Deliberation and Natural Slavery

1. Introduction

Slavery was ubiquitous in the ancient world, and classical Greece, for all its obvious glory, was by no means an exception. Relentlessly upheld by custom, slavery played an essential role in the ancient economy.¹ Custom, however, is the king of the unreflective, and, more often than not, it is rapidly dethroned when confronted by sustained philosophical inquiry. A practice that requires the complete domination of one human being by another seemingly calls for a more adequate theoretical justification than appeal to past precedent. Nonetheless, the belief that no better justification could be wrought was apparently quite prevalent amongst many of Aristotle’s contemporaries and immediate predecessors. Simply put, on this view, slavery was a matter of nomos or convention—at base a slave was no different, morally speaking, from his master.² Fate had simply dealt the former a bad hand.

Aristotle, of course, will have none of this. In Book I of the Politics he carefully distinguishes conventional from natural slavery, arguing that the enslavement of one individual by another is morally permissible only if the slave is by nature inferior to his or her master.³ Hence, Aristotle’s justification of slavery trades upon there being an identifiable natural difference between master and slave. As is well known, Aristotle notoriously argues that such a difference does indeed obtain. Importantly, it is neither immaturity, as in the case of the very young, nor physical or psy-


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chological impairment, as in the case of the crippled or the insane, that results in one's being a natural slave. Instead, according to Aristotle, certain individuals fall into the category of natural slaves due to their inability to engage in practical deliberation (P 1260a12). Natural slaves suffer from a defect in their humanity in that they are ultimately incapable of determining, and subsequently pursuing, those ends (i.e., virtuous activity and philosophical contemplation) that are constitutive of eudaimonia. At best, the natural slave can only indirectly participate in the Good Life to the extent that he or she is owned by a just master and is thus a part of a well run household.

Moral condemnation aside, contemporary scholars are in almost unanimous agreement that Aristotle's argument for the above is decidedly unclear and riddled with deep inconsistencies. Much of the difficulty centers on Aristotle's claim that the natural slave is "without the faculty of deliberation" (P 1260a12). Taking a cue from Book III of the Nicomachean Ethics, this claim is thought to imply that the natural slave is completely devoid of even the rudiments of basic means-ends reasoning. Not surprisingly, this strikes most commentators as wildly implausible—particularly when Aristotle asserts that all non-Greeks are natural slaves. Indeed, on this reading, it is hard to see how the natural slave would be little more than an automaton and therefore by no means essential to the maintenance of the well run household.

In what follows, I intend to provide the most charitable interpretation

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6 For a tightly argued version of this criticism see Taylor, op. cit., p. 256.

7 As Brunt (op. cit., p. 362) notes, "slaves must be capable of deliberation to the extent required of any techne. They must show some foresight even in cooking a meal!"
of Aristotle’s position possible by distinguishing between both a “nar-
row” and a “broad” sense of practical deliberation explicit in Aristotle’s
writings. The former sense simply involves the ability to determine
what means are efficacious to the production of a predetermined end.
The latter broader conception affords the agent the ability to deliberate
not only about the means to ends, but also to make substantive choices
concerning the ends themselves. Crucially, I argue that the natural slave
retains the ability to deliberate in the narrow sense but cannot deliberate
in the broad sense; he is therefore clearly not an automaton, but also fails
to count as a moral agent—for it is precisely the ability to determine
what ends are constitutive of the Good Life that confers Aristotelian
moral agency on an individual.

As will be shown, such an account in many ways successfully ex-
plains why the institution of slavery is supposedly both “just and benefi-
cial” to those enslaved, as well as why the enslavement of “barbarians,”
but not necessarily fellow Greeks, is, in line with much of classical Hel-
lenic sentiment, completely permissible. I further maintain that this in-
terpretation is at least partially successful in meeting Nicholas Smith’s
objection that Aristotle’s doctrine of natural slavery is incapable of justi-
fying the obviously “despotic” relationship that must obtain between
master and slave. Nonetheless, I contend that even on this most charita-
ble of readings Aristotle’s argument fails. Why? Simply because, given
the advent of classical liberalism, such “thick” conceptions of moral per-
sonhood have fallen by the intellectual wayside. Each, save for those in
their nonage or dotage, is the natural moral equal of every other—a con-
sequence that renders any doctrine of natural slavery conceptually bank-
rupt. I begin by considering Aristotle’s rejection of conventional slavery.

2. Aristotle’s Rejection of Conventional Slavery

In his discussion of the household, Aristotle identifies the relationship of
master and slave (along with husband/wife and parent/child) as funda-
mental to this most basic and naturally occurring form of human asso-

8To establish this distinction I rely on John McDowell, “Deliberation and Moral De-
velopment in Aristotle’s Ethics,” in Steven Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting (eds.), Aris-
totle, Kant and the Stoics: Rethinking Happiness and Duty (Cambridge: Cambridge Uni-


10This argument is a development of several of Anthony Kronman’s insights in his
article “The Concept of an Author and the Unity of the Commonwealth in Hobbes’s Le-
cation. The slave, Aristotle contends, is an “animate instrument of property” that exists for the sole purpose of facilitating household management (P 1253b32). Slaves are essential for performing the myriad variety of mundane tasks that by and large comprise daily living. Importantly, the genuine slave is not simply a metaphorical extension of its master’s body—a “helping hand” as it were—but instead must also be understood as one who lacks any sort of identity outside of this relationship. The slave is literally a “part” of its master who, qua slave, “belongs entirely to him and has no life or being other than that of so belonging” (P 1254a11-12).

The function and nature of the slave is thus clear. Nonetheless, the crucial question of who ought to count as a slave remains open. What is at issue here, of course, is a matter of justification. Under what conditions should we allow one person to own another? An immediate option, and one that Aristotle repeatedly rejects, is the conventional route: slaves are those persons whose subjugation is legally sanctioned. In other words, it is up to each society to enact a “slave code”—that is, a set of laws that determine those classes of people (e.g., those who fail to make good on their debts, those whose parents are slaves, those who are captured in war, and so on) whose enslavement is deemed permissible. On this view, slavery is simply a product of cultural circumstance. Anyone who is either unwise enough or unlucky enough to run afoul of a particular society’s edicts is doomed to a life of involuntary servitude.

The problem with the conventional response is that in basing slavery solely on “legal sanctions and superior power,” it completely ignores the question of justice (P 1255b13-14). For instance, is slavery as a result of capture in war morally permissible? On the conventionalist account, so long as one’s society recognizes the relevant convention, it obviously is. Aristotle, however, belittles this response as overly simplistic and morally problematic. Slavery as a result of capture in battle, he argues, is only permissible insofar as the war waged was just. If not, then enslaving the vanquished is simply an unjust consequence of an unjust war (P 1255a23-25). The deeper difficulty that this example highlights, and the reason Aristotle ultimately dismisses a conventionalist justification of slavery as ethically inadequate, is the capricious and arbitrary fashion with which it determines the relationship of master and slave. On such an account, the precise problem is that anyone can count as a slave, viz., “anyone of the highest rank could be captured and sold into slavery,” and such a state of affairs is, from a moral point of view, extremely unsettling, since “no one would say that a person who does not deserve to be in a condition of slavery really ought to be a slave” (P 1255a24-26).

Clearly then, whether or not one ought to be bound or free is a matter
of impartial *desert* as opposed to conventional happenstance. For slavery to be permissible, at least on a theoretical level, a set of objective criteria must be identified whereby we can *readily distinguish* between master and slave, between he who is fit to command and he who is fit to serve. Such criteria, in application, must be more or less *epistemically transparent*. That is, in order to avoid the unjust enslavement of one who ought to remain free, the criteria employed must definitively distinguish natural masters from natural slaves. Thus, even if we grant that there are natural slaves, a potentially grave problem still exists: if we cannot readily distinguish (e.g., through some combination of physical/psychological attributes) who is a natural slave and who is not, then the enslavement process remains unacceptably arbitrary and no different, at least in consequence, from its conventionalist rival. Many who in theory ought to be free will find themselves in bondage. Hence, only those who, as it were, wear their natural slavery on their sleeve can legitimately be enslaved.

On Aristotle’s account then, the moral permissibility of slavery demands that the following two conditions be met:

1. Natural slaves must exist.
2. Natural slaves must be readily distinguishable from those who are rightfully free.

(1) is an ontological requirement the truth of which must be established before the practice of slavery can be morally condoned. (2), of course, is an epistemic requirement (what I will refer to as the *transparency requirement*) that will enable us to know the truth of (1). Crucially, unless (2) obtains we will be forever in the dark about (1), and thus slavery, as practiced, will (barring lucky guesses) be unacceptably arbitrary and contrary to justice. In turn, (2) becomes operative only if one has the relevant criteria of identity at hand to pick out who, if anyone, falls within the class of natural slaves.

A purely conventional account ignores these criteria, the result being the unacceptable arbitrariness noted above. Such criteria point to a dif-

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11 As Smith notes, Aristotle develops his theory of natural slavery in order “to secure the morality of enslaving certain persons” (op. cit., p. 142). See also Brunt, op. cit., p. 366.

12 Stephen R.L. Clark claims that Aristotle’s account fails precisely for this reason, i.e., that there would be no “usable criteria for picking [natural slaves] out from the mass of the population” (p. 33), but fails to connect this idea with Aristotle’s concerns about justice and his advocacy of enslaving non-Greeks. See Clark, “Slaves and Citizens,” *Philosophy* 60 (1985): 27-37. I turn to this issue in section 4.

13 Fortenbaugh claims, but without any supporting argument, “of course, there are no natural slaves in the world.” See Fortenbaugh, op. cit., p. 137.
ference in kind and thus, in accordance with the demands of justice, allow us to determine when someone can, and cannot, be enslaved, viz. "the difference between ruler and ruled [by nature] is one of kind, and degree has nothing to do with the matter" (P 1259b36-37). Ideally, conventional slavery must be limited by natural slavery—only those who are by nature slaves can legitimately fall within the scope of such conventions. If not, then slavery as a matter of convention is based upon nothing other than "force" and "as such has no warrant in justice" (P 1253b21-22). In sum, for Aristotle, the only morally permissible type of slavery is natural slavery.14

3. Aristotle on Natural Slavery

Neither Aristotle nor his opponents are revolutionaries.15 The issue of reform, let alone abolition, is not on the table (save for possibly restricting the class of slaves to non-Greeks). At most, the doctrine of natural slavery is to function as a regulative ideal that can provide a theoretical underpinning for justifying the enslavement of one individual by another.16 Nonetheless, it is crucial for the theoretical viability of the doctrine to show that natural slaves do indeed exist—theories that are in principle unverifiable are of little if any use. Hence, even as Aristotle points out the moral limitations of conventional slavery he is quick to maintain that there is "both philosophical and empirical evidence for the existence of natural slavery" (P 1254a18-19). What evidence? Aristotle argues that a combination of differences in physical and mental capacity is what legitimates the distinction between master and slave—in line with the above, these purported differences are to count as the criteria whereby individuals are to be classed accordingly.

As one might expect, Aristotle's argument for a master/slave distinction based upon physical criteria is notoriously weak. Again, Aristotle claims that the telos of the slave is to undertake whatever mundane tasks are deemed necessary (e.g., hauling water and casks of olive oil, clearing tables, cleaning, and so on) for the maintenance of a well run household.

14 For a similar but more historically oriented discussion of this point see Brunt, op. cit., p. 352-55.
15 Concerning Aristotle's commitment to the existence of slavery see Brunt, op. cit., p. 353.
16 This point was made clear to me by an anonymous reviewer for this journal. As Aristotle notes, "not all those who are actually slaves, or actually freeman, are natural slaves or natural freeman." Nonetheless, Aristotle also observes that "there are cases where such a distinction [between natural master and natural slave] exists." Importantly, only the latter case is described as "just" (P 1255b7).
This being so, nature, at least in principle, provides the slave with a body befitting a life meant solely for physical toil:

But it is nature's intention also to erect a physical difference between the body of a free-man and that of the slave, giving the latter strength for the menial duties of life, but making the former upright in carriage and (though useless for physical labor) useful for the various purposes of civic life—a life which tends as it develops, to be divided into military service and the occupations of peace. (P 1254b26-31)

Ideally then, we could distinguish a slave from his master through differences in the respective servility or nobility of their physical person. Other things being equal, the natural slave is a lumbering “living tool” while the natural master exudes bodily grace and poise. Of course, other things are rarely, if ever, equal, particularly in this case. Based upon physical criteria alone, it appears practically impossible to determine who, by nature, ought to be enslaved. Why? Simply because such differences are radically underdetermined to the point that the transparency requirement (i.e., that one can readily and decisively distinguish master from slave) cannot be met. Not surprisingly, Aristotle himself concedes the essential hopelessness of attempting to draw a substantive master/slave distinction on the basis of putative physical differences between the two: “The contrary of nature’s intention, however, often happens: there are some slaves who have the bodies of freemen” (P 1254b31-32). Thus, due to nature’s apparent inconsistency, physical criteria do not pass muster in that they fail to offer any epistemically reliable way to recognize differences in kind between master and slave.  

In light of these difficulties, it is not hard to see why physical appearance and/or constitution plays little if any justificatory role in Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery (although one would expect a slave to be physically suited for a life of servitude). Aristotle consequently turns to what he takes to be a much more powerful argument: On the one hand, the natural slave, due to an innate defect in his capacity to engage in practical deliberation, is morally inferior to those who are naturally free. On the other, the natural master, who does possess this type of deliberative capacity, is the slave’s “superior in goodness” (P 1255a20-21). This thereby insures that the relationship between master and slave is both “just and beneficial” for all parties concerned (P 1255b5). A mental, as opposed to a purely physical, difference thus functions as the determining factor in identifying those who are born to serve.

As Brunt observes, Aristotle claims that there is “empirical evidence,” presumably of a physical nature, for slavery but then never actually provides any (P 1254a18-19). See Brunt, op. cit., p. 379. Williams also notes the essential weakness of this argument. See Williams, op. cit., p. 114.
Aristotle’s argument (what I will refer to as the Mental Differences Argument) rests on the following biconditional claim:

x is a natural slave iff x is “without the faculty of deliberation”

(P 1260a12)

Specifically, a natural slave is defined as an individual “who is capable of becoming the property of another”—a state of affairs that is realized when the individual in question only “participates in reason to the extent of apprehending it in another, though destitute of it himself” (P 1254 b21-23). Thus, even though the slave does retain the faculty of understanding (i.e., the ability to grasp though not formulate practical directives), due to a lack of deliberative capacity he or she is only capable of responding to commands issued by the practical reason of another (i.e., the freeman/master). Put another way, this dependence on the practical reason of another, given the slave’s inability to engage in practical deliberation, results in the slave not satisfying a basic condition of Aristotle’s conception of moral personhood, thereby morally legitimating (at least in Aristotle’s eyes) his or her subjugation.18

Unfortunately, the Mental Differences Argument, at least as it is presented in the Politics, often lapses into vagueness and ambiguity when one attempts to pin down what precisely Aristotle means by practical deliberation. To flesh out the argument we must turn to Books III and VI of the Nicomachean Ethics—the locus classicus of Aristotle’s inquiry into this subject.19 For Aristotle, the capacity to deliberate practically is intimately bound up with the concept of choice or prohairesis (NE 1111b3-9). Choice is a species of voluntary action limited to fully functional adult human beings whereby, in choosing, we may direct our attention to a consideration of either means (instrumental choice) or ends (substantive choice). Importantly, the distinction between these types of choosing is marked out respectively by both a “narrow” and a “broad” sense of practical deliberation.20

In the narrow sense, introduced by Aristotle in NE Book III, the scope

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18This point is argued for below in section 3.

19One might object that the Politics and the Nicomachean Ethics are distinct texts and that attempting to move from one to the other violates a basic rule of textual interpretation. With regard to the Ethics and the Politics, however, I do not feel this to be a problem, since Aristotle explicitly views the former subject as a preparation for the latter (NE 1094a17-1094b10). Presumably Aristotle does not fully develop concepts such as “deliberation,” “virtue,” “choice,” etc., in the Politics, since he believes that he has adequately treated them elsewhere. All citations from Nicomachean Ethics (“NE”) are from the David Ross translation, revised by J.L. Ackrill and J.O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

20Wiggins terms these two types of deliberation “technical” and “non-technical,” respectively. See Wiggins, op. cit., p. 37. See also McDowell, op. cit., pp. 19-22.
of deliberative activity is completely restricted to a consideration of means, or, more precisely, to a consideration of those means that are most efficient at attaining a desired and fixed end. In this context, practical reason’s role is purely instrumental—for “[w]e deliberate not about ends but about means” (NE 1112b8) and further “the end cannot be a subject of deliberation, but only the means” (NE 1112b35-36). As Aristotle notes, the doctor does not deliberate about whether to cure the sick, nor does the statesmen deliberate about whether to enact legislation. Instead, the scope of their practical inquiry is limited to determining what means will most likely lead to the efficient realization of their respective ends: health and civic harmony. Indeed, any discussion of ends in this context is superfluous—for a physician to deliberate about whether he or she ought to attempt to eradicate disease would betray a complete failure to understand what a physician is. Thus, to deliberate in this narrow sense is simply to engage in basic means-ends reasoning: we attempt to choose that act, or series of actions, which will be instrumental in bringing about a predetermined end.

In *NE* Book VI, however, Aristotle presents an expanded conception of practical deliberation. This broader sense widens the scope of our deliberative activities to include not only a consideration of means to ends but also a consideration, to some extent, of the relative worth of the ends themselves. As the following passages illustrate, practical wisdom, in this sense, is not concerned with securing a particular end such as health but, more importantly, it involves being able to determine the proper end(s) of human life.

Now it is thought to be a mark of a man of practical wisdom to be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself, not in some particular respect, e.g. about what sorts of things conduce to health or to strength, but about what sort of things conduce to the good life in general. It follows in the general sense also the man who is capable of deliberating has practical wisdom. (*NE* 1140a26-31; emphasis added)

Further along in the same chapter we are similarly informed that practical wisdom

is a true and reasoned state of capacity to act with regard to the things that are good or bad for man... It is for this reason that we think that Pericles and men like him have practical wisdom, viz. because they can see what is good for themselves and what is good for men in general; we consider that those can do this who are good at managing households or states. (*NE* 1140b3-9; emphasis added)

Aristotle again raises the distinction, at the end of Book VI.9, when he discusses what it means to possess “excellence in deliberation”:
Furthermore, it is possible to have deliberated well either in the unqualified sense or with reference to a particular end. Excellence in deliberation in the unqualified sense, then, is that which succeeds with reference to what is the end in the unqualified sense, and excellence in deliberation in a particular sense is that which succeeds relatively to a particular end. (NE 1142b27-32)

Clearly, as these passages attest, two very different senses of deliberation are operative within the conceptual confines of the NE. On one hand, we have the “technical” conception of practical deliberation broached in Book III whereby its purpose is simply to choose those means that are most “effective” at attaining a predetermined end. On the other, we have a very “non-technical” notion introduced in Book VI, which, at least in the virtuous individual, manifests itself not simply instrumentally but substantively as well. That is, this broader notion of practical deliberation is primarily concerned with “questions of general policy”—not about simply attaining a desired objective but rather about what objectives to form in the first place. In other words, the purpose of deliberating well in this broader and more substantive sense is to arrive at the “best specification” of what the proper ends of human life in fact are and then be able to determine the most appropriate means thereunto. Indeed, until this specification is rendered, means-ends reasoning of the former sort does not, and cannot, enter the picture. We must be able to grasp what we ought in fact to be striving towards before any successful striving can take place.

It should by now be apparent that this state of affairs bears directly upon Aristotle’s conception of moral personhood and agency. An Aristotelian moral agent is one who can engage in virtuous activity, and to engage in such activity requires that one be practically wise; that is, that one be able to deliberate well about those things that are good for man in general and without qualification. Hence, if this deliberative capacity is absent, impaired, or underdeveloped, then one cannot count as a person in the moral sense of the term. Why not? Following from above, the man of practical wisdom is simply one who possesses excellence in deliberation in its most general and unqualified sense. Therefore, in the absence of such broadly deliberative capacities, one cannot be practically wise and, in turn, without the presence of practical wisdom, truly virtuous behavior is rendered impossible. This is so precisely because, at the very least, practical wisdom is a necessary condition for the proper exercise of virtue, that is, the capacity to choose morally correct actions (NE 1144b38-39). Simply put, practical wisdom, through the broad, substan-

21 McDowell, op. cit., p. 20.

tive deliberative capacities it embodies, "determines the end" that we ought to pursue and sets down "commands," that is, practical imperatives, to that effect (NE 1145a4-5).

Let us now return to the matter at hand—the question of Aristotle's view of natural slavery. A natural slave, we are told, is one who is "without the faculty of deliberation" (P 1260a12). Deliberation in what sense? Narrow or broad? It seems highly implausible, to say the least, that Aristotle could have maintained that a natural slave is one who is completely devoid of any instrumental reasoning capacities whatsoever. Indeed, such an entity would be little more than a zombie and essentially worthless to the household.\(^{23}\) Even the simplest tasks require a bare modicum of instrumental reasoning if one is to accomplish them. For example, imagine a slave who is commanded to bring his master a glass of water. Clearly, the slave must not only be able to apprehend this command but, as importantly, how to satisfy it. And executing the command to adequate satisfaction would seem to involve a certain amount of narrow deliberative capacity—the slave must understand that fetching the glass of water requires knowing where a glass is, knowing where the water is, realizing that the glass must be filled with water and then promptly brought to the master. More complicated commands would presumably require a higher degree of instrumental rationality—for example, being ordered to accomplish a series of tasks such as setting the table, peeling the potatoes, watching the roast, fetching wine and water, and so on—particularly if any degree of efficiency is to be involved.\(^{24}\) Indeed, if slaves were little more than exquisitely trained apes (and even apes seem to possess the rudiments of means-ends reasoning), then it is hard to see why they would be so essential to the maintenance of the well run household. Only the simplest of tasks (if even these) could be expected of them. Why not hire a freeman who in fact is instrumentally rational? Would he not be able to accomplish more, and hence be of more value, than a dozen slaves wholly lacking in this department? On the other side of the coin, retaining natural slaves (as such) would more

\(^{23}\)Fortenbaugh argues that natural slaves "lack the capacity to deliberate but are in other respects cognitive creatures" (op. cit., p. 137). It is hard to see how this claim makes sense, however, unless one affords at least some deliberative capacity to the natural slave—for if one cannot engage in any sort of means-end reasoning how can one be viewed, at least in a practical sense, as in any way cognitive? Clark here makes the better move in maintaining that what the natural slave ultimately lacks is the ability to live a "life in accordance with a rational plan" (op. cit., p. 33). Presumably what Clark means is that the natural slave is incapable of formulating such a plan and thus lacks the capacity for broad deliberation—a point I also make below. See also Brunt, op. cit., pp. 362-63.

\(^{24}\)And efficiency does seem to be an important, if not overriding, desideratum since, after all, the slave is "a servant in the sphere of action" (P 1254a7).
likely than not be a failure of narrow deliberation on the part of a master who desired a well run household.

Aside from concerns about practical effectiveness, a moral argument immediately comes to the fore: if natural slaves are those who are totally lacking in narrow deliberative capacity, then few if any individuals ought to be enslaved. It simply seems to be an extremely well confirmed empirical fact that almost all humans (except perhaps the comatose) are to some degree capable of at least rudimentary means-end reasoning. This being the case, then, on Aristotle's own terms, slavery would lack any sort of theoretical foundation upon which one could construct a moral justification of the practice. Simply put, no natural slaves would exist. If nearly everyone does possess narrow deliberative capacities and if it is precisely a lack of these capacities that is supposed to mark out the class of natural slaves, then Aristotle's argument obviously collapses. Viewed from the standpoint of narrow deliberation, the Mental Differences Argument is completely unsound. The only type of slavery possible would be conventional slavery, and Aristotle has, for a variety of reasons, summarily ruled this option out.

Nonetheless, perhaps these practical and moral demands can be met if we consider the natural slave as one who lacks the faculty of broad deliberation. Granting this assumption, the problem of practical effectiveness is at once resolved. Natural slaves, while they may be incapable of deliberating about ends, can still deliberate about the means that are necessary to bring about a predetermined end, for example, satisfying the myriad commands of one's master. As such, the acquisition of natural slaves would prove particularly "useful for the necessary purposes of life"—given a capacity for narrow deliberation, they could be assigned a great many complex tasks essential to securing a properly managed household (P 1260a34). This interpretation also dovetails nicely with Aristotle's moral justification of slavery. There is a difference in kind, one will recall, between freeman and slave, which this reading forcefully brings out: in lacking broad deliberative capacities, the slave cannot be considered a moral person, and hence, their difference in station and treatment can now be deemed morally permissible.

The slave fails to meet the standards of moral personhood simply because he is incapable of behaving virtuously. In the very passage where we are informed that the slave is by definition "entirely without the fac-

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25 Aristotle, as an astute student of human nature, must have been aware of this fact.
26 For a similar argument see Brunt, op. cit., pp. 361-62.
27 Smith, however, argues that Aristotle still requires a further argument to justify the "despotic" nature of the master-slave relationship (op. cit., pp. 150-54, passim). I dispute this contention below.
ulty of deliberation” (P 1260a12), the “ruler” or master is defined as one who “must possess moral goodness in its full and perfect form—that is, the form based upon rational deliberation” (P 1260a17-18). The sense of deliberation employed here is most plausibly read as broad rather than narrow, particularly if we take the Nicomachean Ethics as our guide. As noted, to be virtuous, that is, morally good, requires that one possess practical wisdom, which in turn is possible only if one is capable of “excellence in deliberation in the unqualified sense” (NE 1142b28). That is, moral goodness requires the ability to deliberate about ends as well as means—what sorts of ends (i.e., “good action”) are worthy of pursuit as well as the means to them (NE 1140b6-7). The natural slave is thus one who is incapable of determining what these ends are and hence can never pursue them. The natural slave clearly lacks practical reason in this substantive sense—an absence that is best attributed to the slave’s incapacity for broad deliberation. For Aristotle, to be free and deserving of freedom is to be capable of virtue, and this latter state of affairs requires that one “be born with an eye, as it were, by which to judge rightly and choose what is truly good, and he is well endowed by nature who is well endowed with this” (NE 1114b2-5). The slave is morally blind, being unendowed by either nature or circumstance in this most crucial sense.

At this stage, we can see why Aristotle holds that the natural master is the slave’s “superior in goodness” (P 1255a20-21), and, perhaps less clearly, also understand why he further claims that a state of natural servitude is both “beneficial and just” for the slave (P 1255b5). Obviously, for Aristotle, the natural master or freeman is the natural slave’s moral

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28As Brunt observes, the most plausible reading of the text on this issue is that “it is the power of deliberation of the kind that precedes moral choice which a natural slave lacks” (op. cit., p. 362).
29This claim is further buttressed in NE Book X where Aristotle argues that the slave cannot achieve eudaimonia since he cannot, by definition, engage in “virtuous activities” (NE 1177a11).
30In technical terms, the biconditional claim “For any X, X is a natural slave iff X is without the faculty of deliberation” (P 1260a12) needs to be restated as “For any X, X is a natural slave iff X is without the faculty of broad deliberation.”
31Importantly, while the slave, due to this defect in his humanity, can never acquire virtue proper, he is still capable of being conditioned to behave in accordance with the demands of temperance and courage (P 1260a35-36). The presence of such conditioning, however, does not a moral person make, since it can be equally applied to “both children and brutes” (NE 1144b9-10). Also, I employ the phrase “by either nature or circumstance” to imply that not only can we be born without the capacity to engage in broad deliberation, but furthermore, this capacity can also be destroyed. This possibility, brought to my attention by an anonymous reviewer, is discussed in detail in section 4 in connection with Aristotle’s argument that all “barbarians” are to count as natural slaves.
superior simply because the former can participate in a life of full and complete virtue while the latter cannot. The path to *eudaimonia* remains open to one and is permanently closed to the other. In turn, this moral hierarchy erected by nature between master and slave explains in what sense the relationship between the two can be considered “just” at least in the sense of being equitable. Equity requires that equals be treated equally, and also that *unequals* be treated *unequally*. Due to his lack of broad deliberative capacities, the natural slave is his master’s moral inferior—the differences in their respective moral psychologies justify their different stations in life. Hence, the slave’s servitude and the master’s freedom are in accordance with the strict requirements of equity.

Nevertheless, how can the relationship between the two be construed as “beneficial” for the slave? Prima facie, one would hardly think of the institution of slavery as advancing the interests of those enslaved. Aristotle has a ready answer. Given his truncated deliberative abilities, the slave is not only incapable of being genuinely moral, he is also incapable of being genuinely prudent: “Pericles and men like him have practical wisdom, viz. because they can see what is *good for themselves* and what is good for men in general” (*NE* 1140b5-7). The slave, without the “eye” of practical wisdom, as it were, cannot “see” where his real interests lie. Importantly, of course, the master does not, as he does in the cases of women and children, rule directly in the interest of the slave. The slave, one must recall, is a tool and of purely instrumental value—any benefit that rebounds to him as a result of his servitude is both indirect and coincidental (*P* 1278b35). This state of affairs notwithstanding, however, Aristotle remains adamant that “a wrong exercise of his rule by a master is a thing disadvantageous for both master and slave” (*P* 1255b9-10). It is to the mutual advantage of each to be part of a well run household. This being the case, “[t]here is thus a community of interest, and a relation of friendship, between master and slave, when both of them naturally merit the position in which they stand” (*P* 1255b12-13; emphasis added). The community of interest involved here is the common good of the household, to which both the master and the slave contribute and from which each *benefits*, albeit to a strikingly different degree. The master is able to specify what the good of the household is, while the

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32A similar state of affairs holds in the case of women and children (see below).
33Much as if, no matter how distasteful the analogy, a farmer were to mistreat his livestock. For more on this point see Brunt, op. cit., pp. 347-50.
34The ultimate benefit in question is not simply the slave’s personal survival but rather being able to engage in the best possible life—a servant in a well run household—that remains open for him or her. Only in this way can the natural slave participate in some semblance, no matter how feeble, of the Good Life.
slave merely exists to service and advance this end that is predetermined for him. So long as each does as he ought, that is, each performs his specific function well, the community of interest constituted by the household is properly served and each thereby benefits to the extent that he is able. An invisible teleological hand, as it were, insures that the interests of all are, at least within the overall context of a well run household, "identical" (P 1255b11). Natural slavery is, at least in this somewhat limited sense (particularly from the slave's point of view), ultimately beneficial for all parties involved.

A community of interest is one thing, but a "relationship of friendship" between master and slave seems to be quite another. Surprising as it may appear (at this point any interpretation aiming at consistency will have to be stretched), Aristotle holds, both in the Politics and the Nicomachean Ethics, that a just relationship between two individuals creates the possibility of friendship between them. Of course, the kind of friendship possible will vary according to the equality that prevails between the two, and this being minimal to nonexistent at best between master and slave, the extent of their resulting friendship will be correspondingly meager. Nonetheless, Aristotle claims that this arrangement is infinitely preferable to the conventional route whereby "slavery rests merely on legal sanction and superior power" (P 1255b13-14).

At this juncture, for those familiar with the literature, my interpretation will appear to run afoul of Nicholas Smith's critique as set down in his article "Aristotle's Theory of Natural Slavery." Therein, Smith argues that Aristotle discusses two very different ways in which one person can rule over another: "regally" and "despotically." On the one hand, the former instance aptly describes the proper rule of one citizen over another, a father over his child, and a husband over his wife. In each case, the ruler rules primarily in the interests of the ruled and only secondarily with regard to himself. On the other hand, in the latter instance the ruler rules primarily in his own interest and only secondarily in the interest of the ruled—for example, as in the case of natural slavery (P 1278b32-37). The model for regal rule is that of reason over appetite, and for despotic rule, mind over body (P 1254b1-7). Smith claims, how-

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35 Indeed, in the NE, as Aristotle notoriously remarks, the master cannot engage in friendship with the "slave qua slave," since "there is nothing common to the two parties." He then appears to contradict himself in maintaining that the slave, at least qua man, can "share in a system of law or be party to an agreement" and therefore friendship is possible between the two (1161b3-4). It is hard to see how this apparent inconsistency can be completely resolved but it is clear that, at least with regard to the moral life, there is nothing in common between the two. A host of scholars criticize Aristotle on this point. See, e.g., Barker, op. cit., p. 366; Brunt, op. cit., pp. 367-68; and Taylor, op. cit., p. 256.
ever, that once Aristotle allows for the natural slave’s ability at least “to apprehend the reason of another” (*P* 1254b21-23), the despotism essential to natural slavery cannot be maintained: “The same man, when guided by another with reason, is no longer beast-like: he can have some share of virtue; he can at least enjoy (or suffer) reason.” As such, the proper rule of master over slave is *regal* in nature and any inkling of despotism on the part of the former towards the latter is thus tyrannical and without justification.

This is a powerful objection and it threatens to undermine any interpretation that attempts to render Aristotle’s account of natural slavery at least prima facie consistent. Nonetheless, I believe that some of its force can be deflected. Granting the natural slave the capacity to engage in narrow deliberation may appear to be a step in the wrong direction, but this need not necessarily be so. As seen through the Humean lens that comprises much of Twentieth Century moral psychology, the ability to engage in instrumental reasoning, at least from the perspective of rationality, sufficiently warrants the ascription of moral personhood. This is a far cry from Aristotle. In a deep sense, while perhaps no longer “beast-like,” the natural slave remains *completely* devoid of moral personhood: “The good life is the chief end, both for the community as a whole and for each of us individually” (*P* 1278b 17). As noted, due to his inability to engage in broad deliberation, the natural slave is absolutely incapable of engaging in a life of virtue, that is, a “good life,” and, indeed, he exists way beyond the pale of Aristotle’s eudaimonistic axiology. As such, the very concept of intrinsic value can hold no meaning for him. Yet this is the very *raison d’être* of the ethics: to determine what is worthy of choice “for its own sake and for the sake of nothing else” (*NE* 1094a18-19).

More specifically, and contra Smith, regal rule, in its purest form, is “of the sort which is exercised over persons who are *similar* in birth to the ruler, and are *similarly free*” (*P* 1277b4; emphasis added). In short, it is the rule of one citizen over another—a rule that in turn presupposes that every “good citizen must possess the *knowledge* and *capacity* for ruling as well as being ruled” (*P* 1277b6; emphasis added). In other words, in order to be fully worthy of such rule, one must in some sense be able, through both “knowledge and capacity,” of being a *ruler*. The natural slave, of course, in the absence of any broad deliberative abilities, lacks both. What of children and women? They occupy a middle ground—neither full-fledged citizens nor natural slaves. Children—that is, male infants—presumably possess at least the *potential* to develop

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their broad deliberative capacities and thus as long as this potential remains actualizable, it would seem that one could, barring any obvious “slavishness” on the part of a particular child, make a prima facie case for their falling under regal rule. In the case of women, their problem is not so much one of unactualized potential as one of inconstant will. Women possess broad deliberative capacities “but in a form which remains inconclusive” (P 1260a12). Women, on this account of Aristotle, are best understood as “natural akratics”—they can grasp, in a sense, the essence of the good life, but they can never consistently translate such knowledge into action.\textsuperscript{37} Hence, they need to be under the guiding hand of a phronimos to insure that their interests are best served. On this view, then, the flame of broad deliberation, although quite pale and flickering, still burns brightly enough for children and women to count as quasi-moral persons. They are thus deserving of at least some measure of regal rule. Natural slaves, however, are non-moral persons, bereft of even an ember of broad deliberation. As such, there is nothing inherently unjust or inconsistent, at least from an Aristotelian perspective, of treating them more or less “despotically.”

A brief summary is in order. So far, I have argued that Aristotle attempts to justify the existence of natural slavery on the basis of the Mental Differences Argument. That is, those who are natural slaves deserve their lot in life because they lack the deliberative faculties requisite to being considered a full, or even a quasi-, moral person. I further claimed that Aristotle distinguished between two types of deliberation: narrow (a consideration of means to predetermined ends) and broad (a consideration not only of means but also what constitutes the end in the unqualified sense). For pragmatic and moral reasons, I maintained that Aristotle could not plausibly be interpreted as meaning that natural slaves are incapable of any deliberative behavior at all. Instead, I concluded that the only way for the theory of natural slavery as set down in the Politics to be at least prima facie viable required that natural slaves are those individuals who are completely bereft of broad deliberative capacities. As such, they would still be useful to the household, but they could not acquire practical wisdom, be virtuous, or participate in the Good Life. In short they would not be moral agents and therefore their enslavement would not run contrary to justice. I further argued that this account can withstand Smith’s penetrating criticism that, at worst, natural slaves deserve to be under regal, as opposed to despotic, rule. So far, however, the question of who, if anyone, actually is to count as a natural slave, remains open. It is addressed below.

\textsuperscript{37}This idea was pointed out to me by Steve Strange.
4. The Transparency Requirement and the Enslavement of “Barbarians”

Even granting that the interpretation so far is sound, a sticky problem of verification remains. By what “usable criteria,” to employ Clark’s phrase, are we to distinguish natural master from natural slave? This question clearly demands an answer. If not, the doctrine will be devoid of empirical content; fit for little more than being pilloried on the stage by a latter-day Aristophanes. In a nutshell, the extension of the concept of an Aristotelian natural slave seems hopelessly vague and opaque. Aristotle apparently admits as much when he opines that “it is not as easy to see the beauty of the soul as it is to see that of the body” (P 1254b37-38; emphasis added). In turn, such epistemic opacity runs contrary to the demands of justice—if we can never be sure who lacks these deliberative powers and who does not, then the process of enslavement is rendered unacceptably arbitrary.

What can account for a lack of broad deliberation? Aristotle appears to allow for three specific possibilities: (1) a naturally occurring incapacity; (2) a prolonged exposure, starting at birth, to extreme climactic conditions; (3) a “savage” moral upbringing. The first option provides us with the most straightforward, though not necessarily unproblematic, explanation. Recall here the metaphorical “eye” through which the “end in the unqualified sense” may be grasped. As noted above, the natural slave is devoid of such an eye, being, in this case, not unlike someone blind from birth. The resulting defect in his humanity is simply the direct byproduct of a naturally occurring incapacity.

Turning to the second possibility, in the Politics Aristotle claims that climatic conditions incidental to “geographical position” play an essential role in the development of proper political capacity, that is, the ability to rule and be ruled in a regal fashion (as instantiated in a polis):

The peoples of cold countries generally, and particularly those of Europe, are full of spirit, but deficient in skill and intelligence; and this is why they tend to remain comparatively free, but attain no political development and show no capacity for governing others. The peoples of Asia are endowed with skill and intelligence, but are deficient in spirit; and this is why they continue to be peoples of subjects and slaves. The Greek stock, intermediate in geographical position, unites the qualities of both sets of peoples. It possesses both spirit and intelligence: the one quality makes it continue free; the other enables it to attain the highest political development, and to show a capacity for governing every other people. (P 1327b23-34; emphasis added)

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38Clark, op. cit., p. 33.
39Williams observes that this admission is a “disaster” on Aristotle’s part, since physical differences themselves were negligible at best. See Williams, op. cit., p. 115.
Tabling for now Aristotle’s pernicious and rabid ethnocentrism, being raised in a physical environment subject to extremes of heat or cold may also account for the presence of truncated deliberative capacities.

Third, and more implicitly, the capacity for broad deliberation could be destroyed by coming of age in a “bestial” amoral milieu. As J.S. Mill later observed, “[c]apacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed, not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance.” To no surprise, such worries are even more well-founded in the case of Aristotle. Actions must all be done “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive . . . and this is characteristic of virtue” (NE 1106b15-16). Furthermore, the phronimos must intuit the incredibly intimate connection between virtue and eudaimonia—a tall order demanding years of habituation and intellectual training at the hands of morally enlightened role models and teachers. Consider, then, what might happen to an individual raised in particularly “brutish” circumstances (NE 1145a20). According to Aristotle, he or she would be beyond both “virtue and vice”; a thoroughly amoral creature wallowing in the depraved depths of near bestiality (NE 1145a21). Could such a creature ever be “morally rehabilitated”? Given the delicate intricacies involved in Aristotle’s conception of moral pedagogy, one would tend to think not—it is not particularly difficult to assume that at some point our capacity for broad deliberation would simply be snuffed out.

Let us return to the problem of epistemic opacity. If the arbitrariness of conventional slavery is to be avoided, then at least one of these possibilities must provide a fairly facile criterion for distinguishing between natural master and natural slave.

The least helpful option, at least in application, appears to be the first. Ceteris paribus, how is one to determine whether or not an individual suffers from a naturally occurring lack of broad deliberative capacity? Perhaps a series of tests could be employed, but devising and implementing such tests, with any degree of practical effectiveness, would appear hopeless. Notice, however, that the remaining two alternatives offer a better chance of success. Succinctly, each accounts for the occurrence of natural slavery through readily observable environmental conditions, in light of which worries about the presence or absence of an inborn capacity are rendered groundless. Thus armed, Aristotle has a


41By analogy, consider being born with 20/20 vision and then continuously staring into the sun. Blindness will inevitably result. Similarly, even if one is born with full capacity for broad deliberation, being raised in the midst of moral depravity will destroy it.
ready set of empirical criteria with which to determine who ought to be enslaved—namely, anyone who was raised in an excessively corrosive physical or moral environment.

For the moment, Aristotle’s notorious and apparently outrageous claim that all “barbarians” are natural slaves makes sense. Aristotle routinely describes non-Greeks as servile and slavish by nature (P 1252a34; 1252b5; 1285a16-18; 1327b23-34)—a state of affairs that presumably results from their overexposure to harsh climatic extremes in combination with being raised under morally subhuman conditions—that is, outside of a polis. Notice, then, that the problem of epistemic opacity is now confined to the case of native-born Greeks. Hence, only the enslavement of Greeks would be unacceptably arbitrary—a not unhappy result, at least from the perspective of many ancient Greeks themselves. Ethnocentrism was a pervasive cultural force in classical Greece, so much so that the only commonly recognized moral difficulties with slavery involved cases in which those to be enslaved were themselves ethnic Greeks.*^ Aristotle’s theory, so interpreted, is thus by no means radical. Indeed, since most slaves in classical Greece were of foreign origin, Aristotle’s doctrine of natural slavery does much more to support than to undermine the status quo.^4

Nonetheless, cracks in practical application, though not necessarily in theoretical viability, quickly appear. Even granting the ludicrousness of the second criterion, the “despotic” enslavement of Asiatic peoples appears particularly problematic. After all, such peoples are highly intelligent and, à la Smith, it would seem that they at worst qualify for regal rule. Due to their lack of thymos, they are not unlike women, that is, natural akratics, in that the absence of “right desire” dooms them to accept meekly their enforced servility. As such, and ironically enough, the blond-haired, blue-eyed inhabitant of Northern Europe (the source of most slaves in ancient Greece) appears to fill, much more closely, the above bill of sale. Perhaps, then, slave “hunting” should by and large be restricted to those from the North (P 1255b35).

Further difficulties are implied, however, by the application of the third criterion. The enslavement of Asians would still appear unwarranted—were the cultures of ancient Egypt and Persia so savage as to

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^4 For an interesting discussion of this point, as well as a general introduction to the widespread extent of ethnocentrism in classical Greece, see John E. Coleman, “Ancient Greek Ethnocentrism,” in J.E. Coleman and C.A. Walz, Greeks and Barbarians (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1997), pp. 175-220. See also, Brunt, op. cit., pp. 347-51.

^5 Prima facie, the doctrine, so understood, may require the gradual manumission of ethnic Greeks raised in Greece. Exceptions could still be made, e.g., penal servitude as the result of capture after participating in an unjust war.
destroy the broad deliberative capacities of every single subject? One would think not. Again, "slave-tests" might be employed, but this option circles back to the problem of epistemic opacity. The cultures of north-
ern Europe and those surrounding the Black Sea may perhaps be bereft of any civilizing influences (NE 1148b15), but now a more daunting dif-
ficulty arises: hereditary slavery would have little or no theoretical justi-
ification. After all, environmental factors are primarily responsible for the lack of broad deliberative capacities amongst non-Greeks. Neutral-
izing such elements, for example, by being raised in a well run house-
hold that in turn comprises part of a well run polis, would seem to insure that while adults captured abroad may be enslaved, their children ought not to be. It is here that Smith’s criticism really comes into play. It is not recently enslaved adult northern Europeans who are deserving of “regal” rule, but the children of such individuals who are born into the polis. Natural slavery would appear to be at most a uni-generational phenome-
non. Again, issues of practical applicability need not impugn theoretical viability. The aforementioned difficulties in application do not imply that Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery theory is somehow inconsistent, or for that matter, incoherent. In short, its justificatory collapse must come from without, not from within.

5. Liberalism and the Deflation of Moral Personhood

Philosophical theories can be successfully challenged in a number of ways. One can expose crippling internal inconsistencies or usher forth potentially devastating counterexamples. A simpler, more elegant strat-
egy often lies in a deflationary move, whereby central concepts of the theory under attack are robbed of much, if not most, of their philosop-
ical force. Take Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery—it is in many ways a subtheory of his overall conception of moral personhood. Natural slaves lack the requisite deliberative capacities to count as moral per-
sons. Radically deflate the latter notion and the former will likewise evaporate. In turn, Aristotle’s conception of moral personhood is itself intimately intertwined with a eudaimonistic teleology that places an

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44Smith, of course, argues that it is the adults themselves who, while deserving of despotic rule in the “wild” actually ought to be ruled regally upon exposure to civiliza-
tion. Hence, slaves only deserve to be treated as such before they have actually been en-

45Perhaps one could intentionally raise the children of natural slaves in such harsh moral environments so as to replicate the slavish characteristics of their parents. But such “forced conventionalism” obviously raises many more moral difficulties than it solves.
overarching emphasis on full participation in the polis as the defining mark of humanity.

Deep down, a very basic question is being begged: why is such a robust conception of moral agency a necessary condition for full membership in an ethical/political community? Aristotle's answer, of course, comes up short—particularly with the advent of classical liberalism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. The underlying idea that the community is some sort of metaphysical vehicle through which our humanity is realized is summarily rejected. In its stead, the much less romantic view, that political society is little more than an artificial construct, created by and for individual men in order to better serve their interests, ultimately triumphs. In the process, Aristotle's commitment to a supposed natural social hierarchy, characterized by radical moral inequality in the form of natural masters and natural slaves, is exposed as little more than pedantic bunk and cultural prejudice. The success of this move, however, demands that the conceptual content of what it is to be a moral person be reduced to a bare minimum. In short, that moral agency requires minimal rather than maximal deliberative powers and therefore no sane healthy adult is an Aristotelian natural slave.

This deflationary approach, as the hallmark of the classical liberal tradition, comes into its own with Hobbes. In Leviathan, Hobbes heaps copious amounts of scorn on the Aristotelian claim that men are somehow unequal by nature:

The question who is the better man, has no place in the condition of meer nature; where all men are equall. The inequality that now is, has bin introduced by the Lawes civill. I know that Aristotle in the first booke of his Politiques, for a foundation of his doctrine, maketh men by Nature, some more worthy to Command, meaning the wiser sort (such as he thought himself to be for his Philosophy;) others to Serve, (meaning those that had strong bodies, but were not Philosophers as he;) as if Master and Servant were not introduced by consent of men but by difference of Wit.46

Indeed, for Hobbes, it is a necessary precondition for society "That every man acknowledge the other for his Equall by Nature."47 The purported "difference of Wit" upon which Aristotle bases his entire doctrine of natural slavery is illusory; it involves mistaking an artificial, socially constructed hierarchy for a naturally occurring phenomenon. Slavery results from societal convention, the "consent of men," and cannot be justified by appealing to a purported defect in the human natures of those who are enslaved. All men (with the notable exception of "natural

47Ibid.; author's emphasis.
Deliberation and Natural Slavery

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fooles") possess the requisite amount of reason to count as moral persons. The Laws of Nature, Hobbes writes, are available to those of even the “meanest capacity”; that is, there is a bare modicum of reasoning ability available to all men such that each has equal intellectual access to the “rules of civil life” and therefore each is equal to the other in at least this sense. No one is by nature any better or any worse than anyone else when it comes to determining what ought and what ought not be done.

Specifically, as opposed to Aristotle’s “thick” notion of moral personhood, Hobbes’s is decidedly “thin.” His moral psychology is such that only the most meager of mental assets are necessary for membership in one’s moral and political community. The difference between the two is most strikingly brought forth when one considers Hobbes’s conceptual analysis of deliberation. In his hands, the concept is whittled down to stand for nothing more than “the whole summe of Desires, Aversions, Hopes and Fears” that bear on a proposed course of action. To deliberate well simply means to be able to estimate, with a high degree of accuracy, the probable consequences of one’s actions—gone is any talk of “ends in the unqualified sense” and “eudaimonia.” Indeed, there is no longer a “Finus ultimus” for the man of practical wisdom to grasp. Aristotle’s hallowed conception of deliberation is thus deflated to such an extent that even the feeblest exemplars of the species are quite capable of engaging in such activity.

Hobbes’s attack on Aristotle is rightly viewed as the cornerstone of “modern democratic theory” in that the requirements for moral personhood and citizenship are minimal at most. Men are by nature equal and such equality provides the foundation for the universal ascription of moral and political rights. It is a path first embarked upon by Hobbes and subsequently followed by all of modern liberalism’s “heavy hitters” (each with their own permutations, of course) including Pufendorf, Locke, Rousseau, Hume, Smith, Kant, and Mill. None of these philosophers found Aristotle’s arguments for natural slavery in the least persua-

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49 Kronman, op. cit., p. 170. See also pp. 168-71, passim.
50 Hobbes, op. cit., p. 129.
53 Kronman, op. cit., p. 171.
In the wake of classical liberalism, a capacity for broad deliberation is simply not a necessary condition for moral personhood—natural slaves do not, and essentially cannot, exist.

6. Conclusion

In sum, an attempt has been made to provide the most plausible interpretation of Aristotle’s doctrine of natural slavery—that natural slaves are those who lack, by nature, the capacity to engage in broad deliberation. This reading avoids many of the common missteps attributed to Aristotle concerning this issue, and it is also able to withstand some of the most penetrating criticisms thereof. In turn, an argument was further wrought to show that the transparency requirement, while incapable of being satisfied by ethnic Greeks, does come into play when Aristotle routinely asserts that all “barbarians” are natural slaves. While perhaps limited in practical application, the result is not necessarily an unhappy one from the perspective of the typical ancient Greek slave owner. Most slaves in classical Greece were of foreign origin and therefore Aristotle’s doctrine, so interpreted, goes a long way towards supporting the status quo. Aristotle’s theory is thus by no means either revolutionary or reformist; indeed, it is in many ways quite reactionary. Importantly, it has been maintained that while morally repugnant, Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery does not suffer from any major internal inconsistencies. Instead, its demise must come from without, specifically with the advent of classical liberalism and the deflationary conception of moral personhood thereby embraced. Only then does the Aristotelian concept of a natural slave find its well-deserved place atop the philosophical scrap heap.55

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