The Public and the Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy

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According to a widely accepted interpretation, one promoted unreservedly by Hannah Arendt, Aristotle depicts the private in the following ways: (1) as distinct and separate from the public; (2) as corresponding to the household; (3) as serving only individual and species survival; and, most notably, (4) as justifying “force and violence . . . because they are the only means to master necessity—for instance, by ruling over slaves.” On this interpretation, Aristotle reveals “tremendous contempt” for the private by depicting it as a dark, despotic, and subhuman sphere in which freedom does not exist. “In ancient feeling the privative trait of privacy, indicated in the word itself, was all-important; it meant literally a state of being deprived of something, and even of the highest and most human of man’s capacities.”

It follows in this widespread interpretation that Aristotle thinks that a “truly human” life awaits in the public sphere. One must earn this life by mustering the courage to leave the sheltered and predictable (if wretched) household. One needs courage also to participate in the unpredictable world outside the household: the speeches, deeds, and political affairs of men. Moreover, in challenging men to initiate speech and action, the political realm calls

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1 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 24–38, 45–46, 71–84. Arendt thus implies without resolving that the private on this account is both opposed to and the condition for freedom (see especially 27, 30–31).

2 Arendt tries in this way to address the difficulty her interpretation creates: if the household is a miserable place, then why does it take courage to leave it?
on each "to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (aien aristheuein)." Freedom lies exclusively in the political realm because only through political speech and action can one excel and reveal one's individuality. On this account, Aristotle connects freedom with excellence and excellence with individuality, and he specifies agonistic political action as the means to all three. Accordingly, Arendt claims, "the 'good life,' as Aristotle called the life of the citizen, therefore was not merely better, more carefree or nobler than ordinary life, but of an altogether different quality."³

As I noted in the Introduction, I contest the view that Aristotle equates the private with the household. I argue that he conceives the private as activities, not as sites, and as activities not restricted to the household. An activity qualifies as private, if it cultivates virtue without accommodating or conforming to common opinion. Because in Aristotle's view the household can and should contain private activities, my interpretation acknowledges that he regards the household as a private place; that is, the private status of the household derives from its affording an opportunity to practice unqualified virtue.⁴

In the first three chapters of this book I consider the activities (and, to illuminate them, their agents) that Aristotle believes the household should contain and contest Arendt's interpretation of Aristotle's notion of the household. I do not dispute that Aristotle thinks the purpose of the household is to meet basic needs and foster the survival of the species, but I do dispute that he thinks fulfillment of this purpose requires force and violence. Chapters 1 and 2 show that he thinks the exercise of prudence on the part of household rulers can bring about the satisfaction of needs. Chapter 2 shows that in his view nature facilitates meeting needs without coercion by providing human beings who are inclined to do necessary tasks. Chapters 1 and 3 show that fostering species survival through marriage and child rearing does not require violence or despotism according to Aristotle. In these three chapters I also contest the view that Aristotle thinks the only purpose of the household is to meet individual and species needs. The household's other main purpose is to cultivate moderation and judgment in its members. Members may distinguish themselves by the way

⁴ Whether household members take advantage of this invitation does not change the household's private status.
and the extent to which they exercise these virtues. Finally, these beginning chapters show that Aristotle does not perceive a “gulf” between the public and the private: ideally, human beings serve the public by exercising the uncompromised virtue acquired in the household both inside and outside the household. More precisely, my discussion shows that the household is, as Arendt says, distinct from the city, but not in the way she claims—and thus is not separate in the radical way she attributes to Aristotle. 

On the Relation between the Household and the City

Rejecting Arendt’s interpretation that Aristotle conceives the household to be radically separate and opposed to the good life offered by the city points to the hypothesis that he conceives it to be like the city and thus to foster living well. But does rejecting her interpretation entail endorsing the claim that Aristotle conceives the household and the city to be virtually or essentially identical? How far does Aristotle go in assimilating the household and the city?

Does he go as far as Hegel, for example? According to Hegel, the family is “the first . . . ethical root of the state.” The state is prior to the family insofar as the purpose of the latter derives from the former:

The philosophic proof of the concept of the state is the development of ethical life from its immediate phase through civil society, the phase of division, to the state, which then reveals itself as the true ground of these phases. . . . Actually, therefore, the state as such is not so much the result as the beginning. It is within the state that the family is first developed into civil society, and it is the Idea of the state itself which disrupts itself into these two moments.

For Hegel, then, the family is theoretically a moment of the state, reflecting the state’s rational foundations. The family maintains its distinctiveness only insofar as it is a particular instance of the uni-

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5 Human Condition, 28, 35.
7 Ibid., sec. 256, emphasis added.
versality of the state; that is, it “contains the moments of subjective particularity and objective universality in a substantial unity.”

On the one hand, some of Aristotle’s claims seem to support such an understanding of the household, implying that the aims of the household and the city are the same and even that the household should serve the city rather than itself. First, in being “partnerships,” the household and the city each “aim at some good” (Pol 1252a4). Moreover, the aim of the city, being “the most authoritative good of all” (1252a5–6), must subsume the good at which the household aims. Second, since “the household as a whole is a part of the city” and “the virtue of the part must have regard to that of the whole” (1260b13–15), one might infer that every aspect of the household should reflect the moral standards set forth by the regime. For example, parents should raise good citizens (1260b15–16, 19–20). Third, Aristotle seems to imply similarly, and in a part of the Politics concerning the best regime, that individuals should serve the city: “One ought not to think that a citizen belongs to himself, but that all belong to the city, for each is a part of the city” (1337a27–29). Thus again, one may infer that the household should generate good citizens. Notably, the source of one of Hegel’s claims is found in Aristotle: “The city is prior by nature to the household and to each of us” (1253a19, 25–26), suggesting perhaps that the household should adapt its purposes to those of the city. Indeed, this view seems to be strengthened by Aristotle’s explanation that the city stands to the individual as the body to the hand: a person cannot exist, or at least live well, without the city (1253a18–19). Perhaps Aristotle thinks, as Harry V. Jaffa infers, that “the polis . . . [is] the only community adequate for the fulfillment of man’s specifically human potentiality,” in which case all lesser communities must exist for the sake of it.

On the other hand, not all these statements from Aristotle unequivocally support a Hegelian interpretation of his conception of the household as a phase of political goodness, its purpose virtually one with the city’s. Most of them support equally the view that the household’s purpose is different from but in accordance with the city’s. Furthermore, other passages work against in-
interpreting Aristotle’s household as mirroring the ethical life of the city. First, the *Politics* opens by challenging the assumption that a household differs from a city only in size (1252a9–13). Aristotle shows, for example, that a household is more diverse than a city in that it can accommodate several forms of rule at once (1253b9–10, 1259a37–39, b1, 10–11). Second, he indicates that within a regime citizen virtue must be the same insofar as it derives from the regime (*Pol* 1276b30–31), yet he says that a city must be made up “of human beings differing in kind” (*Pol* 1261a22–24). The context—a critique of Plato’s alleged proposals for communism—indicates that Aristotle is advocating moral as well as occupational pluralism (1261a16–22, 30–37). Moral diversity must then derive from private sources. Indeed, in contrasting the good man (*agathos*) and the good citizen (*spoudaios*) (*Pol* III.4), Aristotle indicates that their respective goodesses derive from different sources and intimates that the good man’s goodness derives in part from the household. According to Aristotle, human beings become “good and excellent [*agathoi kai spoudaioi*]” through “nature, habit, and reason [*phusis ethos logos*]” (*Pol* 1332a38–40; *NE* 1103a23–26, 1143b6–7, 1144b4–14). Men become good citizens (*spoudaioi*) by being ruled in the ways of the regime and discharging a particular function within the regime (*Pol* 1276b30–1277a1). Thus, civic virtue is incomplete insofar as it derives from only habituation and listening (not nature); furthermore, it must always be defective except in the best regime insofar as it derives from and sustains the particular standards of a regime rather than deriving from and sustaining the good life (*Pol* 1277a1–5, 22–23). But should we infer that good human beings can exist in regimes inferior to the best—in democ-

10 More precisely, his statements are prescriptive in being descriptive.

11 But in the same context he adds, “yet the good of each thing is surely what preserves it” (1261b9), indicating that the (private) parts of a city must cultivate not simply diversity but virtue.


13 As Develin explains, “we have indications that *agathos* implies some inherent, if cultivated, quality, while with *spoudaios* the accent is on effectiveness in action, often intimating ‘the right man for the job’, being used when no ethical aspect is to be stressed” (ibid., 77). Furthermore, in the best regime the *spoudaios* citizen is also a good man because he “works for the benefit of the *koinônia* which is the state: the *politeia* is the point of reference for his *aretê*. This contributes to the end of the state, which is to produce *agathoi* men. (The state promotes the realisation of the potential)” (79). For Develin’s philological analysis of *agathos* and *spoudaios* supporting these claims, see 73–79.
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racies, oligarchies, polities, and even tyrannies? To the extent that unqualified virtue derives from nature, the answer is yes, since regimes cannot determine natural ability. But because natural ability alone does not make someone virtuous (\textit{NE} 1144b4–30), the possibility of good human beings in defective regimes depends on there being in the regimes a source of habituation and education other than the regime. By Book III of the \textit{Politics}, where Aristotle contrasts the good man and the good citizen, he has already indicated such a source of habituation and education, for by then he has noted or discussed domestic forms of rule (\textit{politi\kê}, \textit{basili\kê}, \textit{despoti\kê}, \textit{gamikê}, \textit{patrikê}, \textit{oikonomi\kê}). But he affirms the possibility of the household's cultivating, not simply virtue that differs from civic virtue, but unqualified virtue, when he notes in Book III the possibility of a regime being constituted of (unqualifiedly) good men (1277a4–5). A reader of Aristotle must infer that the goodness of good men may derive from the household for the following reasons.

First, insofar as goodness comes from nature, and insofar as a human being's parents are a medium for nature, a good human being's goodness comes in this indirect sense from the household. Second, the best regime must be constituted of excellent parts, since a whole cannot be excellent without its parts being so (\textit{Pol} 1332a32–34). Moreover, if such a part is truly excellent, then it must be excellent also in itself or apart. To maintain the possibility of an excellent city is then to maintain the possibility of excellent human beings and excellent households existing in defective regimes.\textsuperscript{14} The possibility of excellent human beings in inferior regimes indicates that the household may be a source of their goodness—since it is among the private sources of habituation and education in a regime. It must be inferred as well that even in the best regime virtue must come from private as well as public sources, for otherwise it would be incomplete. Laws and public institutions, even of the best sort, cannot make one fully human.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, virtuous households are more likely to arise than virtuous cities, since a household requires far fewer good human beings to qualify as good than a city requires to qualify as good.

Able to contain private activities, the household is a potential source of freedom; it may contribute to a fully human life. In that human beings are obliged to strive to be fully human (NE 1098a16–17), they are obliged to the private rather than the public when the public falls short of goodness. But human beings ideally ought to uphold both public and private standards, since the whole human good does not lie in either but springs from their interaction.

We again see a contrast with Hegel’s view, which describes the ethical “as the inter-penetration of the substantive and the particular.” There is a difference between arguing that I can be wholly free only by making a dual commitment, to the public and the private, and arguing that “my obligation to what is substantive is at the same time the embodiment of my particular freedom.” For Hegel, one is good or free only if the objective universality of the state is implicit in one’s particular interests; it is as if for him the legitimacy of the private derives from the public because the public embodies the universal. For Aristotle, in contrast, the public and the private (ideally) make distinctive contributions to the ethical; the private does not have to promote what the public promotes for its contribution to help actualize the ethical or be legitimate.

In summary, Aristotle is not arguing either that the household must be bad and distinct from the public (Arendt) or that it must be good and therefore a reflection of political goodness (Hegel). He is arguing that households may and should be a source of virtue, and that the sort of virtue they are capable of fostering differs from and may either be in tension with (if the regime is inferior) or complement (if the regime is good) civic virtue. In ordinary regimes, a good household distances itself from the regime, for in this way it can retain its standards (serving itself). In the best regime, a good household is in dynamic harmony with the regime, cultivating

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16 See also E. Barker, The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle (New York: Dover, 1959), 399–400. M. I. Finley observes that “it is often overlooked that Aristotle defined man as being not only a “zoon politikon, a polis-being, but also a zoon oikonomikon, a household-being” (The Ancient Economy, 2d ed. [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985], 152). Contrast Jaffa’s earlier noted interpretation: “The distinction between mere life, on the one hand, the consequence of procreation and self-preservation, and the good life, is apparent from the difference between the household and the polis . . . except as he lives in a polis a man cannot live a fully human existence, he cannot function as a man” (“Aristotle,” 74).

17 Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, secs. 261, 264, 265, 267, 270.
virtue that enhances civic virtue (serving the regime in serving itself).

**The Household's Contribution to Virtue**

In the remainder of this chapter I support the two main claims put forth in the previous section. In this section I show that, according to Aristotle, the household has the potential to cultivate uncompromised virtue, or, as I put it henceforth, the *ideal* household cultivates such virtue. The subsequent sections indicate the activities peculiar to the household which enable it to promote virtue that surpasses the virtue most regimes cultivate. These discussions serve to make clear that ordinary regimes need households because they are a source of unadulterated virtue that may filter into the regime. They also take up my second claim: that Aristotle's ideal household promotes an aspect of unadulterated virtue which a regime cannot promote. Thus, even Aristotle's best regime needs households. Promoting complete virtue requires promoting its public and private dimensions.

Aristotle indicates in several places that unqualified virtue characterizes the household properly understood. Explaining the nature of the universe in the *Metaphysics*, he writes: "Everything is ordered together to one end; but the arrangement is like that in a household, where the free persons are least allowed to act at random, and have all or most of their actions preordained for them, whereas the slavish and the animals have little common responsibility and act for the most part at random" (1075a19–23). The good household is a source of virtue because its parts assume an "orderly arrangement," as do the parts of the universe (1075a11–14). Aristotle thus implies that the orderly arrangement characterizing the household derives not from the requirements of political or other circumstances but from the requirements of virtue itself; it is preordained in this sense. Corroborating and making more precise this claim, he states at the beginning of the *Politics* that "what makes a household" ("and a city") is "partnership in" "perception of good and bad and just and unjust and the other moral qualities" (1253a15–18); that is, the household embodies moral standards.

Since the "good life" depends on "education [*paideía*] and virtue
[aretē] above all" (Pol 1283a24–26), the household must assume a role in securing the good life. A human being must be not only educated but morally virtuous to live well. Education by the laws and institutions of a regime is indispensable for citizens, particularly from the point of view of the regime; all citizens being instructed similarly in the ways of the regime establishes and sustains the regime (Pol 1337a11–27). But each citizen should also receive a private education, which is superior to public education in not being uniform but tailoring itself to the needs and abilities of individuals (NE 1180b7–13). Moreover, if the regime should fail to cultivate habits in individuals (so as, for example, to prepare them to undertake occupations), then it devolves on “each man to help his children and friends toward virtue” (NE 1180a30–32). Thus, depending on the nature of the regime, a household may have both to instill the best moral standards in its members and to render them fit for practical life outside the household.

**The Means to Virtue: Rule**

How may a household instill virtue? According to Aristotle, through some sort of rule. Since nature adapts human beings to receive moral virtue (NE 1103a25), human beings should use a means according to nature to instill it. Rule is such a means. It is natural in the sense of inevitable and in that it confers benefits on or improves both the ruler and the ruled (Pol 1254a21–22). We can infer its inevitability, for something must hold together parts that appear to be wholes (1254a28–31). We can also infer its desirability in that it facilitates a number of things becoming one—or their partnership—and “all partnerships aim at some good” (1254a4). Moreover, we can observe all around us the advantages ruling and being ruled confer: infants become adults because their parents rule them; a body becomes healthy because a soul rules it; a human being lives well because his intellect rules his appetite; even sounds form music because harmony rules them (1254b4–9, 1254a32–33). As human experience makes clear, the benefits rule confers on the ruler, on the one hand, and on the ruled, on the

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18 Rule is natural in the second sense in moving both ruler and ruled toward completion, toward what is best (Pol 1252b32–1253a1).
other, vary: the patient benefits more from the doctor’s practice than does the doctor; children benefit more from parental care than do parents; masters benefit more from mastery than do slaves (Pol 1278b32–1279a8). Nonetheless, both ruler and ruled always benefit in some way—intentionally, accidentally, or indirectly—because they share some common task or purpose (Pol 1254a27–28).

That ruling and being ruled are according to nature does not mean that either is easy. What is according to nature appears to be divine insofar as it appears to be in the best state possible; but it is not “sent by the gods,” or the same as fortune, because it requires effort on our part (NE 1099b9–24). Indeed, Aristotle observes, “in general, it is difficult to live together and be partners in any human activity” (Pol 1263a15–16). This observation seems to move Aristotle’s notion of the household toward Arendt’s interpretation—that the household is a place of toil yielding no real satisfaction. According to Aristotle, however, things brought into being through effort—nature’s or man’s—are the greatest and noblest of all things (NE 1099b22–24). They thus yield much pleasure, for “actions in accordance with virtue are by nature always pleasant” (1099a13–14). Furthermore, the difficulty of living together decreases to the extent that the parties recognize their common aim, a life as complete and self-sufficient as possible (Pol 1280b33–35, 1260b13, 1254a27–28).

**The Aim of Household Rule: Virtuous Individuals**

In that the best household’s aim is to instill unqualified moral virtue through some sort of rule, its aim appears to be indistinguishable from that of the best regime. Moreover, the aims of the best household and the best regime are alike in that they both seek to acknowledge the distinctiveness of individual human beings; according to Aristotle, diversity more than sameness gives rise to unity (Pol 1261a29–30, 22–24). Both the household and the city should promote similarity in the sense of virtue, but neither should promote homogeneity (1263b31–32). “Habits” deriving from household activities and “laws” from the regime can together make the city “one and common through education” (1263b36–40).
without sacrificing diversity. Nonetheless, as noted earlier, household activities are better suited to individualized instruction and thus to acknowledgment of individuality than is public education. Cities, then, should rely more on households than on laws and public institutions to maintain diversified excellence. The question is, what should household rule instill to achieve this diversity?

According to Aristotle, instilling moderation and judgment makes human beings virtuous without eradicating any distinctiveness other than a lack of virtue. The man and the woman of the household may exercise both moderation and judgment as well as “show who they really and inexchangeably are” by selecting and remaining with each other, managing the household, and caring for their children. Likewise, children and servants may also acquire and demonstrate moderation, judgment or understanding, and distinctiveness by the ways they conduct themselves and respond to the heads of the household. Indeed, the extent to which members of the household practice moderation and judgment is itself expressive of distinctiveness.

Teaching Moderation

All household members must learn to be moderate toward things and each other. The various forms of household rule can teach members moderation by revealing to them the natural ends of their natural desires (Pol 1257b19–34). For example, household management (rule over the material conditions of a household) teaches that specific things must fulfill specific needs and desires: food satiates hunger, a bed satisfies the need for sleep; money itself cannot satisfy such needs. Thus, household management teaches

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19 Philosophy too should help to effect this and may arise in the household (see Chapter 3, “An Intellectual Being: A Philosopher?” pp. 61–65) or in the city (see Chapter 6, “Leisure: Education in Reason?” pp. 155–60).

20 Arendt indicates that Aristotle reserves the public realm for individuality (Human Condition, 41).

21 This appears to be an elementary teaching, but according to Aristotle some heads of households fail to learn it; supposing that it is the function of household management to increase property, they strive to preserve or increase their money indefinitely. “The cause of this state is that they are serious about living, but not about living well” (Pol 1257b38–1258a1).
human beings to check their desire for money—itself an unnatural, because unfulfillable, desire. The various household relationships also teach moderation in various ways. Forming a household entails the exercise of moderation in that it requires limiting oneself to one out of many sexual partners and companions. Parenthood teaches both the parents and the children moderation. Since children's reasoning powers are not developed, parents must find the mean between arguments and force which is effective for teaching their children (Pol 1260a13–14, b6–7, 1332b10–11; NE 1179b23–29). It is because children are potentially reasoning and reasonable beings—or "free persons"—that one ought to rule them in "kingly fashion" (Pol 1259a39–b1, 1253b4, 1285b32). And children, who are not inclined to be moderate, must learn to be so if they are to live well (NE 1179b24–34). Finally, as the next chapter shows, ruling slaves teaches both the masters and the slaves moderation.

Aristotle's characterization of the ideal household as requiring the exercise of moderation contrasts with the general contemporary liberal view according to which what goes on in the household is entirely a matter for the (undefined) discretion of household members. Indeed, activities are private according to Aristotle only when the actors heed the limits established by nature.

The moderation learned in the household not only helps to sustain the household but facilitates all human engagement. Even philosophy, which is not in itself moderate, presupposes moderation.
public virtue, and so it—not courage—might be said to be in Aristotle's eyes the political virtue par excellence.25

**Teaching Judgment**

In addition to moderation, the good household teaches judgment (Pop 1253a15–18). Forming a household requires judgment in that it requires choosing a good partner. Raising children involves judgment as something to be taught. Ruling servants involves judgment in trying to compensate for the servants' lack of it. What is pertinent to this inquiry, however, are the ways judgment required by the household differs from that required by the regime. One significant difference involves natural affection; another, the end each aims to realize.

According to Aristotle, the end of the city is justice, which all take to be "some sort of equality"—that is, equal things for equal persons (Pop 1282b14–21). But this definition encompasses both natural justice, the fundamental principle of which is proportionality or desert, and conventional justice, the fundamental principle of which is arithmetical equality (NE 1134a26–28, b18–19).26 The regime that is “by nature”—realizes natural justice—is best (NE 1135a5). But since realizing natural justice in a regime presupposes many deserving human beings and the ability to detect them—that is, requires fortune and virtue to achieve (Pop 1331b21–22, 1277a1–5)—cities should aim first to realize conventional justice.

Should the household also then seek conventional or ordinary justice? In two places, Aristotle says that it should not. "Political justice seems to consist in equality and parity," “but there does not seem to be any justice between a son and his father, or a servant and his master—any more than one can speak of justice between my foot and me, or my hand, and so on for each of my limbs. For a son is, as it were, a part of his father" (MM 1194b23, 5–15). As he

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25 Arendt seems to acknowledge that Aristotle counts moderation among the political virtues, but she indicates that he thinks it is "helpless to offset" the inherent unpredictability of human interaction (Human Condition, 191; see also 192–99).

26 It encompasses both since it does not specify "equality in what sort of things and inequality in what sort of things" (Pop 1282b21–22).
explains in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, “there can be no injustice in the unqualified sense toward what is one’s own, and a chattel or a child until it reaches a certain age . . . is, as it were, a part of oneself, and no one decides to harm himself. Hence there can be no injustice toward them, and therefore nothing unjust or just in the political sense. . . . what is just in households . . . is different from what is politically just” (1134b10–17).

By proceeding immediately to discuss natural justice, Aristotle suggests that it characterizes the household. The household appears to be even a paragon of natural justice in that inequalities within it are evident and determine who rules and who is ruled. And, as Arlene W. Saxonhouse explains, “the family, because its differences in *eîdê* are observable, demonstrates a unity in diversity which perhaps becomes impossible in political life. In the *polis* obvious differences in *eîdê* are absent. . . . The family with its definition of differences . . . attains a certainty in nature not available to the city.”

Or, at least, not available to most cities. In other words, it appears that the household, being a model of natural justice, is a kind of model for the best regime. Aristotle would apparently like the natural superiority holding together the (best) household to hold together the (best) city. Indeed, he may insist on the preservation of households (in all regimes) because they have the potential to exemplify perfect unity or justice and by their examples point the city toward a higher justice.

Aiming to realize natural, not conventional, justice, the good household ruler does not treat all members equally or give each a turn at ruling; rather, it is incumbent on this ruler to detect the virtues of each member and treat him or her accordingly, giving guidance or instruction when needed and freedom to make choices when deserved. The household is a compound of “unlike persons”—man, woman, servants, and children—who, moreover, have multiple functions or obligations—as husband and father, wife and household manager, son or daughter and future citizen (*Pol* 1277a5–8, 1253a4–14). There are thus not only manly virtues,
womanly virtues, servile virtues (1277b20–23), and presumably even youthful virtues but also virtues attached to being a husband, father, wife, and child. A household thrives when each member performs his or her function, or upholds his or her obligations, in accordance with the virtues proper to doing so (NE 1098a14–15).

The variety of virtues indicates the variety of judgment in the household. Most notably, the judgment of those ruling differs from that of those being ruled, as becomes clear when we take into account the deliberative capacities of each kind of member and Aristotle’s distinctions among intellectual virtues in the Nicomachean Ethics. One acquires prudence by repeatedly putting into effect good judgments about at least one’s own affairs, if not the affairs of others (NE 1141b12–21, 29–1142a10). Lacking experience, the young cannot have prudence (1142a15–16). Lacking good judgment, or the ability to detect through deliberation what action to perform, and how and when to perform it, the slavish, who lack the ability to deliberate, cannot have prudence either (NE 1143a29–31, Pol 1260a12). The nonslavish adults of the household, however, having both experience and the ability to deliberate (Pol 1260a10–13), may have prudence. In fact, household management requires that they do (NE 1141b31–32). Nonetheless, the prudence of the man and the woman apparently differ. Although it is the responsibility of both to manage the household, the man should acquire possessions and the woman should oversee their use and consumption (Pol 1277b24–25). It follows that the man should acquire the household servants (Pol 1255b37–39), since they are animate possessions (1253b32), and that the woman should command them, since their function is to assist in the use of other possessions (1253b32–33, 1254a2). Moreover, Aristotle indicates in several ways that the man, at least more than the woman, should guide their children; for example, “the man rules the child” (Pol 1260a10). In addition, Aristotle assigns marital rule to both the

29 Acquisition is the only part of meeting needs that justifies the use of strength or force. Although the natural modes of acquisition Aristotle assigns to household management (farming, raising animals, hunting, and fishing) alter or destroy nature, they are “by nature just” because plants and most of the lower animals are “for the sake of human beings” (Pol 1256b15–27); see also The Politics of Aristotle, vol. 2, ed. W. L. Newman (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 174–75, note on 1256b20. Moreover, although household management subsumes acquisition, the latter must occur outside the household proper.

30 Chapter 3, “An Educated Being: A Parent?” pp. 57–59, provides more examples and support for this claim.
husband and the wife; that is, spouses rule each other (Pol 1253b9–10, 1259a39–b1, 4–10).\(^{31}\) Since the man and the woman each rule over others, at least in part for the good of those others (Pol 1278b32–1279a8), each has complete moral virtue, which Aristotle calls justice and prudence (NE 1130a2–14, 1145a1–2; Pol 1260a17–18, 1277b25–26).\(^{32}\) But because each rules over different persons, they again exercise prudence differently (Pol 1260a10–12, 20–24, 1277b20–23).

In contrast to the judgment of the free adult members of the household, the judgment of children and servants is lacking. Children have only the potential for judgment and prudence; servants can only follow judgment and comply with prudence (Pol 1260a12–14, 1254b22–23).

Variety of judgment appears naturally in the household; even more, in the good household, those who rule acknowledge it. Good household rulers do not command their spouse, children, and servants in the same way (NE 1134b15–16). By way of presenting the household, then, Aristotle suggests that private judgment differs from the judgment required by most regimes in that it acknowledges differences in kinds of, and aptitude for, virtue among human beings. Moreover, in trying to promote the virtues peculiar to each member, household rulers promote individuality.

In addition to promoting individuality, private differs from public judgment in not having law to aid it (Pol 1282b1–6). Both political and household rulers must employ “knowledge and choice” (Pol 1332a31–32) to bring about, respectively, the city’s and the household’s excellence. But, whereas political rulers may refer to legal knowledge, household rulers must rely only on their understanding of moral virtue. Private judgment may thus be even more difficult to acquire than public judgment. In any case, as the estate manager Ischomachus explains to Socrates, acquiring private judgment is difficult: “To acquire these powers a man needs education; he must be possessed of great natural gifts; above all, he must become very great [divine, to megiston dé theion genesthai]. For I reckon this gift is not altogether human, but divine—this power to

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\(^{32}\) Justice implies prudence in that it means being able to effect what is good for others, and it differs from prudence in that it means effecting only what is good for others—not for oneself.
win willing obedience: it is manifestly a gift of the gods to the true votaries of prudence.\textsuperscript{33}

Insofar as ruling and being ruled in the household require judgment, they prepare free or able members for life as citizens (in any regime), since a citizen is one who "shares in judgment [kriseōs]" (\textit{Pol} 1275a22–23). But, insofar as ruling in the household requires acknowledging natural differences and encouraging natural potential—that is, requires prudence (\textit{phronēsis}) or justice (\textit{dikaiosunē})—it prepares one to live in the best regime or to contribute to its making. By ruling a household well, one comes to understand the meaning, benefits, and wisdom of natural justice.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{Affection}

Although one may become moderate and prudent by way of household activities, men and women do not live together out of a desire to be virtuous. Not least among the reasons they live together, indeed listed first in one place by Aristotle, is \textit{philia}, friendship or affection (\textit{NE} 1162a16–24). The friendship that arises between a man and a woman seems to be natural, Aristotle says, by which he means here instinctive (\textit{kata physein huparchein}). It is not merely that men and women are sexually attracted to one another or inclined by nature to couple, but rather that they are inclined by nature to form couples, to be friends.\textsuperscript{35} Men and women are not, then, habituated, or, as contemporary jargon would put it, socialized, to pair. Moreover, their staying together or establishing households is not the consequence of acculturation either; for establishing a household is a means, not only to keep alive their natural affection for one another (\textit{NE} 1157b5–13), but to satisfy

\textsuperscript{33} Xenophon, \textit{Oeconomicus} (Loeb Classical Library, 1923), 524–25.

\textsuperscript{34} Aristotle may then be recommending having a family as a qualification for citizenship. During his time, adult males were considered citizens and could vote once registered, but they were not expected to speak at assemblies or to hold office until they were married, with a household; see Stephen R. L. Clark, "Aristotle's Woman," \textit{History of Political Thought} 3, no. 2 (1982), 189. In Sparta, Lycurgus made having a family a legal qualification for citizenship; see Plutarch's \textit{Lycurgus, Apophthegmata of the Lacedaemonians}, noted and cited by Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges in \textit{The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 42.

\textsuperscript{35} Although, to the extent that friendship involves attraction or being pleased with one another (\textit{Pol} 1157a1–2), they are mutually attracted.
other natural desires: the desire to have children and the desire for assistance (charin...tòn eis ton bion; eparkousin) (NE 1162a20–23, Pol 1252a26–30). That it is entirely natural for human beings to establish households does not mean, as we see here, that they establish them exclusively for reasons of utility or necessity. Friendship, children, and assistance, though they may be useful, are more than necessary to survival (NE 1155a28–29, 1169b22, 1097b8–11, 1099b2–4, 1163b1–5). The desire to live with a man or a woman turns out to be in fact an indirect desire to live well. Hence Aristotle says that the friendship between a man and a woman who live together “seems to be one of utility and pleasure combined” (NE 1162a24–25, 1099a13–14).

That households are natural also does not mean that human beings establish them simply by instinct, without exercising judgment or choice. Nature, after all, includes human nature, and thus the ability to discriminate. Marriage is the work or result of friendship, and “friendship is the [intentional] choice of living together” (Pol 1280b36–39). At the same time, friendship in general is a need, and the sort in question is, as noted, instinctive (NE 1155a5, 1162a16). Aristotle’s meaning must then be that, although a human being cannot live well without a mate, one can choose who that mate is to be. Human beings will continue to form households, but not, at least if they do so according to nature, without some discrimination.³⁶

But, one might object, does Aristotle not, in stating at the beginning of the Politics that the city is the most important form of association, suggest that it, not the household, is the primary satisfier of the natural human inclination for friendship or association?

³⁶To put the point in modern terms, one cannot live well unless one has self-respect, self-respect depends on having things of one’s own that one esteems, and the surest way to have things one esteems is to choose them oneself. This is not to say, and this Aristotle would stress, that what one chooses is necessarily worthy of esteem—of being chosen—but rather that, in order for things and relationships to contribute to self-respect and thus to living well, they must be chosen. As Martha Craven Nussbaum explains, in Aristotle’s view “the choice of the good must come from within and not by dictation from without. All reflective men might choose the same good life; but what makes each of them a good man is that he is the one who chooses it. And what is more, it will not count as a good life for him unless it is a life chosen by his own active practical reason: prohairesis enters centrally into the specification of the good life itself” (“Shame, Separateness, and Political Unity: Aristotle’s Criticism of Plato,” in Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980], 423).
In fact, he indicates that this is not the function of the political partnership: it "must be regarded . . . as being for the sake of noble actions, not for the sake of living together" (Pol 1281a2–4). A household, being founded in affection, provides a kind of sociality that the city does not. The sociality public activity provides is ordinarily impartial, since citizens seek justice and think only impartiality—or law—can secure it (Pol 1287b4–5). That the companionship the household provides is affectionate and partial does not mean in Aristotle's view that it contravenes justice or nobility or the good life. In fact, "the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality" (NE 1155a28). Aristotle wants us to see that partiality or intimate affection is a part of the good life and facilitated by privacy.

The human desire for affection is then a component of the human desire for privacy. Human beings seek affection not from many but from a few, and they want to know that those few are their own. This desire for persons we can call our own is, to recall, natural; "for there are two things above all which make human beings care for things and feel affection, the sense of ownership and the sense of preciousness" (Pol 1262b22–23).37 We feel affection for what is ours and want to make ours what is dear to us, what we esteem. The household in particular enables us to show and sustain affection for a few and to define those few as our own. It is unique in satisfying our desire for a private social life. The desire for marriage and the social life that accompanies it is connected with the good life, then, because it satisfies not merely a desire for social life but also a desire for privacy.

FRIENDSHIP AND JUSTICE IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Characterizing the household as a place of inequality and affection, Aristotle seems to be contradicting his claim in the Nicomachean Ethics that persons who are separated by some wide gap

37 Ownership is then only a necessary, not sufficient, condition for securing affection; the thing or person loved has also to be worth caring about, or precious. On this account, the desire to improve or make worthy what is one's own—be it property, a husband, or a child—seems to be a natural extension of affection for what is one's own. In Chapter 7, "True Friendship," pp. 174–80, I also discuss the conditionality of affection.
in virtue cannot be friends (1158b33–35, 1159a5). And if household members cannot be friends, then the household cannot be a model for the best regime, for “friendship seems to hold cities together, and legislators seem to concern themselves seriously with friendship more than with justice” (1155a22–24).

But, although it is true that family members are not ordinarily complete and enduring friends in the way that those who are “equal and similar” in virtue can be (NE 1159b2–4), they can be friends of a lesser sort:

There is a different kind of friendship which involves superiority of one party over the other, for example, that of a father toward his son, and in general that of an older person toward a younger, that of a man toward a woman, and of any sort of ruler toward the one he rules. These friendships also differ from each other. For friendship of parents to children is not the same as that of rulers to ruled; nor is friendship of father to son the same as that of son to father, or of man to woman as that of woman to man. Each of them has a different virtue and function, and there are different causes of love. Hence the ways of loving are different, and so are the friendships. (1158b11–19)

Moreover, Aristotle opens the possibility that family members can be complete friends if the party of lesser virtue loves the party of greater virtue to such an extent as to compensate for the inferiority: “This above all is the way for unequals . . . to be friends, since this is the way for them to be equalized” (1159b1–2).

As to the claim that the ideal household is a model for the best regime, it should be recalled that it is claimed to be such in that it exemplifies the principle of just rule: to each according to his or her virtue. It is not claimed that the best household is a microcosm or reflection of the best regime. The two cannot mirror one another because their constellations of virtue differ: the household is constituted of unequals; the best regime of equals and unequals. Unlike household members (and lesser friends), friends who are equal in virtue do not request assistance or benefits from one another, for their friendship is not based on lack or utility (NE 1159b10–15). On the contrary, they seek to confer benefits and to outdo each other in
justness, temperance, and all the other virtues (*NE* 1169b11–13, 1168b25–31, 1169a11–12, 32–b1, 1107a6–7).38

Aristotle seems then to lead us to the conclusion that the household exemplifies true justice but falls short of yielding true friendship. Yet he qualifies that conclusion by indicating that the free adult members may have complete moral virtue and thus the capacity for true friendship with each other, and by suggesting that love itself may compensate for some lack of virtue, enabling an inferior member to approach true friendship with a superior member. Aristotle may be telling us that true friendship is bound less by circumstance than by individual virtue.

Why then do *legislators* try to bring about friendship more than justice? In the best regime, legislators want to bring about true friendship more than true justice because true friendship inspires greater virtue than true justice. In a regime that rewards and punishes according to virtue, a good man exercises virtue in order to merit an honorable occupation or office and avoids vice in order to avoid disgrace. But he would “throw away both wealth and honors and in general the goods that are objects of competition . . . on the condition that [his] friends would gain more” (*NE* 1169a20–21, 26–27, 29–b1).39 True friendship may even cause a man to sacrifice his life; indeed, Aristotle implies that having friends makes men willing to die for their country (1169a18–20). Further, “it is nobler to do well by friends than by strangers” (1169b12–13), and, to recall, the political partnership is for the sake of living nobly. Finally, among intellectually gifted good men, true friendship leads to the activity of philosophy (*NE* 1172a1–6), the supreme activity. By these statements Aristotle prompts the thought that the private has more power to elicit excellence than the public. Good legislators, then, are concerned to facilitate privacy and thus true friendship with laws and education.

In ordinary regimes, legislators want to bring about friendship more than justice because justice is a condition sought to remedy faction (*NE* 1155a22–26, 1134a30–33), which must be minimized for

38 One can outdo another in temperance, for “there is no excess . . . of temperance . . . since the intermediate is a sort of extreme [in achieving the good]” (*NE* 1107a22–23). True friendship does and does not demand a kind of excess.

39 Contrast Arendt’s depiction of Aristotle’s (and the ancient Greeks’) conception of the good life as agonistic (*Human Condition*, 36–37, 41).
regimes to last. Ordinary regimes aim at political friendship, in other words, because it is a state of affairs in which citizens agree on the fundamental constitutional arrangements of the regime and thus on how to resolve conflict.\(^{40}\) Hence Aristotle says that “when men are friends they have no need of justice” (*NE* 1155a26–27). At the same time, he indicates that even ordinary legislators should seek to bring about true friendship, for they too should be concerned with eliciting the most virtue possible from their citizens. Legislators everywhere are then obliged to facilitate privacy.

By depicting the household as a place that may, through its activities, cultivate virtue independently of the regime, Aristotle reveals the unwisdom of Plato’s alleged proposal to abolish households. Indeed, it is clear that we should understand Aristotle’s portrait of the household in Book I of the *Politics* as (among other things) a supplement to his explicit critique in Book II of the proposals advanced in the *Republic*. Had Aristotle meant to convey, as Arendt contends, that household activities oppose virtue, this would have sit poorly with his denunciation of the *Republic’s* proposal for communism. Why indeed preserve dark and despotic households if a class of individuals can collectively provide for the city?

Aristotle’s account of the household is, nonetheless, more than a plea for preserving households. It serves as a portal into the private. He places it at the beginning of the *Politics* both because it signals the importance of the private and because human beings first experience the private in the household. Indeed, Aristotle hints that only by experiencing household life may one progress to the many other forms of private activity that constitute part of the good life (*NE* 1142a9–10).

We have, however, yet to uncover the full range of virtuous activities Aristotle’s ideal household offers. In the next two chapters I thus consider mastery, serving, and the activities of women in the household.