THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINING MORALITY IN A DEMOCRACY: INSIGHTS DRAWN FROM ARISTOTLE'S *ETHICS* AND *POLITICS*

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Prepared for delivery at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association

San Francisco, August 30 - September 1, 2001 (revised 10/2019)

The Challenge of Sustaining Morality in a Democracy: Insights Drawn from Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*[1]

The moral conduct of the individuals in any society is a perpetual concern. While most seek a response to the challenge of sustaining morality solely from the point of view of ethics, an alternative is an approach that draws upon both ethics and politics. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* provide discussions of the issues that go to the very essence of this challenge. The primary focus of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is an inquiry into the virtuous conduct of the individual, while the *Politics* considers virtue, not from the perspective of the individual, but from the perspective of the political regime in which the individual lives.

Although the perspectives of the two works differ, there are also several points of overlap. At the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* politics is identified as the most authoritative and most architectonic one in which the best belongs and the primacy of the *polis* is clearly stated:

> . . . because it legislates what one ought to do and what to abstain from, its end would encompass those of the others, with the result that this would be the human good. For even if this is the same thing for an individual and a city, to secure and preserve the good of the city appears to be something greater and more complete: the good of the individual by himself is certainly desirable enough, but that of a nation and of cities is nobler and more divine.[2]

The discussions of justice and prudence (*phronesis*) in Books V and VI of the *Ethics* are advanced against the backdrop of political considerations. Aristotle even casts part of his discussion of

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1. Research for this paper was supported in part with a grant from the Liberal Studies Program at California State University at Fullerton, which enabled me to attend a week-long seminar on Aristotle's *Politics* at St. John's College, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

2. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1094b1-10. There is no discussion of the *Eudemian Ethics* in this paper, further references to *Ethics* refers only to the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

friendship in the overtly political realm when he considers the similarity between friendship and justice and the types of friendship that prevail in different political systems.[3]

Similarly, although the primary focus in the *Politics* is on the political regime, Aristotle also ventures into the realm of individual conduct. For example, he discusses the question whether the virtue of the good man and the excellent citizen is the same. In Book 7, the reader is reminded of the primary inquiry in the *Ethics* when the focus shifts from the best regime to the most choiceworthy way of life. The concluding book of the *Politics*, as we have it, is on the topic of education with very specific recommendations on the training of youth.[4]

The question I intend to address, however, is not the relationship of the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, but rather how these two works together suggest a response to the challenge of sustaining morality in a democracy. Aristotle makes clear in the *Ethics* that the exercise of virtue by individuals takes place in a public setting, but that public setting is largely determined by the political regime.[5] Of the types of regimes, democracy is identified as the deviation of a polity, the

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3. Aristotle presents the same classification of constitutions of one, few, and many, (kingship, aristocracy, and polity) and the perversions of those constitutions (tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy). The only difference in the *Ethics* is the substitution of the word timocracy for polity. *Ethics*, 1160a30-1160b20.

4. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 1276b15, 1323a15, Book 8.

5. The final and perfect good is identified as self-sufficient. Aristotle clarifies that the self-sufficient does not refer to the self alone or to a man living a solitary life, but "what is sufficient also with respect to parents, offspring, a wife, and in general, one's friends and fellow citizens." (*Ethics*, 1097b10) There is some question, however, if this also applies to the wise person who is identified as the most self-sufficient (*Ethics*, 1177a35) and seeming to need no others in the pursuit of his studies. The distinction that Aristotle seems to be pointing to is that insofar as the person who contemplates is engaged in the highest pursuit of study that leads to the greatest happiness, he has no need of external things to accomplish his task, but insofar as he is a human being, he will need such things, "with a view to living as a human being." (*Ethics*, 1178a25-1178b5).

rule of many.[6] It is a fair question to ask why pursue an inquiry into what Aristotle identifies as a deviation rather than the polity itself, the correct form of government by the many. The word democracy was specifically chosen for the title of this paper because it is the common way in which the American form of government is identified. At the end of this paper I intend to make some general remarks about the challenge of sustaining morality in American "democracy."[7] Before getting to this topic, however, let's begin by addressing the prior question of the morality of the citizenry in a political regime and specifically the relationship between the city and the virtuous conduct of its citizens.

The issues that Aristotle raises in Book 1 of the *Ethics* and subsequently develops in the remainder of the work include the good, happiness, the work of a human being, and morality or virtue. The point of beginning is the general assertion that all things aim at some good. The end may be an activity or certain works apart from the activity. Aristotle focuses the inquiry on the best and suggests that the best belongs to the most comprehensive science: politics. "For it ordains what sciences there must be in the cities and what kinds each person in turn must learn and up to what point."[8]

Aristotle explains that the highest of all goods related to action is generally called happiness. Disagreement arises when an attempt is made to define happiness. For some it is pleasure, for others it is wealth, and honor for still others. Aristotle arrives at a definition of the best by dismissing those things that are means to something else, such as wealth, and focusing on that

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6. *Politics*, 1289a25.

7. According to Martin Diamond, the American regime is more correctly identified as a democratic republic. Martin Diamond, *The Founding of the Democratic Republic* (Illinois: F.E. Peacock Publishers, 1981), p. 9.

8. *Ethics*, 1094a-1094b.

which is an end in itself. That end is happiness. "We always choose it [happiness] on account of itself and never on account of something else."[9]

The assertion that happiness is the best is examined from two points of view: self-sufficiency and the most choiceworthy. Aristotle first clarifies that self-sufficiency is not meant to suggest solitude or isolation, but instead means a complete life that is not lacking anything. This life includes family, friends, and fellow citizens. Happiness fits the description of self-sufficiency because, "that which by itself makes life choiceworthy and in need of nothing."[10]

With respect to the work of the human being, Aristotle begins his argument with the question that if all parts of the body--such as eyes, hand, and foot--have a certain task, does not man too have a certain task apart from these? The work of a human being goes beyond that of nutrition and growth, and sense perception, and is to be found in the active use of his reason. Man is thus set apart from plants and animals and fulfills his active life through the use of reason. Aristotle defines the work of a human being as consisting in "an activity of soul in accord with reason." The definition is further refined by the recognition that Aristotle is speaking of those people who do things well and nobly, thus "the human good is becomes an activity of soul in accord with virtue, and if there are several virtues, then in accord with the best and most complete one."[11]

Once this definition has been established, several questions arise. Foremost among them is, if our happiness is the result of virtuous activity, what is virtue and how do we become virtuous? At the outset of the *Ethics*, Aristotle makes the claim that the best belongs to politics; he returns to

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9. *Ethics*, 1095b15-30,1097a30, 1097b.

10. *Ethics*, 1097b5-20.

11. *Ethics*, 1097b25-1098a20.

this theme when considering the question of how happiness and virtue are acquired. “And these points would be in agreement also with those made at the beginning: we posited the end of the political art as best, and it exercises a very great care to make the citizens of a specific sort—namely, good and apt to do noble things.”[12] Before turning to politics and how this character is encouraged among citizens, let's first review Aristotle’s discussion of virtue.

The discussion of virtue is divided into two parts: moral and intellectual. The primary distinction between the two is that the former is formed by habit and latter is taught. Recalling the definition of human good--an activity of soul in accord with virtue--the emphasis remains on activity. We learn moral virtue through habituation, through the repeated exercise of an activity. Habituation of moral virtue begins with the young, but is not limited to them. The task of the law giver is also to inculcate good habits in the whole of the citizenry.[13] We learn intellectual virtue through the exercise of reason; we practice it through the decisions that we make. This is not learned as a youth, however. It takes, as Aristotle points out, experience and time.[14]

Aristotle casts his discussion of moral virtue in terms of the mean. Both excess and deficiency destroy the moral quality that lies at the mean between these two extremes. The first example that Aristotle gives of this is the virtue of courage. “He who avoids and fears all things and endures nothing becomes a coward, and he who generally fears nothing but advances toward all things becomes reckless.”[15] The deficiency is cowardice, the excess is recklessness and the mean is courage. Courage is exhibited through one's actions and responses to different situations. The

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12. *Ethics*, 1099b30.

13. *Ethics*, 1103b.

14. *Ethics*, 1103a15.

15. *Ethics*, 1104a20.

habituation that is coincident with moral virtue does not have so much to do with courage as with the circumstances related to the exercise of the virtue. "By being habituated to disdain frightening things and to endure them, we become courageous, and by so becoming, we will be especially able to endure frightening things."[16]

The second example that Aristotle gives of moral virtue is that of moderation. Licentiousness and boorishness, which can lead to insensitivity, are the excess and deficiency respectively. The context that Aristotle provides is that of pleasure: abstaining from bodily pleasures is an act of self-control and is moderate. Not all pleasures are bad, however, and the goal is to learn or to be habituated to what is correct: "one must be brought up in a certain way straight from childhood . . . so as to enjoy as well as to be pained by what one ought, for this is correct education."[17]

The topic of pleasure is an important one and goes beyond the context of the virtue of moderation. There are two additional discussions of pleasure later in the *Ethics*.[18] These discussions are largely more in depth examinations of the inquiries already presented in Book 2. They are enhanced because the topic is revisited after the inquiry into moral and intellectual virtue and moral strength and weakness, and friendship in the case of the second discussion. The limitations of this paper do not permit an extensive consideration of Aristotle's discussion of pleasure, but the comments that Aristotle makes relating to politics and pleasure are worth noting.

Aristotle argues that pleasure and pain must be included in the discussion of virtue, beyond being part of the explanation of the virtue of moderation as mentioned above. Pleasure does not

16. *Ethics*, 1104b.

17. *Ethics*, 1104a20, 1104b10.

18. The last four chapters of Book 7 and the first five chapters of Book 10 are devoted to further discussion of pleasure.

have any serious worth in and of itself, but individuals will choose to engage in conduct because of the accompanying or resulting pleasure.[19] Aristotle identifies pleasure as one of three factors that determine choice; the other two are the noble and the advantageous. By contrast, the avoidance of certain activities is determined by the shameful, the harmful, and the painful.[20] Beyond the inducement to perform particular actions or engage in behavior that pleasure encourages--or that pain or the threat of punishment discourages--this subject necessarily enters the political context because the individual's behavior affects the citizenry as a whole. This point will become clearer once the relationship between the individual and the city is explored when we begin discussion of Aristotle's *Politics*, but it is important to underscore that Aristotle includes the discussion of pleasure and pain early in the *Ethics* because of its decisive effect on conduct. The power of pleasure can be so great that it can bring great misfortune to the individual and possibly to the regime, or it can result in happiness. In the *Ethics*, there are two statements that speak directly to this concern about habituation to pleasures that are proper to a human being.[21] With respect to individual behavior, Aristotle states, "the whole matter of concern in both virtue and the political art is bound up with pleasures and pains. For he who deals with these well will be good, but who does so badly will be bad."[22] With respect to the lawgiver, although Aristotle is speaking directly to the point of habituation, the discussion of pleasure is indirectly related as well: ". . . by habituating

19. Aristotle makes this assertion about pleasure not being of serious worth in his final discussion of pleasure in Book 7, 1154a30.

20. *Ethics*, 1104b30.

21. Aristotle uses these words, "the pleasures held to be decent" in his closing remarks on pleasure in Book 10 of the *Ethics*, chapter 5, 1176a25.

22. *Ethics*, 1105a10.

citizens, lawgivers make them good, and this is the wish of every lawgiver; all who do not do this well are in error, and it is in this respect that a good regime differs from a base one."[23]

Habituation to acts of moral virtue is of course only the beginning of the exploration of those activities of the soul in conformity with virtue, Aristotle's definition of the good of a human being.[24] The discussion of intellectual virtue is the completion of the topic of virtuous action in that the mean is not simply an arbitrary calculation, but is determined by what Aristotle refers to as correct reason. "One ought to choose the middle term—not the excess and not the deficiency—and that the middles term is what correct reason states it to be."[25] Of the five faculties that Aristotle identifies and uses as the basis of his explanation of intellectual virtue—art, science, prudence, wisdom, and intellect—our discussion will be limited to prudence because it is most concerned with human affairs. He couples it with wisdom to begin the discussion. "For wisdom, being a part of the whole of virtue, makes one happy by being possessed and by being active. Further, the relevant work is completed in accord with prudence and moral virtue. For virtue makes the target correct, prudence the things conducive to that target." In a discussion of cleverness and prudence, he distinguishes the two and underscores the importance of latter: "virtue in the authoritative sense does not arise in the absence of prudence."[26]

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23. *Ethics*, 1103b.

24. References to the soul have been quoted in various passages, but no effort has been made to include Aristotle's explanations in the text of this paper. Briefly, Aristotle bases his distinction between the moral and intellectual virtues on the nonrational and rational parts of the soul. The nonrational part of the soul is further subdivided into the vegetative and the part characterized by desire and the rational part into one part possessing reason in the authoritative sense and one part listening to reason. This framework is referred to throughout the *Ethics*, but the scope of this paper will not pursue it in depth. The primary explanations of virtue and the soul are found in Book 1, chapter 13 and Book 6, chapter 1.

25. *Ethics*, 1138b20.

26. *Ethics*, 1144a5, 1144b15

A good life is largely dependent upon the choices that one makes. How these choices are made depends upon a number of factors that may include knowledge, habituation, the prospect of pleasure or pain, or future consequences. Aristotle explains that we deliberate about the means to achieve particular ends or to achieve the choices that we have made.[27] Deliberating well is a characteristic of someone who possesses prudence. "Prudence is a true characteristic that is bound up with action, accompanied by reason, and concerned with things good and bad for a human being." Of those who are prudent, including politicians, "they are able to observe the good things for themselves and those for human beings. We hold that skilled household managers and politicians are of this sort too."[28]

We have already discussed that pleasure and pain can be powerful sources of influence in the behavior of individuals, and that one way to overcome their detrimental effects was by correct habituation. The presence of prudence is a way to go beyond the influences of pleasure and pain because thoughtful deliberation, or the exercise of prudence, is an exercise in applying correct reason that does not allow the part of the soul that battles with reason to hold any sway, but instead follows that part of the soul that is rational.

Aristotle links moral and intellectual virtue in his explanation of prudence. "That is why in fact we call 'moderation' by its name, on the grounds that it 'preserves prudence,' and it does preserve the sort of conviction indicated. For it is not *every* conviction that the pleasant and painful ruin and distort . . . but rather those convictions concerning action."[29] Moderation was discussed in Book 2 of the *Ethics* as one of the moral virtues and presented as the mean, the moderation of

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27. Aristotle discusses action, choice and avoidance in Book 2, chapters 2 and 3 of the *Ethics*.

28. *Ethics*, 1140b5-10.

29. *Ethics*, 1140b10-17.

excessive appetites. In Book 6, Aristotle suggests that without moderation, the exercise of prudence would not be possible. The emphasis remains on activity. Knowledge is not the end, but prudence completes the happiness that wisdom produces. "Virtue makes the target correct, prudence the things conducive to that target."[30]

The argument of the *Ethics* is far more complex and comprehensive than this brief summary has allowed, but we have nonetheless gained some insight into Aristotle's treatment of virtue in the work that precedes the *Politics*. In the concluding pages of the *Ethics* Aristotle argues that while words may suffice for a few to make them good, more is needed to persuade the many to goodness. Aristotle again points to the desirability of proper upbringing so that virtuous conduct can subsequently be encouraged, but he also recognizes the need for laws to compel good behavior. His concluding suggestion is that for the man who wishes to make individuals better, he should learn something about legislation. "Now, since those prior to us have left undiscovered what pertains to legislation, it is perhaps better for us to investigate it ourselves—and indeed what concerns the regime in general—so that, to the extent of our capacity, the philosophy concerning human affairs might be completed."[31] We thus turn to Aristotle's *Politics* to continue our inquiry into the challenge of sustaining morality in a democracy.

The *Ethics* begins with the assertion that all things aim at some good; the *Politics* begins with the assertion that the city as a sort of partnership or community is "constituted for the sake of some good."[32] The most basic partnership formed out of necessity is that of the household; the village, the union of several households, is a partnership formed for the sake of nondaily needs; the

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30. *Ethics*, 1144a5.

31. *Ethics*, 1181b10.

32. *Ethics*, 1094a, *Politics*, 1252a.

city is the partnership of several villages formed for the sake of living well.[33] We can infer that it is only in the city that men can live well. One way to understand the good for which the city is constituted is that man, who is by nature a political animal, can realize his work or activity in the city.[34] The city, however, does not exist for the sake of individuals, "the city is both by nature and prior to each individual."[35]

Understanding what the city is and man's place within the city is fundamental to grasping why it is incumbent upon the legislator to inculcate good habits in the citizenry and why he must legislate with the aim of encouraging virtuous behavior. What the city represents is the public venue where the exercise of virtue is possible. The household presents opportunities for the exercise of virtue within the context of the relationships between husband and wife and parents and children, but these are necessarily limited. It is the city, the larger public forum, where the full extent of moral virtue can be practiced, where courage and moderation can be exhibited, where other moral virtues such as generosity, magnificence, magnanimity, and ultimately justice can be performed. The mere existence of the city, however, coupled with the recognition that virtuous conduct is most likely to occur in the city, does not necessarily mean that a virtuous people is going to arise and flourish.

Although Aristotle gives a very thorough explanation of virtue in the *Ethics*, he is just as clear about the difficulty in achieving such conduct:

> That moral virtue is a mean, then, and how it is such; that it is a mean between two vices, the one relating to excess, the other to deficiency; and that it is such on account of its being skilled in aiming at the middle term in matter of passion and action, have been stated

33. *Politics*, 1252b10-1253a.

34. The assertion that man is by nature a human being who is political is found in the *Ethics* at 1097b10 and the *Politics* at 1253a.

35. *Politics*, 1253a20.

> adequately. Hence it is in fact a task to be serious, for in each case it is a task to grasp what resides in the middle. For example, to grasp the middle of a circle belongs not to everyone but to a knower. And so too, to become angry belongs to everyone and is an easy thing, as is also giving and spending money; but to whom [one ought to do so], how much, when, for the sake of what, and how—these no longer belong to everyone nor are easy. Thus in fact acting well is rare, praiseworthy, and noble.[36]

The challenge of encouraging and sustaining morality in a city is an enormous task, but worthy of study because of the great benefit to all.

As described above, the *Politics* begins with a description of the natural development of the city, and an inquiry into the various relationships of the inhabitants of the city. The focus shifts in the second and subsequent books of the *Politics* to a study of regimes: "the regime is an arrangement of a city with respect to its offices, particularly the one that has authority over all matters."[37] After consideration of other views of the best regime, Aristotle begins his discussion of regimes by drawing a distinction between those regimes that look to the common advantage (correct regimes), and those regimes that look only to the advantage of the rulers (deviations). The other distinction that he makes is based upon the authoritative element being either one, a few, or the many. We thus have listed under correct regimes kingship, aristocracy, and polity, and the corresponding deviations of tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy.[38] These six categories serve only as basic organizing principles and, as any reader of the *Politics* discovers, there are many variations based upon the livelihood of the inhabitants, the proportion of the wealthy to the impoverished, the organization of the offices within the city, to name a few. In spite of Aristotle's detailed and thorough inquiry into all of these variations, the focus of the *Politics* continues the theme that was set out in the *Ethics*, namely, the attainment of the best for man and the fulfillment of his activity:

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36. *Ethics*, 1109a20-30.

37. *Politics*, 1278b10.

38. *Politics*, 1279a20-1279b10.

"Living well, then, is the end of the city, and these things are for the sake of this end. A city is the partnership of families and villages in a complete and self-sufficient life."[39]

There is another organizing principle within the *Politics* in addition to the classification of regimes. The simplest way to describe it is the examination of regimes as they actually exist and the inquiry into the most desirable or the best regime. To advance our discussion into the challenge of sustaining morality in a political regime, we'll consider two topics that are drawn from each of these different approaches: the emphasis on what Aristotle refers to as the middling element and the encouragement of leisure among a people.

While Aristotle's study in the *Politics* is broad and far-reaching, I am confining my remarks here to the general discussions of polity and democracy. Democracy, described in the most general terms, is that form of government in which the majority rules with a view toward its own advantage rather than to the common good and where those who have authority have neither a significant amount of property or wealth.[40] There are variations in how democracies choose to run the daily affairs of the city due in large part to how the inhabitants sustain themselves. The democracy in which a large portion of the population are farmers and who do not live near the assembly is going to be governed differently than the democracy in which the population tends more toward merchants and laborers who can frequent the assembly more readily.[41]

In contrast, the polity is that form of government where the multitude rules with a view to the common advantage. Aristotle also describes polity as a mixture of oligarchy and democracy and the reason for this is the presence of both the well-off and the poor in the governing of the regime

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39. *Politics*, 1280b40.

40. *Politics*, 1279b 10, 20, 40.

41. *Politics*, VI.4.

and the usage of particular democratic or oligarchic practices in the administration of the regime.[42] Aristotle explains that rules governing adjudication can be fashioned democratically, (e.g. paying poor people for their participation and not fining the well-off for not participating), or oligarchically, (e.g. fining the well-off and providing no pay for the poor). The polity may choose one practice or the other, in other cases it may find a compromise between the two practices, or it may select from each practice.[43] The polity thus assumes its own character even though its governing practices are drawn from decidedly different forms of regimes.

Where democracy and polity come together, beyond the multitude as the governing authority and the usage of democratic governing practices as explained above, is in the defining principle that they share, freedom. This is in contrast to the defining principle of virtue in an aristocracy and wealth in an oligarchy.[44] Where the two diverge is with respect to virtue. The multitude that rules toward the common advantage can be characterized as more virtuous than the multitude that governs to its own advantage.

Aristotle recognizes the challenge that is presented when the multitude aims toward the common good: "It is possible for one or a few to be outstanding in virtue, but where more are concerned it is difficult for them to be proficient with a view to virtue as a whole."[45] Aristotle does, however, admit of the possibility of the multitude being superior to the few:

> The many, of whom none is individually an excellent man, nevertheless can when joined together be better--not as individuals but all together--than those who are best . . . For because they are many, each can have a part of virtue and prudence, and on their joining

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42. *Politics*, 1279a35, 1293b35, 1294a20.

43. *Politics*, 1294a35-1294b10.

44. *Politics*, 1294a20.

45. *Politics*, 1279a35.

> together, the multitude with its many feet and hands and having many senses, becomes like a single human being, and so with respect to character and mind.[46]

While this virtue of the multitude may not be a common phenomenon, Aristotle does recommend that it be used to the advantage of the regime. Those offices such as assemblies, councils, or juries are useful ways that polities and democracies can draw upon the strengths that the multitude presents.[47] They are thus working toward common ends and taking an active role in governance by participating in the administration of the regime.

Aristotle identifies the groups that comprise the multitude of the people in two ways. They are recognized by their professions--farmers, artisans, merchants, warriors--but they are also identified by their means. Up to this point, there have only been references to the wealthy and the impoverished, but Aristotle also refers to a middling element.[48] This middling element seems to be a reference to means and possessions, but there is also a suggestion that character is included as well:

> It is agreed that what is moderate and middling is best, it is evident that in the case of the goods of fortune as well a middling possession is the best of all. For it is readiest to obey reason, while for one who is overly handsome, overly strong, overly well born, or overly wealthy--or the reverse of these things, overly indigent, overly weak, or very lacking in honor--it is difficult to follow reason. The former sort tend to become arrogant and base on a grand scale, the latter malicious and base in petty ways; and acts of injustice are committed either through arrogance or through malice. Moreover, these are least inclined either to avoid ruling or to wish to rule, both of which things are injurious to cities.[49]

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46. *Politics*, 1281b1.

47. *Politics*, Bk 3, ch 12.

48. *Politics*, 1291a, 1289b30.

49. *Politics*, 1295b5-15. In Book 7, chapter 7 Aristotle gives the example of the Greeks possessing spiritedness, and thought and art, in contrast to the colder Europeans who possess only the former and the Asians who possess only the latter. The Greeks not only share in these qualities, but Aristotle remarks "it holds the middle in terms of location." *Politics*, 1327b25.

Beyond this assessment of the qualities that result from this "middling possession," Aristotle also praises different aspects of this middling element. He praises the individuals who comprise the middle in the city, he praises the city that depends upon this middling element, and he praises the legislators that come from the middling citizens. Because of the presence of this middling element, there will be fewer factional conflicts within the regime and this will provide stability. The people, too, will be settled in the sense that they will not be envious of what others have, thus avoiding class conflicts.[50]

These observations about the middling element in a city and the ensuing beneficial effects are reminiscent of Aristotle's discussion of moral virtue in the *Ethics*. The reference to obeying reason in the passage quoted above, which allows one to be guided by the mean, and avoiding excessive or deficient conduct is central to virtuous behavior. The discussion of the middling element in the *Politics* restates Aristotle's ethical theory and casts it in a decidedly political setting. Aristotle admits that the middling regime is rare, but for the purposes of the present inquiry, this discussion presents some very useful guidance in sustaining morality in those governments where the multitude has the authority.

This paper is based upon the assumption that morality among a people cannot be sustained without a greater governing body that enforces laws that provide order, but also permits the social interaction necessary. Stability in the political regime is as important as moderation is in the individual. The presence of the middling element serves a two-fold purpose. On the one hand, because the people (the predominant middling element) exhibit moderate conduct, the regime is stable; on the other hand, because the regime is stable, the people enjoy the benefits of a well-run city. One of these benefits is having that necessary setting for the exercise of virtuous conduct.

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50. *Politics*, Bk 4, ch 11.

The encouragement of leisure among a people is the second topic that speaks to the issue of sustaining morality. There are few references to leisure in the *Politics*. Aristotle, in his discussion of the best regime, comments that there is a need for leisure "with a view to the creation of virtue and political activities." He subsequently places leisure in a larger context: "Life as a whole is divided, too, into occupation and leisure and war and peace, and of matters involving action some are directed toward necessary and useful things, others toward noble things."[51] The former are done for the sake of the latter. Aristotle looks to the legislator to influence, legislate, and educate the people toward these higher goals. The people should be capable of going to war, but they should prefer peace. They should be able to provide the necessary things, but prefer the noble. Their occupations are with a view to leisure.

In Book 8 Aristotle further describes leisure as involving pleasure, happiness, and living blessedly. Leisure is not simply absence of activity, but it is being engaged in that type of activity that is in consonance with virtuous activity and noble things. The reference made to leisure in Book 8 is in the discussion of those topics that should be included in education. The distinction that Aristotle draws is between learning for its own sake and learning with a view to occupation or necessity. It is the former that is referred to as liberal or noble.[52] Although Aristotle promises to address this type of education later, we do not have any such text.[53] For the purposes of the present inquiry, however, this concept of leisure suggests another avenue to consider regarding the question of sustaining morality among a people. A simple way to phrase the idea behind the concept of leisure is the difference between mere living or subsisting and living well. An individual may come

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51. *Politics*, 1329a, 1333a30.

52. *Politics*, 1338a10, 1338a30.

53. "There is no further discussion of this question in the *Politics* as we have it." *Politics*, 1338a34, translator's note.

to realize this difference on his own, but encouraging a people to move in the direction toward higher things would benefit all.

A people wracked by war or consumed with the defense or expansion of its borders is not going to foster a society that looks to the cultivation of nobility and virtue. A people that does not look beyond satisfying its immediate needs or indulges in excessive consumption will not be inclined to appreciate the difference between living and living well. Although Aristotle's remarks are few concerning leisure, he seems to suggest that a legislator (or the governing body) can direct a people toward leisure if he is aiming toward their common good. If a legislator is governing with an aim toward his personal ambitions—Aristotle identified this regime as a deviation—cultivating leisure and higher aims among the people is not going to be among his goals. The legislator or the governing body that aims toward the common good—a correct regime in Aristotle's classification—is one that would find ways to instill this sense of living well.

The title of this paper is "The Challenge of Sustaining Morality in a Democracy." The polity is distinguished from the democracy, strictly speaking, on the basis of the multitude governing with a view to the common good, but the distinction can also be made on the basis of whether virtue is encouraged among the people. The challenge may be met by instituting practices in the government that move the democracy toward a polity, by encouraging the middling element of the population to play a predominant role in the governing body, and by fostering a sense of leisure among the people.

With respect to American "democracy," these three recommendations are applicable. Are the policies of the government aimed toward the common good? Do the extremes of the population, the very wealthy or the impoverished, dominate? Are higher aims and noble pursuits encouraged

among the people? Pondering these questions and using them to guide policy and decision-making may well go a long way toward sustaining morality and thus allowing all to live well.

I conclude the reflections presented in this paper with some final guidance from the *Politics*: "There are two things that living well consists in for all: one of these is in correct positing of the aim and end of actions; the other, discovering the actions that bear on the end."[54] The aim is to sustain morality and using the suggestions that Aristotle puts forth in the *Ethics* and the *Politics* that have been discussed in this paper support the aim. Aristotle also explains that excellence in the city is not "the work of fortune, but of knowledge and intentional choice."[55] He thus lays at our feet the responsibility for our own happiness.

54. *Politics*, 1331b25.

55. *Politics*, 1332a30.

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