Rethinking Natural Slavery in Aristotle

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ABSTRACT

Aristotle's conception of the natural slave remains a contentious issue. I challenge two common interpretations that misrepresent his account. The first holds that natural slaves share the same human nature as free men, with their deficiency arising from their actions and habituation. The second sees the natural slave as a subhuman, closer to animals, with an innate and ineliminable rational defect. I reject both views and argue that Aristotle sees the natural slave as a legitimate human being but with a rational deficiency. Furthermore, I contend that this deficiency is more severe than some scholars acknowledge, particularly those who take Aristotle as identifying non-Greeks with natural slaves and assess their cognitive abilities on the basis of the intellectual achievements of non-Greeks.

Aristotle argues that certain people can be justly enslaved on the basis of their nature, a position he explicitly defends in his discussion of natural slavery in *Politics* I. However, the interpretation of the 'nature' attributed to the slave is a subject of debate. It is widely believed that Aristotle justifies the exclusion of the natural slave from the political and good life on the basis of their necessary and ineliminable defective nature. Among these scholars, some view the slave as a legitimate human being, while others argue that Aristotle regards the slave as subhuman, akin to animals. A minority of scholars, however, challenge this standard interpretation, claiming that the slave is a legitimate human being with the same natural capacities as free citizens at birth.[1] They argue that what qualifies a person as a natural slave is not an innate defect, but rather their later actions and habituation. According to this view, the nature of the slave is indeed reversible.

In this paper, I will critically evaluate and reject two contrasting views: the idea that the natural slave is subhuman with an irreversible defective nature, and the claim that the natural slave is

1 Despite nuances in their views, proponents of the first interpretation include Lear (1988), Schofield (1990, 1999), Garnsey (1996), Kraut (2002), Heath (2008), Karbowski (2012), Pellegrin (2013), Kamtekar (2016), Leunissen (2017), and Anagnostopoulos (2018). For the second interpretation, see Frank (2004) and Bodéüs (2009), both of whom we will examine in more detail below.

a legitimate human with a reversible nature. Instead, I will argue that Aristotle sees the slave as a legitimate human being, but one who possesses an inherent and irreversible deficiency.

Although a significant part of *Pol.* I is dedicated to the topic of slavery, Aristotle's primary interest is not in slavery itself. Rather, his discussion of slavery appears incidental to his main focus: the diversity of political rulership.[2] He begins *Pol.* I.1 by stating that the political state, which is the highest form of association, also aims at the highest good (*Pol.* I.1 1252a4–6). Immediately after, he asserts that those who believe the roles of the statesman, a royal ruler, the head of an estate, and the master of a family are the same are mistaken; they assume the difference is only one of scale, rather than of kind (*Pol.* I.1 1252a7–10). Thus, Aristotle's critique of the Platonic notion of unified rulership is what drives his inquiry from the very beginning.[3] Aristotle refers to this idea of unified rulership at two other key points in *Pol.* I. The second reference occurs, unsurprisingly, just before he begins his discussion of natural slavery at the end of *Pol.* I.3 1253b16–20. Then, after completing his analysis of natural slavery in Chapter 6, he concludes by stating that "it is also evident from the foregoing that the rule of a master is not the same as the rule of a statesman and that the other kinds of rule are not all the same as one another, though some people say they are" (*Pol.* I.7 1255b16–19).[4] Thus, the discussion of slavery seems to be part of a larger project aimed at refuting both the Platonic view and the belief, held by many, that all power is naturally despotic (*Pol.* VII.2 1324b32). Aristotle's ultimate aim appears to be advancing one of his key political ideas: the concept of political rule, where a free man governs over other free and equal citizens (*Pol.* III.4 1277b7).[5]

Since Aristotle is not primarily concerned with the phenomenon of slavery as such and offers rather a sketchy theory as a way to explore and understand different forms of rule, his account of natural slavery contains certain gaps and apparent inconsistencies. For example, as Pierre Pellegrin points out, although Aristotle suggests in his biological works that some animals possess foresight and a form of practical wisdom and hence "what goes for animals certainly goes for slaves", Aristotle does not address it in his account of natural slavery (Pellegrin 2013, 112). Regarding the incoherent claims, Wayne Ambler observes that

2 On this point, I agree with Schofield (1990, passim), Nichols (1991), Heath (2008, 244), and Pellegrin (2013, 93).

3 A passage in the *Statesman* seems to be Aristotle's target: "Then shall we posit the statesman and king and slave-master, and the manager of a household as well, as one thing, when we refer to them by all these names, or are we to say that they are as many sorts of expertise as the names we use to refer to them?" (*Statesman*, 258e7-11, tr. Rowe). For a comprehensive comparison and analysis of Aristotle's *Politics* and Plato's *Statesman*, see Depew (2019).

4 Unless stated otherwise, all the *Pol.* quotes are by Reeve, those from *Eth. Nic.* by Irwin, and those from *Eth. Eud.* by Inwood and Woolf, with occasional modifications.

5 Cf. Ober (2001) and Leunissen (2017), who seem to believe that Aristotle's purpose is to rationalize actual slavery. See Ambler (1987), who challenges this view.

Aristotle seems to suggest not only that the strict standards for natural slavery are rarely or never met in actual practice but also that they are incoherent even in speech. They seem to require that the slave be human, but that he be as far from his master as are the beasts; that he have no craft but that he be useful; that he be as if a natural part of his master but that he be separable from his master" (Ambler 1987, 400).[6] Coupled with Aristotle's dense and sometimes ambiguous philosophical style, these gaps and inconsistencies have made the topic of slavery difficult to interpret. There is no scholarly consensus on how Aristotle's account should be understood, and its ethical and political implications remain highly contested.

In this paper, I aim to explore how we should interpret the 'nature' of the slave as outlined by Aristotle in *Pol.* I. I believe that without a clear and precise understanding of what Aristotle's concept of natural slavery entails, we may be drawn to prevailing interpretations that seek to either exonerate or condemn him on this ethically troubling issue, often on the basis of a biased reading. To avoid such pitfalls, this paper will challenge two leading interpretations in order to offer a more compelling account through a close examination of Aristotle's text. The primary aim of this paper is critical: to engage with prominent interpretations that misrepresent Aristotle's account. By challenging and deconstructing these arguments, I aim to build a clearer understanding of Aristotle's perspective on natural slavery.

In what follows, I will examine and evaluate two influential interpretive approaches to Aristotle's conception of natural slavery. Both approaches have some merit, yet neither reflects Aristotle's account accurately. The first approach views the natural slave as a human being who is 'according to nature' (*kata phusin*), with a rational deficiency that can be overcome. According to this interpretation, the slave is not born with a permanent impairment; instead, their rational deficiency results from their actions and subsequent habituation. Thus, the slave is seen as not having an immutable nature. The second approach interprets the natural slave as subhuman, with an inherent ineliminable deficiency. Here, the slave is considered a deformed being, more akin to animals than to humans, and is thus seen as 'against nature' (*para phusin*). I will argue that while these interpretations are not entirely wrong, neither provides an accurate understanding of Aristotle's view of the natural slave.

Instead, I will propose that the natural slave is a legitimate human being and 'according to nature' but possesses an inherent and ineliminable rational deficiency. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that this rational deficiency is more severe than some scholars who interpret Aristotle as equating non-Greeks with natural slaves have suggested. I will argue that, because Aristotle does not categorise non-Greeks – either categorically or for the most part – as natural slaves, it is unjustified to assess the cognitive

6 See also Schofield (1990), Smith (1991), and Garnsey (1996).

capabilities of natural slaves on the basis of the cultural and intellectual achievements of non-Greeks. I will show that while the natural slave is incapable of acquiring advanced intelligence and skills, he is still rational enough to live independently without constant supervision from a master. However, whether with or without a master, the slave will never be able to attain happiness or lead a good life.

I will present and assess the first interpretation in Section 1, the second in Section 2, and finally, in Section 3, I will offer my own interpretation, along with a discussion of the extent of the natural slave's rational deficiency.

1. THE NATURAL SLAVE AS HUMAN WITH ELIMINABLE WEAKNESSES

In this section, I will begin by briefly summarising the views of Jill Frank and Richard Bodéüs, followed by a joint evaluation of their positions.

In her work *Citizens, Slaves, and Foreigners:* Aristotle on Human Nature, Jill Frank asserts that "there is nothing immutable that singles out any person as a slave". Instead, she argues that "the slave identity... is determined by activity" (Frank 2004, 95). According to Frank, a natural slave possesses the same first-level capacity for *logos* (reason) as everyone else, but what he lacks is a second-level capacity.[7] She explains that "the one who possesses the capacity for *logos* but consistently does not use it, engaging instead in activity that falls short of *prohairetic* activity, is a natural slave" (*Ibid.*, 96). Thus, the slave's deficiency is not due to an innate limitation in his capacity for *logos*, but rather "his failure to actualize the first-level capacity for *logos* he possesses" (*Ibid.*, 96).

According to this interpretation, the slave does not have an immutable nature and is, in fact, capable of ceasing to be a slave. Frank argues that Aristotle's recommendation for slave owners to offer the promise of freedom to their slaves suggests that slaves have the potential to stop being slaves (*Ibid.*, 95). This view alludes to an important passage in *Pol.* VII.10. There Aristotle argues that in the ideal state, it is preferable for farmers to be slaves selected from heterogeneous tribes or from those lacking a spirited nature. As a second-best option, he suggests they could be barbarians from neighbouring regions (*Pol.* VII.10 1330a25–32).

Aristotle further notes that it benefits slave owners to hold the prospect of freedom as an incentive for all slaves (*Pol.* VII.10 1330a32–33). Frank argues that the promise of freedom mentioned in this passage is significant. She states, "Insofar as... a slave can develop

7 According to *De an.* II.5 417a22ff., at the first level of potentiality, "something is a knower in the way in which we might say that a human knows because humans belong to the class of knowers" (417a23–24). He is a potential knower at the first level "because his genus and matter are of a certain sort" (a27). At a second level of potentiality – which is equivalent to first-level actuality – "we say directly that the one who has grammatical knowledge knows" (a25–26). The transition from potentially knowing to coming to be an actual knower requires alteration. To be an actual knower becomes possible by "being altered through learning, with frequent changes from a contrary state" (a31–32) (*De an.* transl. Shields).

sufficiently good habits and a sufficient measure of moderation to someday deserve his freedom… and insofar as, to Aristotle, there can be no moderation without practical wisdom, indeed no virtue without practical wisdom, and vice versa (*NE* 1144b30–33), attributing to natural slaves even a 'modicum of virtue' is, *eo ipso*, to attribute to them practical wisdom and, thereby, to call into question the immutability of their slavery" (Frank 2004, 94–96).

Richard Bodéüs presents a similar interpretation of the natural slave in his work *On the Natural Foundations of Right and Aristotelian Philosophy*. He asserts that "the servile soul is not… a soul deprived of reason at birth; but it is probably not a soul that natural growth has deprived of reason either. On the contrary, the slave was born, like every infant, without reason, and, like every infant, he also, according to all appearances, naturally acquires reason with age" (Bodéüs 2009, 89).

In his analysis, Bodéüs notably refrains from using the term 'natural slave', instead frequently referring to 'a servile soul'. Similarly, he opts for the term 'weakness' when discussing the slave's reason rather than using 'defect', 'deformity', or 'impairment'.

Regarding Aristotle's definition that the slave is "he who participates in reason to the extent that he apprehends but does not possess it" (*Pol.* I.6 1254b22–3), Bodéüs acknowledges that this statement confirms the weakness of the slave's reason. However, he contends that "the fact that this weakness belongs to reason proves, paradoxically, that it is not, for Aristotle, a weakness of birth, nor even a natural weakness in the sense that we understand it", because "for Aristotle, reason is a principle that is not given at birth but is acquired naturally with age" (Bodéüs 2009, 89). To support this claim, he cites a passage from the *Eth. Eud.*, where Aristotle states that "reason is one of the natural starting points, in that it will be present so long as one's development is allowed to take place and is not stunted" (Eth. Eud. II.8 1224b29–31). He also references Aristotle's remark at the end of *Pol.* I.13 as evidence of the rational capacity of the slave: "Those who deny reason to slaves, and bid one use orders only, are wrong in what they say; for slaves ought to be admonished more than children" (*Pol.* I.13 1260b5–7). From these passages, Bodéüs infers that "for the slave, reason is not absent but deprived of all that age can naturally provide. Briefly, the servile soul is characterized not by a natural defect but by the defect of all that is not simply natural" (Bodéüs 2009, 89).

Thus, Bodéüs aligns with Frank in asserting that the rational deficiency of the slave does not pertain to a first-level capacity but rather results from subsequent causes. In terms of his capacity for reason, the slave is not fundamentally different from any other infant at birth. In a significant and revealing statement, Bodéüs writes, "if we have understood properly, on the whole he [the natural slave] is the only man in the state of nature in society – a man who reasons and understands what is said to him and carries out his orders well, but not more than this, i.e., *he is without this something*

'more' that is provided by education and which makes one free... it is the 'acquired' more than 'the natural' that distinguishes individuals from each other" (*Ibid.*, 90, my emphasis). Therefore, what a servile soul lacks is not an inborn deficiency or incapacity, but rather the absence of those attributes that are developed through later education or habituation. Bodéüs further states that if the slave lacks a deliberative capacity or the ability for self-determination, it is because he lacks a goal in life, which is not solely an intellectual capacity. Instead, "it consists effectively in having the power to establish desires only in the immediate, and this betrays the weakness or powerlessness of an education that should fix desire upon a representation of a good to pursue in the future" (*Ibid.*, 91).

Both Frank and Bodéüs seem to uphold the following two interconnected claims: first, the natural slave is a human being who is endowed with the first-level capacity for *logos* at birth; second, because the deficiency of the slave arises from later habituation and education, the nature of the slave is not immutable.

In what follows, I will contend that the interpretation offered by Frank and Bodéüs is indefensible for several reasons. However, before addressing the reasons that challenge this interpretation, it is essential to acknowledge that their assertion regarding the humanity of the natural slave is undoubtedly correct. I will focus extensively on the debate surrounding the human-subhuman nature of the slave in the subsequent sections and provide arguments in favour of the 'humanity' of the slave. Therefore, it is sufficient to note here that Aristotle consistently emphasises that the natural slave is a human being (*Pol.* I.4 1254a14–16; I.13 1259b27; *Eth. Nic.* VIII.11 1161b5–6) and hence, this aspect of Frank's and Bodéüs' interpretation is indeed correct.

However, while I concur with both writers that Aristotle regards the slave as a human being with some degree of participation in reason, I find their additional claim that the rational deficiency of the slave is not congenital but instead results from their actions or habituation to be mistaken.

In *Pol.* I Aristotle provides two definitions of the natural slave.[8] The preliminary definition is found in *Pol.* I.4, and it states

> [First Account:]
> For anyone who, despite being human, is by nature not his own but someone else's is a natural slave. And he is someone else's when, despite being human, he is an article of property; and an article of property is a tool for action that is separate from its owner. (*Pol.* I.4 1254a14–17)

After presenting this preliminary account, Aristotle proceeds in Chapter 5 to explore whether anyone who fits that definition actually exists (*Pol.* I.5 1254a17–18). He subsequently states that

8 We will address the second definition in the next section and refer to both definitions throughout the paper. For the methodological aspects of *Pol.* I.4–7, with a focus on the definitions of the natural slave, see Karbowski (2013).

"it is not difficult either to determine the answer by theory or to learn it empirically. For ruling and being ruled are not only necessary, they are also beneficial, and some things are marked out right from birth (ἐκ γενετῆς), some suited to rule and others to being ruled" (*Pol.* I.5 1254a21–24). Aristotle then illustrates this claim regarding things that are "marked out from birth to rule and to be ruled" by examining various types of things, including the natural slave and the master. The overall purpose of appealing to this argument about natural rulers and subjects, as illustrated through various entities such as the body and soul, man and beast, male and female, is to draw a conclusion about the relationship between master and slave. This suggests that the natural slave is destined to be a subject as a result of his specific nature 'from birth', indicating that any capacities or incapacities attributed to the slave are, for the most part, congenital.[9]

Aristotle makes it very clear that slaves cannot share in happiness or in a life characterised by choice or *prohairetic* activity. In a well-known passage, he states that the state exists not for the sake of life only "but rather for the sake of living well, since otherwise there could be a city-state of slaves or animals, whereas in fact there is not, because these share neither in happiness nor in a life guided by deliberate choice" (*Pol.* III.9 1280a32–34).[10]

Frank, for instance, argues that the slave's failure to engage in *prohairetic* activity is a matter of choice rather than a reflection of his necessary and immutable nature. However, this passage indicates that Aristotle categorises the slave alongside animals in terms of their incapacity to form a state, which challenges this interpretation. Both non-human animals and natural slaves, by their very nature, are incapable of forming states because they cannot make deliberative choices or share in happiness. Thus, I interpret this passage as suggesting that being a natural slave is a given and irreversible condition.

Moreover, this interpretation appears to conflate the phenomenon of natural slavery with that of 'slavish' human beings who need not be natural slaves. Bodéüs' cautious language which refers to natural slaves as human beings with a 'servile or weak soul' and a 'weak reason' is particularly revealing. However, there are numerous passages both in and outside *Politics* where Aristotle identifies the character or behaviours of

9 See Pellegrin (2013, 102), who argues that the traits qualifying an individual for slavery are natural and not circumstantial, as natural slaves are so 'from birth' and not as a result of events such as capture or debt. See also Anagnostopoulos (2018, 181–182) in support of this conclusion.

10 See also *Eth. Eud.* II.10 1226b21–22: "therefore choice is not present in all other animals, nor in a human of every age, nor in a human of every condition"; *Eth. Nic.* X.6 1177a8–9: "No one thinks of a slave as having a share in happiness, unless he has also a share in life." Cf. *Pol.* VII.12 1331b39–42: "Now everyone aims at living well and happiness is clear, but some are capable of these things whereas others are not, because of some misfortune or their nature." Kraut (1997, 124) thinks that "here Aristotle has in mind slaves and women, whose reason is so defective that they cannot fully actualize the virtues".

individuals as 'servile' or 'slavish' without suggesting that they are natural slaves (*Pol.* III.11 1282a16–17, V.11 VII.17 1313b9, 1336b11–12; *Eth. Nic.* I.4 1095b18–20, III.11 1118b20–21, IV.4 1124b31, VII.9 1125a2, IV.5 1126a78, IV.8 1128a20–22; *Eth. Eud.* I.15 1215b34-I.15 1216a1, III.2 1231b9–20; *Rhet.* II.9 1387b15–17). Bodéüs might support his view by arguing that the slave "does not have a personal goal and is satisfied with serving the goals of others" (Bodéüs 2009, 93) and that "he does not have any goals in life except to survive" (*Ibid.*, 96). However, Aristotle frequently criticises the majority of human beings for failing to organise their lives around any goals, drifting through life without a definite purpose, and merely living for the sake of survival, without implying that these individuals are natural slaves (*Eth. Nic.* I.4 1095a14–22; *Protr.* 46, 22–26). Thus, this interpretation seems to fail to distinguish between natural slaves and 'slavish' human beings who need not be slaves.

Finally, many readers find Aristotle's recommendation to slave owners to offer freedom as a reward puzzling. Consequently, Frank understandably infers that the promise of freedom indicates the slave's capacity to acquire virtue and cease being a slave. She believes this suggests that the deficiency of the slave is neither necessary nor ultimately ineliminable.

Now, Aristotle posits that sharing a household with a master is mutually beneficial for both the slave and the master. Although the advantage and benefit to the slave in this relationship are, in fact, 'incidental' (*Pol.* III.6 1278b32–33), it is generally more advantageous for the slave to share the life of a free man capable of 'rational foresight' (*Pol.* I.2 1252a31) and deliberation than to live independently. Indeed, Aristotle justifies the enslavement of a natural slave on the basis of this mutual benefit and advantage. Thus, commentators question why, if enslavement is better and more beneficial for the slave than freedom, Aristotle recommends the promise of freedom as a reward.

Some discussion regarding this point is found in the *Economics*, where it states that "all [slaves] ought to have a definite end in view; for it is just and advantageous to offer slaves their freedom as a prize, for they are willing to work when a reward is set before them and a limit of time is defined" (*Oec.* I.5 1344b15–17, tr. Forster). The author of the *Economics* seems to advocate offering freedom as a reward after a specified period as a serious and sincere promise rather than a deceitful one (Cf. Schofield 1990, 22, n.45). This is regarded as both just and advantageous.[11] As I will revisit this point in the final section, it suffices for now to state that the natural slave can indeed live and survive independently without the care and direction of a master. They are not akin to children or 'helpless mental invalids' (Kraut 2002, 284) who require constant supervision. The reason why it is preferable for them to share a household is to benefit from the *phronêsis* of a master and to partake

11 Aristotle granted freedom to his slaves in his will, as reported by Diogenes Laertius (v 14–15). For more on freed slaves and Aristotle's will, see Heath (2008, 267 ff.).

in a degree of virtue that they could not achieve independently.[12] Therefore, Frank is mistaken in believing that the promise of freedom calls into question the immutability of their slavery.[13]

To conclude, while this interpretation of natural slavery is partially correct in asserting that, for Aristotle, natural slaves are human beings who share in reason, it goes astray in characterising the rational deficiency of the slave as an effect of later causes such as action and habituation. Therefore, when Bodéüs states that the natural slave does not possess an image of any form of good and does not desire it as their own good (Bodéüs 2009, 90), this should be understood as a consequence of a necessary inborn deficiency related to the first- level capacity, rather than as something contingent upon later causes, as both Bodéüs and Frank suggest.

2. THE NATURAL SLAVE AS SUBHUMAN WITH INELIMINABLE DEFORMITY

According to the second line of interpretation we will explore, the natural slave is viewed as a defective and degenerate subhuman, whose deficiency in rationality is both inescapable and ineliminable. We will examine Peter Garnsey's account in his work, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*, where he interprets the natural slave as being akin to bestial animals.[14]

Garnsey argues that in both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, slaves are portrayed as subhuman, though in different ways (Garnsey 1996, 124). He suggests that when Aristotle wrote the *Eth. Nic.*, he had not yet formulated the concept of natural slavery. However, this does not imply that Aristotle did not consider some human beings to be subhuman or aligned with beasts. Garnsey specifically refers to *Eth. Nic.* VII.6, where madmen are compared to brute animals on the grounds that both are "falling away from nature" (*Eth. Nic.* VII.6 1149b34–6). Garnsey raises the question: "Are natural slaves assimilable to the category of 'bestial' people introduced in the Ethics? These people are described as diseased, physically underdeveloped, or 'degenerate'. They are said to be individuals and rare, and though Aristotle claims that they are mainly barbarians, he does not go on to suggest that they are natural slaves" (Garnsey 1996, 113). He believes Aristotle did not refer to natural slaves here because he had not yet developed the

12 See Deslauriers (2003, 216), who argues that "natural subjects acquire virtue by borrowing the *phronêsis* of a natural ruler."

13 The fact that a slave can partake in a limited degree of virtue does not imply the potential for a fundamental transformation into a fully capable human being. That said, this does not also mean that the offspring of slaves will necessarily be natural slaves. Exposed to the Greek way of life and favourable environmental conditions, the children of slaves might become capable human beings. For more on the theory of the effects of climate, see Section 3.

14 While there are others who have provided similar interpretations, I prefer to focus on Garnsey because his account offers a more complete orthodox reading that serves our purposes better. Other scholars have proposed more nuanced perspectives. See e.g. Lear (1988, 199) and Schofield (1999, 139), who argue that the natural slave is subhuman.

concept of natural slavery fully. Otherwise, Aristotle "missed an opportunity of introducing natural slaves in this context in the Ethics" (*Ibid.*, 114). Garnsey maintains that in the Eth. Nic., Aristotle already regarded the humanity of the slave as inferior, citing Aristotle's statement that "insofar as he is a slave… there is no friendship with him. But there is friendship with him insofar as he is a human being" (*Eth. Nic.* VII.13 1161b5–6) to imply that "'slavery as such' is less than human condition" (Garnsey 1996, 110).[15]

Regarding the *Politics*, Garnsey argues that Aristotle was keen to demonstrate that slavery is natural and that it is beneficial and good for certain individuals to live in this way.

However, Garnsey contends that, while Aristotle attempted to avoid depicting the natural slave with the 'degenerate' subhumanity seen in the bestial people of the Ethics, in the *Politics* "the distinctions between human and animal, and slave and animal, do not coincide. It turns out that in the *Politics* the line between human and animal is usually firmly drawn, but that between slaves and animals is fuzzy" (*Ibid.*, 111). Garnsey supports this by referring to several passages where Aristotle compares or associates slaves with animals. For example, he cites passages where Aristotle states that "the usefulness of slaves diverges little from that of the animals; bodily service for the necessities of life is forthcoming from both" (*Pol.* I.5 1254b24–25) and that "the best that slaves or animals can expect is security" (*Pol.* I.2 1252a30–31; Garnsey 1996, 113).

From these passages, Garnsey concludes that the distinction between slaves and animals is not as firmly defined as that between animals and human beings, suggesting that slavery represents a subhuman condition (*Ibid.*,113). He writes, "Whatever Aristotle's overall intention, the net result of his analysis is that there is very little humanity in his natural slave" (*Ibid.*, 124). Presumably, Garnsey believes Aristotle's intent was not benign, as evidenced by the closing remarks in his book:

> [S]lavery was natural, beneficial, and useful to both sides of the master/slave relationship, and a necessity for the attainment of the good life. This was a sophisticated version of the popular ideology according to which slaves were as a race degenerate and vicious and therefore fit for subjection (Garnsey 1996, 239).

This interpretation, which treats the natural slave as subhuman and aligns them with bestial animals, is unconvincing for several important reasons. First and foremost, the humanity of the slave, as sharing the same species form as the other free members of the household, is embedded in the very definition of the natural slave. Aristotle emphasises this point repeatedly in *Pol.* I, where he provides an official and comprehensive account of natural slavery. In his initial definition of the natural slave at *Pol.* I.4 1254a12–16, which we quoted earlier, Aristotle refers to the slave as a human

15 Cf. Broadie's commentary on *Eth. Nic.* VII.13 1161b6–7 in (2002, 416).

being (*anthrôpos*) three times. Should we accept Garnsey's implication that Aristotle might have had some ulterior motive or hidden intention in treating the slave as human, or should we take Aristotle at his word?

A discussion on whether Aristotle's account is driven by a certain ideology or if false consciousness plays a role in his positive view of slavery is beyond the scope of this paper.[16] However, I see no compelling reason to doubt Aristotle's portrayal of the slave as a human being, as this notion is clearly interwoven throughout every aspect of his account in the central chapters on slavery. For instance, in *Pol.* I.13, where Aristotle discusses the virtues of the members of the household, he begins by raising a puzzle about the status of the slave. He argues that if the slave can possess virtues such as courage and justice, then it raises the question of how they differ from free men. But "if they do not, that is absurd (*atopon*), since slaves are human and have a share in reason" (*Pol.* I.13 1259b27–28). He then goes on to identify the virtues appropriate to the slave, as well as to the woman and the child, in accordance with their respective roles and functions.

Similarly, Garnsey is mistaken in considering slaves as being 'against nature' (*para phusin*). He links the slave with 'mad' and 'diseased' individuals who 'fall from nature' and who, as he cites from *Phys.* II.8 199a33ff, are 'failures' or 'monsters' and therefore 'against nature' (*para phusin*). According to Aristotle's teleological or goal-directed conception of nature, it is true that while nature typically aims to achieve its goal and produce complete (*teleios*) specimens, it can sometimes err and fail to reach that goal. When nature fails, Aristotle offers two possible explanations. Either nature cannot "master the matter in the proper way" (cf. *De gener. animal.* IV.4 770b9–27), or some competing natural process interferes with its course (cf. *Phys.* II.8 199b23–26). When this happens, nature may produce deformed or defective specimens (see also *De an.* III.9 432b21–23).[17] However, Aristotle does not characterise the slave as a deformed or defective being that is contrary to nature (*para phusin*) in this sense. In the absence of any such characterisation, to interpret the slave as someone who 'falls from nature' with 'little humanity' is to stretch the text unjustifiably.[18]

16 Newman (1887) and Baker (1973) viewed Aristotle more as a reformer than a defender of actual slavery. For a more recent and comprehensive discussion, see Schofield (1990), who argues that Aristotle's theory does not fully align with the requirements of an ideology. Cf. Ward (2009, 78–79) and Kamtekar (2016 *passim*). See also Pellegrin (2013, 92–93), who, in the light of Schofield (1990), revises his earlier view of Aristotle's position as ideological in the Marxist sense.

17 Aristotle often emphasises that what happens according to nature does so 'always or for the most part' (*Phys.* II.8 199b15–18; *PA* III.2 663b28–9; *De gener. animal.* I.19 727b29–30) and 'always if there is no impediment' (*Phys.* II.8 199b23–6).

18 Witt (1998, 129–30) appears to support the view that women have a compromised form, stating that "there is something wrong with their forms" and suggesting that their form is defective. Cf. Henry (2007) and Gelber (2017) for contrasting interpretations. See also Karbowski (2012, 335–341) for a discussion of allegedly "systematically" defective

Let us examine the claim that the distinction between animals and slaves is insufficiently clear, suggesting that Aristotle treats slaves on a similar level to animals. To address this claim, we must turn to Aristotle's second and more refined definition of the slave in *Pol.* I.5:

> [Second Account:]
> For he who can belong to someone else (and that is why he actually does belong to someone else), and he who shares in reason to the extent of apprehending it, but does not have it himself (for the other animals obey not reason but feelings), is a natural slave. (*Pol.* I.5 1254b20–23)[19]

In this definition, Aristotle outlines two key characteristics that define a natural slave.

First, the slave is someone capable of belonging to another person, and second, while he can apprehend (or perceive) reason (*logos*), he does not possess it himself.[20] To preempt any confusion, Aristotle immediately distinguishes the slave, as a human being, from animals by stating that "animals obey not reason but feelings" (*Pol.* I.5 1254b23). Thus, while the slave can understand and obey reason, animals lack this ability and are driven by feelings. In this final definition of the natural slave, Aristotle makes it clear that the natural slave is substantially different from non-human animals.

Aristotle regards children, because of their developmental stage, as closer to animals in terms of their immature cognitive capacities and natural dispositions (e.g. *Hist. animal*. VIII.1 588a31-b3; *Eth. Eud*. II.8 1224a25–30; *Eth. Nic*. III.2 1111b6–10; VII.12 1153a30–35; *Phys*. II.6 197b5–8).[21] However, in a much-debated passage in *Pol.* I.13, children and slaves appear to share similarities in their cognitive capacities. In this passage, the slave is described as lacking deliberative capacity, while the child possesses it only in an undeveloped form (*Pol.* I.13 1260a12–13). Thus, both the slave and the child are incapable of exercising deliberation. However, while children grow out of this incapacity and eventually become capable of deliberation, the slave remains permanently in this impaired state (*Pol.* I.13 1260a12–14).

Given that children have a certain affinity with animals in some respects, and both children and slaves are deficient in deliberation, it might seem tempting to draw a correlation between animals and slaves. If valid, this could lend some support to Garnsey's interpretation.[22] Howev-

zoological kinds, such as moles, lobsters, seals, and crocodiles in Aristotle, in the context of natural slavery.

19 ἔστι γὰρ φύσει δοῦλος ὁ δυνάμενος ἄλλου εἶναι (διὸ καὶ ἄλλου ἐστίν), καὶ ὁ κοινωνῶν λόγου τοσοῦτον ὅσον αἰσθάνεσθαι ἀλλὰ μὴ ἔχειν.

20 In the *Republic* 371d-e, Plato notably refers to certain servants as wage-earners whose thinking or intelligence (*dianoia*) does not qualify them to belong to his ideal city, although their bodies are strong enough for labour.

21 See Lennox (2015) for an illuminating analysis of the commonalities and continuities between young children and non-human animals regarding their natural dispositions.

22 See Schofield (1990, 12–16), who consistently depicts the natural slave as 'child-like' in his analysis and views the slave as subhuman.

er, this assumption cannot be reconciled with Aristotle's remarks about children and slaves in *Pol.* I.13. There Aristotle complains that "those who deny reason to slaves, but tell us to give them orders only, are mistaken; for slaves should be admonished more than children" (*Pol.* I.13 1260b4–6). Admonition works better with slaves because they can understand and respond to reason, whereas children, unable to respond in the same way, must be guided by pleasure and pain (*Eth. Nic.* X.1 1172a20–21).[23] The slave can understand reason, even if he cannot deliberate independently. Moreover, the slave is capable of a certain degree of virtue to "prevent him from performing his tasks inadequately through intemperance or cowardice" (*Pol.* I.13 1260a35–6). This would be beyond the abilities of children, whose behaviour is primarily driven by pleasure and pain. Therefore, any inference connecting slaves with animals on the basis of an affinity between children and animals is unfounded.

Garnsey cites several passages where Aristotle mentions or correlates animals with natural slaves (*Pol.* I.5 1254b21–24; I.2 1252a30–1; I.5 1254b25–34; I.8 1256b20–5; III.9 1280a31–5). However, as Malcolm Heath also explains, in these passages where animals and slaves are compared, "there is no implication that the diverse relationships which supply these illustrations are identical in any other respects than being natural and hierarchical, nor that the subordinate terms are identical in any other respect than being naturally subordinate" (Heath 2008, 259). Let us consider the passage at *Pol.* I.5 1256b20–5, where Aristotle describes the acquisition of natural slaves as a form of 'hunting' or warfare. Garnsey places great emphasis on this passage, but I believe it should not be given undue significance. Prior to this, in *Pol.* VII, Aristotle had already associated human beings with animals in several contexts, since, for him, humans are indeed a species of animal. This applies to both rulers and subjects, slaves and masters alike. For example, he writes that "a human being is by nature a political animal" (*Pol.* I.2 1253a3–4); "a human being is more of a political animal than a bee or any other gregarious animal" (*Pol.* I.2 1253a7–8); and "no animal has speech except a human being" (*Pol.* I.2 1253a9).

Again, at *Pol.* I.8 1256a19ff, Aristotle argues that different types of food give rise to different ways of life among both humans and animals, illustrating his point with examples of animals that live scattered or in herds, as well as nomadic people, fishermen, and hunters. In this broader context, where humans are considered a species of animal, Aristotle describes the acquisition of "such men that are by nature intended to be ruled" as a kind of 'hunting' or 'warfare' (*Pol.* I.8 1256b20–6). Given that this context already treats humans and animals together in terms of food acquisition and ways of life, we should not rush to infer the subhumanity of natural slaves on the basis of this or similar passages where slaves and animals are related in some way.

Finally, Garnsey asserts that "his [the master's] living tool seems to have very little that is human about it" (Garnsey

23 I borrow this reference from (Heath 2008, 249).

1996, 123). Aristotle does, indeed, describe the slave as a sort of 'living tool' used to advance the actions of the master (*Pol.* I.4 1254a7–8). As a 'living but separate organ' (*Pol.* I.6 1255b11), the slave is part of his master, forming a unified system where both parties derive mutual advantage and benefit. Although the benefit to the slave is 'incidental' (*Pol.* VI.6 1278b32–3), Aristotle acknowledges that "if the slave deteriorates, the master's position cannot be saved from harm" (*Pol.* VI.6 1278b31–38), implying that the benefit and interest must be mutual.

Aristotle distinguishes between animate and inanimate tools in this context, providing the example of a lookout as an animate tool for a ship's captain (*Pol.* I.4.1253b28–30). In *EN* I.8 1099a33-b2, Aristotle also notes that "many things are done by means of friends", suggesting that he sees no issue with treating friends as instruments in certain contexts. Additionally, he considers children and inanimate property as 'part' of the father (*Eth. Nic.* V.6 1134b10).

Thus, Aristotle applies the concept of 'tool' not only to inanimate objects serving specific functions but also to animate subordinates such as a lookout, a friend, or even one's children. Of course, the slave differs in that he is perpetually at the master's disposal. However, the notion of being a 'living tool' does not lead to the conclusion that the slave is a different species or subhuman.

In conclusion, if the preceding discussion is accurate, the current interpretation makes an unfounded assertion regarding the subhumanity of the slave that is not definitively supported by the text. Natural slaves are not subhuman; rather, they are legitimate members of the human species. This argument will be further substantiated in the next and final section of this paper.

3. THE NATURAL SLAVE AS HUMAN WITH AN INELIMINABLE DEFICIENCY

In the previous section, we presented ample evidence that challenges the view that natural slaves are subhuman and, consequently, 'contrary to nature'. We have compelling reasons to take Aristotle at his word when he explicitly states that natural slaves "are human and have a share in reason" (*Pol.* I.13 1259b27–28). His conviction is that reason is distinctive of human beings, and as legitimate members of the human species, natural slaves possess a share in reason.

As previously noted, Aristotle qualifies his assertion regarding the rational capacity of the slave in his definition: "he who participates in reason to the extent that he apprehends but does not possess it" (*Pol.* I.5 1254b22–23) is a natural slave. I submit that the rational capability of the slave identified here corresponds to the non-rational aspect of the soul that perceives and desires, which "participates in a way in reason" (*Eth. Nic.* I.13 1102b14).[24]

In *Eth. Nic.* I.13 Aristotle states that

> The non-rational [part]…appears to be double in nature. For the plant-like aspect of soul does not share in

24 See also *Eth. Nic.* I.7 1098a4–5; I.13 1102a26-1103a10; *Eth. Eud.* II.1 1219b28–31; *Pol.* VII.14 1333a16–18.

> reason in any way, while the appetitive and generally desiring part does participate in it in a way (*pôs*), i.e., in so far as it is capable of listening to it and obeying it: it is the way one is reasonable when one takes account of advice from one's father or loved ones, not when one has an account of things, as for example in mathematics. That the non-rational is in a way persuaded by reason is indicated by our practice of admonishing people, and all the different forms in which we reprimand and encourage them. If one should call this too 'possessing reason', then the aspect of soul that possesses reason will also be double in nature: one element of it will have it in the proper (*kuriôs*) sense and in itself, another as something capable of listening as if to one's father (*Eth. Nic.* I.13 1102b29–34, tr. Rowe).

Initially, Aristotle classifies the 'appetitive and desiring' aspect of the soul as belonging to the non-rational (*to alogon*) soul. However, because this aspect is 'capable of listening to reason and obeying it', it is described as 'participating in reason in a way (*pôs*)'.[25] While Aristotle indicates that this aspect of the soul also possesses reason, it is important to note that only one aspect of the soul possesses reason in the 'strict' or 'proper' (*kuriôs*) sense. This point should not be interpreted as contradicting Aristotle's characterisation of the rational capability of the slave in the *Politics*. We should understand his assertion that 'the slave does not possess reason' as referring to the 'possession of reason' in the strict sense. The slave is said to perceive or apprehend reason and, hence, shares in it. The discussion in *Eth. Nic.* I.13 allows us to conclude that the slave does, in fact, possess reason, albeit not in the strict sense.[26]

Moreover, Aristotle's description of how the appetitive and desiring part of the soul shares in reason is strikingly similar to his explanation of the slave's participation in reason. The appetitive and desiring part is capable of listening to reason and becoming reasonable, analogously to how "one takes account of advice from one's father or loved ones". It is "in a way persuaded by reason", as evidenced "by our practice of admonishing (νουθέτησις) people". Similarly, slaves are capable of following and obeying reason, while "other animals obey not reason but feelings". As previously mentioned, "admonition (νουθέτησις) is more properly employed with slaves than with children" (*Pol.* I.13 1260b5–7). Natural slaves can perceive and apprehend reason and therefore respond to admonition, whereas children are more akin to animals in this regard, as they tend to follow their feelings.

25 See also *Eth. Nic.* II.1: "there are two parts of the soul that share in reason, but do both share in reason in the same way. One does so by giving commands, the other because it is by nature such as to obey and listen" (1219b27–31). Cf. *De an.* III.9 432a22-b7 on *to logon echon* and *to alogon*.

26 See *Pol.* I.5: "it is natural and beneficial for the body to be ruled by the soul, and for the affective part to be ruled by understanding (*tou nou*) (*the part that has reason*)" (1254b6–8, my emphasis). Again, what is meant is to possess reason in the strict sense.

That said, in a key passage of the *Hist. animal.* VIII.1, Aristotle states that "corresponding to art, wisdom, and intelligence (*synesis*) in mankind, certain animals possess another natural capacity of a similar sort" (*Hist. animal*. VIII.1 588a29–31, tr. Balme), which might seem to blur the distinction between the cognitive capacities of non-human animals and natural slaves. However, we should resist drawing this conclusion. This passage highlights two crucial aspects of animal cognition and character traits. First, Aristotle clearly asserts that all animals share certain character traits such as courage, gentleness, and cowardice. Thus, the possession of these traits (*ethê*) is not exclusive to human beings; rather, they are "more apparent in the case of human beings" (*Hist. animal.* VIII.1 588a20). Second, Aristotle indicates that intelligent reasoning (*Hist. animal.* VIII.1 588a23: *tês peri tên dianoian syneseos*) is a shared feature among all animals. For instance, in *Hist. animal.* IX.3, Aristotle suggests that deer, cranes, and cuckoos are *phronimos* (*Hist. animal*. IX.3 611a16), and he points out how swallows exhibit precision in thinking (*ibid.*, 612b21) and how wrens are similarly skilful in building their nests (*ibid.*, 615a19; 616a5).

Nevertheless, in the passage from the *Hist. animal*. VIII, Aristotle discusses similarities and differences among kinds of animals in two distinct ways. He states that some psychological traits vary only in degree between different kinds of animals, while others can be sufficiently different, and in such cases, we should treat them as analogous (ἀνάλογος) (*Hist. animal*. VIII.1 588a25–29). Thus, regarding the cognitive capacities of humans and nonhuman animals, Aristotle considers them to differ analogously, classifying them into different kinds. Despite possessing certain cognitive capacities similar to human intelligent reasoning, this similarity is not merely a matter of degree; rather, these are analogous traits that suggest nonhuman animals and humans belong to different kinds.[27]

Nowhere in his treatises does Aristotle imply that the rational capacities of slaves are merely analogical, suggesting they should be categorised with non-human animals.[28] Furthermore, in the *ergon* argument, when Aristotle mentions the active life of the part of the soul that possesses reason, he further distinguishes between that which has reason in being obedient to it and that which possesses it and engages in thought. This distinction closely parallels the distinction made in *Eth. Nic.* I.13 and the depiction of the rational capabilities of the slave in the *Politics*. He concludes that "the function of man is activity of the soul in accordance with reason or not without reason (μὴ ἄνευ λόγου)" (*Eth. Nic*. I.13 1098a7–8, my emphasis and translation). The additional part presumably aims to include human beings with lesser

27 See Lennox (2015, 202ff.) for a helpful discussion of this passage.

28 In *Cat.* 5 Aristotle says that "Substance… does not admit of a more and a less…For example, if this substance is a man, it will not be more a man or less a man either than itself or than another man" (3b32–37) which indicates that human species is a simple kind.

rational capabilities, such as slaves.[29] Therefore, human *ergon* does not consist solely of political deliberation or philosophical reasoning that a free adult male can perform; it encompasses a broader range of rational capabilities exhibited by human beings fulfilling varying tasks and functions within the household.[30] Thus, although the rational capabilities of slaves are diminished, they still possess reason in some capacity and can perform the characteristic ergon of human beings to a certain extent.

If this discussion correctly demonstrates that natural slaves are human beings, albeit with diminished rational capacities, a question still arises regarding the extent to which those rational abilities are diminished. In my view, natural slaves are not significantly impaired in their cognitive capacities to the point that they require constant care and support like children. However, they also lack the ability to exhibit high levels of intelligence and skill in any area of reason. This interpretation can be contested in two interrelated ways, which I will examine and address throughout the remainder of this paper while also defending my own interpretation in the meantime. The first objection can be dismissed relatively quickly, while the second will require more extensive examination.

29 See Kraut (2002, 283), Colaner (2012), and Karbowski (2013, 346), who argue that slaves are accommodated in the *ergon* of human beings in *Eth. Nic.* I.7.

30 See Ward (2009), titled "Is 'Human' a Homonym for Aristotle?" She addresses this question by examining the deliberative capacity of human beings and concludes that, for Aristotle, 'human' is synonymous (97).

One might be reluctant to accept a limited understanding of the slave's rationality on the basis of Aristotle's assertion that the slave lacks deliberative capacity. It could be argued that Aristotle only denies the slave the ability to make deliberative choices and decisions regarding his life and well-being, suggesting that the statement "the slave apprehends but does not possess it [reason]" (*Pol.* I.5 1254b22–3) refers specifically to the absence of this capacity for ethical deliberation. If this argument holds, the opponent might contend that the slave is not impaired in 'every' area of reason, such as theoretical, technical, and practical thinking, but rather only in a limited aspect of practical thinking.

This objection is not compelling for the following reason. Commentators frequently misinterpret the statement regarding the 'lack of deliberative reason' as an explanation of the statement about 'apprehending but not possessing reason'. However, Aristotle's account and analysis of the slave are found in *Pol.* I.4–6. He provides his preliminary definition in *Pol.* I.4 and his refined, final definition, which includes the specification about 'apprehension of reason' in *Pol.* I.5. In contrast, the discussion about 'the lack of deliberation' arises in *Pol.* I. 13, where Aristotle reflects on efficient household management and the functions and virtues of household members. Let us consider the well-known passage:

> It is clear, then, that the same holds in the other cases as well, so that most instances of ruling and being ruled are natural. For free rules

> slaves, male rules female, and man rules child in different ways, because, while the parts of the soul are present in all these people, they are present in different ways. The deliberative part of the soul is completely (*holôs*) missing from a slave; a woman has it but it lacks authority (*akyros*);[31] a child has it but it is incompletely developed. We must suppose, therefore, that the same necessarily holds of the virtues of character too: all must share in them, but not in the same way; Rather, each must have a share sufficient to enable him to perform his own task. (*Pol.* I.13 1260a6–17)[32]

The context in that chapter focuses on the ethical character of the members of the household, and as such, all members, including both the free and the slave, are evaluated on the basis of their deliberative capacity. For Aristotle, the ability to deliberate well is crucial for attaining the highest human end. Given that Aristotle presents his official definition of the slave much earlier and that the discussion about the lack of deliberative reason takes place within a specific context of virtue and character, we cannot restrict the interpretation of the statement about apprehension of reason solely to the absence of deliberative reasoning in ethical matters.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Aristotle qualifies the nature of the slave's deliberative reasoning. He states that the slave lacks the deliberative aspect of the soul 'completely (*holôs*)' (*Pol.* I.13 1260a12). If this deficiency is not partial, it suggests that the slave may also be unable to excel in technical or productive reasoning, as Aristotle defines technical reasoning as a form of deliberative reasoning in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Ethical reasoning, which strictly pertains to the practically wise man, focuses on living well and is not limited to means-ends reasoning (*Eth. Nic.* VI.9 1142b29–34). In contrast, technical deliberation is confined to identifying means to ends and is directed towards products such as strength, health, buildings, ships, and so on. If the slave indeed lacks deliberative reason 'completely (*holôs*)', it is highly likely that he cannot progress or excel in both practical and technical deliberation. Therefore, anyone unwilling to attribute a limited degree of rational capacity to the slave across all areas of reason must provide additional evidence to support this reading.

Malcolm Heath presents such a proposal that I will dispute before concluding. I take his view seriously because he explains the cognitive capacities of natural slaves with the intellectual achievements of non-Greeks, which is a crucial point to be addressed in this discussion.

In a significant paper, Heath argues that understanding the rational

31 The meaning of a "deliberative capacity that lacks authority" in the case of women is disputed. See Fortenbaugh (1977, 2015); Modrak (1994, 207–22); Dobbs (1996); Leunissen (2017, esp. Ch. 6); Frede (2018); Deslauriers (2022, esp. Ch. 3) for alternative lines of interpretation.

32 See Depew (2019, 244–251) for an analysis of the role divisions in the household and the significance of those role divisions for the *polis* in comparison to Plato's theory. Also, see Karbowski (2019, 226–34) for further discussion of role divisions in the *polis*.

capacities of natural slaves requires examining those of non-Greeks, as he believes that Aristotle considers all non-Greeks to be natural slaves (Heath 2008, 245).[33] By exploring their rational capacities and limitations, we can gain insight into Aristotle's conception of natural slaves. However, regrettably, Heath's assertion that Aristotle regards all non-Greeks as natural slaves is presented without substantial argument; he cites a few contentious passages (*Pol.* I.2 1252b5- 9; I.6 1255a28-b2; III.14 1285a19–21) without further commentary.

Heath's analysis of the rational capacities of slaves relies heavily on ethnographic data from Aristotle's time, of which Aristotle was probably aware. He points out that Aristotle wrote a now-lost work on the customs of non-Greeks. This data suggests that non-Greeks were capable of autonomous rational action, founding cities, and executing complex logistical projects, such as Xerxes' invasion of Greece. Some possessed technologically advanced cultures, as evidenced by the Egyptians' invention of mathematics (*Met.* 1.1 981b13–25) and the Babylonians' expertise in astronomy (*De caelo* 2.12, 292a7–9) (246). Heath concludes that while non-Greeks can exhibit technical and theoretical reasoning, their impairment lies primarily in practical reasoning (Heath 2008, 246). His examination of the rational features of 'non-Greeks' leads to a conclusion regarding the rational impairment of 'natural slaves'.

> Natural slaves, then, suffer from an impairment that is limited in several ways: it is an impairment of the capacity for *practical* (not technical or theoretical) reasoning; it is an impairment of the capacity for *deliberation* (not a conceptual or motivational failure); it is an impairment of the capacity for *global* deliberation; and it is an impairment that disrupts deliberation by detaching an individual's conception of intrinsic value from executive control of his behaviour. Yet, though the impairment is limited in these ways, its consequences are profound. In every other respect a natural slave may be extremely intelligent; but he lacks the capacity to make reasoned judgements about what he should do consistently with his conception of living well in general. And this renders him incapable of living a worthwhile human life. (Heath 2008, 253, his emphasis)

According to this interpretation, the rational impairment of natural slaves is relatively minor. They possess the capacity for both theoretical and technical reasoning and can become quite advanced and intelligent in these domains.[34]

33 In a footnote, Heath notes that "it does not follow that this is true of every individual non-Greek, without exception. For Aristotle, natural processes are relatively robust tendencies, not exceptionless rules" (2008, p. 246, n. 6). However, this still implies that Heath views non-Greeks as a class as 'typically' or 'for the most part' natural slaves.

34 Recently, Deslauriers (2022, 321, n. 50) expressed her agreement with Heath's interpretation, stating that "Malcolm Heath

Additionally, they are capable of practical reasoning to a significant extent. While they may have an understanding of certain goods, they struggle to guide their deliberations on the basis of this understanding.

I find this approach to explaining the rational capacities and limitations of natural slaves problematic. Heath is unjustified in directly categorising non-Greeks as natural slaves. Although certain passages in the *Politics* may appear to indicate that Aristotle considers all non- Greeks to be natural slaves, there is strong evidence that challenges this assumption. It is true that Aristotle acknowledges a pool of natural slaves among non-Greeks; however, the stronger assertion that he categorically views non-Greeks as natural slaves is questionable. A thorough examination of this claim would warrant a separate study, but I will discuss a few key passages to challenge Heath's position. My stance is that not all non-Greeks, or even most of them, are natural slaves, making it inappropriate to attribute the technical and scientific achievements of non-Greek cultures to natural slaves.

A key passage frequently mentioned in this discussion, and also cited by Heath, is *Pol.* VII.7. In this well-known passage, Aristotle discusses the natural character traits of Greeks and non-Greeks as influenced by environmental factors. He addresses this topic while identifying the essential 'natural qualities' of the first inhabitants of his ideal *polis* (*Pol.* VII.7 1327b18–20). He observes that the nations in colder regions, particularly in Europe, are spirited but lack intelligence and skill, whereas those in hotter regions, such as Asia, are intelligent and skilled but deficient in spirited temperament. Aristotle then examines how these natural character traits affect the political dynamics of these nations. He argues that the nations in colder regions, as a result of their inherent qualities shaped by their environment, tend to be relatively free yet lack political governance, while those in hotter regions often submit to tyranny and enslavement (*Pol.* VII.7 1327b23–31). Conversely, the Greeks benefit from their geographical position, as they possess a balance of both sets of qualities, allowing them to be free and capable of self-governance (*Pol.* VII.7 1327b29–31).[35]

Aristotle does indeed support a theory linking climate to natural character traits, though he is not the first to propose it.[36] This passage indicates that cli-

has argued persuasively that we should understand the impairment of slaves as limited in important ways." This perspective appeals to Deslauriers because she believes that Aristotle considers women to be as intelligent as men, despite lacking deliberative authority. If women were viewed as less intelligent than men, the distinction between women and slaves would disappear (see esp. 253–254).

35 Aristotle notes that there are differences in natural traits among Greeks as well, with some exhibiting one- sided characteristics (*Pol.* VII.7 1327b33–34). The distinction between non-Greeks and Greeks is further blurred by the historical existence of despotic forms of rule in both regions (*Pol.* 3.14 1285a15–b3).

36 In the Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places* Asians and Europeans are described in the following way: "The small variations of climate to which the Asiatics are subject,

matic variation acts as an external cause influencing the natural traits of different peoples. In his biological texts, Aristotle provides physical explanations for the effects of climate on both humans and non-human animals. Mariska Leunissen's recent work analyses this theme extensively, demonstrating that environmental factors such as temperature and moisture affect the material nature of living beings. She notes that humans, as a species, are characterised as the hottest, moistest, and least earthy of all blooded animals (Leunissen 2017, 45). In *Pol.* VII.7, this corresponds to the Greeks' well-balanced (*eu kekratai*) material nature, thriving in favourable climatic conditions.

In contrast, populations from colder regions, while spirited, possess hotter blood than the ideal 'well-mixed' humans, which may explain their lack of intelligence. Leunissen argues that this spiritedness alone does not account for their lower intelligence; their thicker, earthier blood leads to less accurate sense organs.[37] Conversely, people from hotter regions, characterised by colder blood, lack spirit but have heightened perceptual intelligence because of their thinner and purer material nature. The Greeks, benefitting from temperate environmental conditions, maintain a balance of intelligence and spirit, aligning their material nature with the species-specific ideal for humans (*Ibid.*, 46–47).

Aristotle thinks that environmental factors causally influence regional and individual differences in character by directly affecting human material nature. While these differences can confer advantages in virtue to certain groups, such as the Greeks, others, such as Asians and Europeans, face challenges as a result of less favourable climatic conditions. A notable passage indicates that, among these groups, Asians are the most servile, lacking spirit and being tolerant of oppression. Aristotle states that "the non-Greeks are by nature more slavish (τὸ δουλικώτεροι) in their character than Greeks, those in Asia being more so than those in Europe, they tolerate rule by a master without any complaint"

extremes both of heat and cold being avoided, account for their mental flabbiness and cowardice as well. They are less warlike than Europeans and tamer of spirit, for they are not subject to those physical changes and the mental stimulation which sharpen tempers and induce recklessness and hot-headedness. Instead, they live under unvarying conditions." But this author also suggests a correlative cause for natural character in the political regime: "Such things appear to me to be the cause of the feebleness of the Asiatic race, but a contributory cause lies in their customs; for the greater part is under monarchical rule. When men do not govern themselves and are not their own masters they do not worry so much about warlike exercises as about not appearing warlike, for they do not run the same risks…Moreover, such men lose their high-spiritedness through unfamiliarity with war and through sloth, so that even if a man be born brave and of stout heart, his character is ruined by this form of government. Good proof of this is that the most warlike men in Asia, whether Greeks or barbarians, are those who are not subject races but rule themselves and labour on their own behalf." (sec.16, tr. Chadwick and Mann).

37 While Heath (2008, 253–258) accounts for the lack of intelligence only by the elevated level of spiritedness, Leunissen (2017, 46) provides a more satisfactory account by also revealing the link between the material nature of sense organs and intelligence.

(*Pol.* III.14 1285a19–22). He associates spiritedness with courage, viewing it as a prerequisite for courage. Consequently, Asians, having less spiritedness, are more likely to endure oppression.

While Aristotle acknowledges that climate influences the material natures and character traits of people from different regions, suggesting that natural slaves may be found among non-Greeks, it is important to distinguish between the belief that natural slaves exist among foreigners and the claim that all non-Greeks are natural slaves. Neither of the passages explicitly categorises all Asians and Europeans as natural slaves.[38]

In our main passage in *Pol.* VII.7, Aristotle specifically considers Asians as having a 'slavish' disposition as a result of their continuous subjugation under tyrants. He further describes non-Greeks as "more slavish" (τὸ δουλικώτεροι) than Greeks, and Asians as more so than Europeans (*Pol.* III.14 1285a19–22). However, as previously mentioned, it is unreasonable to assume that 'slavish' necessarily equates to 'natural slave', as Aristotle often uses the term to describe behaviours and characteristics without implying that these individuals are natural slaves.[39] While some of the 'slavish' people among non-Greeks may be regarded as natural slaves, not all can be categorically identified as such.

Furthermore, while Asians are described as lacking spirit, they are said to possess 'intelligence' (*dianoia*) and demonstrate considerable skill in crafts, indicating their capacity for technical reasoning and knowledge (*Pol.* VII.7 1327b27–9). Many interpreters, including Heath, tend to interpret both types of reasoning attributed to Asians as narrowly referring to technical intelligence, attempting to align the Asian character with that of the natural slave depicted in *Pol.* I (Heath 2008, 246, n.10). However, Aristotle uses *dianoia* to refer either to the entirety of the thinking faculty (*De an.* I.4 408b3, b9, II.9 413b13, II.3 414b17, II.3 415a7–8, III.10 433a18) or an aspect of thinking that is typical of humans when Aristotle relates it to other capacities of thinking such as reason (*logos*), reasoning (*logismos*), and intellect (*nous*) (*De an.* I.2 404a17, II.3 414b18, II.3 415a8, III.4 429a23, III.9 433a2; *Met.* IV.1.1025b25).[40] Notably, at *Pol.* I.2 1252a31–2, *dianoia* is identified as the faculty of the 'natural ruler and the natural master'. Therefore, the assertion that Asians possess intelligence (*dianoia*), a capacity linked to distinctively rational thought, undermines efforts to categorise them as natural slaves as characterised in *Pol.* I.

Another frequently cited passage in this debate comes from *Pol.* VII.10, which discusses the recruitment of farmers for the ideal polis. As already mentioned before, Aristotle suggests that the best farmers would be slaves chosen from heterogeneous tribes or those lacking a spirited

38 As Leunissen (2017, 54) and Pellegrin (2013) note, the children of slavish non-Greeks who have been raised in more favourable climatic conditions can acquire better character traits.

39 On this point see also Ward (2002, 22) and Deslauriers (2022, 254).

40 I borrow the references about *dianoia* from Ward (2002, 22–23).

character, while the second-best option would be non-Greeks or barbarians from neighbouring regions (*Pol.* VII.10 1330a25–31).[41] Here, Aristotle distinguishes between slaves and non-Greeks, further countering the idea that non-Greeks can be categorically identified as natural slaves. Additionally, in *Pol.* I, Aristotle warns against two assumptions regarding natural slavery: first, one should not presume that an individual with the physique of a worker necessarily possesses the soul of a slave (*Pol.* I.6 1255a28-b2), and second, one should not assume that a foreign-born person is automatically a slave (*Pol.* I.15 1254b15–34). These cautions also weaken the interpretation that closely associates non-Greeks with slaves in the context of farmer recruitment.

Finally, categorically characterising non-Greeks as natural slaves would contradict Aristotle's admiration for certain non-Greek political organisations, particularly Carthaginian society. In *Pol.* II, Aristotle analyses the constitution of the North African Carthage as one of the best constitutions alongside Crete and Sparta.[42] As previously mentioned, Aristotle explicitly states that natural slaves cannot form a state and are excluded from attaining virtue and happiness (*Pol.* III.9 1280a32–34). If he acknowledges that some non-Greeks can establish states, let alone create one of the best constitutions, then the claim that Aristotle considers all or most non-Greeks to be natural slaves becomes highly questionable.[43]

If the previous discussion is accurate, we cannot reasonably accept Heath's assertion that all non-Greeks are natural slaves and, therefore, attribute the technical and scientific achievements of non-Greek peoples to natural slaves. Consequently, Heath's attempt to elucidate natural slavery through ethnographic data on non-Greeks proves unconvincing. It would be inconsistent for Aristotle to define a natural slave as someone who 'participates in reason to the extent of apprehending it but not possessing it' while simultaneously suggesting that a natural slave can develop advanced skills, exhibit high intelligence in technical and theoretical reasoning, and exercise practical reason to a significant degree.

Finally, before concluding, I would like to elaborate on the technical capabilities of the slave. Contrary to Heath's argument, natural slaves are not equipped

41 Charles (1990, 193) argues that Aristotle's suggestion regarding the recruitment of farmers is a reaction to Plato, who in the *Republic* extended citizenship privileges to all members of the state, including farmers and craftsmen. Aristotle views this as a mistake, believing it would lead to quarrels, lawsuits, and other social evils, and that the farmers would be rebellious and unmanageable. Thus, he argues that it is far better to rely on serfs, slaves, and helots, who are less prone to revolt. However, we must note that in the *Laws* (776c/777c-d), Plato also states that the slaves of a *polis* should not come from the same region. He criticises Spartan helotism because of the repeated uprisings in Messenia.

42 See Lockwood (2021, 480–485) for a detailed analysis of three constitutions in support of the view presented here.

43 Cf. Plato's *Symposium* (209d6-e4), where Socrates praises certain Greeks and barbarians for producing good laws and constitutions that grant their creators immortality: "Other men in other places everywhere, Greek or barbarian, have brought a host of beautiful deeds into the light and begotten every kind of virtue."

to found cities or manage logistically complex projects such as Xerxes' invasion of Greece.[44] While they can gain experience and develop skills in various crafts by following a craftsman's instructions, they cannot acquire the necessary knowledge to become craftsmen themselves. Thus, they can only be 'the mere maker' or 'the hand worker' mentioned in the *Met*. I.1. In this text, Aristotle differentiates between the 'master craftsman' (ἀρχιτέκτονας), who possesses true knowledge and understands causal explanations, and the 'handworker', who acts solely on the basis of experience and habit (*Met*. I. 1 981a30-981b4). This means that while a handworker might be able to heal a patient or create a pot by following a craftsman's guidance, he lacks the craft knowledge of a master craftsman.

Aristotle identifies three types of doctors in *Pol.* III.1: the ordinary practitioner, the master physician (ὁ ἀρχιτεκτονικὸς), and the individual educated in the art (ὁ πεπαιδευμένος) (*Pol.* III.1 1282a3). According to the distinction in *Met*. I.1, the ordinary practitioner probably serves as an assistant who follows the master doctor's instructions, paralleling the 'handworker' reliant on experience and habit. Plato also makes a similar distinction in the *Laws*, referring to the slave as the 'assistant' to a doctor, which may have influenced Aristotle's classification in *Pol.* III.1.[45]

In *Laws* 720a, Plato notes that 'assistant doctors', who can be either free men or slaves, acquire their skills through observation and experience under a master's guidance, while a fully qualified doctor, who must be free, learns through study and can teach others. Aristotle seems to adopt this distinction, acknowledging two types of doctors in *Pol.* III.1 that align with his definitions of the master craftsman and the handworker in *Met*. I.1. Considering that Plato categorises the slave as one who can serve as an assistant doctor, and that Aristotle's distinctions align with Plato's framework, this further supports the idea that natural slaves can only be 'mere makers' or 'ordinary workers' who rely on experience and habit, rather than master craftsmen who require extensive study and contemplation to attain their expertise.

This does not mean that the slave is incapable of simple means-end reasoning. He can certainly reason about how to achieve specific tasks in his daily work, such as determining the appropriate medicine for a patient or deciding how to cut material for shoemaking.

However, attaining a high level of intelligence or excellence in a craft, as suggested by Heath and others, is beyond the slave's rational capabilities. Additionally, the slave cannot deliberate effectively about how to shape his own life, which is why it is both beneficial and just for him to tie his life with that of a master. By doing so, he can gain a degree of virtue by drawing on his master's practical wisdom.

44 In this sense, I believe Richard Kraut's interpretation of the rational capabilities and limitations of the slave is more accurate (2002, 285–290).

45 I owe this reference to the *Laws* to Kraut (2002, 288).

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have evaluated and challenged two prominent interpretations of Aristotle's conception of natural slavery. The first interpretation posits that a natural slave shares the same human nature as free individuals. According to this view, while the slave possesses full rational capacity at birth, deficiencies in reasoning arise from their actions and habituation. Thus, Aristotle does not deny a certain group of humans a good life as a result of an immutable nature; rather, their subordinate status results from their failure to realise their potential. In contrast, the second interpretation describes the natural slave as a degenerate subhuman with inherent rational deformities. Here, the distinction between the slave and animal is seen as less defined than that between the animal and human.

I have argued that both interpretations fail to offer a satisfactory account compatible with the text. Instead, I have proposed that Aristotle considers natural slaves legitimate human beings who can perform the characteristic human *ergon* to a certain extent. While the natural slave cannot deliberate effectively on how to lead his life or excel in theoretical and technical reasoning, he can recognise the rational directives of others and perform simple means-end reasoning in his daily tasks. I have also rejected the interpretation that views the rational impairment of the natural slave as minimal. Specifically, I challenged the reading that equates the rational capabilities of the slave with those of non-Greeks, assuming all non-Greeks are natural slaves. While Aristotle may consider some non-Greeks to be natural slaves, it is incorrect to extend this categorisation to all or most non-Greeks. Therefore, we should refrain from evaluating the rational abilities of natural slaves solely in relation to the intellectual and cultural achievements of non-Greeks. Instead, I have proposed that that the idea of the natural slave possessing a limited level of rational capacity aligns better with the text. Nevertheless, although the natural slave may have limited cognitive capacities, he does not necessarily require a master to ensure his survival. He is capable of sustaining himself and, as Richard Kraut puts it, can "live on his own and earn his daily bread well enough" (Kraut 2002, 290). Since the master possesses good judgment and rational foresight, the slave can benefit from the master's life by offering him his manual labour and service.

Although I have only said a little about the philosophical merits and demerits of Aristotle's account, examining key interpretations within Aristotelian scholarship has offered rewarding insights into the 'nature' of the natural slave. In contrast to the first interpretation, we can conclude that Aristotle ultimately excludes a class of human beings from participation in the good life on the basis of their supposedly unchangeable nature – a stance in which he was undoubtedly mistaken.[46]

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