly with all the other forms of goodness and wickedness, the law commands some kinds of behavior and forbids others; rightly if the law is rightly enacted, but not so well if it is an improvised measure.[13]

Aristotle argues that everything that is prescribed by law is, in a sense, just: "it is clear that all lawful things are in some sense just; because what is prescribed by legislation is

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[8] Ibid., 172 (1129a21-b6).
[9] Ibid., 173, 174, 176-177 (1129b-1131a).
[10] Ibid., 174 (1129b30-1130a18).
[11] Ibid., 174 (1129b30-1130a18).
[12] Ibid., 174 (1129b30-1130a18).
[13] Ibid., 173 (1129b6-30).

lawful, and we hold that every such ordinance is just."[14] Aristotle's argument seems to be as follows: the law prescribes what is just, therefore the law abiding individual is said to be just in the same sense.

The second sense of the term justice refers to the 'fair'. Justice in this sense refers not to the whole of virtue, but to a particular part of virtue.[15] Unlike universal justice which subsumes many different types of human activity, justice in this second sense, which Aristotle terms particular justice, refers only to activities that involve taking one's share:

> Therefore there is another kind of injustice which is a part of universal injustice, and therefore a part of the unjust in general which means 'contrary to the law'. Further, if one man commits adultery for gain, making money by it, and another pays out money and is penalized for gratifying his desire, the second would be regarded as licentious rather than grasping, but the former would be regarded as unjust, though not licentious. This makes it clear that the act is unjust because it is done for gain.[16]

The person who is unfair is one who takes more than his share. A person who is unjust in this sense is considered to be grasping; they always choose the larger share of goods, "not all goods, but those that make up the field of good and bad fortune."[17]

Aristotle goes on to distinguish between two different types of particular justice: distributive and rectificatory justice. Distributive justice is "shown in the distribution of honour or money or such other assets as are divisible among the members of the community (for in these cases it is possible for one person to have either an equal or

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[14] Ibid., 173 (1129b6-30).
[15] Ibid., 174 (1129b30-1130a18).
[16] Ibid., 175 (1130a18-b8).

unequal share with another."[18] The second kind of particular justice is one that "rectifies the conditions of a transaction."[19] Both kinds of particular justice appear to be very significant to the basic functioning of a political association. While universal justice is essential for the goodness of political arrangement, particular justice seems to be significant for the very existence of the state.

With respect to distributive justice Aristotle states that: "it is when equals have or are assigned unequal shares, or people who are not equal, equal shares, that quarrels and complaints break out."[20] In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle only makes mention of the potential conflict that may arise over the distribution of goods in a society, in the *Politics* he describes the potential severity of such conflict. In the *Politics* Aristotle points to the distribution of goods as a major source of sedition: "as objects, profit and honor provoke dissension because (as we have just noted) men want to get them themselves: as occasions they lead to dissension because men see others getting a larger share—some justly and some unjustly—than they themselves get."[21] A just distribution of goods it seems, is therefore essential for maintaining a society.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle is very explicit with respect to the role of rectificatory justice in a society. Rectificatory justice, according to Aristotle, actually holds the state together, by creating the conditions for exchange:

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[17] Ibid., 172 (1129a21-b6).
[18] Ibid., 176-177 (1130b32).
[19] Ibid., 177 (1130b32-1131a22).
[20] Ibid., 178 (1131a22-b14).
[21] Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle , 207 (1301b36-1302b5).

> It is proportional requital that holds the state together; because people expect either to return evil for evil—and if they cannot, feel that they have lost their liberty—or good for good, and if this is impossible no exchange can take place; and it is exchange that holds them together.[22]

For this kind of justice is crucial in any form of transaction, such as in criminal matters and matters of exchange. According to the above passage if one has suffered an injustice at the hand of another, it is crucial that the injured party receives some form of requital. It is the purpose of the judge to restore the inequality that was caused by the injustice: "even when one party has received and the other given a blow, or one has killed and the other been killed, the active and passive aspects of the affair exhibit an unequal division; but the judge tries to equalize them with the help of the penalty, by reducing the gain."[23] Without requital, Aristotle argues, individuals will feel that they have lost their liberty. Requital is also crucial in matters of exchange, for the possibility of exchange depends upon each of the parties receiving the agreed upon value of their commodity. Where a value cannot be agreed upon no transaction will take place.[24] Where one does not receive the agreed upon value, an unequal division has occurred and the party that has been shortchanged will demand requital. This form of justice is crucial to the existence of a state, for without it no transactions may take place. The transaction of goods is one of the essential purposes of the state.

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[22] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 183 (1132b28-1133a13).
[23] Ibid., 180 (1132a2-19).
[24] Ibid., 185 (1133a31-b19).

The question now becomes, how does envy undermine justice? In general it will be argued that the envious disposition is dangerous because envy strains against the demands of justice, thereby undermining that which makes political life possible.

Emotion and Action

In chapter two the attempt was made to explicate Aristotle's concept of moral virtue. The concept was pulled apart, distinguishing the genus of virtue on the one hand and its differentiae on the other. There the significance of the emotions and actions which differentiate virtue from vice were deliberately downplayed and distanced from the chapter's focus of concern, namely, the dispositions themselves. The aim of that chapter was to articulate as clearly as possible the causes of the envious response. Had the envious disposition not been distinguished from the emotions and actions that it gives rise to, an understanding of the causes of envy would have been precluded. Although the second chapter emphasized the generic aspect of virtue, this does not imply that the differentiae—the emotions and actions that arise out of these dispositions—are unimportant. Just the opposite is the case. The statesman is concerned with the dispositions on account of the emotions and actions that arise from them. The statesman wants to endue the citizens with certain kinds of dispositions in order to ensure that they will be disposed to act in certain ways.

The first task will be to bridge the gap created by the approach that was used in chapter two; specifically, the attempt will be made to account for the relationship between dispositions, emotions, and actions. A disposition, it has been argued, describes one's

tendency to feel in a particular way. For example, one's disposition towards fear will determine how, when, and to what degree one experiences that emotion. Emotions are important because how one feels in a certain situation affects how they are likely to act in that situation. The reason for this is that all emotions are attended by pleasures and pains.[25] It is these pleasures and pains that induce one to act in certain ways.[26] Aristotle places such emphasis upon the experiences of pleasure and pain precisely because they are so crucial in determining human activity. Human beings need to correctly distinguish between pleasures and pain, precisely because the wrong kinds of pleasures may induce one to act in a manner that is deleterious for themselves, and even the whole of society.

The significance of having the right kinds of pleasures and pains is most evident in cases involving simple sense perception. Sensation provides animals with information that is crucial for survival. Experiences of pleasure and pain are of utmost importance in directing animal life. Pleasures guide one towards those things that they need in order to survive, while pain warns one of danger. When a person puts their hand on a hot stove, they experience pain and therefore instantly pull their hand away. When part of an earthworm is on a dry piece of concrete and the other part on a wet piece of turf, the earthworm will move towards the wet piece of turf. If the hand was not removed from the burner it would be permanently damaged, if the earthworm did not move to the damp turf it would quickly dry out and die. Sensation provides the animal with information that is crucial for the survival of the animal.

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[25] Ibid., 95 (1104a33-b20).
[26] Ibid., 95 (1104a33-b20).

If the animal is for some reason deprived of sense, or if their ability to sense is thrown off for some reason the implications could be deleterious for the organism. If one has a fever their body temperature is hotter than normal, and as a result a room temperature which to a person with a normal body temperature would feel comfortable, to the feverish individual would appear to be cold. On account of the fact that the feverish person's sense organ is in the wrong state, the feverish person's ability to effectively distinguish between different temperatures is compromised. As a result the information that the feverish individual is receiving is incorrect. If the feverish person were to act in accordance with the information that he was receiving from his senses, he would try to warm himself up—though pleasant such a course of action could prove fatal.

The role that emotion plays in human life is not unlike the role of pleasure and pain in sense perception. The emotions, with their attendant feelings of pleasure and pain,[27] provide individuals with information about the surrounding world. Emotions act as signals indicating to a person a potential danger or good. It is precisely for these reasons that Stephen R. Leighton argues that emotions should be honed:

> Fear is not something to be struggled with or overcome, but something to be sensitive to and exploited. The prospect of imminent, destructive or painful evils that fear embodies is particularly important to a creature whose ultimate aim is to live and do well. Fear on a battlefield then involves an awareness of the situation with which one has to deal, and does so in a way that allows one to deal with the situation.[28]

It is important that emotion is properly oriented because of the role that emotions play in determining human action. For example, the disposition of the rash man inclines him to

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[27] Ibid., 95 (1104a33-b20).

act in ways that are rash, because of his relative insensitivity to the pain associated with fear. As a result he is likely to engage in activities from which the courageous man would refrain. In contrast, the disposition of the coward is so overly sensitive to pain that he may be inhibited from acting in situations in which he ought. What differentiates the virtuous individual from those lacking in virtue are their emotions and actions.

How Envy May Undermine Justice

Why is envy so dangerous? In the previous chapter it was argued that within the sphere of indignation the individual is called upon to determine whether another's good fortune is deserved or undeserved. While the indignant person feels pain only at instances of undeserved good fortune, the envious person was described as one who "went further" and was pained by all instances of his neighbour's good fortune. In the context of this discussion envy is best described as an emotion that is inappropriately honed, resulting in actions that are deleterious for political associations. In this section I will attempt to explain why envy is politically dangerous.

Just as fever, and an insensitivity to fear, dispose people to act wrongly so to does the disposition associated with envy. It was argued that those who envy are disposed to do so on account of their excessive concern with their own self-worth. Such individuals, I have argued, are, as a result, unable to appropriately assess the justice of a particular distribution of goods. Since the envious person is so concerned with their own self-worth, they will have a tendency to begrudge others their deserved good fortune, if they

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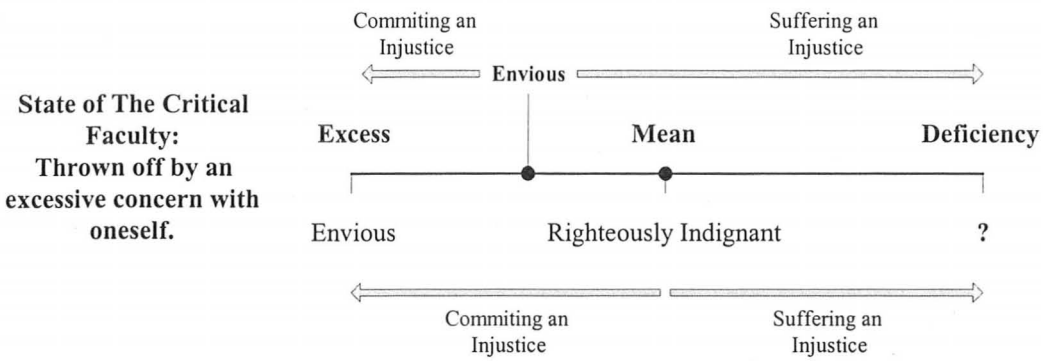
[28] Stephan R. Leighton, "Aristotle's Courageous Passions," Phronesis 30:76-99.

consider the distribution to be a threat to their own self-worth. The envious disposition is represented on the following diagram:



In the diagram the disposition of the envious person is presented as excessive in comparison to the mean state. As a result of this difference in disposition the envious person would be pained by the kind of situation that the righteously indignant person would consider fitting. In contrast, the righteously indignant person would be pained by the kind of situation that would be agreeable to the envious person. Since the situations in question involve the distribution of goods, which is the realm of particular justice, I have defined this sphere accordingly. The righteously indignant person holding the mean position would be pained by situations in which goods were distributed unfairly. His character is, in this respect, identical with Aristotle's description of the just man:

> Also justice is that state in virtue of which a just man is said to be capable of doing just acts from choice, and of assigning property—both to himself in relation to another, and to another in relation to a third party—not in such a way as to give more of the desirable thing to himself and less to his neighbour (and conversely with what is harmful), but assigning to each that which is proportionately equal; and similarly in distributing between two other parties.[29]

[29] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 186-187 (1133b19-1134a6).

The envious man, on the other hand, is so concerned with his own standing that the just distribution may cause him pain; he is satisfied only when the distribution of goods is in his favor, if not by increasing, but at least by not changing his standing relative to others.

As a result of this disposition the envious person may be driven to act in any number of ways, all of which undermine the demands of justice. In the first case, and most obviously, envy may affect the distribution of goods in society. The envious person would be pained by any distribution of goods that would reward those who they consider to be their like. If envy is widespread, the discontent may reach such a pitch that it may lead to sedition or social stagnation. For a society in which envy is widespread, it becomes difficult to settle upon any unequal distribution of goods. In such a society if goods continue to be distributed unequally, the result may be social sedition. If on the other hand the legislator gives in to this envy, the possibility for social development may be undercut. For an excessive concern with equality and ensuring that all people have equal shares, makes it difficult to reward people for achievements. As a result the incentive for innovation is removed.

As argued in the first chapter, the social system in which Aristotle lived was significantly different from today's society. In his time there was no formal police force, nor was there a system of public prosecution, and individuals played a much greater role in the government of the *polis*. The ancient Greek *polis* was characterized by self-help, whereas modern society depends upon the institutions of the state. In Greek society, the character of the citizens which comprised it were crucially significant for the overall stability of the society. Therefore envy, in such a society, may readily undermine justice.

For, if envious people are creating the laws and enforcing them, there is little hope for justice.

Conclusion

For Aristotle, envy and its deleterious effects are among the highest of political concerns. This is not to suggest that certain modern thinkers do not agree with such a prognosis, Schoeck is quite clear on this point:

> ...by means of the most diverse arguments, human societies—or the men who have to live in society—have persistently sought as far as possible to suppress envy. Why? Because in any group the envious man is inevitably a disturber of the peace, a potential saboteur, an instigator of mutiny and, fundamentally, he cannot be placated by others. Since there can be no absolutely egalitarian society, since people cannot be made truly equal if a community is to be at all viable, the envious man is, by definition, the negation of the basis of any society.[30]

If justice holds the community together and allows for a society to successfully engage in exchange, then anything that threatens justice must be a political concern of the first order. Envy is just such a threat.

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[30] Schoeck, Envy: A Theory of Social Behavior, 33.

Chapter Four

Aristotle's Political Arrangement: Notions of Justice

Thus far our discussion has been concerned with two things: the nature of envy, and its political significance. I have attempted to show that the statesman who fails to consider and guard against envy is like the architect who neglects to take into account structural stains and stresses that could potentially destroy his buildings. Anything erected by such an architect must be uncertain at best, and unstable or impossible at worst. The remainder of this thesis will discuss the viability of the particular political arrangement that Aristotle proposes. Specifically, the concern of the second part of this thesis will be to show how well the political arrangement proposed by Aristotle manages envy. The discussion of Aristotle's political arrangement will be divided into two parts, this chapter will explicate and discuss Aristotle's theory of justice, while the following chapter will be concerned with discussing the particular kind of constitution that Aristotle proposes.

There are two reasons for my decision to divide the discussion of Aristotle's political arrangement into two parts. The first reason is that Aristotle himself clearly considers notions of justice to be of central importance to any political arrangement. He argues that justice is the principle upon which a constitution, that is, a particular distribution of political office, is based. [1] Therefore, before turning to Aristotle's proposed distribution of political office, it would be logical to begin with the examination of his particular notion of justice. The first task of this chapter will be to explain the

[1] Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, 117 (1280a10-42) and n. 1.

conception of justice that Aristotle proposes. The second part of this chapter will discuss whether, and to what extent, this notion of justice engenders, exacerbates, or creates the conditions for socially deleterious envy.

Aristotle's Conception of Justice

While all, according to Aristotle, "are agreed in doing homage to justice," in practice justice is rarely achieved.[2] Aristotle identifies two reasons for this. The first and most common reason is that individuals tend to "judge in their own case."[3] The second reason is that individuals—who believe themselves to be judging justly—are mistaken. According to Aristotle, such individuals believe that they are professing an absolute and complete conception of justice when they are not.[4] As a result of these two reasons numerous competing conceptions of justice arise. In his treatment of justice in the *Politics*, Aristotle makes a particular effort to distinguish his notion of justice from both the democratic and oligarchic varieties. Following Aristotle's method, we will first begin with Aristotle's critique of the democratic and oligarchic notions of justice, followed by the explication of the notion of justice that he proposes.

Besides the general homage paid to justice, there is one further point that, according to Aristotle, all are agreed upon: "everyone agrees that justice in distribution must be in accordance with merit in some sense."[5] That is to say, all of the different conceptions of justice maintain that goods ought to be distributed on the basis of desert.

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[2] Ibid., 203-204 (1301a19-1301b36).
[3] Ibid., 117-118 (1279b28-1280b32).
[4] Ibid., 117-118 (1279b28-1280b32).

Conceptions of justice are distinguished by the particular kind of merit or desert according to which goods are distributed: "the democratic view is that the criterion is free birth; the oligarchic that it is wealth or good family; the aristocratic that it is excellence."[6] Aristotle rejects the notions of merit that underwrite the democratic and oligarchic conceptions of justice. He criticizes these two conceptions of justice on two grounds. First, he argues against the advocates of democracy and oligarchy on the grounds that their notions of merit are inaccurate. Second, Aristotle argues that both democrats and oligarchs fail to take into consideration the true end of the state, and that they therefore uphold notions of justice that are bound to reward people incorrectly.

Aristotle's first ground for rejecting democratic and oligarchic conceptions of justice is that while both conceptions of justice maintain that distribution ought to be in accordance with merit, they both assert mistaken notions of merit. As stated in the previous paragraph, democrats maintain that free birth is the basis for distribution, such that, all who are freely born have a claim in the government of the *polis*. In oligarchies it is not free birth, but wealth, or social nobility that serves as the basis for distribution. The problem with these two conceptions is that simply because two persons are both freely born or similarly wealthy—does not, for Aristotle, imply that these individuals are equal. While Aristotle does not altogether deny the democratic principle that political office ought to be distributed equally, he stresses that justice in its complete sense does not

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[5] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 178 (1131a22-b14).
[6] Ibid., 178 (1131a22-b14).

mean equality among all people but rather equality among equals.[7] In oligarchies inequality is sanctioned. According to Aristotle, this is acceptable only insofar as it is inequality among those who are not equal that is being sanctioned.[8] While both oligarchs and democrats assert that equals and unequals ought to be treated accordingly, both are mistaken in their understanding of what constitutes equality and inequality among people. The difficulty with both of these conceptions of justice is that their notions of merit lack specificity. These conceptions of justice posit a total equality among people on the basis of an equality in one respect: "oligarchs think that superiority on one point—in their case wealth—means superiority on all: the democrats believe that equality in one respect—for instance, that of free birth—means equality all round."[9] Justice according to Aristotle is "relative to persons," and a just distribution is one in which "the values of the things given correspond to those of the persons receiving."[10] The problem with the democratic and oligarchic conceptions of justice is that they fail to sufficiently consider the kind of person receiving and instead base their distribution upon criteria such as free birth or wealth.

Aristotle's second ground for rejecting democratic and oligarchic conceptions of merit is that both democrats and oligarchs fail to take into consideration the end of political life. The kind of justice that they profess is one that rewards those who

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[7] Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, 117 (1279b28-1280a22).
[8] Ibid., 117 (1279b28-1280a22).
[9] Ibid., 118 (1280a22-b32).
[10] Ibid., 117 (1279b28-1280a22).

contribute to ends which, in both cases, fall short of the true end of political association.[11] Against the proponents of oligarchy Aristotle argues that their conception of justice appears strong only if property is the purpose of political association:

> If property were the end for which men came together and formed an association, men's share [in the offices and honours] of the state would be proportionate to their share of property; and in that case the argument of the oligarchical side—that it is not just for a man who has contributed one pound to share equally in a sum of a hundred pounds...with the man who has contributed all the rest—would appear to be a strong argument.[12]

Property, while it is important for the existence of a state, is not the end for which the state exists. Therefore, a conception of justice that rewards individuals on the basis of their property is mistaken. Against the democrats Aristotle argues that the true end of the polis is not simply to: "provide an alliance for mutual defence against all injury, or to ease exchange and promote economic intercourse."[13] Therefore, he argues that all who contribute to the alliance and all who contribute to economic intercourse should not on account of this activity be given a share in the *polis*. For According to Aristotle, if this is not the true end of the state, then it is not just to reward people as if it were.

Aristotle, like democrats and oligarchs, posits a notion of justice which maintains that merit ought to be the basis of distribution. However, Aristotle's notion of merit is significantly different. The democratic and oligarchic notions of justice are similar in that

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[11] Ibid., 118 (1280a22-b32).

[12] Ibid., 118 (1280a22-b32). Brackets are from the text.

[13] Ibid., 118 (1280a22-b32). Here Aristotle does not explicitly say that the democratic conception favors this kind of an end. However, this may be reasonably assumed given the structure of the discussion thus far. As well, the democratic conception favors those who contribute to the working of the polis in any way—therefore the participation in politics is extended to all parties. The result is the same.

they both assert notions of merit that consider only a person's circumstances; they consider an individual's birth, wealth or social nobility. These two notions of justice differ in that the former maintains that free birth is the criterion which determines social equality and inequality, while the latter maintains that wealth and social standing are the appropriate criteria. In contrast, Aristotle's notion of justice asserts a notion of merit that does not simply consider an individuals circumstances, but one that considers the worth of the individual: "justice is relative to persons; and a just distribution is one in which the relative values of the things given correspond to those of the persons receiving."[14] Aristotle posits an aristocratic notion of justice, in the sense that, the point of merit which determines the distribution of goods, and social equality and inequality, is virtue. While one may accurately assert that, for Aristotle, virtue is the basis according to which goods ought to be distributed, such a characterization does not fully capture the subtleties of Aristotle's position. For as we shall see, goods are not distributed simply on the basis of virtue, but rather on the basis of the suitability of the individual and the goods in question.

For Aristotle, goods ought to be distributed according to virtue. This implies that individuals who are possessed of excellence will have a greater claim than those who are not. However, it is important to note that for Aristotle, it is not virtue in any respect that justifies one in having a greater share; he stresses that in order for one to have a claim, a person's virtue and the goods being distributed ought to be suitable. Aristotle makes this point in the following passage from the *Politics*:

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[14] Ibid., 117 (1279b28-1280a22).

> Let us suppose a man who is superior to others in flute-playing, but far inferior in birth and beauty. Birth and beauty may be greater goods than ability to play the flute, and those who possess them may, upon balance, surpass the flute-player more in these qualities than he surpasses them in his flute playing; but the fact remains that *he* is the man who ought to get the better supply of flutes.[15]

Aristotle argues that the flute player ought to receive the better supply of flutes because he is superior to others in flute playing. It is on account of his proficiency that the flute player ought to receive the best supply of flutes, for he—not the beautiful or noble man—will make the best use of them. In his discussion of indignation in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle makes a similar argument: "every kind of good is not suitable to the first comer, but a certain proportion and suitability are necessary (as for instance beautiful weapons are not suitable to the just but to the courageous man, and distinguished marriages not to the newly rich but to the nobly born)."[16] Unlike the democratic and oligarchic notions of merit, that which is used by Aristotle is very discerning. Democrats and oligarchs maintain that that individuals are equal, and that they therefore have equal claims, on the grounds of free birth and wealth, respectively. In Aristotle's conception one has a claim to a particular good on the basis of virtue, and then only if the good in question is suitable given the nature of one's excellence. Under the Aristotelian conception of justice equality is much more narrowly conceived. For, in order for two people to have an equal claim to a particular good they must be similarly virtuous and this excellence must, in both cases, be suited to the good in question.

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[15] Ibid., 130 (1282b23-1283a23).

[16] Aristotle, The "Art" of Rhetoric, 235 (1387a31-34).

Aristotle's second ground for criticizing the democratic and oligarchic conceptions of justice is that both conceptions fail to take into consideration the end for which political associations exist. Aristotle explicitly identifies this end to be the good life:

> The end and purpose of a polis is the good life, and the institutions of social life are means to that end. A polis is constituted by the association of families and villages in a perfect and self-sufficing existence; and such an existence, on our definition, consists of a life of true felicity and happiness.[17]

For Aristotle the good life is the life of virtuous activity. Aristotle's notion of justice is embodies this understanding of the end of political association. For according to his notion of justice those who have the greatest share in the *polis* are those who contribute most to this end:

> Those who contribute most to an association of this character [i.e. who contribute most to good action] have a greater share in the polis [and should therefore, in justice, receive a larger recognition from it] than those who are equal to them (or even greater) in free birth and descent, but unequal in civic excellence, or than those who surpass them in wealth but are surpassed by them in excellence."[18]

Aristotle, I have argued, maintains that excellence, or virtue, is the basis according to which goods are distributed. Those individuals who possess, and exhibit, the kind of excellence that contributes to the good human life are, according to Aristotle's conception of justice, worthy of the greatest goods and the highest honors.

What then makes one deserving of the greatest goods and the highest honors? According to Aristotle only the morally virtuous individual is worthy the greatest goods

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[17] Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, 120 (1280b32-1281a11).

and honors. Just as the good flute player is deserving of the finest flutes because his proficiency will enable him to make the best use of the instruments, similarly, the morally virtuous individual is deserving of the highest goods because they too will make the best use of those goods.

Assessing The Aristotelian Notion of Justice

In a Theory of Justice John Rawls states that:

> One conception of justice is more stable than another if the sense of justice that it tends to generate is stronger and more likely to override disruptive inclinations and if the institutions it allows foster weaker impulses and temptations to act unjustly. The stability of a conception depends upon a balance of motives: the sense of justice that it cultivates and the aims that it encourages must normally win out against the propensities towards injustice.[19]

Aristotle presents a notion of justice in which virtue is the basis for all distribution, and the determination of equality and inequality. The question with which we are now concerned is whether the principle of justice proposed by Aristotle generates or fosters envy in society. Some have argued that the conditions that are condoned by Aristotle's conception of justice actually serve to engender and exacerbate envy. It will be argued that the Aristotelian conception of justice is quite effective in diminishing social comparability and anxiety, two of the key causes of envy, and that it does so without destroying the possibility for social progress.

Before turning to the discussion of how Aristotle's notion of justice succeeds in undermining the possibility for envy, one particular objection to the Aristotelian

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[18] Ibid., 120 (1280b32-1281a11). Brackets are from the text.

conception of justice needs to be put to rest. One potential source of difficulty with Aristotle's conception of justice is that it condones the unequal distribution of property and goods in society. Such an unequal distribution of goods has been held to be a potential cause of envy and therefore social discord. According to Aristotle, Phaleas was the first to suggest a policy of the equal distribution of land in order to avoid social discord.[20] While Phaleas was ready to propose an equality of property there are others who are ready to go much further. Joseph H. Berke labels this the egalitarian position, and he defines this position as: "the attempt to get rid of ill will and bad conscience by deriding desire and destroying the objects of such desire, not only money and goods, but intangible qualities and unique experiences as well."[21] Those who object to Aristotle's argument on the basis that it sanctions inequalities among people do not raise an argument that is particularly problematic for Aristotle. The problem with the egalitarian objection is that it is based upon a superficial understanding of envy. Inequality *per se* is not the cause of envy. People are not necessarily envious of those who are simply better off than they are. Indeed, as Schoeck argues, inequality may actually serve to assuage the envy that might otherwise arise:

> In some situations, the best means of protection against the envy of a neighbour, colleague or voter is to drive, say, a Rolls-Royce instead of a car only slightly better than his, or, if Brighton is his resort, to choose a world cruise rather than a holiday in Sicily. In other words, overwhelming

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[19] John Rawls, A Theory of Justice, 454.

[20] Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, 63 (1266a22-b13).

[21] Joseph H. Berke, Tyranny of Malice: Exploring the Dark Side of Character and Culture (New York: Summit Books, 1988), 270.

> and astounding inequality, especially when it has an element of the unattainable, arouses far less envy than minimal inequality...[22]

Those who assert that inequality in the distribution of goods causes envy, and criticize Aristotle on the basis of this assumption, mistake the outward expression of envy for its cause.

Material circumstances cannot account for the phenomenon of envy, precisely because envy is an act of individual perception; the causes are found inside, not outside, the envier. Envy has more to do with how an individual perceives a situation, than with the circumstances of a situation. In earlier chapters I have argued that two of the key factors that contribute to the envious response are comparability and anxiety. The following discussion will attempt to show how Aristotle's notion of justice may serve to limit both of these factors.

Comparability

Envy has been described as "above all a phenomenon of social proximity."[23] Individuals are more likely to consider themselves to be like, or equal to, those who have a similar kind of life. While a similarity of circumstance makes comparability between people more likely, it is important to keep in mind that for envy to arise it is sufficient that one *believe* that another is their equal. The perception of equality need not be contingent upon a similarity of circumstance, it may also be fueled by pervasive social ideas, such as the belief in the equality of all people. A key virtue of the Aristotelian conception of

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[21] Helmut Schoeck, Envy, 77.
[23] Helmut Schoeck, Envy, 26.

justice is that, by maintaining distinctions between people and the kinds of activities they engage in, it may inhibit the subjective perception of equality.

It was said that for envy to arise it is sufficient for an individual to believe that another is their equal. Notions of justice are responsible for establishing the basis for equality and inequality in society. If the basis of equality is broad, a greater number of individuals will be looked upon as equals. If the basis of equality is too broad the conditions for politically dangerous envy are created.[24] The reason for this is that one may imagine themselves to be equal to a larger set of individuals and as a result a greater number of people may experience envy. Such a situation is particularly dangerous because of the negative effects this may have on social interaction, it may even threaten the stability of the entire political association. The problem with the democratic notion of justice is that its notion of equality is too broad. Under this conception of justice the comparability among people is greatly increased because this notion of justice maintains that free birth is the basis of equality. The oligarchic notion maintains that wealth and social nobility are the basis of equality. Although this notion of justice seems to posit equality on a narrower basis, it is still quite problematic because this notion of justice allows for very different kinds of people to be considered equal on account of their wealth. For example, the wealthy merchant and the wealthy nobleman may be considered to be equals, at the same time maintaining that the wealthy merchant and the poor

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[24] "The envy experienced by the least advantaged towards those better situated is normally general envy in the sense that they envy the more favored for the kinds of goods and not for the particular objects they possess. The upper classes say are envied for their

merchant are unequal. While such an assertion may be an accurate reflection of the wealth that these individuals possess, the nobleman is unlikely to perceive the merchant as his equal, and the poor merchant still has reason to consider the wealthy merchant a kind of equal. The democratic notion of justice increases the sphere of envy because it encourages the perception of equality among a very large set of very different people. The oligarchic notion of justice has a narrower, but equally untidy, basis for equality.

Unlike the democratic and oligarchic notions of justice, Aristotle's conception of justice makes much finer distinctions. According to Aristotle's notion of justice goods are to be proportionately distributed on the basis of virtue. Not only does this notion of justice require that one distinguish between degrees of individual excellence, but it also requires that one consider the suitability of the virtue and the goods in question. For according to this conception of justice particular kinds of goods are suitable and fitting for people with particular kinds of excellence. Equality is conceived quite narrowly under this conception of justice. According to this conception of justice, particular types of human virtue are compared. While two people may be said to equally virtuous with respect to particular kinds of activities—they are not said to be altogether equal. If equality is understood in these terms, it is much more difficult for one to consider themselves to be altogether like another individual. The possibility of perceiving another as equal to oneself is decreased because this notion of justice requires that one compare individuals on the basis of particular qualities.

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greater wealth and opportunity; those envying them want similar advantages for themselves." Rawls, A Theory of Justice, 531.

While Aristotle's notion justice may serve to diminish a broad based perception of equality, it does sanction inequalities among individuals who are comparable. According to Aristotle, the best flute player is to receive the better supply of flutes, and the brave man is to receive the most beautiful weapons. Since the Aristotelian system allows for the unequal distribution of goods among individuals who are comparable it may be considered to be envy inducing. Indeed, these conditions do seem to be consistent with the factors that I have argued contribute to the envious response. However, while such conditions may cause envy, this kind of envy is not particularly dangerous politically. Moreover, these kinds of conditions are desirable because they are necessary for social progress.

The kind of envy that may be induced by Aristotle's system in not politically dangerous because it is specific and not general envy. The kind of envy that is most likely to arise in Aristotle's system would occur among groups of people who are very similar. That is envy is likely to arise among potters and flute players when one member receives good fortune. This kind of envy is not politically dangerous because it will be confined to those who are comparable. So while Aristotle's notion of justice makes it possible for the coward to envy the beautiful weapons bestowed upon the brave man, it is unlikely that such a distribution would pose a problem for those who are not warriors. For, in a society in which this particular notion of justice has been imbibed, and serves as the basis upon which individuals make distinctions, non-warriors will not look at warriors as their equals. Moreover, it is unlikely that individuals in different spheres will support envious feelings of such a nature, precisely because they will be recognized as arising out

of envy and not out of a concern for justice. For the coward to voice displeasure at the brave man's weapons, would be an admission of envy. Such claims are more likely to be recognized as envious grasping, for they are clearly not supported by the notion of justice. Others are more likely to be indignant when faced with such a situation. This is not the case under the democratic conception of justice. For the democratic system, on account of its broad notion of equality, makes it possible for many different kinds of people to be envious of another's advantages.[25]

Nonetheless it remains true that if Aristotle's notion of justice does create the conditions for envy, this envy will arise among those who are competing for the same kinds of goods. For Aristotle's conception of justice allows for an unequal distribution of goods among such individuals. While the Aristotelian notion of justice restricts comparability among different groups of people, it also encourages it among others. This is desirable. This situation is desirable because it contributes to social progress. To maintain that all potters ought have equal shares, discourages motivation, innovation and overall social progress. Moreover, to deny such distinctions will remove a primary cause of emulation. It is therefore not surprising, and perhaps even fitting, that in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* it is Minerva who calls upon Envy for assistance.

Anxiety

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[25] It is evident that the brave man will use the fine weapons in the best manner, it is unlikely that many will begrudge him these weapons—this is not the case involving goods where the proficient is more difficult to recognize, such as politics.

The second major factor involved in the envious response is the extent to which one is anxious about their own self-worth. As it was argued in the chapter two it is not a lack of self-worth or self-esteem that is the source of envy, for those who are entirely lacking in a sense of self-worth rarely feel envy. Rather it is an issue of anxiety over one's sense of self-worth which is particularly responsible for envy. An individual is most likely to envy not simply those who are comparable to them in a general sense, but in particular those who are more successful with respect to something that one considers to be very important to their self-conception. An individual who has a particularly fragile sense of self-worth, that is one who is anxious about being a person of worth, is more likely to feel envy when they are surpassed by another on the field which is crucial to their self-worth.

It was argued that the distinctions implied by the Aristotelian notion of justice, though narrow, sanction a degree of social comparability. While social comparability is an important factor in envy, the perception of equality is not enough. A potential difficulty with the Aristotelian notion of justice is that its proportionate distribution of goods among those who are comparable, may actually create the conditions for anxiety. Aristotle's notion of justice sanctions the unequal distribution of goods on the basis of excellence. As a result a great emphasis is based upon the differences between people, this may promote invidious comparison. It may be argued that Aristotle's political system actually fosters anxiety with respect to ones position in society, precisely because one's claim is based entirely upon their particular degree of excellence. Where individuals are concerned with their standing relative to others like them, envy is likely to occur.

While it may be true that competition is likely to arise among comparable individuals, there is an important aspect of Aristotle's system that needs to be considered in addition. While Aristotle's system may create the grounds for competition with respect to particular activities, he also teaches that not all activities ought to be considered important for one's sense of self. Aristotle systematically diminishes the significance of particular kinds of activities, while praising other kinds of activities. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle maintains that moral excellence is among the highest kind of human activity. The man who is just in the complete sense is one who is most truly said to be possessed of moral virtue. By maintaining that moral activity is the highest kind of activity, Aristotle is attempting to shift the basis of self-definition to one that is a source of less anxiety. Others have maintained that such a shift is a useful method for controlling envy:

> There is only one way, I think, in which to combat the conservation of envy, and that is to encourage people to judge themselves along dimensions which, by their very nature, make comparisons with how *others* are doing out of place. Someone seriously concerned with 'enlightenment' (in something like the eastern sense, or with 'closeness to God', or with aesthetic awareness, for example, would not judge himself according to how 'enlightened', 'close', or 'aware' his neighbour seemed to be.[26]

Aristotle is trying to encourage people to be concerned with their character, specifically their moral virtue. The morally virtuous person is one who is concerned with, and takes pleasure in, feeling and acting at "the right times on the right grounds towards the right

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[26] David E. Cooper, "Equality and Envy," Journal of Philosophy of Education 16, no. 1 (1982): 36.

people for the right motive and in the right way."[27] Such a person is not concerned with others as much as he is with himself. The envious person, on the other hand, is more concerned with others;

> The eye of envy is bold and unabashed. It is not passive, as is the eye of jealousy, but active. "For envy," says Bacon, "is a gadding passion, and walketh the streets, and doth not keep home," seeking one might add, whom it may devour.[28]

Aristotle, by encouraging a concern with one's own character, is turning the eye inward. He roots the sense of self-worth inside, to the pleasure that one feels when they act correctly. Such a basis for self-worth does not require that one exceed others, nor is it likely to be diminished by the recognition of a similar character in others.

This lack of excessive concern is expressed in the character of the magnanimous man. Aristotle describes the virtue of magnanimity as the crown of all of the virtues: "so magnanimity seems to be a sort of crown of the virtues, because it enhances them and is never found apart from them. This makes it hard to be truly magnanimous, because it is impossible without all-round excellence."[29] Such a person is worthy, and knows himself to be worthy, of the greatest honors.[30] Pusillanimity and conceit are the two extremes of this disposition. The pusillanimous man is one who has an excessively low opinion of his own self-worth.[31] The conceited man is one who has an excessively high opinion of his worth; such an individual, though unworthy, considers himself to be worthy of the highest

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[27] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 101.

[28] William N. Evans, "The Eye of Envy and Jealousy," The Psychoanalytic Review 62, no. 3 (Fall 1975): 486.

[29] Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle, 155 (1123b35-1124a23).

[30] Ibid., 153 (1123a31-b13).

honors.[32] It is important to note that the magnanimous man's sense of self worth arises from his own recognition of his moral excellence. Although such a person considers himself to be worthy of the greatest honors, he does not attach much significance to the honors of men:

> At great honours bestowed by responsible persons he will feel pleasure, but only a moderate one, because he will feel that his is getting no more than his due, or rather less, since no honour can be enough for perfect excellence. Nevertheless he will accept such honours, on the ground that there is nothing greater that they can give him. But honour conferred by ordinary people for trivial reasons he will utterly despise, because that sort of thing is beneath his dignity. And similarly with dishonour, because it cannot rightfully attach to him.[33]

Such an individual is described as imperturbable.[34] Indeed this seems to be the chief mark of the magnanimous man, for he is not excessively distressed or concerned about anything, he "will neither be overjoyed at good nor over-distressed at bad fortune."[35] The reason for this imperturbability is that the magnanimous man's sense of self-worth does not stem from honors received, the good opinion of others, or the recognition that he is possessed of an excellence that that others lack. His sense of self-worth arises from his recognition of his own virtue. Given that his sense of self-worth is rooted in such an awareness he will be less subject to anxiety than one whose self-worth hinges on a more contingent basis.

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[31] Ibid., 153 (1123a31-b13).
[32] Ibid., 153 (1123a31-b13).
[33] Ibid., 155 (1123b35-1124a23).
[34] Ibid., 154 (1123b13-35).
[35] Ibid., 155 (1123b35-1124a23).

In earlier chapters the envious man was compared to the feverish man. Such a person, it was argued, could not distinguish between deserved and undeserved good fortune because they are overly concerned with their own self-worth. The kind of character that Aristotle is trying to encourage in his citizens is one that is largely impervious to anxiety. He does this by shifting notions of worth away from the kinds of achievements that are easily subject to reversal, and instead maintains that the true worth of a person is their degree of virtue. This conception of justice gives people the distance they need from the affairs of others. They are given security, in that, their worth as individuals is not affected by the fortunes of others. Thereby the reason for the concern and anxiety over the fortunes of others is removed. This kind of character will enable one to make the kinds of distinctions that are necessary if one is to be able to distinguish between deserved and undeserved good fortune.

A virtuous individual will actually hinge their self-worth upon their ability to be just and to make good judgments. The just man is like a connoisseur of fine art, one who is able to recognize another's brilliance and prides himself upon being able to recognize and grant excellence its due. To do anything less, to be perceived as anything less would be to threaten the virtuous man's sense of self. One of the characteristics of such an individual is the ability to grant and admit the superiority of another. Such a person is concerned with justice. They would consider it beneath themselves to deny one who is deserving their due.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to explicate and discuss Aristotle's theory of justice. It was argued that the theory of justice avoids the problem of envy because it lessens the degree of social comparability and undermines anxiety with respect to one's self worth. My defense of the Aristotelian notion of justice requires that this notion of justice is imbibed by most of the individuals in a society. That is to say, this defense of the Aristotelian system requires that individuals think, and perceive reality, according to the terms of this notion of justice. If indeed envy is a matter of perception, then the only way to inhibit the expression of this emotion is by altering how individuals perceive the world around them.

Although it makes sense to argue that the key to solving the problem of envy rests with altering individual perception of reality, this is much easier to argue than to effect. Aristotle's political arrangement may be criticized on this ground as well. It may be argued that Aristotle's political arrangement does not handle envy particularly effectively precisely because its success is contingent upon a certain degree of moral development. However, Aristotle takes this into consideration as well. What is particularly interesting about the political arrangement that Aristotle proposes is that his proposed distribution of political power in the *polis* is not entirely consistent with his principle of justice. This is the second reason for my decision to consider Aristotle's notion of justice separately from his proposed distribution of power. In the following chapter I examine Aristotle's distribution of political power and I evaluate how well it handles the problem of envy.

Chapter Five

Aristotle's Political Arrangement: The Distribution of Power

The previous chapter argued that Aristotle's notion of justice inhibits socially dangerous envy by decreasing the scope of comparability and by promoting a secure basis for individual self-worth. The extent to which envy is inhibited in society, is therefore dependent upon the degree to which citizens have been habituated in accordance with this principle of justice.[1] In a society in which individuals have not been so habituated, it is less likely that they will have similar conceptions of social comparability and self-worth. As a result more citizens may tend to have an invidious perception of reality. A difficulty arises when we consider the problem of instituting the Aristotelian conception of justice in a society of individuals who have not been habituated in accordance with it. This poses a difficulty because justice in this sense demands that goods ought to be distributed on the basis of excellence, and envy, as I have argued in chapters two and three, is pain at deserved good fortune. To put the matter differently, if goods are distributed on the basis of excellence, envy is likely to be exacerbated. It may therefore be argued that a political arrangement which is entirely based upon the Aristotelian notion of justice will exacerbate envy more likely than not.

Aristotle seems to recognize the difficulties associated with building the just society. He recognizes that a high degree of moral development is required in order to

[1] That is, the extent which one's character has been shaped by this principle of justice, so that they begin to discern, desire and act in accordance with it.

create and maintain such a society. In order to avoid this difficulty, Aristotle does not propose a political arrangement that is entirely consistent with his principle of justice. Rather, he proposes that political power be vested in the middle class, arguing that such a distribution of political power is the more stable. He proposes a distribution of political office that aims to balance the competing interests of the different classes in society. The first task of this chapter will be to describe the kind of constitution that Aristotle proposes. This will be followed by an examination of whether or not such a distribution serves to exacerbate envy. The remainder of this chapter will look at Aristotle's political arrangement as a whole, examining how his notion of justice and his proposed distribution of political power work together in decreasing envy in society.

Political Arrangement

What is most strikingly apparent about Aristotle's proposed political arrangement is that it is not the logical extension of his principle of justice. It is not the logical extension of his notion of justice, because the distribution of political power that he believes to be most practicable is not altogether determined by merit. The aim of this section is to describe how Aristotle's proposed constitution differs from his notion of justice. First we will begin by describing what an entirely just distribution of political office looks like, followed by an explication of why Aristotle considers such a distribution to be impracticable. Second we will look at the kind of political arrangement that Aristotle proposes, examining both why he proposes such an arrangement and how he justifies it.

According to Aristotle, those who contribute most to the good life of a state justly have the greatest claim to honors and political office.[2] The logical extension of this notion of justice would be a kind of aristocracy or rule of the best:

> If there is any *one* man who in turn is richer than all the rest, this one man must rule over all on the very same ground of justice [which the few rich plead *their* right to rule]; and similarly any one man who is preeminent in point of good birth must carry the day over those who claim on the ground of birth. In aristocracies, too, the same logic may be applied in the matter of merit or goodness. If some one man be a better man than all the other good men who belong to the civic body, this one man should be sovereign on the very same ground of justice [which the other men plead in defence of their right to govern...Even the claims of the many may be challenged by this line of argument].[3]

If the distribution of goods in society is to be based upon excellence then, as Aristotle argues in the above passage, the virtuous ought to have a share that is proportionate to their degree of excellence. If this principle is to be followed through consistently it follows that if a person exceeds all others in excellence, such an individual ought to rule:

> Nobody, we may assume, would say that such a man ought to be banished and sent into exile. But neither would any man say that he ought to be subject to others. That would be much as if human beings should claim to rule over Zeus, on some system of rotation of office between themselves and *him*. The only alternative left—and this would also appear to be the natural course—is for all others to pay a willing obedience to the man of outstanding goodness. Such men will accordingly be the permanent kings in their states.[4]

If this principle of justice followed through logically, then virtue would be the only consideration in the distribution of political office. Whether a state was governed by the one, the few, or the many would be determined by the relative preponderance of virtue.

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[2] Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, 132 (1283a23-b25).
[3] Ibid., 133 (1283a23-b25).

What is interesting is that Aristotle does not propose a constitution that is perfectly in line with this principle of justice. In book four of the *Politics*, Aristotle considers the kind of constitution that may be attained by most states. He begins by arguing that the statesman needs to consider, among other things, "which sort of constitution suits which sort of civic body."[5] Aristotle argues that it is impossible for most states to attain the best or ideal kind of constitution.[6] He argues that when considering the best kind of constitution, and the best way of life for the majority of states and men, one should not employ, "a standard of excellence above the reach of ordinary men, or a standard of education requiring exceptional endowments and equipment, or the standard of a constitution which attains ideal height."[7] Aristocracy, he argues, is an ideal that is beyond the reach of most states. Such an arrangement, he states: "either lie, at one extreme, beyond the reach of most states, or they approach, at the other, so closely to the constitution called 'polity' that they need not be considered separately and must be treated as identical with it."[8] As a result Aristotle concludes that this kind of constitution is generally impracticable.

Rather than promoting the aristocratic ideal Aristotle argues that the polity is, for the majority of states, the best kind of constitution.[9] The polity is a constitution which vests power in the middle class. Aristotle defends such a distribution of power on the

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[4] Ibid., 136 (1284b4-1285a9).
[5] Ibid., 155 (1288b10-40).
[6] Ibid., 155 (1288b10-40).
[7] Ibid., 180 (1295a25-b29).
[8] Ibid., 180 (1295a25-b29).
[9] Ibid., 182 (1295b29-1296b9).

grounds that the middle class, on account of its middle condition, are most amenable to reason, they are not overly ambitious, they know how to obey and are best able to rule.[10] Aristotle vests power in the middle class, because they are by their very position in society better disposed to hold political office. The middle class serves to mediate the conflicting interests of the rich and the poor. For, according to Aristotle, a state that is composed of only the very rich and the very poor is a state of enmity and faction: "the result is a state, not of freemen, but only of slaves and masters: a state of envy on the one side and on the other contempt. Nothing could be further removed from the spirit of friendship or the temper of a political community."[11]

Envy and The Distribution of Political Power

Recognizing that an aristocratic constitution is beyond the reach of most states, Aristotle argues that the polity is the best kind of constitution for most states. He argues in support of the polity on the grounds that the middle class, in whom power is vested, is generally better suited for political office than are the very rich or the very poor. According to Aristotle's description of the middle classes, they are the least likely to envy. The polity is therefore a suitable kind of political arrangement if envy is a political concern.

There are a number of characteristics of the middle class, according to Aristotle's description, that would suggest that they are not disposed to envy. Firstly, Aristotle

[10] Ibid., 181 (1295a25-b29).
[11] Ibid., 180 (1295a25-b29).

describes the middle class as "the most ready to listen to reason."[12] In addition Aristotle argues that the middle classes "suffer the least from ambition."[13] Those who have such characters are less likely to be disposed to envy. In the first case, they will be less susceptible to emotion in general. Second, those who are not overly ambitious, will be less likely to be excessively concerned with the good fortune of their neighbors. What's more Aristotle argues that those who have always been blessed with the greatest advantages, the very rich, have a tendency towards contempt, while the very poor, having always lacked advantages, tend to be mean and poor spirited.[14] Both types of character serve to inhibit one's ability to correctly distinguish between deserved and undeserved good fortune. While the mean spirited individual is more likely to be envious, because they tend to be excessively concerned with all things, the contemptuous individual is also likely to be begrudging to those who do not resemble him.

Apart form these traits of character, Aristotle suggests one further reason in favor of the middle class. He argues that the middle class, given their moderate position, are more secure than any of the other classes:

> The middle classes...enjoy a greater security themselves than any other class. They do not, like the poor, covet the goods of others; nor do others covet their possessions, as the poor covet those of the rich. Neither plotting against others, not plotted against themselves they live in freedom from danger; and we may well approve the prayer of Phochylides
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> Many things are best for the middling:
> Fain would I be of the state's middle class.[15]

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[12] Ibid., 181 (1295a25-b29).
[13] Ibid., 181 (1295a25-b29).
[14] Ibid., 181 (1295a25-b29).
[15] Ibid., 182 (1295b29-1296b9).

This is arguably the most significant characteristic of the middle class when considering the possibility of envy. For, as I have argued, anxiety is a chief cause of envy. If indeed the middle class is more secure in themselves it is less likely that their self-worth will affect their ability judge justly.

The Political Arrangement

Aristotle I have argued recognizes how implausible an aristocracy is for most states, and instead proposes the polity on the grounds that such a constitution does not require a high degree of moral virtue among is citizens in order to work. I have also suggested that such a constitution is not the logical extension of Aristotle's notion of justice. While pragmatic reasons may require that power is placed in the middle class, he still maintains a notion of justice that is based upon merit. Unlike other kinds of political arrangements, that posit notions of justice that favor the dominant social class, Aristotle all the while maintains his notion of justice. Perhaps the most important lesson to be drawn from Aristotle's proposed political arrangement is that while political office needs to be distributed so as to balance the competing interests in society, he still maintains that the strength of a constitution depends upon the extent to which individuals have been properly habituated. Aristotle proposes the polity, while still maintaining, and seeking to engender, a notion of justice that rewards individuals on the basis of excellence.

In book four of the Politics, the book directly following his discussion of the most practicable type of constitution, Aristotle discusses the causes of sedition. It is evident that for Aristotle psychology plays an important role with respect to the stability of a

state. He argues that sedition is likely to arise where individuals feel that they are not being treated justly, according to their own conceptions of justice: "both democracy and oligarchy are based on a sort of justice; but they both fall short of absolute justice. This is the reason why either side turns to sedition if it does not enjoy the share of constitutional rights which accords with the conception of justice that it happens to entertain."[16] Democrats, as Aristotle argues, therefore press for equal shares in everything, while oligarchs demand inequality.[17]

Aristotle argues that these notions of justice, particularly their conceptions of equality and inequality need to be kept within bounds. If equality is pushed to far, than any unequal distribution of goods, regardless of how important such a distribution may be to the well being of a state may lead to sedition. Similarly, the oligarchic conception of justice, considering only wealth and family nobility, may distribute goods so unjustly as to lead to sedition. The problem with these conceptions of justice is that they begin with an initial error: "the right course is [not to pursue either conception exclusively, but] to use in some cases the principle of numerical equality, and in others that of equality proportionate to desert."[18] Aristotle goes on to argue that both the democratic and the oligarchic can be acceptable forms of government, insofar as neither is pushed to an extreme: "if you push either of them further still in the direction to which it tends, you

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[16] Ibid., 204 (1301a27-b36).
[17] Ibid., 204 (1301a27-b36).
[18] Ibid., 206 (1301b36-1302b5).

will begin by making it a worse constitution, and you may end by turning it into something which is not a constitution at all."[19]

The legislators and statesman, Aristotle argues, must know "which democratic measures preserve and which destroy, a democracy; similarly, it is their duty to know which oligarchical measures will save, and which will ruin, an oligarchy."[20] Aristotle's argument implies that neither democrats nor oligarchs ought to preserve notions of justice that make it easy for people to covet unjustly.

Conclusion

It does not follow that if one is to accept this principle of justice that democracy or oligarchies ought to be done away with. As Aristotle demonstrates, this principle of justice may be, and to a certain degree must be, maintained in democracies and oligarchies. For if democracies and oligarchies are allowed to push their notions of justice too far then the conditions are created for sedition. In particular, if a society's notion of justice engenders a notion of equality that is either too broad or too narrow, or establishes a basis for self-worth that is too fragile, the possibility of envious sedition increases. Instead the statesman needs to be concerned with habituating and training his citizens to feel, and therefore act, in a manner that will support the constitution: "the education of a citizen in the spirit of his constitution does not consist in his doing the actions in which the partisans of oligarchy, or the adherents of democracy, delight. It

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[19] Ibid., 232 (1309b16-1310a2).
[20] Ibid., 232 (1309b16-1310a2).

consists in his doing the actions by which an oligarchy, or a democracy, will be enabled to survive."[21]

[21] Ibid., 233 (1309b16-1310a2).

Conclusion

It is worthwhile to study envy within the context of Aristotelian political philosophy because Aristotle has both an accurate understanding of the nature of envy, and a feasible approach to addressing the problem of envy in society. Aristotle, it was argued, understands that envy arises as a result of excessive anxiety with respect to one's own self-worth. He understands the subjective nature of envy; that it is dependent more upon one's subjective perception of reality, than any material inequality. Aristotle's notion of justice may inhibit broad-based social envy by engendering a manner of perceiving reality that limits social comparability and anxiety. However, Aristotle also remembers to take into consideration that one's manner of perceiving the world, and the thought processes, feelings and desires that go along with it, is not readily changeable. He therefore proposes a political arrangement that seems to successfully balance the competing interests in society, while at the same time striving to change those interests.

The study of envy within the context of Aristotelian philosophy is also useful in that it places the political significance of being able to rule and be ruled into high relief. Envy is effective in this respect precisely because of the lengths to which the envious individual is willing to go in order to ease their pain. Laws and the threat of retribution are not necessarily enough to prevent envious lashings out. Still less is the envious person to be trusted in matters of legislation. The wisdom of Aristotle's political philosophy is that he emphasizes the importance of creating a citizenry that is disposed to

feel and act in the best manner. Individuals who lack the correct moral disposition, one that enables them to approach the circumstances of life with reason, are entirely subject to their surroundings. Such individuals are like animals that lack the ability to reflect upon their perceptions, and are therefore committed to the belief that sun is one foot across. Taken to an extreme such an individual is like the plant that, lacking a mean temperature, is subject to the temperature of its environment. Any character that lacks a mean state—one that is insufficiently distanced from the surrounding world—cannot be trusted or participate meaningfully in the democratic process.

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