(Published in: *Boletim do CPA. Revista de Estudos Filosóficos e Históricos da Antiguidade. Ano VIII N.° 15 Jan/Junho 2003*).

ARISTOTLE AND NATURAL SLAVERY

GiuseppeTosi[1]

Aristotle is one of the first philosophers to explicitly pose the problem of the legitimacy of slavery, to weigh up the opposing opinions and to develop a series of arguments that will remain points of reference for all subsequent debate.[2] The philosopher didn't write a treatise on the subject,[3] but he left us ample and significant passages in his ethical-political works. The main discussion takes place in Book I of *Politics*, which devotes five chapters to the subject; other notes can be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemic Ethics*.[4]

1. CONTEXT

The context in which the discussion takes place in Book I of *Politics* - which deals with family or domestic administration (*oikonomia)* - is the definition of the different types and spheres of government (*arché)*. The relationships that are established between the simple elements that make up the home (*oikos)* are different: the master/slave relationship is despotic (*despotiké)*, the husband/wife relationship can be defined as nuptial (*gamiké)* and the father/son relationship can be defined as paternal (*teknopoietiké* or *patriké).*[5]

In this passage, Aristotle's aim is not only to describe and classify the different and possible relationships that take place within the *oikos,* but above all to distinguish them from typically political relationships: his criticism is directed at

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[1] Professor in the Philosophy Department at the Federal University of Paraíba

[2] See: M. I. FINLEY, *Schiavitù antica e ideologie moderne*, Bari 1981 (1980), p. 120), and P. GARNSEY, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 11-16.

[3] Garnsey notes that if Aristotle had done so, he wouldn't have been the first, because tradition records the existence of a lost treatise by Antisthenes, a disciple of Socrates, entitled: "On Freedom and Slavery". GARNSEY, *Ideas of Slavery,* cit. p. 12.

[4] *Politics,* I, 3-7 and passim; III, 6, 1278b 32-8; *Nicomachean Ethics,* VIII, 12, 1160b 28-32; VIII, 13, 1161a 30- 1161b 10; *Eudemic Ethics,* 1241b 18-24; 1242a 28-32.

[5] While in this passage Aristotle uses the term *teknopoietiké*, later he replaces it with *patriké*: *Pol.*, I, 12 1259a 38.

those conceptions - such as the Platonic one - which, not accepting the distinction between the two spheres, transposed the typical relationships from the domestic to the political sphere:

> Now," says Aristotle, "those who believe that the man of government (*politikón), the* king (*basilikón), the* head of the family (*oikonomikón)*, the slave master (*despotikón)* are the same[6] are not expressing themselves well; they don't see in each one of them anything more or less than a difference in kind; As if, for example, if there are only a few people subjected to the slave master (*despotés), if there are more* people subjected to the head of the family (*oikonomikón)*, if there are even more people subjected to the government (*politikón)* or the king (*basilikón), there* is almost no difference between a large house and a small town. About the man of government and the king, they believe that when someone exercises government alone, he is a king; on the other hand, when he exercises it in accordance with the principles of political science and either governs or is governed (*árchon kai archómenos)*, then he is a man of government (*politikón).* But this is not true.[7]

It is clear from the very first page of the *Politics* that the issue that most interests Aristotle is the multiplicity of types of government (*arché)* and their justification. It is therefore in this context that the discussion on slavery should be read; Aristotle's central question is to understand and justify the existence of different spheres and forms of man's rule over another man.[8] Aristotle wants to define and justify slavery, but also to distinguish and preserve the freedom of citizens, who cannot be governed as if they were slaves.

We must also consider that the philosopher doesn't just assume the historical fact of slavery without discussion, but is one of the few ancient authors who takes seriously the objections of those who considered it something "contrary to nature" and therefore the fruit of pure violence, as appears in this passage:

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[6] According to Aubonnet, these would be Socrates (Xenophon, *Mem. III,* 4, 12; III, 6, 14) and Plato (*Pol.* 258e - 259a*;* Laws, III, 680d - 681a; 683a). J. AUBONNET, *Notes complémentaires,* in ARISTOTE, *Politique,* Vol. I, Paris 1991, p.106.

[7] *Pol,* I, 1, 1252a 7-16. For the Greek text, we have used the edition by W. D. ROSS, *Aristotelis Politica*, recognovit brevique adnotatione critica instruxit W.D. Ross, Oxonii e typographeo claredoniano 1957; and the text established by Jean Aubonnet, *Aristote. Politique*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres 1991. Our Portuguese translation has been checked against Aubonnet's French translation, Laurenti's Italian translation (ARISTOTELE*, Politica.* Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1993) and Mário da Gama Kury's Portuguese translation (Aristotle, *Política,* UNB, Brasília 1997).

[8] Malcom Schofield was very insistent on this aspect: "The issue which appear to dominate his mind right through the book is the question: how many forms of rule (*arche*) are there? And the urge to replay: "not just one but several" is the mainspring of the argument". M. SCHOFIELD, *Ideology and Philosophy in Aristotle's Theory of Slavery*, in *Aristoteles' <POLITIK>*, Akten des "XI Symposium Aristotelicum", Friedrichshafen/Bodensee, 8/3.9.1987, Herausgegeben von Günter Patzig, Göttingen 1990, p. 17.

> Let's start by talking about the master and the slave to see what use is necessary, and to see if we can come up with a better theory (*béltion) of* this subject than those accepted so far. Some believe that the rule of the master (*despoteía)* is some kind of science and that the administration of the household (*oikonomía)*, the rule of the master, and the political rule (*politiké) and the* royal rule (*basiliké)*, as we said at the beginning, are the same thing. For others, the domination of the master (*despózein)* is contrary to nature (*pará phúsin). Indeed*, it is only by virtue of the law (*nomos)* that one is a slave, and the other is free; but by nature (*phýsei)* there is no difference: therefore, this domination is not just (*díkaion),* because it is violence (*bíaion).*[9]

Critics of slavery claim that it is not the natural condition of men, but that it is contrary to nature because all men are free by nature, and slavery, as an institution, was introduced by virtue of the law of the strongest and finds no justification other than pure violence, which cannot be the foundation of what is just: the two terms are placed iconically opposite each other: "*oudé díkaion: bíaion gar". It is* therefore necessary to find a "rational" justification for slavery that is not based solely on the use of force. From this demand comes the famous distinction between "slave by law and by nature":

> Slavery and slave are taken in two different senses: there is, in fact, a slave and slavery according to the law (*katà nómon)* and this law is a convention (*omologia)* by which those who have been defeated in war belong to the victor. Now, it is precisely against this conventional right that many men of law bring an action of illegality (*graphé paranomôn),* as is usually done when accusing a political speaker (*rétor)*: they consider it strange that a man who can exercise violence and who is superior in strength should make the victim of his violence his slave and his subject. Even among the wise (*sophoi*) there are those who think one way or the other." [10]

The men of law, the jurists find it "strange" (*deinós) to* justify slavery based on mere violence: *deinós* also means "terrible, tremendous, funereal, unbearable, repugnant", adjectives that better express the moral connotation of the repulsion that the use of pure violence arouses in these "men of law". This point deserves

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[9] *Pol.,* I, III, 1253b 14-23. Among the critics of slavery were the orator Alcidamante of Elide, a disciple of Gorgias, (the only citation of this opinion is in Aristotle, *Rhetoric,* I, 13 1373b 18) and the sophists Antiphon and Lycophron. On this subject, see Garnsey, *Ideas of slavery* cit. In Jean Aubonnet's opinion "Le principe même de l'esclavage au IV siècle av. J.-C. ne semblait pas être admis sans contestation comme le prouvent divers témoignages", but he mainly quotes testimonies from poets and historians. J. AUBONNET, *Notes complémentaires,* in ARISTOTE, *Politique,* Vol. I, Paris 1991, pp. 112-113.

[10] *Pol.,* I, II, 1255a 5- 12.

attention because it shows that Aristotle accepts the criticism of those who didn't consider it fair or possible to base law on mere force and forces him to find a "rational" justification for the phenomenon[11] .

It is precisely to answer this objection that Aristotle introduces the distinction between slavery by law and by nature: only by demonstrating the naturalness of slavery can it be justified and go beyond the mere use of force. Legal slavery will only be just if slaves by law and by nature coincide, otherwise it could happen that "people considered very noble (*eugenestatoi)* are slaves and daughters of slaves, if they are taken prisoner and sold".[12]

It's clear that all the reasoning stands if Aristotle manages to give a satisfactory definition of natural slavery, demonstrate its existence and describe the characteristics of slaves by nature; otherwise, slavery remains left to mere force and therefore without justification.[13] The thesis we will try to demonstrate is that the philosopher was unable to produce this demonstration.

2. DEFINITIONS.

Reading Aristotle's text carefully, we can find four different attempts to define the "slave by nature".

2.1 "Object of property and instrument of production".

Aristotle begins, as he usually does, with an observation of the reality of slavery as it was experienced in his time and, using ordinary language, presents the first two characteristics that define the slave: he is an object owned by the master and an instrument of production, albeit *sui generis*:

> Among the instruments (*órgana*), some are inanimate (*ápsucha)*, others animate (*émpsucha*): for example, for the ship's captain the tiller is inanimate, the sailor watching over the bow of the ship is animate (because in the arts the subordinate - *uperétes* - is a kind of instrument). In the same way, every object of property (*ktema*) is an instrument for life (*órganon pros zoén)* and property (*ktésis)* is a set of instruments. The slave, too, is an animated object of property (*doulos ktéma ti émpsuchon*) and each subordinate (*uperétes*) is like an instrument that takes precedence over the other instruments [...] Therefore, instruments are instruments of production

[11] For Aubonnet: "La relation qu'Aristote établit entre *tò bíaion* e *tò pará phúsin* (*Phys.*, IV, 8 215 a 3 et *passim)* lui vient de Platon (*Tim.,* 64 d)". IDEM, p. 113.
[12] *Pol.*, I, 6, 1255a 25-30.
[13] *Pol.,* I, 6, 1255b 12-15.

> (*órgana poietiká)*, while an object of property (*ktema), on the other hand,* is an instrument of action (*órganon praktikón*): thus from a shuttle we obtain something more than its simple use, but a garment or a bed are only used. [...] Now, life is action and not production (*bíos prâxis or póiesis esti*), so the slave is a subordinate in the order of instruments of action (*ho doulos uperétes ton prós prâxis*).[14]

The first definition of a slave is that he is an "object of property", which is the permanent and main characteristic of ancient (and modern) slavery.[15] As an object of property, they "belong" to the master in the literal sense of the term, i.e. they are a part of him.[16]

What distinguishes him from other objects of property is the fact that he is animated, that is, that he has a *psyché,* which makes him similar to other subordinates or free servants (*uperétes)*, thus recognizing his human characteristics. On the other hand, what distinguishes him from men is precisely the fact that he is property, a part of the master, while the *uperets,* despite carrying out subordinate and manual tasks, are legally free.

At the same time, Aristotle defines the slave as an animated instrument (*órganon émpsuchon*) and an instrument of action (órganon *praktikón*) and not as an instrument of production (*órganon poietikón*). In this context, the distinction marks the difference between instruments intended "beyond the use that is made of them", for the production of other goods such as the shuttle *(órgana poietiká)* and those intended for use in themselves, such as the bed *(órganon prakikón)*. Both are necessary for life, but life is essentially action (*praxis*) and not production (*poesis*), that is, activity whose end is not external to man, but which consists of the continuous improvement and fulfilment of human potential through education, *habitus* and the exercise of virtues. Slaves are thus the animated instruments that

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[14] *Pol.,* I, 4, 1253b 27- 1254a 8.

[15] "A slave was property. The slave owner's rights over his slave-property were total, covering the person as well as the labor of the slave. The slave was kinless, stripped of his or her old social identity in the process of capture, sale and deracination, and denied the capacity to forge new bonds of kinship through marriage alliance. These are the three basic components of slavery." GARNSEY, *Ideas of slavery...,* cit.

[16] *Pol.,* I, 4, 1254a 8-15. The part/whole analogy is also used in Pol, I, 6, 1255b 10-13. However, if the natural slave is a part of the master and if the relationship is beneficial to both, what sense is there in "offering all slaves freedom as a prize" as Aristotle suggests in VII *Pol.,* in , 11, 1330a 31-33. How can a part live outside the whole? This is just one example of how Aristotelian analogies should be considered as exemplifications and not identifications. We also know that Aristotle will leave in his will the provision to free all his slaves after his death.

allow the master and owner to achieve full human fulfilment through *praxis,* and are therefore placed among the instruments of action.

In the opinion of some interpreters, this means that when Aristotle speaks of slaves, he has in mind domestic servants and not those destined for productive labor on the *ergastola*.[17] This reading - which is not shared by interpreters who stress the importance of the productive labor of slaves -[18] seems plausible to us in the light of the Aristotelian text, although not exclusive. In any case, this discussion is not decisive for our subject, because whatever Aristotle's historical reference may be, it doesn't change the substance of the matter: it is beyond doubt that, for Aristotle, the slave is both property and an "animated" instrument, as he states in the first definition of slave that he gives us:

> A being who, by nature, does not belong to himself, but to another, even though he is a man (*ánthropos on)*, is, by nature, a slave. He belongs to another who, even though he is a man, is an object of property and an instrument ordered to action (*óganánon praktikón)* and separate.[19]

If so far Aristotle has described a factual situation, here he seems to provide a definition of what a "slave by nature" is. But the tautological nature of the reasoning is evident: a slave by nature is one who belongs to another and belongs to another who is an object of property and an instrument of action, that is the slave. In a strict sense, this is the definition of the "legal status" of the slave by law and not the "ontological status" of a slave by nature. In fact, it doesn't explain why the slave belongs "by nature" to another. The fact that this is a description and not a definition, and even less a demonstration, is immediately apparent in the continuation of the discourse that investigates the existence and justice of natural slavery:

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[17] FIORAVANTI, Gianfranco, *Servi, rustici, barbari: interpretazioni medievali della Politica aristotelica,* in "Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore", Classe di Lettere e Filosofia, XI, 2 1981, pp. 399-429; p. 403 (author's translation)

[18] For example, Silvia Campese, who stresses the role of the slave as the central axis of the production of goods and tends to identify the labor of slaves as productive labour *in toto.* See: S. CAMPESE, *Polis ed economia in Aristotele*, in "Aristotele e la crisi della politica*",* Napoli 1977, p. 13-60. *Apud* FIORAVANTI, *Servi, rustici, barbari...* cit., p. 401.

[19] *Pol.,* I, 5, 1254a 14-18. It's important to note the clause, "even though he is a man", repeated twice, which is full of consequences, as Enrico Berti observes: "This conclusion reveals the existence of a difficulty realized by Aristotle himself, namely the fact that a man can be the object of property on the part of another man". BERTI, *Il pensiero politico di Aristotele,* Rome-Bari 1997, p. 33 (author's translation).

> Whether or not there is anyone who is like this by nature, and whether it is more convenient and just (*béltion kai díkaion)* for someone to be a slave or whether, on the contrary, all slavery (*pasa douléia)* is unnatural is what we must investigate next. [20]

Aristotle recognizes that he has not yet produced a demonstration of the existence of the slave by nature.

2.2 "Some, from birth, are destined to command, others to be commanded"

The first argument that Aristotle presents to justify the existence of slaves by nature constitutes the architecture of the entire discourse. It is a consideration of universal value about the natural hierarchical order that governs all living, animate beings:

> In all things that result from a plurality of parts and form a single common entity, whether the parts are continuous or separate, one will always see the dominant and the dominated *(to árchon kai to archómenon)*. This happens in animate creatures by virtue of the order of nature. [...] The living, in any case, is composed of soul and body, and the former, by nature, commands and the latter is commanded (*to árchon kai to archómenon)*.[21]

Aristotle uses an analogy between the structure of the social organism and the structures of living beings to state a general principle: in all complex living beings there must be a dominant and a dominated. Without this relationship, the unity of the whole would not be possible, which is what allows the parts to exist: this is the justification for the naturalness of relations of domination between men.

But, as Berti observes, "This, however, is still not the justification for slavery, but simply for government, valid for both the family and the city."[22] So Aristotle goes on to clarify his definition, stating that among the various forms of government (*arché)* there is a fundamental distinction based not on convention but on nature, between those who are by nature slaves and therefore destined to obey and those who are by nature free and therefore destined to command. Aristotle is categorical and explicit on this point:

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[20] *Pol.,* I, 5, 1254 a 18-20.
[21] *Pol,* I, 5, 1254a 28-32; 1254a 34-36.
[22] BERTI*, Il pensiero politico di Aristotele,* cit.

> To command and to be commanded (*árchein kai árchesthai*) are among the conditions that are not only necessary, but also convenient; and certain beings, from birth (*ek genetés),* are differentiated (*diésteke)*, to be commanded, or to command. [23]

There is therefore a distinction between the domination exercised over slaves, called *despotic,* and that exercised over the free, called *political,* which can vary according to constitutions, but which must always guarantee, in some way, the principle of equality between free citizens. This distinction is qualitative:[24]

> The authority of the master and of the governing man cannot be of the same kind, and all forms of government are not equal to each other: for one is exercised over men who are free by nature and the other over slaves; moreover, the administration of the household is a kind of monarchy (in fact, each household is governed by one man), while political government is exercised over men who are free and equal by nature *(hé dé politiké éleuthéron kai íson arché*)".[25]

The organicist analogy serves to highlight some fundamental principles of the political community and the problem of its unity: it is seen as an organic unity of different and unequal parts, a unity in which each element occupies its "natural place" and exercises its specific function. This principle, which Aristotle uses in other passages,[26] legitimizes and justifies the existence of distinctions and differences as essential characteristics of any complex society, made up of parts, but does not imply that these distinctions must necessarily be "natural": it justifies diversity, but not inequality. Such distinctions would be natural if Aristotle demonstrated that there are beings destined from birth to be commanded, who possess characteristics that justify their natural and permanent inferiority.

The "demonstration" takes place using some analogies and making some comparisons between the different forms of power that are exercised in the domestic and political spheres.

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[23] *Pol.,* I, 5, 1254a 21-24.
[24] *Pol.* III, 6, 1278b 30- 1279 a 13. and VII, 14, 1332b 16-27.
[25] *Pol.,* I, 7, 1255b 16-22.
[26] In Book II of the *Politics,* Aristotle develops his criticism of the principle expressed by Plato in the *Republic that* "the greatest good of the city is unity, the greatest evil is discord" (Rep. V, 450c), stating that the city is, by nature, a plurality (*plêhthos gár ti tehn phúsin estín he pólis,* 1261a 18) and that "a city is not only a multitude of men (*or mónon d'ek pleiónôn ánthropôn estín eh pólis*) but of men of different kinds (*állá kai ex eídei diapheróntôn)*: because, in fact, a city is not generated (*gínetai)* from equals (*ex homoíôn*)."

> The living being (*zoon),*" writes Aristotle, "in the first place, is composed of a soul and a body, and of these, the first, by nature, commands (*archon), the* other is commanded (*archomenon).* [...] Therefore, in the living being, we can discern both the authority (*arché)* of the *despotic* type (*despotiké)* and that of the political type (*politiké)*: because the soul dominates the body with the authority of the lord and the intellect (*nous)* commands the appetite (*órexis)* with the authority of the political or royal type (*basiliké).*[27]

The comparisons are of two different types: the power of the soul over the body is like despotic power and, therefore, the master/slave relationship is similar to the soul/body relationship, while the government that the rational part of the soul exercises over the affective part is compared to the power of the political man or the king. These comparisons give rise to two different definitions of slaves, which we will examine below.

2.3 "Those who differ from each other like the soul from the body and man from the animal".

The master/slave relationship is initially considered to be analogous to the soul/body relationship, in which the soul rules the body with despotic authority, and the man/animal relationship, in which man rules the animal:

> Those who differ from each other like the soul from the body and man from the animal (and those whose activity is reduced to the utilization of their physical strength are in this condition, and this is the most that can be gained from them) are slaves by nature, and the best thing for them (*hois béltión estin)* is to submit to this form of authority, as in the cases mentioned.[28]

The comparison between slaves and animals is taken to such an extent that Aristotle compares the acquisition of slaves to a hunt, analogous to that practised against wild animals:

> The art of acquiring slaves is different from both sciences, and is like a form of the art of war or hunting....Therefore, the art of war will also be, by nature, and in a certain sense, an art of acquisition (and, in fact, the art of hunting constitutes a part of it) and it must be practiced against wild beasts (*tería)* and against those men who, born to obey, refuse to do so, and this war is, by nature, just (*os phúsei díkaion touton onta tón polemón*). [29]

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[27] *Pol.,* I, 5, 1254a 34 - 1254b 7.
[28] *Pol.,* I, 5, 1254b 15-20.
[29] *Pol.,* I, 8, 1256b 23-26.

These very crude statements and analogies - to us - seem to admit the existence of substantial differences between slaves and free people, as if they were different species, an expression of an almost "racist" theory of the differences between men, in the strict sense of the word.[30] However, as several interpreters have pointed out, they are incongruous with Aristotle's general anthropology, which considers man to be an *infima species* and does not admit the existence of human subspecies such as "animated instruments".[31]

2.4 "Those who can perceive but do not possess reason".

However, Aristotle uses a second analogy, that between the rational part (*nous)* and the desiderative part (*orexis*) of the soul. In fact, taking up the "definition" given earlier, he states that:

> In fact, a slave by nature is one who can belong to another (*the dunámenos allou einai)* (and in fact does belong to him) and who participates in reason insofar as he can perceive it (*aisthanesthai)* but not possess it (*echein)*: the other animals are not subject to reason, but to impressions. In terms of usefulness, however, the difference is minimal: slaves and domestic animals help with their bodies (*sómati)* for the necessities of life.[32]

Here we see not only that the slave by nature belongs to another, but that he can, in the sense that he can belong to another and is naturally incapable of looking after himself. Furthermore, Aristotle states that this being differs from animals in that he can perceive reason and understand command, but not to use reason and command himself.

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[30] These statements would play an important role in the debate on the New World that took place in the first half of the 16th century and would serve the master of rhetoric and translator of Aristotle, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, as the key to his justification of the enslavement of the Indians. Juan Ginés *de* Sepúlveda, *Democrates alter, seu de justis belli causis apud Indios,* critical ed. with Spanish translation by A. Losada, CSIC, Madrid 1951; 2 ed. ivi, 1984, pag. 22 (author's translation). This "bellicose" reading of Aristotle will be contrasted by Bartolomé de Las Casas in his work: *Argumentum apologiae adversus Genesium Sepulvedam Theologum cordubensem (1550),* BNP, Fonds Latins, reproduced in "Apologia", edition under the care of A. Losada, Madrid 1975.

[31]Cf. BERTI, *Il pensiero politico di Aristotele* cit., p. 34: "Now, it is evident that it is incongruous to consider some men as different from others in terms of soul from body, all men being formed of soul and body, or as man from animal, man and animal belonging to different species". SCHOFIELD, *Ideology and Philosophy...* cit., p. 12: "The very idea that there could be natural slaves might be thought to conflict with a belief firmly rooted in Aristotle's general philosophy, viz. that the man is an *infima species* with his own distinctive essence. His natural philosophy recognizes no such species or sub-species as "ensouled tool".

[32] *Pol., I*, 5, 1254b 20-24.

This argument is more plausible than the previous ones because it guarantees the slave a certain type of effective rationality, albeit passive, which distinguishes him from animals and allows him to take orders.[33] However, in this case, the master/slave relationship becomes similar to the man/woman or father/son relationship, because, as the Stagirite had said before: "the soul dominates the body with authority of a despotic kind and the intellect (*nous)* commands the appetite (*orexis)* with authority of a political or regal kind (*basiliké).*"[34]

In this way, the fundamental distinction between free and slave and the "despotic" relationship is no longer justified.[35] Nor is the attempt to find qualitative differences between free and slave justified. The bodily differences are not obvious, as Aristotle himself admits:

> In fact, nature wants to make a difference in the bodies of the free and the slaves: the latter have robust bodies for the necessary services; the others have erect bodies that are useless for such activities, but fit for political life (which is divided between the occupations of war and peace). Often, however, the opposite happens: some have the body of the free, others the soul of the free, because if the free had a physique as different as the statues of the gods, everyone would admit that the others deserved to be their slaves. If what we've said is true of the body, it should be even more true of the soul: however, it's not so easy to see the beauty of the soul and that of the body.[36]

The argument of physical differences appears so specious and unsubstantiated that Aristotle even dismisses it: the bodily criterion is not enough to define the slave by nature because there are free people with slave bodies and slaves with free bodies. It would be even more difficult to distinguish free and slave by the inner qualities of the soul, because it is difficult to see the beauty of the soul.

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[33] The person who drew attention to the difference between the two types of analogies and stated that Aristotle's "true" argument was based not on the analogy between body and soul, but on the analogy between the two parts of the soul, was W.W. FORTENBAUGH, *Aristotle on Slaves and Women,* in J. BARNES - M. SCHOFIELD - R. SORABIJ (eds.), *Articles on Aristotle* 2, *Ethics and Politics*, London 1977.

[34] *Pol.,* I, 5, 1254a 34 - 1254b 7.

[35] This is Smith's criticism of Fortenbaugh's thesis, stating that if Aristotle's "true" argument is the analogy between the two parts of the soul, the despotic relationship is no longer justified. SMITH, *Aristotle's theory of Natural Slavery*, in *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, edited by D. KEYT and D. MILLER, Oxford UK & Cambridge USA 1991, p. 155.

[36] *Pol.,* I, 5, 1254b 27 1255a 2.

Despite Aristotle's various attempts, we still haven't really found a satisfactory definition of the essential qualities of the slave's soul such that, even though he is a man, he deserves (*axios) to* be a slave. Perhaps a better result would be possible if we analyzed that *ánthropos on*.

3. ARE THEY REAL MEN?

Aristotle doesn't explicitly tackle the question of the "humanity" of slaves, but he does leave us with some important observations when he affirms the possibility of some kind of friendship between them and admits that slaves can exercise some kind of virtue.

Friendship

A characteristic of tyranny is the fact that it does not allow friendship (*philia)* between its members, because in tyranny, the subjects are not treated as free but as slaves and the relationship is only for the tyrant's benefit. What can happen in this case is the kind of *philia that occurs* between a craftsman and the tool he uses, or the soul and the body it commands, or the master towards the slave. But can we call "friendship" this relationship between unequals? What benefit does the slave receive if he is reduced to a mere animated instrument at the service of the master? Aristotle answers with a phrase that summarizes the discussion on slavery in all its ambiguity:

> In fact, all things receive the care of those who use them, but there can be neither friendship nor justice towards inanimate objects. And one cannot have friendship for a horse or an ox, nor for a slave as a slave (*prós doulon é doulos*), because there is nothing in common. For the slave is an animate instrument and the instrument is an inanimate slave. As a slave, therefore, there can be no friendship with him, but as a man there can (*e anthropos)*: it seems, therefore, that there is something just for every man (*ti díkaion pantí anthropô) in* favor of all those who have in common the capacity (*dunámenon koinonésai) for* law and contract; therefore, there can be friendship (with the slave) insofar as he is a man (*óson anthropos).*[37]

The slave by nature is compared to an object, an instrument, a thing or domestic animals like the ox and the horse. As such, one could take care of him and

[37] *EN,* VIII, 13 1161 b 5-8.

look after him, but not befriend him. At the same time, it is said that, as a man, a certain kind of friendship is possible, because there is a just one for every man with whom you can have a common law and a contract

Virtue.

These reflections, which are quite surprising, show Aristotle's difficulty in simultaneously recognizing the humanity of the slave and attributing non-human characteristics to him. We can find the same difficulty in the chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics* dedicated to virtue, where the philosopher asks whether there is also a certain type of virtue for the slave. More interesting than the answer is the way the question is posed, which is nothing more than the formulation of an aporia:

> In the first place, one could doubt that there is any virtue proper to the slave other than those that are instrumental and servile and most precious of the latter, for example, temperance, courage, justice and each of the other moral dispositions of this kind; or that there is no virtue other than those required by the labour that occupies the body. Both hypotheses present difficulties (*aporian)*: for if slaves possess (some kind of virtue of their own), how would they differ from free people? But if they don't possess it, it's absurd (*atopon), since* they are men and participate in reason (*ónton anthrópon kai logou koinonounton*). [38]

Aristotle realised that he was facing an unsolvable aporia, which he expressed in radical terms, anticipating the criticism that would be levelled at him in the centuries to come, or perhaps trying to silence the criticism and doubts that arose in his mind.[39] The aporia could not be expressed in a better way, and so the solution could not be convincing: *tertium non datur.* Aristotle states several times that the slave "participates in reason", that "slaves cannot be denied reason" and that everyone, including slaves, "possesses the parts of the soul", but that they totally lack the deliberative part (*to bouletikón*), which is why they can only perceive reason, that is, obey orders, but not exercise it. Furthermore, it is said that the difference between slave and free is qualitative and not quantitative, which means that it is not a question of possessing intelligence or reason, but of two totally

[38] *Pol., I,* 13, 1259b 22-29.

[39] This confirms Garnsey's observation: "One suspects that the real debate took place within the earth and minds of its [slavery] defenders, more especially those whose philosophical or religious beliefs gave them a glimpse of human nature that was hard to reconcile with slavery". GARNSEY, *Ideas of Slavery* cit., p. 238.

different types of reason, because the slave is devoid of the noblest part of the soul, that is, the deliberative part.

So, we come back to our initial question: is the slave a human being? Apparently yes, because he shares reason and virtue and, as a man, you can have friendship for him. On the other hand, he lacks the noblest part of the soul and is therefore an inferior and incomplete being. Since the differences between free and slave, between those who command and those who are commanded, are specific and not quantitative, slaves would belong to a different "species": a subhuman type, situated between man and animal. But in Aristotelian theory, the human species is the ultimate (*infima*) and there can be no other species between man and animal.

The barbarians

One last question seems pertinent: are there "slaves" by nature? It seems that, for Aristotle, only barbarians can be natural slaves, but not Greeks. In fact, not all slaves "by law" deserve to be such; this happens when a war isn't just or when the nature of the prisoners doesn't allow it.[40] Among those who deserve to be slaves as prisoners of a just war are certainly the barbarians, but not the Greeks, because "it must be said that some are slaves everywhere, others nowhere. The same principle also applies to nobility: the Greeks believe that they are noble not only in their homeland but everywhere, and that the barbarians are noble only in their homeland, assuming that there is absolute nobility and freedom and another that is not absolute, as Helen says: "But I, who descended from divine parents / who would ever dare to call me a servant?".[41]

4. DIALECTICAL METHOD AND *ENDOXA*

[40] "Others, referring, as they think, to a certain conception of what is just (because the law expresses a certain form of what is just) admit that slavery because of war is just, but at the same time deny it, because it is possible that the cause of war is not just, and no one could in any way call a slave someone who does not deserve to serve." *Pol.,* I, 7, 1255b 22-25.

[41] *Pol.* I, 6, 1255a 32: See also: *Pol.,* I, 2, 1252b 5-9: "Among the barbarians, the woman and the slave are on the same level because they do not possess the element that by nature commands (*to phúsei árchon)* and therefore their community is made up of slaves. That is why it is said that: "dominating the barbarians suits the Hellenes", as if naturally barbarians and slaves were the same. The quote from Euripides is taken from *Ifigen. Aul.,* 1400. In another tragedy by Euripides, *Helen* (276), we read: "The barbarians are all slaves, except for one". This is probably the passage that inspired Hegel's famous statements in the *Lessons on the Philosophy of History*. See also BERTI, *Il pensiero politico di Aristotele*, cit., p. 37: "For Aristotle, only the barbarians are slaves by nature, due to the fact that they do not know how to govern themselves

As we have had the opportunity to show, the theory presents aporias both in the internal coherence of its arguments and in its compatibility with Aristotelian anthropology.[42] For this reason, some interpreters claim that it is an "error", a "flaw" and conclude that: "Aristotle is still a giant, but he has an Achilles tendon."[43] Others believe that Aristotle's "errors" are due to the fact that the great philosopher allowed himself to be conditioned by the prejudices of his time.[44] In this case, the theory's aporias can be explained if we consider it not as a "rational" explanation of natural slavery, but as an ideological justification of legal slavery.[45] The procedure is typically ideological: given historical conditions that favour certain "interests" are absolutized as if they were fixed and permanent natural characteristics, i.e. objective and therefore unrelated to those interests. In this way, the slave, reduced by violence to the condition of an object and animated instrument in the hands of the master, receives these characteristics as if they were his intrinsic and permanent condition.

The philosopher implicitly recognizes that manual labour in general and slave labour in particular were a necessity dictated, we would say today, by a certain degree of development of the productive forces and means of production of the time, without which all of ancient society could not subsist.[46] This is the fact that could

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[42] There is no unanimity among Aristotle's commentators on this point. According to some, the justification of the existence of natural slaves is consistent with the premises and arguments of his system and expresses the "crude and concrete application of his authoritarian philosophy" (as E. HAVELOCK, *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics*, New Haven and London 1957, p. 352, *apud* SMITH, *Aristotle's Theory of Natural Slavery,* 1991, p. 146). Others, on the other hand, claim that the theory of natural slavery cannot be reconciled with his philosophy, which itself can provide the elements for its critique. Among them, BERTI, *Il pensiero politico di Aristotele,* cit.

[43] Nedilson Lauro BRUGNERA*, Slavery in Aristotle,* EDIPUCRS/Editora Grifos, Porto Alegre 1998, p. 9.

[44] These would be, as Berti says, "sexist, slavish and racist ideas, which were commonplace in Aristotle's time" and which are not consistent with the premises of his thought. BERTI, *Il pensiero politico di Aristotele,* op. cit., p 5.

[45] Authors who have defended the ideological character of Aristotelian theory include: E. BERTI, *Storicità e actualità della concezione aristotelica dello Stato,* in "Verifiche", VII (1979), pp. 305-358. P. PELLEGRIN, *La théorie aristotélicienne de l'esclavage: tendences actuelles* de l'*interpretation,* in "Revue Philosphique de la France et de l'Etranger", (1982), pp. 345-57. Garnsey also states: "This [theory] was a sophisticated version of the popular ideology according to which slaves were as a race degenerate and vicious and therefore fit for subjection - a motif of ancient literature from Aristophanes to John Chrysostom". GARNSEY, *Ideas of Slavery*, cit., p. 239. Schofield agrees only in part with this interpretation, as it tends to deny the general ideological character of Aristotelian theory and limit it to the identification between slave and barbarian. SCHOFIELD, *Ideology and Philosophy...,* cit.

[46] "The contradictory nature of these arguments, their internal incoherence and their contrast with Aristotle's other doctrines seem to confirm that they are ideological arguments, while the true Aristotelian explanation is economic." BERTI, *Il pensiero politico di Aristotele,* cit.

not be questioned without subverting the entire existing social order[47] But he could not be content with simply recognizing a factual situation, he had to justify it theoretically: To admit that slavery was nothing more than the product of a simple vital economic necessity, for society and for the dominant interests, meant justifying the presence of violence in the foundations of this society, and Aristotle, following the master Plato, had icastically contrasted "justice" and "violence": *oudé díkaion, bíaion gar.*[48]

The path to be travelled should be different: to show how slavery was not only not contrary to nature, but belonged to the natural order of things, and was therefore necessary and beneficial for the slaves themselves, and therefore "just". If Aristotle was unable to convincingly demonstrate the existence of slaves by nature, legal slavery remains without justification other than that of violence and, therefore, *pará phúsin*, as denounced by the men of law who gave rise to the whole discussion.

This interpretation presupposes the existence of an argumentative flaw in Aristotle's discourse that makes his conclusions unfeasible, a flaw caused by the "interest" that insinuates itself into the realm of "knowledge". It's a plausible reading, but one that demands excessive demonstrative rigour from Aristotle, which is not in keeping with the nature of the subject under discussion. For this reason, I believe it would be useful to analyze in greater depth the method used by Aristotle in this discussion. To this end, we will use a book by Enrico Berti, recently published in Brazil, entitled *The Reasons of Aristotle*.[49] In it, the author shows how Aristotle uses various methods or forms of rationality: the apodictic, dialectic, semantic analysis, the diaphoretic procedure, elenctic demonstration, the "typological method" and the practical syllogism. The affirmation of a multiplicity of methods is based on the postulate of the "polysemy of being" that underlies Aristotelian methodological and epistemological pluralism.[50] What will decide the type of method depends on the "nature of the subject". And the subject under discussion

[47] This is also the fundamental reason for the persistence of the institution of slavery over long centuries, against which attempts to radically question it have always been few and far between, not only in Aristotle's time, but throughout antiquity, including the centuries when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. See: GARNSEY, *Ideas of Slavery...,* cit.
[48] *Pol.,* I, III, 1253b 14-23.
[49] BERTI, Enrico *As razões de Aristóteles,* Loyola, São Paulo 1998.
[50] See BERTI, *op. cit., p.* XV.

falls within the scope of the "practical sciences" where demonstration cannot demand the same rigor as the theoretical sciences. [51]

Following these observations, we could ask ourselves what path Aristotle followed, using the discussion of natural slavery as a good example of the use of the dialectical method in practical philosophy. Everything starts from the confrontation between two different opinions regarding the "legitimacy" of slavery.[52] Once the question has been *posed*, Aristotle carries out a "semantic analysis" of the word slave to ascertain "in how many senses (*posakhós)* it is said, whether in only one (*monakhós)* or in many *(pollakhós*) (*Topics,* I 15)"[53] , showing how it should be understood in a double sense, and thus establishing the central distinction between "slave by nature" and "slave by law" that will run throughout the dialogue. [54]

An aporia is thus formed,[55] i.e. an opposition between two opposing opinions on the same argument, one defending the natural character, the other the unnatural character of slavery; an aporia that will have to be examined and discussed, using the *endoxa, i.e.* "premises or, if you like, opinions, more authoritative, important, to which one must in any case give credit and from which one cannot depart". [56]

The discussion develops through the confrontation with four definitions that represent precisely the *endoxa*, that is, the diffuse and important opinions in the light of which the aporia should be clarified and resolved.[57] During the presentation, we had the opportunity to show the "circular" nature of Aristotle's argument, a circle that is continually established between what he presupposes and what he intends to "demonstrate". This circularity seems to us to be intrinsic to the dialectical method used. This is neither a rigorous apodictic demonstration nor an elenctic refutation, but a confrontation between opinions, no matter how endorsed and prestigious they may be.

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[51] See *EN,* I, 3, 1094b 11-15: "Our discussion will be adequate if it is as clear as the subject, for precision should not be demanded equally in all reasoning, any more than it should be sought in the products of all the mechanical arts."
[52] *Pol.,* I, III, 1253b 14-23.
[53] BERTI, *op. cit.*, page 41.
[54] *Pol.,* I, II, 1255a 5- 12.
[55] See BERTI, *op. cit.,* p. 137: "First of all, the aporia concerning a certain argument is constituted by the opposing opinions existing around it"
[56] See Berti, *op. cit.*, page 25.
[57] *Pol.,* I, 5, 1254a 14-18; 1254a 21-24; 1254b 15-20; 1254b 20-24

The dialectical method, applied to practical philosophy, is situated in an intermediate sphere between *episteme* and *doxa,* which Plato had rigidly opposed. As Carlo Natali states:

> We don't think that the *endoxa* can have an undoubted claim to truth. Aristotle's behaviour in close contact with the *endoxa,* however, seems to indicate the opportunity, in philosophical discussions, to always bear in mind the problem of the consensus of the audience, that is, of those who will then have to act."[58]

Enrico Berti himself, who defends the scientific character and truth value of the dialectical method, after stating that *endoxa* does not mean "probable premise" or "credible" or "apparent", recognizes that:

> The *éndoxa* are therefore premises or, if you like, also opinions, but authoritative, important ones, to which you must in any case give credence and from which you cannot depart. Aristotle certainly thought that they were also true, but he wanted to point out that, for the purposes of dialectic, what counts is not that the premises are true, but that they are shared, recognized, accepted by everyone, therefore also by the audience-arbitrator and by both interlocutors. [...] The fact of starting from the *éndoxa,* then, does not mean, for dialectics, renouncing truth or settling for a lower degree of truth than science, because dialectics is simply not concerned with truth, but only with discussion, that is, with refutation and, therefore, with the consensus that is indispensable to it. [59]

In our case, the opinions to which credit should in any case be given do not refer to natural slavery, which is precisely the object of the dispute and discussion, but to the *endoxa* used in the debate to "demonstrate" its natural character. These *endoxa* refer to a "universal" or "general" principle of conceiving the relations of government, the content of which is as follows: [60]

1. that the need for government (*arché*) arises from the fact that there is a plurality of parts and that this is a characteristic of every living being;
2. that the parties relate to each other unequally: there will always be the element that commands and the element that is commanded;

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[58] NATALI, Carlo, *Ética,* in "Aristotele" a cura di Enrico Berti, Laterza Roma-Bari 1997, pp. 241-82, a p. 281-82 (author's translation).
[59] BERTI, Enrico, *As razões de Aristóteles,* Loyola, São Paulo 1998, p.25 (bold by the author).
[60] *Pol,* I, 5, 1254a 28-32; 1254a 34-36.

3. that this inequality is natural, "by virtue of the order of nature as a whole".[61]

The doctrine of natural slavery thus becomes a specific application of the general principle of inequality.[62] This was an irrefutable presupposition or paradigm that underpinned a wide range of observations and unified a series of studies carried out by the philosopher in the most varied fields of knowledge; a presupposition that was also accepted by a large part of his audience. We could define it, using a Hegelian category, as a pre-concept (*vor-begriffe*), that is, "a principle in which men understand and recognize each other, a presupposition that is not debated and on which any other scientific activity rests."[63]

In this historical context and with this method of enquiry, Aristotle couldn't have got very far, because he couldn't have strayed too far from the diffuse opinions of his contemporaries. As Carlo Natali states:

> We could say that Aristotle's method is a bit like that of a seafarer who stays close to the shore: a method of navigation that is perhaps a little slow, but safer than facing the open sea on the strength of one's own ideas."[64]

Undoubtedly, the cabotage method is more prudent and safer, but with it no discovery of America would have been possible.

5. FROM *POLIS* TO *COSMOPOLIS.*

But how can we explain the aporias and oscillations that we see in his argument? I believe they may signify a debate with another paradigm or alternative presupposition (a debate that takes place, first and foremost, in the mind or consciousness of Aristotle himself) that did not have the strength to establish itself as dominant, because the historical conditions were not yet "ripe" for this. The idea

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[61]See also Book II of the *Politics for* Aristotle's arguments against the Platonic theory of the necessary unity of the *polis*.

[62] "The multiplicity and plurality of the parties introduces the theme of difference. A political community cannot be conceived without difference: if the plural dimension of men is necessary for the community, it must be said that 'these men are specifically different, because a *polis* cannot be made up of equal elements'. This diversity exists between individuals and between the different parts of the *polis,* and has a qualitative character. [...] It is natural and beneficial to the whole and to all the parts, whereas a condition of parity or reversal of command is harmful and entails disintegration." DUSO, Giuseppe. *La logica del potere. Storia concettuale como filosofia politica,* Laterza, Rome-Bari 1999, p. 57-58 (L'arché e le parti della *polis*).

[63] HEGEL, G.W.F. *Introduction to the History of Philosophy*, Nova Cultural, São Paulo, 1989, p. 97 (The Thinkers)

[64] NATALI, *op. cit.,* p. 282.

of a natural equality between all men had not become an *endoxa,* a common prejudice, but remained restricted to some minority intellectual circles.

We can apply here what Eric Weil says about the character of natural law, which is both formal and historical:

> Without a subject to which to apply it, natural law would be reduced to a pure and empty form. This matter is historical: the decision of what is or is not violence depends on what could be called the spirit of a community at a given time. From a certain moment on, slavery, for example, is seen as a violent and unjust condition, condemned by justice (by natural law): under the form of the law, the arbitrariness of a group's interests is now hidden and shown, and this arbitrariness, to which only violence can give the appearance and force of law, becomes inadmissible. Up to this point, however, even the revolted slave is not protesting against slavery, but is revolting against the fact that he, not the others, is a slave instead of a master."[65]

In fact, at that historical moment, Aristotle represents the conceptions of a historical and social formation that was rapidly falling into decay: the Greek *polis.* With Alexander the Great's enterprise, unexpected and unimaginable new horizons opened up, attenuating the traditional barriers between Greeks and barbarians and broadening the cultural horizons that led from the *polis* to the Hellenistic and Roman *cosmopolis.*

Stoicism and Christianity will affirm the existence of a natural law that is the same for all men,[66] preaching cosmopolitanism in the name of a *philia* or universal brotherhood, without distinctions between "Jew and Greek, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian and Scythian, slave and free".[67] Therefore, the doctrine of natural slavery will lose much of its acceptance; which does not mean the fall or decay of slavery as an institution. The theories that justified it simply changed and, no longer able to resort to the argument of the natural inequality of men, other arguments were used: the Stoics preached the indifference of slavery to the wise and the Christians affirmed that it was permitted by God because of original sin.

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[65] WEIL, Eric. *Filosofia Política*, translated and presented by Marcelo Perine, Loyola, São Paulo 1990, pp. 47-48 (1955).

[66] See REALE, Giovanni, *História da Filosofia Antiga*, Loyola, São Paulo 1992 Vol.III: *O* estoicismo antigo, pp.259- 362; and GAZOLLA, Rachel, *O Ofício do filósofo estóico,* Loyola, São Paulo 1999: pp. 9-77.

[67] SAINT PAUL, *Colossians,* III, 11.

For many centuries, the doctrine had little historical influence, even after the rediscovery of *Politics* in the 13th century. [68] It only took on an important role in the 16th century, in the debate about the New World, becoming the centerpiece of the justification for the domination of the Iberian powers over the newly discovered peoples: Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, translator of Aristotle, applied it almost literally to the Indians, while Bartolomé de Las Casas, defender of the Indians, vehemently rejected it. But this is another chapter in the rich history of political Aristotelianism that certainly deserves a separate discussion.[69]

[68] As Aubonnet says: "For fifteen hundred years (IV century BC - XIII century BC) *Politique* seems to have been ignored, or not to have known more than a limited diffusion, even in the Orient, as certain indices suggest. Après Cicéron, chez qui il y a quelques références aux thèses de Politiquela , on ne trouve plus guère de traces de l'ouvrage d'Aristote." J. AUBONNET *Le destin de l'œuvre: la place de la* Politique *dans l'histoire des idées,* in ARISTOTE, *Politique,* cit.

[69] There is an enormous bibliography on the subject, here we will indicate only one book that is still fundamental: HANKE, Lewis. *Aristotle and the American Indians. A study in Race prejudice in the modern world,* Illinois, London-Chicago 1959 (Brazilian edition: *Aristotle and the American Indians*, Livraria Martins Editora, São Paulo n.d.).