I. Overview of NE x 9 and our Questions

In the closing chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (x 9), Aristotle reminds his audience that while his discourse has provided an account of happiness as virtuous activity, and of the contributions to the happy and good life made by virtue, practical wisdom, pleasure, friendship and so on, their goal (*telos*) is not knowledge but *becoming* good (1179a31–b4; cf. 1103b26–29, 1095a5). How does one become good? Aristotle reviews two further points from earlier in the *NE*: first, that arguments, which is what Aristotle’s discourses provide, are not sufficient to make us good, for they motivate (*protrepsasthai kai parormēsai*) only those who already love the fine (*philokalon*, 1179b7–10; cf. 1095a10). Second, this love for the fine is produced by habits (*ethesi*, 1179b24–26; cf. ii 1 and 4). Only at this point does Aristotle introduce the main idea of x 9, which is that law is the best means for the formation of character.

Why law? Aristotle explains that right habits are not easy for the majority or the young (1179b31–34), and the law’s prescriptions combine reasoning with compulsion without incurring resentment, as would an individual who opposed our impulses (1180a15–25). Aristotle seems to think that we need laws because virtuous conduct requires us to do things that conflict with some of our natural desires, and until and unless we become used to doing this so that it no longer brings us any pain, we need the threat
of punishment – greater pain – from the law. But Aristotle also thinks that virtue, which involves acting for better reasons than the fear of punishment, can be inculcated in at least some people by the right laws. Further, Aristotle maintains that in states that leave the inculcation of virtue up to the family (1180a25–32), the private individual would do well to study legislation to guide his attempts to make others, say the members of his household, virtuous – just as one would want to know the universals in medicine (and not just rely on experience) whether one was responsible for the health of a few or many (1180a32–b3, 1180b20–28).

The chapter concludes with a call for the study of legislation. Even though legislation is a part of political expertise, one cannot learn it from the politicians, for they do not have the intellectual grasp of legislation that would enable them to teach it (if they had such a grasp, they would teach legislation, given its great value – cf. Plato, *Meno* 93b–94d). The sophists are no better for teaching legislation, for they lack experience, as is evident from their identification of legislation with rhetoric and their view that legislation is a simple matter of choosing among the laws of existing constitutions (1180b35–1181a17; cf. Isocrates, *Antidosis*). Choosing laws well requires comprehension (*sunēsis*, 1181a18) and discrimination, but these are based on the very political experience that the sophists lack (cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 19e). Aristotle here distinguishes between the experienced person’s knowledge of the means by which an end is produced and the inexperienced person’s ability to judge only the end product. Thinking of laws as the means by which virtue is produced, Aristotle supposes that it is the experienced person who will be best able to choose which laws bring about the end. A parallel with
medicine illustrates his point: not just anybody, but the trained doctor, can put to good use texts that collect diseases and cures (1181b2–10).

With the verdict that his predecessors have left the subject of legislation unexamined (anereunēton, 1181b11), Aristotle announces a program for an inquiry into legislation and of constitutions (or, in the translation below, “political systems”) in general:

[1] First, then, if any part of what has been said by those before is plausible, let us try to go through it. Then, in the light of the political systems we have collected, [2] let us try to consider what sorts of things preserve and destroy cities and each type of political system, and what causes some cities to be well run, and others badly. For when these issues have been considered, we shall perhaps be more likely [3] to see which political system is best, how each must be arranged, and what laws and habits it should employ. (1181b15–22, Crisp trans., numbers inserted by me)

This agenda seems to point to sections of Aristotle’s Politics: [1] roughly corresponds to Politics ii, [2] to Politics iii 6–vi, and [3] to Politics vii–viii. (Politics i, which considers the city and its constituent parts, is not part of this agenda, and neither is Politics iii 1–5, which is concerned with defining the citizen.) Does the puzzling clause “and how each must be arranged” in [3] refer to different best constitutions (perhaps for different conditions) or back to the different existing constitutions considered in the middle books of the Politics? Scholars argue about whether the text of the Politics represents work from different stages in Aristotle’s intellectual life or mostly fits together into a single, if not fully executed, plan. They also disagree about the order of composition of the
Nicomachean Ethics and Politics, with Kraut 2002 taking the position that the NE was written later, so it is not even clear whether NE x 9’s closing agenda points forward or backward.

Aristotle’s remarks in NE x 9 tell us in a general sense that in his view the contributions of the Nicomachean Ethics are in the service of the project of making those for whose upbringing one is responsible virtuous. However, we can deepen our understanding of this idea by investigating some questions raised by his remarks: Why is it legislation, in particular, that one should study if one is interested in making others virtuous, especially if one is acting only as a private individual, and how does this square with Aristotle’s insistence in Politics i that political expertise and the expertise involved in running a household are distinct? What exactly are the defects of previous work on legislation, and how does Aristotle’s Politics improve on this previous work? It cannot be that the subject has not been broached; after all, Plato’s Laws is a massive work about legislation that provides a rationale for the laws it prescribes.

To pursue these questions, we begin with a review of Aristotle’s various remarks about the relationship between legislation and his discussions in earlier books of the NE, about virtue, friendship, and so on (Section II). Next, we compare Aristotle’s way of thinking about the relationship between legislation and virtue to his predecessors’, especially Protagoras’s, Thrasymachus’s, and Plato’s, to illuminate how they failed to investigate legislation properly (Section III). We also examine Aristotle’s idea that law habituates us to virtue and how exactly this works. Finally, we consider why, given Aristotle’s claim that expertise in ruling the household and the polis are distinct, both private individuals and public officials should study legislation (Section IV).
II. Legislation and Virtue

It sounds odd to modern ears, accustomed as we are to a sharp boundary between the private and the political, that the discussions of the Nicomachean Ethics, about happiness, virtue, friendship, and so on, belong to political expertise (politikē); odder still that they are meant to contribute to legislation (nomothetikē). But Aristotle repeats this claim throughout the NE. In the NE’s “preamble” (pephroimiasthō, 1095a9–10), Aristotle argues that the best good, the end aimed at in all our practical affairs, would have to be the object of “political expertise” (politikē), the architectonic expertise (1094a27), which “makes use of the other practical expertises ... and ... legislates (nomothetousēs) about what one must do and what things one must abstain from doing” (1094b5–6). The end at which the political expert aims (for the citizens) is the same as the end at which any private individual aims (for himself or herself), namely, happiness. In the course of book 1, Aristotle’s audience learns that happiness is activity in accordance with virtue, and Aristotle closes book 1 with a reference forward to book 2’s discussion of virtue, saying that the true student of politics studies virtue because he wishes to make his fellow citizens virtuous. (He gives the lawgivers of Crete and Sparta as examples because, even if they do not get it quite right, these states, unlike most states, are concerned with citizens’ virtue (1102a11ff.). At the beginning of the book 2 account of virtue through habituation, Aristotle says that legislators make citizens good by forming habits in them (1103b3). Aristotle introduces book 3’s discussion of the voluntary and involuntary by saying that it will prove useful to legislators who must assign praise and blame (1109b34). In his book 5 discussion of justice, he explains that “justice” and “injustice” in the sense of “lawful” and “unlawful” refer to the whole of virtue in relation to others,
for the law prescribes acts productive of such virtue (1129b11–1130b13; cf. 1130b20–27). He introduces the topic of pleasure in book 7 by saying that the person inquiring philosophically into political expertise, who is to be the architectonic craftsman of the end, must inquire into pleasure and pain, since moral virtue and happiness involve pleasure (1152b1–7). Finally, he introduces the discussion of friendship in book 8 with the observation that lawgivers care more for friendship than justice, for when people are friends they have no need of justice (1155a23).

While such repetitions attest to Aristotle’s seriousness about the topics of the *NE* belonging to political expertise, they do not explain what he has in mind. A little historical background helps. First, in Greek culture generally, the scope of “law” is wide, including not only written laws but also customs. Aristotle himself extends it to take into its purview the education of the young (viii 1). Second, Aristotle’s idea that the goal of political expertise and its highest branch legislation is the happiness of the citizens goes back to the sophist Protagoras, to whom Plato’s *Protagoras* specifically attributes the claim that the political expertise (*politikē technē*) he teaches leads to success in private and public affairs (318e–319a, with Socrates’ undermining this claim in the rest of the dialogue). The parallel between political expert and doctor that Aristotle draws in *NE* x 9 (1181b2–10; cf. 1180b27) seems to go back to Protagoras as well: in the *Theaetetus*, Plato puts in the mouth of a fictionally resurrected Protagoras the claim that the political expert makes healthy things appear just to a city in the way that a doctor or a gardener makes a sick animal or plant have good and healthy appearances. While these texts point to a Protagorean connection between political expertise and happiness, it is quite likely that Protagoras drew a connection specifically between legislative expertise and
happiness as well, since he took the position that the law defines justice in each constitution and he himself was engaged in legislating for colonies.

Plato’s dialogues assume Protagoras’s connection between political expertise and happiness and seek to determine what this happiness-producing expertise consists in, sometimes criticizing someone’s claims to have it, sometimes specifying criteria by which it may be identified. Political expertise is directive (Statesman 260b–c) and architectonic in that it makes use of the other expertises (Euthydemos 291c ff.); it makes people virtuous (Republic 500d; Statesman 309b–c), because their happiness depends on their virtue (Gorgias 470e). In the Gorgias, in the course of criticizing rhetoric, the so-called expertise that Gorgias claims brings “the greatest good for humankind” (452d; cf. 451c), as a false imitation of corrective justice ( dikaiosunē), Socrates maps out the expertises and their domains in a way that builds on the legislator-doctor analogy.

Political expertise (politikē technē) as a whole aims at the good of the soul; corrective justice is its inferior branch, and legislation (nomothetikē), of which sophistry is a false imitation, is its superior branch (464b–465e). (This distinction is not the same as the distinction drawn by Aristotle in NE v between the two domains of specific justice, distribution and rectification.) These two branches of politics, corrective justice and legislation, correspond to medicine and gymnastics, the two expertises that care for and aim at the good of the body. Legislative expertise seems to be the expertise that produces and maintains the happiness of citizens. This idea is fleshed out in the Republic and much more fully in the Laws, which explores concretely which laws result in the happiness of the citizens.
Plato’s interest in law reflects a concern with a way in which Protagoras’s relativism about justice is appropriated by a younger generation of sophists. While Protagoras emphasizes the relativity of justice due to the variability of law, Thrasymachus adds that not only is justice law-dependent but the laws themselves serve the interests of the powerful (*Republic* i; *cf. Laws* iv 714b–d). Plato responds by denying that laws and a political system that benefit only a part rather than the whole of the city are genuine laws and a genuine constitution (*Laws* 715b), and describing, in both the *Republic* and *Laws*, what laws that serve the common good and produce virtue in citizens would be like. Following Plato’s lead, Aristotle too distinguishes between true and perverted constitutions by whether they aim at the good of the whole or of a part (*Politics* iii 6.1279a17–21), and deems the laws that conform to the former just and those that conform to the latter unjust (iii 11.1282b8–13).

Aristotle joins the battle with Plato against Thrasymachus, and against Protagoras in recognizing a natural justice that is the same everywhere, in addition to the conventional justice that is due to legislation and depends on the legislation’s scope (1134b17–35a5). However, unlike Plato, Aristotle prepares for his account of the best constitution by making a study of actual constitutions with a reputation for good laws and ideal constitutions described by previous thinkers (*Politics* ii 1.1260b27–36). Apart from providing some of the experience that he has claimed develops the judgment (*sunēsis*) needed for choosing correctly among possible laws, the review of constitutions enables Aristotle to evaluate laws in light of their constitutional context – for Aristotle has absorbed this grain of truth from Thrasymachus, that laws maintain the constitution within which they are framed, and they are supposed to. Maintaining the constitution is
not just what corrupt laws, not worthy of the title, do when they maintain the advantages of the ruling class; rather, all laws, insofar as they function well as laws, maintain the constitution to which they belong. Thus, to judge whether a law is a good law, Aristotle considers first what constitution it belongs to. This allows him to evaluate laws both relative to the constitution they are supposed to preserve and absolutely or relative to the constitution that achieves the happiness of all the citizens.

We can see the fruits of Aristotle’s approach in his criticisms of Plato’s ideal constitutions. For example, in discussing the ideal constitution of Plato’s Republic, Aristotle first points out that the degree of unity appropriate for a city is different from the degree of unity appropriate for a family or individual (ii 2), but then, granting that the ideal city is to be maximally unified, argues that far from unifying the citizens, the community of private property and the family results in diffusion of responsibility (ii 3.1261b32–40) and the dilution of family feeling (1262a13–14). Aristotle’s approach also allows for the evaluation of constitutions in the light of legislation required for their maintenance. It is a shortcoming of a constitution if realizing it requires the rustication of everyone over the age of ten (Republic 540e–541a). Looking at laws and constitutions in light of each other reveals what laws are conducive to what good constitutional goals and what laws are not, but also what constitutional goals would be unacceptable given the legislation that would be required to bring them about.

III. Habituation and Law

How does law habituate us to virtue? Aristotle identifies virtue as a disposition in relation to the affections (NE ii 5 1105b25 ff.; cf. Physics vii 3.246a10–247a19) and says that we
acquire virtue by habituation (*ethismos*). He does not say much about what this process consists in, however, only that by performing actions of a certain kind, we acquire a corresponding disposition: thus, it is by how we act in frightening situations, through becoming habituated to feeling fear or confidence, that some of us become courageous and others of us become cowardly (*NE* ii 1.1103b15–20). Ideally, habituation results not just in acting in conformity with the law but also (in those for whom this is possible) of feeling the right way as one acts, for this is the mark of virtue as opposed to mere continence. However, action in conformity with the law is no small goal, for this is the best the many and the young can achieve. This too requires habituation: the law cannot command obedience except through habituation (*Politics* ii 8.1269a20), and a state cannot achieve the goal of lawfulness (*eunomia*) unless its good laws are obeyed (iv 8.1294a3–7).

The case of how habituation results in virtue is, of course, the most interesting. Burnyeat ([1980](#)) proposes that in the process of performing certain sorts of actions (e.g., the brave or temperate sort), one comes to discover their intrinsic value, so that one acquires the disposition to perform actions of that type for their own sake and to take pleasure in them. For part of what it is to have a virtuous disposition is to value such actions for their own sake and take pleasure in doing them.

This raises at least two questions, one philosophical and psychological, and the other textual. First, simply performing an action of the right sort for the circumstances cannot ensure that the agent focuses on the good-making features of an action. So, for example, a hoplite who stands his ground in battle may have his motives to avoid punishment and blame reinforced rather than learning anything about the intrinsic value
of protecting his comrades in battle.\textsuperscript{2} Indeed, contemporary psychological research on motivation suggests that whether one sees one’s activity as intrinsically valuable or as instrumental to some further end, it is sensitive to reward and praise (and so, it is reasonable to suppose, also to punishment and blame) in surprising ways. For example, in a landmark study by Lepper, Greene, and Nisbett (1973), children who were given rewards for drawing with markers proved less likely to draw with markers when no reward was in the offing, as compared with children who were given the opportunity to draw with markers but for no reward. In a review of thirty years of work on the effects of praise on motivation, Henderlong and Lepper (2002) found that unless it is specific, informational, and given for things in the agent’s control, praise often undermines intrinsic motivation, especially in the long term. This suggests that since the law brings about behavioral conformity by punishing nonconformity, it might actually undermine the development of intrinsic motivations to conform by making the extrinsic reasons salient.

However, we should note a significant asymmetry between reward and praise on the one hand and punishment and blame on the other. Reward and praise may be given for ability whether the ability is thought to be due to natural capacity or effort, whereas punishment and blame are given for things that are thought to be in the agent’s control. So even if praise and reward undermine intrinsic motivation – for example, when the praised agent encounters difficulty and concludes that he is lacking in ability after all – there may not be a similar effect with blame and punishment, which carry a clearer message that the desired behavior is in the agent’s control. Despite this asymmetry it seems that both punishment and blame can distract the agent from the intrinsic disvalue
of his actions unless he takes them as giving him information about what was wrong with his actions. But what draws the agent’s attention to the intrinsically good- or bad-making features of actions?

Perhaps Aristotle thinks it is the law itself that does this: because what is important for the development of a virtuous disposition is acting as virtue would and, furthermore, doing so for its own sake, perhaps law provides the correct and illuminating description of the behavior one is to avoid. When Aristotle says that the virtuous person chooses fine actions for their own sake (NE 1105a32), he likely means, “under the description that makes them the fine actions they are,” rather than specifically “as an end rather than a means.” (This removes the apparent conflict between choosing the actions for their own sake and choosing them because they contribute to the agent’s happiness.) Aristotle also does not think of law as especially operating by forbidding, since he thinks that legislation should cover the upbringing of the young and himself describes laws pertaining to education (v 9.1310a13–20, viii 1.1337a10–11).

Although Aristotle frequently points to the educative function of law, we have seen there is a puzzle about the mechanism(s) by which people are supposed to end up valuing actions for the right reasons as a result of habituation by the law. Aristotle’s remarks raise a second, textual, issue: while discovering the intrinsic value of virtuous acts by performing them is surely an important step in the acquisition of virtue, many of the passages on habituation seem to point to something more basic. In NE iii 3 Aristotle says that the person who resists temptations or withstands frightening things cheerfully or anyway without distress is or becomes moderate or courageous, for it is because of pleasure that we do base things and because of pain that we hold back from doing fine
things (1104b5–11). His point seems to be that the performance of (some) virtuous actions requires that we overcome our natural aversions to pain and propensities to pleasure. Standing firm in battle requires overcoming a natural flight response in the face of danger; staying awake throughout one’s night watch requires overcoming a natural desire to sleep when tired. Aristotle’s examples of habituation in the education of his best constitution (*Politics* vii–viii) also point to habituation’s role in changing our response to our natural pleasures and pains. Here, Aristotle recommends exposing young children to cold so that they become accustomed (*sunethizein*) to it, the idea being that in later life we more easily endure those things we have had to endure since childhood (1336a14–20).

The first stage in habituation seems to be getting people accustomed to experiencing certain bodily or emotional states (the point of exposing the child to cold may be so that the body does not fall ill on exposure to cold, or so that the child gets used to feeling cold and no longer thinks of the discomfort as so bad or to be avoided or feared). Aristotle generalizes from this example to strictures on the games children should play and the kind of talk they should hear (1336a25–35, 1336b5). He seems to hold that repeated experience of certain uncomfortable states reduces the motive to escape them. This is the sense in which contemporary psychologists speak of habituation: the diminution in response to a stimulus when it is repeated. It is this aspect of habituation that Aristotle emphasizes in *NE* x 9 when he says that people will not find their nurture and occupations painful when they have become habituated (*sunēthē genomena*, 1179b34–1180a1).

In *Politics* viii 5 Aristotle prescribes for the best constitution certain modes and rhythms for citizens to listen to on the assumption that music produces in its listeners
certain emotional states that it somehow also represents (1340a10–b12). The idea seems to be that one mode represents, say, anger (presumably appropriate anger) and another courage, and these modes also produce anger and courageous feelings in their audience, so that the audience gets practice with these feelings during its musical education and so is disposed to feel them in similar real-life situations. Virtue is a disposition in relation to how we are affected as well to how we act, and how we are affected also influences how we act. But here, habituation is not a matter of diminishing responses to things that we are initially averse to, or to things we are initially strongly attracted to; rather, it seems to involve developing positive and active responses to these things—new pains and pleasures, for example.

It is also interesting that we are supposed to practice being in frightening situations for the development of courage, but apparently not being in tempting situations in order to develop moderation. For moderation, Aristotle recommends veering in the direction of abstention. (In this he differs from Plato, whose Laws [671a–672a] recommends drinking parties for testing and developing the moderation of old men.) Aristotle’s reasoning is that we need to counteract our natural propensities, so our propensity to cowardice by erring in the direction of rashness, and our propensity to self-indulgence by erring in the direction of abstention (NE ii 8.1109a1–19). Perhaps it is because of these different natural propensities that habituation does not look like a unitary phenomenon when we examine it in detail.

The pleasures in the discovery of intrinsic value described by Burnyeat are pleasures that we have to develop our abilities to enjoy. Possibly this value is obscured by our first feelings of pleasure and pain. In any case, the pleasures in the intrinsic value of
virtuous actions are likely to involve reflection and so belong to the development of practical wisdom. One can see how reflection on one’s law-inculcated behavior could take in the reasons for laws to direct us as the laws do, and so to create intrinsic motivation for virtuous actions.

All this bears directly on our particular question about the way in which law makes people virtuous. By threatening punishment for actions contrary to virtue, law motivates behavioral conformity with virtue; by being the subject of reflection, it helps those few that are capable of it to think about the goals of virtuous action and legislation, that is to say, about the chief good.

IV. Political and Private Virtue-Inculcation: Same Expertise or Different?

We turn, finally, to Aristotle’s claim about the value to the private individual of studying legislation. In Politics i Aristotle argues that the content and value of politikē, the expertise in ruling over a community of equals, is distinct from and superior to that of expertise in ruling over inferiors (e.g., the members of a man’s household). He is arguing against Plato’s view, expressed in the Statesman (258e–259c), that political expertise is an art of ruling – whether over few (as in a household) or many (as in a city). And in NE vi 8 Aristotle describes legislation as the controlling part of political expertise – having to do with the universals, while the issuing of edicts has to do with particulars (1141b25–26). But if legislation belongs to political expertise, which is a distinct expertise from that needed by the head of a household, why should a private individual study legislation?
This question bears upon another, and more contentious, one, about the relationship between the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*. It is quite natural for us to read the former as Aristotle’s specification of human happiness and virtue and the latter as his discussion of the constitutional arrangements that do and do not aid in the development of such happiness and virtue. There is nothing wrong with this so long as we do not import modern public-private distinctions into our reading of the *NE*. The *NE* is not focused on individual happiness, for the goal of the architectonic expertise mentioned in the beginning and end of the work is the city’s happiness. There is every reason to construe the happiness of the city individualistically, as at least largely constituted by the happiness of individual citizens, but the *NE* does not seem to be written as if individual happiness is achievable no matter what the social circumstances. This is not to say that no one can be happy except in Aristotle’s ideal constitution, but rather to say that the *NE* is addressed to those who would make others virtuous and thereby happy.

Bodéüs 1993 argues that the *NE* is addressed to would-be legislators (3, 45, 57–62). Considerations favoring this proposal include (in addition to the textual indications of *NE* i 1 and x 9) the inadequacy of the *Politics* for the student of legislation, given that it lacks the *NE*’s general account of the end and of the contribution to it of virtue, activity, friendship, and so on, which a legislator would have to know in order to choose good laws and ensure that they are obeyed, and the repeated remarks (cited at the start of *Section II* herein) that the political and, in particular, the legislative expert should understand the topics discussed in the *NE*. One might object to this that it makes the text of the *NE* irrelevant to the majority of its readers who are not in a position to legislate for a constitution aimed at the development of virtuous and happy human beings (as does
Schütrumpf [1997]. A way out of the irrelevancy worry is suggested by Curren [2000], which proposes that the arguments of the *NE* and *Politics* address self-interested legislators as well as those aimed at the good of the whole (99–100).

But Aristotle is quite clear in *NE* x 9 (cf. i 3.1095a1–11) that arguments and perhaps speeches more generally can have the desired effect only on people who have been brought up to love the fine and to desire and act in accordance with reason. So to whom is the *NE* addressed, and to whom is it relevant?

We can make progress on this question by considering our narrower question about the value to a private individual of studying legislation. Aristotle points out that because many constitutions, unfortunately, leave education in the hands of the family (*NE* x 9.1180a24–29), it is left to the head of the household to prescribe the conduct that shapes those in his care so they will be virtuous (the conversation between Socrates and Ischomachus in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* is an example). Because the problem for the father is how to motivate and direct virtue-inspiring conduct in children who are led by pleasure and pain, he has to formulate rules of action and provide a rationale as well as punishments for noncompliance, just as the laws would in a good constitution. But this means his task is to legislate for his children, and he will do so better if he is guided by legislative expertise than if not. Although Aristotle mentions that the situation of the head of household is in some ways preferable to that of the legislator – his children obey him out of affection; he can tailor his prescriptions to the individuals in his charge – these do not do away with the need for legislative expertise.

Yet legislative expertise suggests a kind of generality that may seem unnecessary in the household. One might wonder: Why can a father not, as Protagoras imagined,
“strive to make him [viz. the child] as good as possible, teaching and showing him by every word and deed that this is right and that wrong, this good and that bad, this holy and that unholy, ‘do this’ and ‘don’t do that’” (Plato, Protagoras 325d, Taylor trans.)? There might be several reasons: even though the facts of kinship and paternal beneficence dispose children to obey their father (1180b5–6), still, children might be less resentful and rebellious if their father coerces them by means of rules whose consistency they can see and whose rationale they understand or will come to understand. Further, a man’s children are only temporarily his inferiors; when they grow up, they will be his equals and the equals of other citizens, and being ruled by even homemade laws prepares them for that. Even private education needs to prepare children for citizenship.

These thoughts can help us reconcile some apparently contradictory remarks Aristotle makes about the practical expertises: that on the one hand, political expertise is distinct from economic expertise – namely, the expertise required for running a household well (Politics i) – but on the other hand, that political wisdom and practical wisdom are the same disposition (hexis), although what it is to be them is different (NE vi 8.1141b23–25). Presumably by the last comment Aristotle means that political wisdom and practical wisdom are related to different things, the city as a whole in the case of the former and one’s life as a whole in the case of the latter. Politics iii 4 echoes this point about sameness of disposition by claiming that the distinctive virtue of the ruler is practical wisdom, which is the same as the virtue of a good man. (In context, Aristotle is distinguishing the constitution-relative sense of a good citizen and a good ruler – defined in terms of preservation of the constitution – from the absolute sense, one who rules and is ruled by equals.) This should not be understood as saying there are two expertises, one
for ruling over others and one for running one’s own life, which converge. Rather, there is one, architectonic, expertise, and it equips one to rule over and be ruled by equals for the sake of the common good, whether the equals in association are the members of a family or co-citizens, where the time of equality may still lie in the future.

**Works Cited**


Notes

I would like to thank Stephen Menn and Ron Polansky for their comments on previous drafts of this contribution.

1 “The wise and efficient politician is the man who makes wholesome things seem just to a city instead of pernicious ones. Whatever in any city is regarded as just and admirable is just and admirable in that city and for so long as that convention maintains itself; but the wise man replaces each pernicious convention by a wholesome one, making this both be and seem just” (Theaetetus 167e, trans. Levett).

2 Although Aristotle discusses courage in one context where it is most salient – military action – it does not follow that the habituation to courage requires military experience (or indeed that nonmilitary contexts do not call for courage). I am grateful to Ron Polansky for his thoughts on this point.

3 I owe this reading of di’ auta to Terry Irwin.