Introduction

The Rediscovery of Citizenship

During an interview on the first anniversary of September 11th, author David Halberstam was suddenly moved to remark, "I used to say I was a New Yorker. Now I like to think of myself as a citizen of the city."[1] As a response to the attacks on America's most cosmopolitan city, Halberstam's comment spoke powerfully to the newfound sense of citizenship that then gripped the nation and has since struggled for definition. For what, indeed, does it mean to be a "citizen"?

To be sure, the events of September 11th and their aftermath have impelled all serious observers to speak anew of the sacrifices and duties of citizenship or of a deeper commitment to community. Beyond this, however, language often fails. With Rousseau, perhaps, some had sought to efface the very word citizen from our vocabulary, or, with Kant, to search out a higher notion of world citizenship, or, with Hobbes, to rest content as subjects rather than citizens as long as life and liberty were otherwise preserved. But if, in the face of present challenges, such notions seem inadequate – if, in particular, we are awake to aspects of citizenship that our own principles and assumptions obscure or resist – where might we turn for understanding? This study turns to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, the two works in the history of political philosophy that together contain the most comprehensive and systematic investigation of the question "What is a citizen?"

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[1] CNN, "Newsnight with Aaron Brown," 9 September 2002, Interview with David Halberstam.

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The Aristotelian tradition became almost moribund with the success of modern liberalism and of attacks such as those of Hobbes on the many "absurdities" of the "old Morall Philosophers," Aristotle chief among them. Yet today Aristotle's thought enjoys a remarkable renaissance. Against the orthodox liberal concept of the state as an association of rights-bearing free agents who contract with one another for the sake of peace and the pursuit of happiness, scholars are again taking seriously the idea articulated most fully by Aristotle that human beings are "political animals." By giving new currency to the old view that individuals are naturally situated within a political community that requires specific virtues, molds character, and shapes its citizens' vision of the good, the revival of Aristotelianism has challenged even such staunch defenders of liberalism as John Rawls to examine again the sphere of the citizen. This reexamination of citizenship belongs also to the recent work of scholars as diverse as Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Rorty, Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, Michael Sandel, Peter Berkowitz, Stephen Macedo, William Galston, and Martha Nussbaum. Yet, for all their diversity, the efforts of these scholars are typically unified by certain liberal presuppositions or ends and, in particular, by the concern to marry liberal principles of equality and individual freedom with a more or less Aristotelian view of community.

Although my book begins from current efforts, it does not seek to duplicate them. In undertaking a study of Aristotle's account of citizenship, I contend that this account is a source of insight for us precisely because it does *not* begin from liberal presuppositions. Aristotle's presentation of citizenship's foundation in law and moral virtue is the classic statement of the preliberal view of political authority and civic education, according to which the community is prior to the individual and the highest purpose of the law is the education to virtue. Moreover, his investigation of citizenship and its connection with virtuous action and the good life addresses the question that is in principle left open by liberal thought: the question of the highest human good. Aristotle's treatment of these matters clarifies the limitations of the current rediscovery of citizenship, with its distinctive liberal assumptions, as well as attachments and concerns that persist within our experience and yet are scarcely acknowledged, let alone explained, by liberal theory. By illuminating dimensions of citizenship that we either overlook or obscure, Aristotle invites our rediscovery of citizenship in its own right.

He thereby helps us to comprehend not only the perspective of cultures or communities that do not share liberal principles, but also the full significance of the question "What is a citizen?" as an enduring human concern.

In following Aristotle's investigation of this question through both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, my study reflects his view of the deep connection between ethics and politics and brings into their proper relation two works that are too often treated apart. Besides its introduction and conclusion, the book has six chapters. Chapter 1 draws a path to Aristotle's thought, beginning from the general critique of the Enlightenment and the specific criticisms of Rawls's influential account of liberalism that opened the door not only to post-Enlightenment views but also to the return to Aristotle. I trace in this context Rawls's reformulation of his original account – his "political liberalism" – as well as other current efforts to describe a citizenship that is robust enough to support political order yet compatible with individual freedom and equality. In the disputes provoked by these efforts, two problems have emerged that provide a bridge to Aristotle's thought, even as they underline its distinctiveness: first, the priority of justice, or "the right," over the good, which remains a crucial but controversial claim of Rawlsian liberalism; and second, the nature of civic education, which raises difficult questions for scholars who wish to establish the moral and political supports of liberal politics while preserving a sphere within which individuals can freely pursue the good as they see fit.

The disputes over these problems indicate the limitations of the current rediscovery of citizenship and the initial reasons for turning to Aristotle's thought. To explore fully the relation between the right and the good, and the nature of civic education, one must begin from Aristotle's treatment of law and the education to moral virtue in his *Nicomachean Ethics.* This treatment opens the way to his direct investigation of the meaning and limits of citizenship in the *Politics.*

The next five chapters proceed thematically, examining in turn the connection of citizenship with moral virtue, education, and the good, and its relation to the political community and law. In Chapters 2 and 3, I show that the *Nicomachean Ethics* offers an account of civic education that is superior to those currently available, first, because it acknowledges the authoritative role of the political community and

the law with regard to education, and, second, because it clarifies how this education bears on the question of the good. In particular, by bringing out the moral and political dimensions of the good, Aristotle is able to explore a concern central to human experience that liberal thought necessarily obscures: the relation between the good life and the nobility and justice that constitute morally virtuous action. Aristotle shows that as the educator to virtue, the political community necessarily elevates this life as best and seeks to reconcile two ends as proper to right action: the common good and the perfection in virtue as an end in itself. In his account of the most complete virtue, justice, he establishes that the deepest problem of civic education is the irrepressible tension between these two ends. Against the claims of the political community and the law, this difficulty reopens the question of how one determines the proper end of action and indicates that the law, for all its authority, cannot be the final arbiter concerning the good. In contrast to others, I do not believe that Aristotle has or desires a single solution to the problem of right action. Nevertheless, his careful treatment of this problem comprehends the perfection that is the highest pedagogic end of the law and illuminates its significance for our good as citizens and human beings.

My argument then moves to two chapters that focus on Aristotle's *Politics*. In Chapters 4 and 5, I examine the demands and necessities of citizenship in connection with the question of the good and then outline more fully Aristotle's treatment of citizenship in the context of the political community's legal prerequisites and natural end. I argue that while Aristotle gives full due to the political community's authority regarding moral virtue and the good, his analysis of the dispute over distributive justice establishes the boundaries of this authority in every regime or political order. His precision about these matters further illuminates the law's limitations with respect to its pedagogic aims and reveals the necessity of a move to a natural or transpolitical, as opposed to a legal or political, perspective on human action and political life.

In his analysis, Aristotle sheds light on the difficulty that may be most troubling for us as liberal citizens: the potential tension between the demands of civic devotion and the independence of individual reason. Accordingly, in Chapter 6, I argue that Aristotle sketches a middle ground between thoughtless or dogmatic commitment to convention and skeptical alienation from it. The possibility of this middle ground

emerges in his account of education in the *Politics* and in his eluci-
dation of an apparently minor moral virtue in the *Nicomachean Ethics*,
wittiness. Against a view popular today that the tensions, conflicts, and
evils inherent in political life are proof of its tragic and ultimately
incomprehensible nature, I suggest that there is in Aristotle's political
philosophy a comic vision in the highest sense: a vision, in short, that
appreciates both the nobility and the limits of human striving and that
in no way despairs of wisdom about human affairs. Such a perspec-
tive, Aristotle indicates, supports a form of prudence by which citizens
understand and defend the benefits of a decent political community
while remaining clear-eyed about its failings or limitations.

My conclusion returns to the current rediscovery of citizenship to
explore directly the guidance offered by Aristotle. That Aristotle is
not a liberal democrat bears repeating. To mention a few obvious
issues: He lists democracy as a deviant regime, his own best order is
aristocratic, and his treatments of slavery and of the political status
of women and foreigners are hardly models of inclusiveness. But as
antidemocratic as Aristotle's thought may be in some respects, it does
not suffer from many of our own blind spots and frequently speaks to
our most serious concerns. Indeed, for all the clear goods of a liberal
order, recent events have underscored that citizenship does not sim-
ply confer benefits but requires sacrifices, and involves not only rights
but also duties – in short, citizenship frequently asks not what your
country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. For us,
then, Aristotle's treatment of the relation between individual and com-
munity, the connection between justice and the good, and the nature
of civic education elucidates aspects of citizenship that we acknowl-
edge without always exploring and for which liberal theory offers lit-
tle insight. Moreover, because Aristotle's investigation of citizenship
addresses the question of the human good with a completeness that
liberal thought necessarily eschews, it offers Halberstam's "citizen of
the city" a path to understanding the relation between being a citizen
and living well as a human being. By thus challenging us to rediscover
these dimensions of citizenship and to reflect anew on the question
of the good, Aristotle's political philosophy can be for us, as it was for
thinkers across the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic traditions of the past,
an indispensable source of enlightenment.

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Liberal Citizenship and Aristotle's Ethics

The current debate about liberal citizenship is marked by a pervasive doubt about such fundamental liberal principles as the primacy of the individual, the neutrality of the contractual state, and the priority and universality of rights. To be sure, there have been past disputes about the political and legal terms of citizenship. In the American case, for example, disputes have ranged from the arguments concerning naturalization at the Constitutional Convention to the battle over voting rights to more recent discussions of immigration. But these past disagreements also reflected a more fundamental consensus that "the first mark of American citizenship," and of liberal citizenship in general, is the "political equality of rights," and that defining citizenship largely entailed working out the full meaning of these terms.[1] Since the current debate follows from critiques of liberal thought itself, however, we now confront fundamental questions concerning the very ideals and principles that have traditionally undergirded discussions of citizenship.

In providing an overview of these critiques and the ways in which scholars have subsequently sought to reconceive liberal citizenship, I seek not to recapitulate this ongoing debate but to describe the general context within which it has arisen and to draw out problems that provide a bridge to Aristotle's thought. I begin from two developments.

[1] Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 1.

First, in the last decades of the twentieth century, a growing percep-
tion that liberal thought, and the Enlightenment project in general,
failed to make good on its promise to ground morality in a rational
and nonteleological framework raised serious doubts about liberal-
ism's capacity to defend its own moral and political principles. These
doubts opened the way to a return to the Aristotelian tradition that the
Enlightenment had rejected, as well as to post-Enlightenment views.[2]
Second, criticisms of Kantian moral philosophy and of John Rawls's
influential Kantian politics in *A Theory of Justice* raised questions about
the relation between the individual and the political community that
have significantly shaped the present efforts to reconceive citizenship.

LIBERALISM AND ITS CRITICS

The remarkable renaissance of Aristotle's thought in the late twenti-
eth century was made possible in part because of doubts arising within
the tradition of liberal thought. In returning to classical philosophy,
neo-Aristotelianism represents a break with what Stephen Salkever
has called "the intransigently antiteleological character" of liberalism's
"founding texts."[3] But as a sketch of some of the developments leading

[2] The school of thought having its inspiration in Aristotle is wide and diverse, and while
I hope to capture some of this breadth and diversity in the notes, my discussion in the
text is limited by my immediate purposes. I therefore confine my references to the
works of several well-known thinkers involved in the revival of Aristotle's thought in
the 1980s and 1990s. More detailed critical surveys of the rise of Aristotelianism, and
the related return to an ethics of virtue, include Gregory Trianosky, "What Is Virtue
Ethics All About?," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (October 1990): 335–44; Peter
Simpson, "Contemporary Virtue Ethics and Aristotle," *Review of Metaphysics* 45 (March
1992): 503–24; and John C. Wallach, "Contemporary Aristotelianism," *Political Theory*
20 (November 1992): 613–41. Volume XIII of *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* (Notre
Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988) contains representative articles.

[3] Salkever, "'Lopp'd and Bound': How Liberal Theory Obscures the Goods of Liberal
Practices," in *Liberalism and the Good*, eds. R. Bruce Douglass, Gerald R. Mara, and
Henry S. Richardson (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 167. See also Alasdair MacIntyre,
"The Privatization of the Good: An Inaugural Lecture," *Review of Politics* 52 (Summer
1990): 348 and *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of
Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 54; Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 2nd
ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 175. For fuller discussions of
liberalism and the question of teleology, see Salkever's *Finding the Mean: Theory and
Practice in Aristotelian Political Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,
1990), pp. 21–36; William Galston, *Justice and the Human Good* (Chicago: University
of Chicago Press, 1980), ch. 2 and *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the
Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), chs. 4–7.

up to it indicates, this break resulted less from a reevalution of ancient teleology than from critiques that called into question liberalism's own moral and political principles. For, alongside Aristotle's natural philosophy, early liberals such as Hobbes and Locke jettisoned also the classical view that the end of government is the human good, understood as virtue and the perfection of human nature. Armed with a new mechanistic and materialistic science of nature, they sought to comprehend the brute facts of our original or prepolitical condition – the "state of nature" – and especially what they saw to be the inevitable conflict or war among human beings in the pursuit of their individual goods, within a political compact whose central purposes were the protection of its members from harm, regulation of their various interests, and preservation of their natural freedom. Despite abandoning an overarching idea of the human good, then, early liberalism sought to establish natural and rational principles for ordering civic life. Although in the state of nature the pursuit of our individual good has no moral import of its own, it becomes a matter of moral and political import when we enter into association with one another, as we are compelled to do if we desire peace and prosperity. In the face of the war and oppression that the unbounded pursuit of our desires would produce, it is both necessary and right to establish an association in which peace and freedom are preserved – in which our natural freedoms, our rights to life and property, for example, are enjoyed in the fullest way without harm to others. From this point of view, the main tasks of government become the regulation of competition and protection of individual freedom, and the central problem of politics, the abuse of power.

Liberalism's story, however, is only just beginning. Under the influence of later Enlightenment thinkers on both sides of the English Channel – with Rousseau and Montesquieu and Hume and Burke as obvious exemplars – and with the rise of Romanticism, German Idealism, and Marxism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the view of nature and human nature grounding the denial of a highest human good succumbed first to an emerging and then to a full-blown sense of the basic historicity of human existence. Under this new dispensation, human nature came to be seen as a product of and not a constant within the continual flux of time and events. More generally,

the idea of nature itself appeared as a salutary myth, a conceptual
fabrication for the purposes of justifying the liberal ideal of the state.
This new sense of our historicity obviously did not allay but deepened
doubt concerning the existence of a highest human good – in a world
of flux, the good or happiness too is radically contingent – yet, more
importantly, it eventually also engulfed the principles informing lib-
eral politics itself. It thus darkened liberalism's horizon with a new
thought. For although Kant and Hegel sought to show that our sta-
tus as historical beings need not undercut the possibility of a rational
moral or political order, if indeed reason can stand above the histori-
cal flux, contemporary scholars began to grapple also with the more
radical views of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and their intellectual heirs. To
recall Alasdair MacIntyre's influential formulation in *After Virtue*, the
view drawn out by Nietzsche (and his "emotivist and existentialist suc-
cessors") is that "all rational vindications of morality manifestly fail
and that *therefore* belief in the tenets of morality needs to be explained
in terms of a set of rationalizations which conceal the fundamentally
non-rational phenomena of the will."[4]

   In rejecting the tradition of which Aristotle was the core, the Enlight-
enment claimed to be able to ground a new, if leaner, morality in true
science and rationality. But liberalism's deepening skepticism, follow-
ing the break with the ancient tradition, finally called into question
its own principles of justice and morality. This development has been
greeted by some as a crisis and by others as a liberation. According to
MacIntyre, for example, the failure of the Enlightenment to secure a
rational foundation for moral consensus and political life means that
the liberal tradition cannot defend against challenges to the public
authority and a disintegration of individual life into self-absorption
and private gratification – if everything is permitted, then anything
goes.[5] Arguing that "the defensibility of the Nietzschean position turns

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[4] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 117 (emphasis in text).

[5] The effort to reform moral and political life gave rise to the communitarian move-
ment with which many contemporary Aristotelians are identified. But the terms "neo-
Aristotelian", "communitarian," and "liberal" are somewhat amorphous in their appli-
cation to any one position. Even those who would identify themselves as liberal might
yet argue in favor of what Michael Walzer has called a "communitarian correction"
("The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism," *Political Theory* 18 [February 1990]:

in the end on the answer to the question: was it right in the first place to reject Aristotle?", MacIntyre has sought to replace liberal theory with "something like Aristotle's ethics."[6] Others have pursued less radical strategies, seeking, for example, to find resources within the Enlightenment tradition for its defense, to modify liberalism in an Aristotelian direction, or to rediscover the republican elements of liberal thought. Efforts of this kind are represented by the work of Peter Berkowitz, Stephen Macedo, William Galston, Martha Nussbaum, and Michael Sandel.[7] Still others, who assert and even celebrate the demise of Enlightenment metaphysics, strive, like Habermas, to formulate a "postmetaphysical" but still liberal framework for ethics and politics or, like Richard Rorty, to search out new possibilities of "individual

15), and communitarians typically have commitments to certain liberal goals, since, as Galston observes, "most Anglo-Americans are, in one way or another, liberals; all are deeply influenced by the experience of life in liberal societies" (*Liberal Purposes*, p. 79). As Charles Griswold has noted, "Among those who in some sense wish to return to the Greeks, there is remarkable consensus that the political offspring of the Enlightenment are, at least in good part, worth preserving. (I refer to liberal institutions and political arrangements)" (*Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], p. 4). For overviews of communitarianism, see Amitai Etzioni, ed., *Rights and the Common Good: The Communitarian Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), and C. F. Delaney, ed., *The Liberalism–Communitarianism Debate* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994).

[6] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 117 (emphasis in text).

[7] See, for example, Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Galston, *Justice and the Human Good, Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and *Liberal Pluralism: The Implication of Value Pluralism for Political Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Martha Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach," in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Volume XIII: Ethical Theory, Character and Virtue*, ed. Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); pp. 32–53, "Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism," *Political Theory* 20 (May 1992): 202–46, and "Aristotelian Social Democracy" in *Aristotle and Modern Politics: The Persistence of Political Philosophy*, ed. Aristide Tessitore (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002); Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* and *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). Malcolm Schofield offers a helpful overview of several uses to which Aristotle's political thought has been variously put in *Saving the City: Philosopher-Kings and Other Classical Paradigms* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 100–1.