

ARISTOTLE ON PRIOR AND POSTERIOR, CORRECT AND MISTAKEN CONSTITUTIONS

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In *Politics* 3.1 Aristotle offers a first, tentative definition of citizen (1275a22–34) and then considers the relationship of citizen to constitution. His remarks are brief, but the general point is clear enough. The notion of citizen depends upon that of constitution. Since constitutions differ not only in kind but also in priority and posteriority (correct constitutions are prior and mistaken or deviant constitutions are posterior), there is no single, common notion of citizen (1275a35–b5). With this conclusion I do not wish to quarrel. What I want to do is to focus on the priority and posteriority which Aristotle attributes to correct and mistaken constitutions. For scholars have not always understood this priority and posteriority and in any case they have left unsaid certain things which seem to me of philosophical interest and importance.

In Section 1, I shall argue briefly against a temporal interpretation of the priority and posteriority of constitutions and then in Section 2, I shall point out that the familiar comparison of constitutions with numbers, figures and psychic faculties may be more misleading than helpful. In Section 3, I shall refer to Plato's *Laws* and suggest that Aristotle's analysis can be more fully appreciated, when it is seen as a rejection of persuasive definition. Finally in Section 4, I shall focus on passages which not only bring out the normative aspect of Aristotle's analysis but also manifest considerable insight into the logic of grading.

1. We may begin by rejecting an interpretation recently advanced in the literature.¹ This is the view that the priority and posteriority mentioned in *Politics* 3.1 is to be construed temporally. At first glance

¹ E. Braun, *Das dritte Buch der aristotelischen "Politik"* = SB Wien (1965) 20–22, 54–60.

such an interpretation seems attractive. For Aristotle not only describes the temporal use of "prior" as primary and most proper (*Cat.* 14a26–28) but also speaks of the city in a way which encourages a chronological interpretation of political purpose and constitutional arrangement (1252a24–1253a39, 1278b15–30). Common advantage is said to bring men together (1278b21–22) and common advantage is declared the goal of correct constitutions (1279a17–20). It is tempting to conclude that correct constitutions are temporally prior, being due to some sort of natural, primitive instinct for association and common advantage. Deviant constitutions are a later phenomenon arising only when the motive of common advantage has been lost.²

This interpretation enjoys an initial plausibility, but ultimately it must be rejected. The introduction of priority and posteriority in *Politics* 3.1 is not based upon a genetic theory of the *polis* whose historicity is open to question and whose relevance to the larger discussion in 3.1 is not at all obvious. For Aristotle wants to argue from the priority and posteriority of constitutions to the absence of a single, common genus. Toward this end the details of history are irrelevant. Tyranny, for example, may be an historically later phenomenon than kingship (cf. 1286b16–17 with 5.1310b18–20 and Thucydides 1.13.1) but this piece of history does not in itself rule out treating kingship and tyranny as coordinate species under the common genus of monarchy. Moreover, temporal sequence is hardly touched upon in *Politics* 3 and when it is, the ordering is not always from correct to deviant constitution (1286b8–22, cf. 4.1296a1–5, 1297b16–28, 5.1301b6–10, 1316a29–34). Even in the *Ethics* where passage from correct to deviant constitution is emphasized (*EN* 1160b10–17), Aristotle is careful not to say that such a sequence is invariable. It is only especially common, because the change involved is least and easiest (1160b21–22). We must conclude that temporal order is not central to Aristotle's thinking and that a different interpretation is to be preferred.

2. In *Politics* 3.1 Aristotle is consciously applying the general principle that whenever things form a series such that one comes first and another second and so on, there is nothing or hardly anything

² *Ibid.* 59–60. Cf. E. Barker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (New York 1959) 310–11, whose remarks concerning chronological order are properly kept apart from an analysis of priority and posteriority.

common to such things (1275a35-38).³ Hence scholars have been quick to group constitutions with numbers, figures and psychic faculties, for Aristotle holds that the members of these classes form such a series and lack a proper genus.⁴ In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle argues that there is no number and figure apart from the specific numbers and figures, for whenever things form an ordered series, that which is predicated of the things cannot be something apart from them (999a6-10). Similarly in the *De Anima* Aristotle holds that there is no figure apart from the triangle, the quadrilateral, etc. and no soul apart from the faculties of nutrition, sensation and intellect (414b20-32).⁵ What interests me here is that Aristotle does not mention constitutions in connection with numbers, figures and psychic faculties. I do not want to suggest that Aristotle fails to mention constitutions, because he thinks they cannot be grouped together with numbers, figures and psychic faculties conceived of as ordered series lacking a proper genus. But I do want to suggest that the priority and posteriority of constitutions is in some respects different. In the *Politics* Aristotle is well advised not to illustrate the priority and posteriority of constitutions by reference to numbers, figures and psychic faculties, for such a move might have the unfortunate effect of diverting attention from features which are not shared and which are important for appreciating fully Aristotle's remarks on correct and mistaken constitutions.

A comparatively superficial difference is that while numbers, figures and psychic faculties form single series in which every member is in some relationship of priority or posteriority to every other member,

³ The addition of *glischrōs* in 1275a38 is probably not significant. It seems to have been added to affect a tentative manner and may be compared with similar additions at *Phys.* 226b27-28 and *De An.* 428b19. See my *Aristotle on Emotion* (London 1975) 47 note 2.

⁴ The grouping takes various forms in different authors. See, for example, J. Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle I* (Oxford 1887) 242; J. Cook Wilson, "On the Platonist Doctrine of the *asymblētoi arithmoi*," *CR* 18 (1904) 256; H. H. Joachim, *Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics*, edited by D. Rees (Oxford 1955) 38; W. D. Ross, *Aristotle's Metaphysics I* (Oxford 1958) 237; D. W. Hamlyn, *Aristotle's De Anima* (Oxford 1968) 94. In what follows I shall not discuss these scholars individually. I am only concerned with the cumulative impression that the priority and posteriority of constitutions can be usefully elucidated by reference to numbers, figures and psychic faculties.

⁵ In another context it might be important to focus on differences between *Metaph.* 999a6-10 and *De An.* 414b20-32. See the interesting remarks of A. C. Lloyd, "Genus, species and ordered series in Aristotle," *Phronesis* 7 (1962) 67-90.

constitutions as presented in *Politics* 3.1 do not form such a single series.⁶ Instead they divide into three groups: kingship and tyranny, aristocracy and oligarchy, polity and democracy. Each group involves priority and posteriority, because each group is composed of a correct and a mistaken form of constitution. But across groups there is no priority and posteriority, so that the correct forms of kingship, aristocracy and polity can be coordinate species of correct constitution—that is to say, species of political arrangement aiming at the common interest (1279a17–18).⁷

Later on we must complicate our account and recognize that in a different context Aristotle will rate and order the correct constitutions, so that finally all six take their place in a single series. But at this moment we should go below what I have called a comparatively superficial difference and notice that this difference is based on Aristotle's teleology. For Aristotle constitutions are by nature purposeful and properly directed toward a specific *telos* (1289a17, cf. 1278b23, 1280b39). This is not true of numbers and figures. In the case of psychic faculties teleology is important and it is of some interest that when Aristotle names the primary faculty, he does so with an appeal to the principle that everything is properly named from its *telos* (416b23–25). But in psychology teleology serves to specify rather than to unite the faculties which are ordered along the *scala naturae*. This is different from the sphere of politics where the *telos* of common advantage serves to unite three different constitutions under the label "correct constitution."

A further difference between constitutions and numbers, figures and psychic faculties concerns the priority of greater value. In the

⁶ To "*Politics* 3.1" might be added "3.6–8," but either way I am expressing myself cautiously, for later and from a different perspective Aristotle will order the correct and incorrect constitutions in a single series. See below, Section 4.

⁷ It might be objected that the species of both the correct and incorrect constitutions form ordered series in that they differ in number: kingship and tyranny are the rule of one man, aristocracy and oligarchy are the rule of the few and polity and democracy are the rule of the many. But this objection seems to forget that in certain cases Aristotle does not think number an essential feature. A least he goes out of his way to argue that oligarchy and democracy are only incidentally the rule of the few and the many (1279b11–1280a6) and when he comes to discuss polity his focus is upon the middle class in contrast with the very rich and the very poor (1295b1–3). Cf. Barker (above, note 2) 312.

Categories Aristotle recognizes that "prior" is often used in an evaluative sense (14b4-8) and in the *Metaphysics* he says that the better is always prior to the worse and that a genus is lacking (999a13-14). The application to constitutions is clear enough. Correct constitutions are valued higher than mistaken ones, because they have a proper goal and conform to simple justice (1279a17-19). Mistaken constitutions are deviations which may be called despotic in that they disregard the interests of free men (1279a19-21). They are bad, not good, and therefore are posterior in an evaluative sense. This is not true of numbers and figures, and while Aristotle would want to rate intellect higher than sensation and both of more worth than nutritive and reproductive capacity, he would not want to say the lower faculties are in any way deviations and violations of simple justice. Deviant constitutions are positively bad. Lower psychic faculties are not in themselves bad, though they can be troublesome and in any case lack the value of intellect.

A final difference is conceptual. The mistaken constitutions are posterior not only because they are of negative value but also because they are conceived of in terms of the correct constitutions. We may compare the *Eudemian Ethics* where primacy is related to definition. "Surgeon" is said to be prior to "surgical instrument," because the *logos* of the former is mentioned or implied in the *logos* of the latter and not *vice versa* (1236a17-22). Viewed this way, a correct constitution is prior, because it is conceptually independent, while a mistaken constitution is posterior, because it is conceptually dependent upon a correct constitution: tyranny is (essentially) a deviation from kingship, oligarchy is a deviation from aristocracy and democracy is a deviation from polity (1279b4-6, 1289a28-30, cf. *EE* 1241b32). This kind of logical analysis—often called focal analysis—is well known to readers of the *Metaphysics*.⁸ Aristotle applies it to being and uses it to explain the priority of substance (1003a33-b10, 1028a34-36). But he does not use it to establish priority and posteriority among numbers, figures and psychic faculties. Two is prior not because it is conceptually independent of other numbers but rather because it is first among the numbers

⁸ On focal analysis see G. E. L. Owen, "Logic and Metaphysics in Some Earlier Works of Aristotle," in *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century*, edited by Düring and Owen (Göteborg 1960) 163-90.

(*Metaph.* 999a8)—i.e., comes first in the series of natural numbers. This series is a developing, open-ended series whose principle of continuation is understood as soon as any member of the series is understood. This is not required in the case of a focal series. We can understand and define “surgeon” without understanding “surgical instrument” (*EE* 1236a22) and we can define both “surgeon” and “surgical instrument” without being certain how this particular focal series is to be extended.

Aristotle’s comparison between figures and psychic faculties (*De An.* 414b20–32) is of considerable independent interest, but in this context we may confine our remarks to the fact that Aristotle does not introduce focal analysis to explain the serial order which marks kinds of figures and psychic faculties. Rather he speaks of the prior always being present potentially in the posterior (414b29–30) and in so speaking passes over an important difference. For while it is a demonstrable truth that any given quadrilateral can be divided into two triangles, it is a matter of empirical observation that sensation does not occur apart from nutritive capacity.⁹ Of course, we might develop a conception of soul such that higher faculties logically imply the presence of lower ones, but Aristotle does not do this, not only because empirical issues are properly settled by observation (cf. 413a31–b1), but also because he accepts the possibility of a separable intellect (413b24–27, 415a11–12). This is not to say that Aristotle’s analysis of psychic faculties makes no use of logical ties. When he comes to consider the psychic faculties indivi-

⁹ Cf. Sir David Ross, *Aristotle, De Anima* (Oxford 1961) 224. Here two caveats should at least be mentioned. First, Aristotle might concede that psychological research involves observation and still claim that all developed sciences including psychology can and should be conveyed in a demonstrative manner (see J. Barnes, “Aristotle’s Theory of Demonstration,” *Phronesis* 14 [1969] 123–52, reprinted in *Articles on Aristotle*, edited by Barnes et al. [London 1975] 65–87). Second, the comparison of psychic faculties with rectilinear figures may be quite helpful in pointing up the way in which a higher psychic faculty tends to inform the activity of a lower psychic faculty. Much as the triangle is not actually present in the quadrilateral, so simple manifestations of nutritive and sensitive capacity are rare in the case of human beings. Man’s intelligence seems to affect almost everything he does, so that only in special (often breakdown) cases can we describe the behavior of a human being as a simple manifestation of nutritive and appetitive capacity. Cf. Joachim (above, note 4) 38–39, who perhaps overstates the way in which lower faculties are “essentially modified” in creatures endowed with higher faculties. For while human beings often manifest intelligence in taking nutrition, their nutritive faculty is said not only to be common (to all living things) and vegetative in nature but also to be especially active during periods of sleep (*EN* 1102a32–b5).

dually, he tells us that activities are logically prior to capacities and in the same way objects are prior to activities (415a16-22). In other words, objects are prior in the focal series object-activity-faculty and therefore are properly investigated first (416a20, 418a7-8).¹⁰ But between the faculties Aristotle does not try to establish a focal series. He treats nutritive capacity first, because it is most common (415a24) and not because its definition will be mentioned in the definition of any higher faculty.

3. It turns out that Aristotle's analysis of constitutions differs from his analysis of numbers, figures and psychic faculties. This in itself is of some interest, but if we want to appreciate fully Aristotle's remarks concerning the priority of correct constitutions and the posteriority of mistaken ones, we should get away from numbers, figures and psychic faculties and consider Plato's *Laws* 712b8-715e2. For here we find the Athenian Stranger anticipating much of Aristotle's argument.¹¹ The Stranger recognizes a distinction between constitutions which benefit the entire population and those which are despotic and enslave a portion of the city (*Laws* 713a1-2, cf. *Pol.* 1279a20-21). He also connects correctness with the common interest (*Laws* 715b3-4, cf. *Pol.* 1279a17-20, 1283b36-42) and even argues in such a way as to suggest that the notion of citizen is dependent upon that of constitution. For the Stranger first decides to withhold the label "constitution" from political arrangements which do not consider the good of the entire community (712e10, 715b3) and then makes a similar decision concerning the use of "citizen" (715b5). To be sure, the Stranger does not formulate a notion of conceptual dependence in the way that Aristotle does (1275a35-36), but he does argue in a way that agrees with Aristotelian method. At very least he seems to recognize the

¹⁰ I understand *trophê* to have the same sense in 416a20 as in 416a22 and I interpret the former passage with reference to 415a21 and 418a7-8. Hence I prefer the translation of W. S. Hett, *Aristotle; On the Soul*, Loeb edition (London 1957) 91, to that of Sir David Ross, *Aristotle, De Anima* (Oxford 1961) 226, and Hamlyn (above, note 4) 20.

¹¹ Cf. Newman (above, note 4) 215-16. That Aristotle was much impressed by *Laws* 712b8-715e2 should be obvious from the passage I am about to cite. Here I would add only that (1) when Aristotle mentions guardians and servants of law (1287a21-22) his words seem to echo *Laws* 714a2, 715c7; (2) when he mentions a connection between law and reason (1287a29-30) he seems to be recalling *Laws* 714a2 and (3) when he is concerned with constitutional mixture and mentions Sparta approvingly (1293b16, 1294b19, cf. 1265b35) he seems to be influenced in part by *Laws* 712d2-e9.

principle that coordinates (*systoicha*) follow coordinates (*Top.* 114a38–b1, 118a35–36, 153b25–26, 156a27–30)—that a decision concerning the use of *politeia* affects the use of *politês*.

There is, however, one important respect in which the Stranger cannot be said to anticipate Aristotle. This is in withholding the label “constitution” from associations which are not directed toward the common good. The Stranger is not ignorant of the fact that Kleinias and other Greek-speakers use “constitution” quite generally to refer to various arrangements including democracy, oligarchy, aristocracy, kingship and tyranny (712b8–c5). Nevertheless, he decides to restrict the use of “constitution” and thereby to give special dignity to a particular kind of constitution—namely, the kind which considers the interest of all citizens. This is what Stevenson and other modern philosophers have discussed under the rubric “persuasive definition.”¹² To introduce as a defining mark something which is absent from many arrangements generally spoken of as constitutions is not so much to analyze usage as to recommend a particular kind of constitution, presumably because this kind of constitution is thought to have desirable features lacking in other forms of constitution. What is troubling and perhaps a fault is that in recommending arrangements which consider everyone’s interest, the Stranger begins in a way that does not distinguish clearly between making a recommendation concerning how we might beneficially use words and giving a report concerning how we actually do use words: “Those (arrangements) which we just now named are not constitutions but settlements” (712e9–10). It is only toward the end of the discussion that the Stranger speaks in a way which seems to indicate that he is recommending something new: “These we *now* say not to be constitutions” (715b2–3).¹³

With this restricted usage Aristotle is unsympathetic. He is prepared to speak of correct and mistaken forms of constitution but he is

¹² C. L. Stevenson, *Ethics and Language* (New Haven 1944) 206–26. Cf. R. Robinson, *Definition* (Oxford 1950) 165–70, who has discussed persuasive definition under the heading “Real Definition as the Adoption and Recommendation of Ideals.”

¹³ The use of *nun* at 712e10 seems to differ from the use at 715b3. In the earlier passage *nun* is used to refer back half a page to 712c3–4. (The OCT is correctly punctuated at 712e10.) In the later passage *nun* does not seem to pick up something just said but rather to emphasize a present decision concerning the usage of “constitution.”

adverse to violating everyday language by withholding the label "constitution" from democracies, oligarchies and tyrannies. Accordingly he offers an analysis which makes room for correct and mistaken forms of constitution and at the same time actually wards off arbitrary linguistic decisions. For Aristotle's analysis not only makes evident the goal of political associations; it also provides a clear explanation of why democracies, oligarchies and tyrannies are called constitutions. They are essentially deviations from polity, aristocracy and kingship and therefore are called constitutions by reference to these correct and primary forms. Ambiguity is mitigated, so that we are disinclined to follow the Stranger. Whatever the practical political gains his restricted usage may promise, we are tempted to follow Aristotle in respecting everyday language.¹⁴

4. Aristotle's interest in the priority of correct constitutions does not blind him to alternative ways of classifying constitutions and in *Politics* 4 he reports that men recognize two basic constitutions—oligarchy and democracy. They are said to classify aristocracy as a kind of oligarchy and polity as a kind of democracy in much the same way that they treat the west wind as a kind of north wind and the east wind as a kind of south wind (1290a13–19). In this particular passage Aristotle does not state explicitly the reasons why men pick oligarchy and democracy as basic constitutions but two reasons come readily to mind. The first is suggested by a later passage in the *Politics*, where Aristotle reports that since the rich and the poor are mutually exclusive classes which normally coincide with the few and the many, constitutions seem to divide into oligarchies and democracies (1291b7–13). In other words, a consideration of groups within the city encourages a division into oligarchies and democracies. The second reason is suggested by the analogy with winds. In the *Meteorologica* we are told that north and south winds are most frequent (361a6). They are the

¹⁴ Aristotle's interest in everyday language is well known, but perhaps it may be noted in this context that Aristotle not only preserves ordinary language in using "constitution" widely to cover deviant as well as correct forms but also appeals to ordinary language in order to explain using "constitution" narrowly to refer to the specific form of polity (1293a40, cf. 1297b24). This is not to suggest that Aristotle was rigidly bound by a devotion to everyday language. In the *Ethics* he acknowledges that men are accustomed to use "constitution" to refer to polity and yet he offers "timocratic" as an appropriate label (*EN* 1160a33–35).

prevailing winds and this fact seems to explain why certain people treat these two winds as standard winds from which other winds are deviations.¹⁵ Similarly with constitutions frequency might be used to select oligarchy and democracy as basic forms (1296a22–23, cf. 5.1301b39–1302a2). Certainly on the criterion of frequency none of the correct forms could qualify. Kingship and aristocracy are beyond most cities and polity is a regrettably rare occurrence (cf. 1295a25–34, 1296a37–40).

Aristotle acknowledges that a division into oligarchies and democracies is especially widespread (1290a22–24), but he is equally explicit in declaring it truer and better to divide constitutions according to his own framework and so to regard oligarchy and democracy as deviations from one or two well established forms (1290a23–29). In speaking of one or two forms Aristotle is thinking of kingship and aristocracy (cf. 1289a30–33) and in speaking of a truer and better division Aristotle is thinking of a normative division. We have already touched upon this point in Section 2, where we observed that correct constitutions are prior not only in a conceptual but also in a evaluative sense. Here we may add that a concern with grading leads Aristotle to reject an alternative framework built around two frequent but mistaken constitutions. This is not to overlook the fact that when Aristotle turns his attention from grading to the causes of revolution, he is quite prepared to speak of aristocracy being in some way an oligarchy (5.1306b24–27). But when Aristotle is interested in grading he prefers a normative framework and not one built around oligarchy and democracy.

This interest in grading also prompts Aristotle to criticize an unnamed predecessor for speaking of good oligarchy and calling democracy best among bad constitutions (1289b5–9). What is interesting here is not so much the identity of Aristotle's opponent as the logic of his criticism.¹⁶ He considers the normative aspect of his division so important, that he not only objects to speaking of, say, good oligarchy (1289b7–8) but also favors a mode of expression which suggests his

¹⁵ Cf. H. Rackham, *Aristotle, Politics*, Loeb edition (London 1950) 288–89, note a.

¹⁶ Aristotle may be thinking of Plato's *Statesman* 302–03, but if this is the case, then Aristotle is not only misremembering the Platonic text but also misremembering it to his own advantage (Robinson [above, note 4] 72). I prefer to leave the matter undecided.

fundamental normative distinction. He does not call it an outright error to speak of one oligarchy being better than another (1289b10–11) but he does not like this mode of speech, for it leaves open whether oligarchy is essentially bad. “Better” is a comparative word which is quite indifferent to the actual value of things graded. Two items may be both very bad and yet one may be properly spoken of as better than the other. Hence Aristotle recommends “less bad” (1289b11), for this expression is commonly used to grade items of negative value. To call one oligarchy less bad than another is to imply that all are bad—that they are all mis-directed and therefore all belong to the class of mistaken constitutions.

Aristotle’s remarks concerning “better” and “less bad” make clear his interest in maintaining a fundamental distinction between correct and deviant constitutions. However, we should not ignore the fact that these remarks are immediately preceded by an ordering of the correct constitutions. Aristotle recognizes the superior value of kingship and aristocracy (1289a30–33) and then goes on to create a single series running from best to worst political arrangement (1289a38–b5, cf. *EN* 1160a35–b22). What we need to be clear about is that such a single series is quite compatible with holding that there are three correct constitutions from which three other constitutions deviate. The important point is that grading requires some standard, so that a complication of the standard is likely to complicate the grade series. When Aristotle first introduces correctness in *Politics* 3, he seems to have Plato’s *Laws* in mind and in any event is concerned solely with correctness of goal. Correct constitutions are those which consider the common good and mistaken constitutions are those which consider the ruler’s good (1279a17–20). This analysis in no way precludes the introduction of a second criterion and therefore a more complicated ranking of constitutions. At the very end of *Politics* 3 Aristotle reaffirms the existence of three correct constitutions and then adds that the best of these correct constitutions must be that which is managed by the best men (1288a32–34). We have here a new standard—namely, that of virtue (1288a36, or virtue accompanied by resources 1289a33). This standard is not intended to replace the standard of proper orientation. But it can supplement it and in particular can be used to help grade correctly oriented constitutions. Kingship may be deemed best

(EN 1160a35), for the (true, absolute) monarch is a man of quasi-divine qualities (1284a10, 1289a40). Alternatively kingship and (ideal) aristocracy may be grouped together and rated best (1289a30–33, cf. 1310b3,32–34) or possibly aristocracy is to be preferred (1286b3–7). But whatever the decision concerning these two constitutions, polity ranks third, for a large number of citizens cannot (or at least not easily) possess virtue fully (1279a40). When virtue is the standard, polity falls short of perfection and therefore may be counted among deviant forms, though from the standpoint of proper orientation, polity is a correct form from which democracy deviates (1293b23–27).

These last remarks concerning polity have been said to reflect a fundamental mistake in Aristotle's division of constitutions.¹⁷ But this criticism is itself mistaken, for properly understood Aristotle's remarks on polity exhibit considerable understanding of what may be called "asymmetrical pairs"—opposites of which one member is a limit that does not admit comparison.¹⁸ When Aristotle calls properly oriented constitutions correct and then goes on to speak of mistaken deviations, he is recognizing at least implicitly that correctness is not a matter of degree but rather a limit from which it is only possible to fall away. And when Aristotle uses *parekbasis* to refer to deviant forms, he is not choosing a poor word.¹⁹ In fact his choice of label is just right. We may compare correctness with straightness—a comparison which is encouraged in Greek by the ambiguity of *orthos*.²⁰ Being straight is the opposite of being crooked, but while a line can be more or less crooked, a line is either straight or not straight. Similarly with noses straightness is an all or nothing proposition. Hooked and snub noses may vary in their contour, but they do not approach the Classical ideal by becoming more and more straight. Rather they become less and less crooked until they are straight. At this point

¹⁷ E. Zeller, *Aristotle and the Earlier Peripatetics*, translated by Costelloe and Muirhead (New York 1962) 243–44.

¹⁸ I have taken the phrase "asymmetrical pairs" from N. Cooper, "Pleasure and Goodness in Plato's *Philebus*," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 18 (1968) 12. See also E. Sapis, "Grading, a Study in Semantics," *Philosophy of Science* 11 (1944) 115–17.

¹⁹ Barker (above, note 2) 308, note 2, suggests that *elleipsis* would be a better label than *parekbasis*.

²⁰ In labeling the correct constitutions Aristotle uses the adjective *orthos* (1279a18) which can mean not only correct but also straight. Cf. *LSJ* 1249 s.v.

they have reached a limit and become paradigms from which hooked and snub noses are properly said to deviate (cf. 1309b23).

In the same way constitutions are either correct or incorrect, and Aristotle tacitly recognizes this when he groups polity together with certain (non-ideal) aristocracies, states that these constitutions are not deviations and then goes on to call them deviations of which there are deviations (1293b23–27). The point is that when the virtue of rulers becomes a (part of the) standard, then polity and certain aristocracies are properly spoken of as deviations, though deviations in lesser degree than democracy, oligarchy and tyranny. But when goal-direction is the criterion in play, then polity and the several aristocracies in question meet the standard and are properly spoken of as correct constitutions from which other forms deviate to greater or less degree. In other words, Aristotle recognizes both that correctness requires a standard which may be varied and also that correctness is not a matter of degree. When the standard is complicated by the addition of virtue, then polity becomes not less correct but rather a deviant form.²¹ All this may be rather complex, but it is not mistaken confusion. On the contrary, it is the mark of a philosopher who understands the logic of grading.²²

²¹ Of course, Aristotle may slip into everyday language and speak of “the most correct” constitution (1293b25). But if this is a slip or perhaps a concession to ordinary language (cf. Sapir [above, note 18] 116), it is far more important that Aristotle speaks of polity and certain aristocracies as deviations, for in so doing he is tacitly recognizing the idea of grading downwards from some standard of perfection.

²² In conclusion I want to thank Professor Robert Bolton for taking a keen and helpful interest in this paper. My students in Greek Political Philosophy are also to be thanked for considerable discussion and criticism.