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Aristotle on the Authority of the Many: *Politics* III 11, 1281a40-b21[1]

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1 Introduction

In this article I analyze a celebrated passage of the *Politics* in which Aristotle formulates his answer to the puzzle of whether the many or the few best citizens should have authority (*kurion einai*) in the city (III 11, 1281a40-1). He argues that at least some multitude is superior to the few best citizens in making political decisions (1281b15-21). His arguments are difficult to interpret. Aristotle does not specify which multitude he takes to be superior to the few best citizens. Nor does he clarify who those best citizens are. His arguments are based on four thinly sketched analogies and it is always challenging to correctly figure the focus of brief analogies. Finally, it is difficult to square the gist of his arguments with other central elements of his political theory. For example, how can he genuinely believe that the many have any legitimate authority given his repeatedly expressed extremely low opinion of their political capacities? And how does a constitution in which the many's claim to authority is stronger than the claim of the best citizens fit within his classification of constitutions?

In this article I propose a new interpretation of Aristotle's arguments about the authority of the many at 1281a40-b21 with a view to overcoming those problems. It consists of the following main tenets. First, the multitude that he refers to in his arguments should be understood on the model of the multitude which rules in polities and the members of which are accomplished in only a part of political excellence, namely, military excellence. Second, the best citizens with whom he compares that multitude in his arguments do not possess

[1] I am grateful to Roger Brock, Jamie Dow, Malcolm Heath, Christoph Horn, Melissa Lane, Christopher Rowe and an anonymous referee for comments on earlier drafts of this article.

complete political excellence but rather the highest degree of military excellence among their fellow citizens in a polity. Third, the members of that multitude are collectively superior to the best citizens in making decisions about political particulars, for example, decisions about specific policies. Fourth, their superiority can be explained by reference to the fact that they collectively possess superior experience to the best citizens, though they have individually and collectively inferior political understanding. Finally, their collective superiority in making political decisions is the outcome of the aggregation of their individual political judgements that are based on experience rather than the outcome of some form of public deliberation that enables them to grasp the political reasons which support their decisions.

In this article I focus exclusively on Aristotle's arguments at 1281a40-b21 and do not analyze his arguments in the remainder of III 11. The following considerations justify my focus on 1281a40-b21. First, the arguments of 1281a40-b21 are widely considered to be the core of Aristotle's arguments in support of the authority of the many and deserve to be properly analyzed in their own right.[2] Second, in the reminder of III 11 Aristotle addresses a separate puzzle, namely, the puzzle of what issues the free and the majority of the citizens should have authority over (1281b21-4). In his discussion of that puzzle it becomes clear that he has in mind a multitude consisting primarily of the poor (see 1281b24-5 and 1281b29) and

[2] The arguments at *Pol* III 11, 1281a40-b21 have received the bulk of the relevant scholarly analysis (see, for example, Waldron (1995), Kraut (2002), 402-9, Wilson (2011), Cammack (2013)) and have been the main point of reference of those contemporary political philosophers who explore links between Aristotle's arguments about the authority of the many and the basic tenets of deliberative democracy (see, for example, Estlund (2008), 232). Even those whose interpretation of III 11 draws on Aristotle's resolution of the second puzzle about what the free and the multitude of the citizens should have authority over (1281b23-4) take the arguments of 1281a40-b21 to be the main focus of their interpretation (for example, Ober (2013), 109-12 and Lane (2013), 252-62) (but see my second consideration in the main text and note 4 below urging caution about the use of the arguments in the remainder of III 11 as a basis for a proper analysis of the arguments of 1281a40-b21).

he argues for the legitimacy of the Solonian constitution that gives to the democratic many the power to elect and inspect officials who come primarily from the class of the wealthy.[3] He believes that his arguments at 1281a40-b21 are linked to his resolution of the second puzzle (see the use of *dio* at 1281b21) and his account of the legitimacy of the Solonian constitution. But it is not immediately clear how they are linked and a crucial analogy that he uses in order to justify the Solonian constitution is incompatible with his arguments at 1281a40-b21.[4] For those reasons the arguments of the remainder of III 11 require independent detailed analysis which I undertake in a separate article.[5]

I proceed as follows. In section 2 I explain the structure of the text of 1281a40-b21 and the main issues that need to be addressed for its proper interpretation. In section 3 I argue for the first two tenets of my interpretation. In sections 4 to 7, I try to establish through an examination of Aristotle's four analogies and his account of the distinction between understanding and experience the third and fourth tenets of my interpretation. In section 8 I

[3] Aristotle takes the Solonian constitution to be the best form of democracy and particularly suitable constitution for a multitude that is composed primarily by farmers (see *Pol* VI 4, 1318b6-19a19).

[4] Aristotle's arguments at III 11, 1281a40-b21 suggest that the members of at least some multitude are collectively better in political decision-making than the few better citizens. But at 1281b34-8 he suggests that the collective political judgements of the members of a multitude in a Solonian constitution need to be mixed with the judgements of the better citizens in order to benefit the city. To illustrate that point he treats their collective judgement as analogous to impure food and the judgement of the better citizens as analogous to pure food. Since impure food alone may not properly nourish the body but need to be mixed with pure food, the analogy implies that the political judgement of that multitude may not benefit the city when it is not mixed with the judgement of better citizens and thus cannot be by itself superior to the judgement of the better citizens. For a more detailed analysis of the analogy at 1281b34-8 that stresses its incompatibility with the gist of the arguments of 1281a40-b21 see Bobonich (2015), 159-60.

[5] Hatzistavrou (unpublished manuscript).

argue for the fifth tenet. I conclude by summarising the main points of my interpretation in section 9.

2 The text

I propose the division of III 11, 1281a40-b21 into three parts:

(T1) …the view that the many rather than the few (*oligous*) best people (*aristous*) should be in power might be entertained as a position (*doxeien an legesthai*), and while it creates some puzzlement (*aporian*), it perhaps also has elements of truth. For it is possible that the many, each one of whom is not individually an excellent (*spoudaios*) person, may nevertheless, when they come together, be better than the few best people, not individually but collectively, in the same way in which (1) feasts to which many contribute are better than feasts which one person funds. For since they are numerous and each one of them possesses some part (*morion*) of excellence of character (*aretês*)[6] and practical wisdom, when they come together, the multitude becomes like (2) one human being that has many feet, hands and perceptions (*aisthêseis*), and similarly for states of character (*êthê*) and intelligence (*dianoian*). That is why (3) the many judge better the works of music and of the poets. For different people judge some different part (*morion*) of a work, while all of them judge the whole of it. (1281a40-b10)

(T2) But (*alla*) it is in this way that the excellent persons (*spoudaioi*) differ from each one of the many, (4) just as the beautiful are said to differ from those who are not beautiful and what is artistically drawn from what is real, namely by bringing together into one dispersed, separate parts, even though if we take those parts separately, that person's eye or another part of someone else may be more beautiful than what is artistically drawn. (1281b10-15)

(T3) It is unclear (*adêlon*) whether that superiority of the many over the few excellent (*spoudaious*) individuals is possible to exist for every people and every multitude. Though presumably, by Zeus, it is clear that it is impossible (*adunaton*) to exist for some of them (for the same argument would be applicable to the case of beasts; and yet how some people practically differ from beasts?) But nothing prevents what has been said from being true about some particular multitude. (1281b15-21)

T1 contains three analogies that purport to show a collective superiority of the many over the best people in political decision-making. T2 contains one analogy that purports to illustrate the respect in which the many are inferior to the best people. T3 explains that the analogies in T1 apply only to a particular type and not to every type of multitude (for the remainder of this article I will call the multitude that is collectively superior to the best people in political decision-making 'special multitude').

[6] The subsequent reference to *êthê* suggests that Aristotle means excellence of character by *aretê* in this context.

To understand Aristotle's arguments we need to

(a) clarify who 'the best people' in T1 are that the special multitude may collectively surpass in political excellence,

(b) analyze analogies (1), (2) and (3) in T1 that illustrate a comparative superiority of the collective political judgement of the special multitude and,

(c) analyze analogy (4) in T2 that illustrates a comparative inferiority of the political judgement of the individual members of the special multitude.

3 The best people

One possibility is that by 'the best people' Aristotle means those who possess individually the highest degree of political excellence not simply among their fellow-citizens but absolutely. They are individuals who possess 'complete' excellence (*pasan aretên*, *Pol* III 7, 1279b1). Complete excellence involves being guided by practical wisdom while possessing all excellences of character (*EN* VI 13, 1144b31-5a2).[7] For Aristotle two types of people possess complete excellence: those who qualify to rule as absolute kings and the aristocratic best, namely, those who qualify as rulers in true aristocracy (*Pol* III 7, 1279a39-b2).

It is clear that Aristotle does not mean by 'the best people' those who qualify as absolute kings. The excellence of those individuals is by definition so supreme that nothing surpasses it and they are to be considered gods among men (III 13, 1284a3-11). Furthermore, their power should not be constrained by law (1284a11-14). So, if the collective political excellence of the special multitude surpassed or were equivalent to the political excellence of absolute kings, the special multitude would be above the rule of law. But Aristotle makes

[7] For Aristotle's commitment to the reciprocity of excellences of character see Irwin (1988).

clear that in applying their collective political excellence the members of the special multitude will always need to operate within the rule of law (III 15, 1286a24-31).[8]

If Aristotle meant the aristocratic best, his point in T1 would be that the collective political excellence of the special multitude is greater than the collective political excellence of the rulers in true aristocratic constitutions.[9] But then it would be impossible to place a constitution ruled by the special multitude within the context of Aristotle's classification of constitutions. Aristotle distinguishes between correct constitutions (absolute kingship, true aristocracy and polity) and deviant constitutions (tyranny, oligarchy and democracy) primarily on two grounds. First, correct constitutions aim at the common good while deviant ones aim at the good of the ruling class alone (III 7, 1279a28-b10). Second, correct constitutions observe while deviant ones flout the true standard of political justice according to which political power be distributed proportionately to one's political excellence (III 13, 1283a26-42). Furthermore, Aristotle distinguishes within the class of correct constitutions two kinds of best constitutions, absolute kinship and true aristocracy (IV 2, 1289a31-3 and V

[8] Aristotle's mention of the feast analogy (analogy (1) in T1) at III 11, 1286a29-30 is a strong reason for thinking that the multitude that Aristotle refers to at III 15, 1286b24-31 is identified with the special multitude that he refers to at III 11, 1281a42-b21.

[9] Another possibility is that in this context Aristotle calls the aristocratic best 'few' because they are not sufficiently numerous to establish a true aristocracy. Aristotle speaks of people being "few" with respect to the political task (*ergon*), that is, with respect to whether they are numerous enough so that a city is constituted by them' (*Pol* III 13, 1283b11-13). His point in T1 could then be that the collective political excellence of the special multitude is greater than the collective political excellence of the aristocratic best *when their numbers are significantly low, so that they cannot effectively establish a true aristocracy*. But at 1283b9-27 he makes clear that fewness with respect to the political task is irrelevant to assessing a political group's claim to rule (see, Newman (1902), 237-8). So, it is implausible that in T1 the potential paucity of the aristocratic best is a relevant consideration.

10, 1310b32-3) that are considered superior to polity (*EN* VI 10, 1160a35-6).[10] Now, a constitution in which the special multitude rules is correct. On the one hand, the special multitude rules with collective political excellence and thus can be reasonably expected to promote the common good. On the other hand, its political power is proportionate to its political excellence since it has collectively greater political excellence than the best citizens. But which correct constitution? If the level of political excellence that the special multitude collectively possesses were greater than the level of political excellence that the rulers of true aristocracy collectively possess, then a constitution in which the special multitude rules would be better than true aristocracy and thus should belong to the best constitutions. But, as we have seen, Aristotle recognizes only one type of best constitution other than aristocracy, namely, absolute kingship.[11]

Alternatively, Aristotle may refer by 'the best' to those individuals who possess the highest degree of political excellence among their fellow-citizens even though they do not possess the highest degree of political excellence in an absolute sense, that is, complete excellence. Rather they possess the highest degree of *partial* political excellence among their fellow-citizens. We may understand partial political excellence on the model of the type of political excellence that Aristotle ascribes to a multitude in a polity.[12] A polity is ruled by 'a

[10] For defence of the claim that absolute kingship and aristocracy are two kinds of best constitution see Newman (1887), 291, Keyt (1991), 257 n.43 and Miller (1995), 192-3.

[11] Gottlieb's (2009), 119-203 argument that in the *Politics* Aristotle believes polity to be better than aristocracy is directly contradicted by Aristotle's explicit claim at *Pol* VII 4, 1332a32-8 that a constitution in which citizens are both collectively and individually excellent is preferable to a constitution in which the citizens are only collectively but not individually excellent.

[12] To simplify matters and not get bogged down in a discussion of Aristotle's complex and not always consistent classification of constitutions I take polity to include the so-called aristocracy that Aristotle describes at *Pol* IV 7, 1293b1-21. Aristotle himself suggests that the two may be discussed as one (IV 11, 1295a34) and polity is the

warrior multitude that is capable of ruling and being ruled in accordance with a law which distributes the offices to the rich based on merit' (*Pol* III 17, 1288a12-15). Unlike the absolute kings and the aristocratic best the members of the warrior multitude do not possess complete excellence. As Aristotle puts it, 'it is possible for one or few to have exceptional excellence, but it is difficult for a large number of men to be accomplished in every kind of excellence, though they can be accomplished especially in military excellence. That is exactly why in that constitution [that is, in polity] the defensive soldiers have the most authority and those who possess weapons share in the constitution' (III 7, 1279a39-b4). So, the members of the warrior multitude in polity possess partial political excellence since they are accomplished primarily in military excellence though not in every type of excellence.[13]

The military excellence Aristotle that primarily characterizes the citizens of a polity must involve some form of courage. But since they do not possess complete excellence, they do not possess the highest form of courage. The highest form of courage is a component of complete excellence and thus presupposes knowledge of all types of goods that are associated with other excellences of character: the most courageous person is the person who is willing to accept honourable death in war even after he has experienced the greatest goods (*EN* III 9, 1117b7-13). The citizens of a polity have a lesser form of courage: as they do not possess

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constitution that he discusses in considerably more length and singles out in his classification of the correct constitutions. I also follow the widely accepted interpretation that the middle constitution is a polity (for a defence of that interpretation see Miller (1995), 262 n.26).

[13] In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle recognizes a condition of natural excellence that does not require reciprocity of excellences of character (VI 13, 1144b34-5a1). But the partial excellence of the citizens of a polity involves more elements than the condition of natural excellence as described in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For the citizens of a polity have some share in practical wisdom while in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle is clear that natural excellence is not guided at all by practical wisdom (VI 13, 1144b1-17). As I later explain, the excellence of the special multitude is habituated.

every excellence of character, their accepting honourable death in war requires them to forfeit fewer and less important goods.[14]

Military excellence also involves ability to reach good decisions about matters of war and peace, which requires some familiarity with things such as the military might of both the city and its enemies (*Rh* I 4, 1359b33-60a5), and ability to take care of military affairs, which requires experience in supervising defence structures and organising military units (*Pol* VI 8, 1322a33-b6).

For Aristotle from the fact that a group of men are all accomplished in excellence it does not follow that they are all equally good. For example, he accepts that though both the aristocratic best and the absolute king possess complete excellence, the latter surpasses the former. So, it is possible to assume that, though all members of the military multitude in a polity are accomplished in military excellence, some of them may surpass the others in it. I suggest that by 'the best people' Aristotle understands those individuals in a polity who surpass in military excellence their fellow-citizens.[15]

Given that accomplishment in military excellence is achievable by a large number of people, I call it 'ordinary' (political) excellence to differentiate it from the exceptional excellence of the absolute king and the aristocratic best. Consequently, I treat the majority of

[14] The form of courage that the warrior multitude in polity possesses is a higher form of courage than the one that the mercenaries possess who have no other good than their life and are ready sell it for small gains (*EN* III 9, 1117b17-20). Mercenaries are less courageous than ordinary citizens who defend their city since when faced with superior enemy force mercenaries have no qualms to root while the citizens prefer death to betraying their city (III 8, 1116b15-23).

[15] I explain the precise nature of their superiority in section 7.

the citizens in a polity as being 'ordinarily' (politically) good while the best people in a polity as being 'ordinarily' (politically) excellent.[16]

My interpretation is consistent with Aristotle's classification of constitutions. A constitution in which the special multitude rules is identified with a polity that is a correct constitution but inferior to absolute kingship and true aristocracy.

4 The three analogies in T1 and the superiority thesis

In T1 Aristotle uses three analogies to illustrate the comparative superiority of the collective ordinary excellence of the special multitude, which, as I have explained, is equated to a warrior multitude that rules in a polity. In all three analogies the collective ordinary excellence of the special multitude is compared to the individual ordinary excellence of a single person who surpasses each one of his fellow-citizens in ordinary excellence. Since, however, the question that Aristotle is addressing in the first part of III 11 is whether the special multitude or the 'few' ordinarily excellent citizens should rule, we should understand those analogies to also purport to show the comparative superiority of the collective ordinary excellence of the special multitude over the collective ordinary excellence of a group of relatively few persons who are individually ordinarily excellent.

In what sense are the political decisions that the members of the special multitude collectively reach 'superior' to the individual or collective political decisions of the ordinarily excellent individuals? It is natural to assume that the goodness of those decisions is

[16] In what follows by 'ordinarily excellent' and 'ordinarily good' individuals I mean ordinarily politically excellent and ordinarily politically good individuals respectively and by 'ordinary excellence' I mean ordinary political excellence.

determined by their political consequences. As Ober puts it, the many 'choose more reality-tracking options with better expected outcomes'.[17] That is, they choose policies that are objectively more beneficial to the city or more just. Thus, the collective political judgement of the special multitude enjoys *epistemic* superiority. The point, then, of the three analogies in T1 is to explain the grounds of its epistemic superiority, that is, to explain the reasons why the members of the special multitude manage to collectively outperform the ordinarily excellent citizens in identifying what is beneficial and just for the polity.

The first is the analogy of the collective judgement of the special multitude with a feast to which many contribute. There have been considerable scholarly discussions of that analogy in its own right. But since that analogy is described in only a little more than a line of the Greek text we cannot draw any safe conclusions about its main point without examining it in the context of the other two analogies. It is useful, nevertheless, to explore in some detail the main interpretations of that analogy in its own right since they suggest two alternative models of understanding the grounds of the epistemic superiority of the special multitude the ascription of which to Aristotle we can subsequently assess on the evidence of the remaining two analogies.

First, there have been different suggestions about the historical analogues that Aristotle may have in mind, for example, whether he has in mind Spartan or Athenian public feasts. Unfortunately the analogy itself provides no concrete clues. Aristotle uses the general term 'feasts' (*deipna*) instead of more suggestive terminology like *phiditia* or *sussitia* which would have been a clear reference to Spartan common meals. When Aristotle refers back to that analogy at III 15, 1286a29-30 he uses the term *hestiasis*. Though the use of that term could be interpreted as an implicit reference to the Athenian common meals provided by the

[17] Ober (2013), 110. See also, Waldron (1995), 569, Wilson (2011), 262, Kraut (2002), 405.

liturgy of *hestiatôr*, such an interpretation would be unsafe.[18] *hestiasis* could be used in a generic sense to refer to meals in general. Furthermore, the feasts in T1 are the result of contributions of the many and not of the liturgy of one person and indeed are contrasted to feasts funded by one person.[19]

Second, and more importantly, there is disagreement about whether diversity of dishes is an essential feature of the relevant feasts. Most scholars take the feast to which the many contribute to be a 'potluck' to which each participant brings a separate dish and thus is characterized by a significant diversity of dishes.[20] For the potluck interpretation of the feast to be plausible the following conditions must be satisfied. First, diversity of dishes cannot be the defining feature of the *goodness* of a feast. For if that were so, then a feast that contains a great variety of tasteless or unwholesome dishes would be considered better than a feast that contains a comparatively small diversity of dishes that are nevertheless tasteful and wholesome. It is more plausible to think that the goodness of a feast relates to some independent standards of fine dining, for example, some combination of standards of culinary taste and healthy diet, and that the point of the potluck interpretation is that the diversity of dishes is what makes it more likely that a feast will meet those standards. Second, for a feast to be good it must also be the case that each diner is likely to enjoy an overall meal that meets those independent standards of fine dining. For a feast that included a great diversity of dishes that were tasteful and wholesome but not provided in sufficient quantity so as not leave any diners hungry could hardly be considered good. Third, in the context of the first analogy both the potluck and the feast which is provided by one person and to which the

[18] For that interpretation see Cammack (2013).

[19] Cammack (2013), 181-4 argues that the liturgy in the fourth century might have been exercised by groups but this is a speculation. For comprehensive arguments against Cammack's interpretation see Lane (2013), 256-7.

[20] For the potluck interpretation, see primarily Waldron (1995), 567 and Ober (2013), 110-11.

potluck is compared must be presumed to meet some minimal threshold of success, namely, they both at least manage not to leave any of the diners hungry. For since on the potluck interpretation Aristotle intended with the first analogy to illustrate the superiority of potlucks, his argument would have been hardly convincing were he to base it either on a comparison between a potluck that succeeds in feeding its diners with a feast provided by one person that it is unlikely to do so or on a comparison between two feasts that fail to meet even that minimal threshold (in the latter case it would be very odd for him to argue that the potluck would be still better than the other feast simply on the grounds that it involves a greater diversity of dishes). Finally, the potluck and the feast that is provided by one person must also be presumed to be comparable in terms of the number and type of the diners involved. It would be difficult to draw any safe conclusions about which feast is better if one compares feasts of unequal sizes and of different composition of diners. For example, it is not clear that a potluck of five hundred diners that includes four dishes is better than a feast of fifty diners provided by one person that includes only one dish (perhaps, for example, the dish of the smaller feast better caters for the special dietary needs of its diners, say, they are all athletes, than the greater diversity of dishes of the larger feast). So, I suggest that on a plausible understanding of the potluck interpretation: (a) the goodness of a feast is understood as being equivalent to some standards of fine dining which all diners are likely to enjoy and (b) is at least partly a function of the diversity of dishes and (c) Aristotle attempts to establish (b) by comparing two feasts (a potluck and a feast provided by a single person) both of which should be understood to meet a minimal threshold of success and to be similar in size and composition of diners.

On the potluck interpretation, the feast analogy should be taken to suggest that the epistemic superiority of the collective political judgement of the special multitude is at least

partly a function of the diversity of the political viewpoints of its members.[21] The collective political judgement of the special multitude is better at tracking what is good and just for the city at least partly because it draws on a wider diversity of political viewpoints than the political judgement of an ordinarily excellent citizen or the collective judgement of a small group of ordinarily excellent citizens.[22] The potluck interpretation suggests that the collective political judgement of the special multitude is a complex whole that is comprised of diverse components, namely, the individual political judgements of its members.

The potluck interpretation has been recently challenged by Lane.[23] Lane does not take the diversity of meals to be characteristic of the feasts that Aristotle is referring to. Rather she understands Aristotle to intend to convey the thought that the public feasts are better 'in so far as many people contribute a measure of expense, so outstripping the provision in terms of the expense borne by any single individual.'[24] If Lane suggests that the overall expense of the feast defines its goodness, then her interpretation is difficult to accept. As Bobonich rightly observes, that definition of the goodness of the feast would be both unAristotelian and counter-intuitive. It would be unAristotelian in that it would take a non-essential property of a feast, namely, its expense, as a criterion of its goodness. And it would be counter-intuitive since that definition would discount the importance of expense per diner: a feast which has

[21] This appears to me to be Ober's position (see Ober (2013), 110-11).

[22] The compared political judgements of the special multitude as a whole and of the ordinarily excellent citizens must be also presumed to meet some minimal threshold of success, for example, they are articulate and not self-contradictory, and to be about comparable matters, for example, they are both about the value of a specific policy.

[23] Cammack (2013) also supports a similar interpretation.

[24] Lane (2013), 259. Cammack (2013), 183 provides a similar definition.

lesser expense per diner but higher overall expense would be better than a feast that has greater expense per diner but lower overall expense.[25]

We may, however, reformulate Lane's interpretation so as to avoid those objections while retaining its basic insight that the superior feasts need not be characterised by a diversity of dishes but rather by greater overall expense (for convenience let us call the reformulated interpretation, the 'expense' interpretation). In a similar way to our analysis of the potluck interpretation of the feast, we may consider that on the expense interpretation the goodness of a feast consists in some independent standards of fine dining (say, some combination of standards of taste and healthy diet) which are likely to be enjoyed by all diners and that it is at least partly a function of the overall expense of the feast. And we may also presume that in the context of the first analogy Aristotle attempts to illustrate the superiority of feasts of greater overall expense by comparing feasts of different overall expense that meet some minimal threshold of success and are similar in terms of their size and type of diners.[26] Now if the expense interpretation is to differ from the potluck interpretation, the greater overall expense must make it more likely that a feast meets the standards of fine dining not by enabling it to incorporate a great diversity of dishes but in some other way. I suggest the following. If the overall expense for a feast is greater, then it is natural to assume that a greater stock of food will be gathered. And if there is a greater stock of food, it is more likely that, first, there will be more food available for people to enjoy, say,

[25] Bobonich (2015), 150.

[26] Since some combination of the standards of taste and healthy diet is an essential feature of a meal, my proposed reformulation of Lane's interpretation is not susceptible to Bobonich's first objection. Nor is it susceptible to Bobonich's second objection: since the feasts that Aristotle compares succeed in feeding all diners and are of similar size, any meaningful increase of their total expense would entail meaningful increase of their expense per diner.

they can be served additional portions (let us call that the 'extra servings' advantage) and, second, the goodness of the feast will not be affected by factors that normally threaten a fine dining experience like the accidental burning of some dishes or the destruction of some ingredients and as a result no one will go hungry because of such misfortunes (let us call that the 'prophylactic' advantage).

Analogously, the special multitude can be understood to possess collectively to a greater degree than the ordinarily excellent citizens those abilities that make it more likely that one will track what is good and just for the city.[27] In what sense does possession of a greater degree of those abilities make the special multitude epistemically superior? We need to keep in mind that if the point of the feast analogy on the expense interpretation is to differ from the point it has on the potluck interpretation, the epistemic superiority of the collective political judgement of the special multitude over the judgement of ordinarily excellent citizens cannot be even partly a function of the diversity of the political viewpoints of its members. One might suggest that in a way analogous to the extra servings advantage the members of the special multitude are able to collectively assess more politically relevant reasons than ordinarily excellent citizens, for example, assess more implications of a certain policy or more objections to it. But it is hard to see how that suggestion would not introduce a diversity of viewpoints. For at least some individual members of the special multitude would base their political judgement on reasons that the ordinarily excellent citizens did not have access to when they deliberated. There is, however, a plausible advantage analogous to the prophylactic advantage: even if the special multitude collectively assessed the same political

[27] Lane (2013), 260 speaks of the many being able to provide more of whatever ability the best citizens can provide and Cammack (2013), 187-9 of the many having more *aretê*. But they do not explain in what way having more of the relevant ability or *aretê* makes the collective judgement of the many more likely to track what is good and just for the city.

reasons as the ordinarily excellent citizens, it would be less likely to make some errors that normally affect the quality of political reasoning (for example, one's omitting to take into account some known political objections when deliberating about what is good and just for the city).[28] In other words, on the expense interpretation having more of some relevant political abilities does not entail being able to examine more (and thus more diverse) political reasons but rather making fewer errors in political reasoning. The expense interpretation presupposes that we can somehow measure, add and compare undifferentiated units of the relevant abilities for political reasoning in the way for example that we can measure, add and compare undifferentiated units of material wealth (or, as we will see in the second analogy, human limbs).

The main arguments for the potluck interpretation are based on the description of the feast to which the many contribute as *sumphorêtos* (see *sumphorêta deipna* at III 11, 1281b2 and *hestiasis sumphorêtos* at III 15, 1286a29) which in its most attested use as a descriptor of common meals refers to contributions of different dishes and on the contrast of that feast with a feast which is simple (*haplês*) at III 15, 1286a30.[29] The primary evidence for the expense interpretation is that in the first analogy the feast to which the many contribute is contrasted with a meal that is funded by one person (*mias dapanês*, III 11, 1281b3) and not by a meal

[28] We have good reason to believe that for Aristotle the special multitude as whole would be less likely to make such errors. It is plausible to assume that such errors may be caused by some passion like anger and Aristotle holds that the collective judgement of the many is less likely to be corrupted by such passions than the judgement of individuals (*Pol* III 15, 1286b31-5). (Cammack (2013), 187 discusses the relevance of 1286b31-5 but analyses it in a different way.)

[29] For the relevant arguments see most recently Ober (2013), 111 n. 16.

cooked by single chef.[30] None of the contrasting pieces of linguistic evidence seems to me conclusive in its own right so as to force a choice between the potluck and the expense interpretation. It is more reasonable to examine the other two analogies that aim at clarifying the points of contrast between the collective judgement of the special multitude and the judgement of ordinarily excellent citizens before we choose between the two interpretations.

According to the second analogy, the special multitude is liken to a man with many feet, hands, perceptions, states of character and intellectual qualities (that is, parts of practical wisdom). The analogy suggests that the collective political judgement of the special multitude is supported by *more* practical wisdom and excellence of character than the judgement of ordinarily excellent citizens. Aristotle may assume that practical wisdom and excellence of character are two single qualities and that we can somehow measure undifferentiated units of them in the way that we can count hands or feet along the lines of the expense interpretation.[31] In that case, to say, for example, that the special multitude has more practical wisdom than a small group of ordinarily excellent citizens means that they collectively have more undifferentiated units of the relevant single intellectual quality. But the justificatory link that Aristotle draws between the second and the third analogy (see the use of *dio*, at III 11, 1281b7) suggests that he has a more complex understanding of what is involved in the collective practical wisdom and excellence of character of the special multitude.

[30] See Lane (2013), 253. Against the linguistic evidence for the potluck interpretation Lane argues that *sumphorêtos* in *ta sumphorêta deipna* at III 11, 1281b2 must be understood on the basis of the contrast with *ek mias dapanês* and understands *aplês* at III 15, 1286a30 to apply to the bearer of expense.

[31] See for example Cammack (2013), 184.

According to the third analogy, the collective political judgement of the special multitude *qualitatively* differs from the political judgement of ordinarily excellent citizens. The collective political judgement of the special multitude is analogous to the collective judgement of a multitude (the members of which are, presumably, at least to some extent, cultured and aesthetically sensitive) about the aesthetic quality of poems (III 11, 1281b7-10). Aristotle claims that (a) different members of that multitude focus on a different part (*morion*) of a poem when they assess the aesthetic value of that poem as whole while (b) all of them collectively consider all parts of a poem.[32] The analogy suggests that the point of (a) is that different members of the special multitude focus on different parts of a policy when they assess its political value as a whole and the point of (b) is that between them they consider all parts of that policy. Since different members of the special multitude focus on different parts of a policy, the collective judgement of the special multitude about a policy reflects a greater *diversity* of the relevant political reasons than the corresponding individual judgement of an ordinarily excellent citizen or the corresponding collective judgement of a small group of ordinarily excellent citizens. I call it the 'diversity' difference. And since the members of the special multitude between them consider all parts of a policy, the collective judgment of the special multitude is *complete* in the sense that it exhausts the range of the relevant political reasons. I call it the 'completeness' difference.

Given that the first analogy is unclear and that Aristotle takes the second and the third analogies to make the same point, I suggest a reading of the three analogies according to

[32] Cammack (2013), 191 claims that *morion* does not refer to a part of a poem but a part of *aretê* with which each spectator judges the poem. Her interpretation crucially depends on the implausible suggestion that the missing verb in the sentence *alloi gar allo ti morion, panta de pantes* (III 11, 1281b9-10) is not to be supplied, as one would naturally expect, from the previous sentence (and thus be *krinousin*) but from seven lines of Greek text before (taking cue from *suphorêta deipna* at III 11, 1281b2 and thus be *pherousin*).

which the first two are read in the light of the point of the third.[33] On the basis of that reading I ascribe to Aristotle the following 'superiority thesis' (ST):

(ST) The collective political judgement of the special multitude is epistemically superior to the political judgement of a single ordinarily excellent individual or to the collective political judgement of a small group of ordinarily excellent individuals because it is supported by more diverse and complete political reasons.[34]

The fact that the collective judgement of the special multitude is supported by more diverse and complete reasons may create the impression that the members of the special multitude possess collectively greater political understanding or knowledge than the

[33] This means that the feast in the first analogy is intended as a potluck that is characterised by diverse dishes that more or less exhaust the culinary variety appropriate for the occasion while in the second analogy the parts of practical wisdom and excellence of character of the individual members of the special multitude are understood not as undifferentiated units of single qualities but as diverse components of complex wholes. Lane (2013), 260 acknowledges that the third analogy suggests diversity of political judgements but does not see that as an argument in favour of the potluck interpretation of the first analogy. She argues that since each judge individually forms a judgement about the aesthetic value of a poem as whole and since their collective judgement is the aggregation of those individual judgements, it is the logic of aggregation that the third illustrates. That argument seems to conflate two separate issues. The first is the issue of whether the epistemic superiority of the collective political judgement of the special multitude is at least partly a function of the diversity of the political judgments of its members which is essentially the main tenet of the potluck interpretation of the first analogy. The second is the separate issue of how the diverse political judgements of individual members of the special multitude are combined. As I explain in sections 6 and 8, Aristotle holds both the main tenet of the potluck interpretation and the view that the collective judgement of the special multitude is the result of the aggregation of the political judgements of its individual members.

[34] I do not propose that ST is the only way Aristotle may account for epistemic superiority of the special multitude in the *Politics*. As I have already mentioned (see note 28 above), III 15, 1286b31-5 may be plausibly interpreted as suggesting that the members of the special multitude collectively may be less likely to commit errors of political reasoning. ST is meant to capture only how the three analogies in T1 account for the epistemic superiority of the collective political judgement of the special multitude.

ordinarily excellent individuals. As I explain in the next two sections, we should resist that interpretation of ST.

5 The fourth analogy in T2 and the inferiority thesis

Since T2 starts with 'but' (*alla*), it introduces a contrast. The contrast is with what immediately precedes it, namely, the gist of T1, according to which the members of the special multitude as a whole are epistemically superior to ordinarily excellent individuals. So, T2 aims at explaining a comparative superiority of ordinarily excellent individuals.

To explain that superiority Aristotle relies on analogy (4). On the one hand, an ordinarily excellent person is analogous to a beautiful person or to a painting of a beautiful person. On the other hand, each member of the special multitude is analogous to a non-beautiful person. Aristotle explains that the superiority of the ordinarily excellent individual consists in his bringing together into a unity separate things in the way that a beautiful person or a painting of a beautiful person brings together into a unity separate parts of the human body or representations of those parts respectively.

How should we understand Aristotle's reference to a 'part' of a human body? At the end of T1, he claimed that each member of the audience bases his assessment of the quality of a poem as a whole on his assessment of the quality of a different 'part' of the poem. In the context of analogy (3), a part of a poem is analogous to a part of a policy on the basis of his assessment of which each member of the special multitude bases his assessment of that policy as a whole. It is plausible to assume that similarly in T2 Aristotle treats a 'part' of a human body as being analogous to a part of a policy about the merits of which as a whole the special multitude collectively decides.

So, an ordinarily excellent individual differs from the individual members of the special multitude in that he alone unifies his judgements, that is, his *kriseis* (*Pol* III 11, 1281b8) about the political merits of different parts of a policy.[35] What does his unifying ability consist in? My suggestion is that Aristotle has in mind the kind of unifying ability that is associated with understanding, namely, an ability to grasp universals through knowing what is common in relevant particulars. That suggestion is supported by the contrast he draws in III 15 between the political capacities of a multitude that, as I have already argued,[36] should be identified with the special multitude that is the focus of III 11, 1281a40-b21 and the reason about the universal (*ton logon ton katholou*) that all rulers should possess (1286a16-17) and that involves primarily an understanding of the law (1286a9-11). It is the ruler (presumably because of his possession of the universal reason) that should legislate (1286a21-2) while the special multitude as a whole has the authority to decide *only* about what the law cannot fix at all or well (1286a24-6), namely, political particulars. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* legislative expertise which is considered a part of political expertise involves, like any type of expertise, grasping what various relevant particulars have in common (X 9, 1180b13-16) and the acquisition of legislative expertise requires, like the acquisition of any other expertise, 'progress towards the universal' (1180b21). At *Metaph* A 1, 981a24-b6 Aristotle clarifies that cognition (*gnôsis*) of universals involves an explanatory account of the nature of a relevant subject matter, namely, the subject matter of a relevant area of expertise. Those who possess understanding are able to support their ability to grasp what relevant particulars have in common with an appropriate explanatory account that

[35] For Aristotle *krisis* refers to a judgment that may be based on perception alone and not on reason (see *de An* III 3, 427a17-22 and *MA* 700b19-21). Thus we should not assume that the judgements of the special multitude involve significant exercise of their rational faculties. See also section 8 below.

[36] See note 8 above.

enables them to identify a relevant reason why (981a15-16 and 981a29) - that is ultimately what the unifying ability peculiar to understanding primarily consists in. So, I suggest that an ordinarily excellent individual differs from the individual members of the special multitude in that he alone possesses some political understanding that enables him to understand the law and involves the ability to produce some explanatory account for his decisions about the political merits of different parts of a policy.

If Aristotle's reference to the unifying ability of ordinarily excellent individuals signifies the fact that they alone possess some political understanding, in T2 Aristotle is committed to the following 'inferiority thesis' (IT):

(IT) Individual members of the special multitude are inferior to ordinarily excellent individuals in that they lack political understanding.

The conjunction of ST and IT shows that for Aristotle the collective judgement of the members of the special multitude is epistemically superior to the individual or collective judgement of ordinarily excellent individuals even though no member of the special multitude has political understanding.

One may object that in T2 Aristotle refers only to the epistemic state of individual members of the special multitude *before* they have somehow brought together their intellectual resources (say, through some form of consultation or deliberation) and formed a collective judgement about a certain policy. But Aristotle may still think that after they have combined their intellectual resources all or most individual members of the special multitude attain some relevant political understanding.

That is implausible. On that interpretation, through a process of collective decision-making the members of the special multitude would reach the same epistemic state as an ordinarily excellent individual. But that is at odds with Aristotle's insistence in T1 that by

coming together the members of the special multitude become better than the few ordinarily excellent citizens 'not individually but collectively'. Aristotle implies that even when they have come together and collectively reached a political decision, the members of the special multitude remain *individually* inferior to the ordinarily excellent citizens. T2 explains what their inferiority consists in.

Do the members of the special multitude *collectively*, though not individually, grasp some relevant political universals and thus attain some political understanding? If that were the case, the collective epistemic superiority of the special multitude over the ordinarily excellent individuals as expressed in ST could be accounted for by its superior collective political understanding. We have strong reason to reject that interpretation. As we have already seen, in *Pol* III 15, Aristotle is explicit that all the collective decisions of the special multitude are about *particulars* (*peri tôn kath' hekaston*) (1286a26-8). It is with respect to decisions about the relevant political particulars (for example, specific policies) that the members of that multitude are collectively better than the ordinarily excellent person (1286a28-9). And in that context Aristotle contrasts the authority of that multitude to decide on political particulars with the reason about the universal that gives its possessors the authority to legislate. That contrast suggests that the members of the special multitude not only individually *but also collectively* lack the relevant universal reason, though they collectively possess a superior ability to grasp political particulars. So, if the special multitude as a whole lacks universal reason, it cannot have political understanding.

My argument above suggests that one should look for an explanation of the epistemic superiority of the special multitude as expressed in ST that does not presuppose that its members either individually or collectively possess political understanding. I take up this task in the next section. One also needs to clarify the epistemic state of individual members of the

special multitude, that is, the type of political understanding that they lack and the type of ability to grasp political universals that they possess. I explore that issue in section 7.

6 Epistemic superiority without political understanding

In T2 Aristotle acknowledges that, when judged separately, a part of a human body, say the eye, of a particular individual who is not beautiful as a whole may nevertheless be more beautiful than a painting of the same part of the human body of a beautiful person. Given the analogy between parts of human bodies and policies that Aristotle draws, we may ascribe to him the following assumption:

A1) There are always individual members of the special multitude who can assess the political merits of parts of a policy, P, better than a single ordinarily excellent individual.

For example, concerning a policy about war and peace, one member of the special multitude may judge better than an ordinarily excellent individual the military might of the army of the polity, another may judge better how to improve the military capability of the army, a third may judge better the military might of the army of a neighbouring city.[37]

A1 alone cannot establish the epistemic superiority of the special multitude as expressed in ST. For it does not preclude that those members of the special multitude who can assess competently the political merits of a certain part, p, of policy, P, will base their judgement of the political merits of P as a whole on their assessment of p as opposed to their assessment of another part, p*, of P which they may not be well-qualified to assess. For example, even though a group of citizens may be more qualified to assess the military might of their army, they may base their overall judgement about the merits of waging war against a

[37] See *Rh* I 4, 1359b33-60a5 for the type of considerations relevant to decisions about war and peace.

neighbouring city on their view about the military might of the army of that city that they may not be equally qualified to assess. If individual members of the special multitude systematically fail to base their judgement about the political merits of a policy as a whole on their judgement about that part of the policy that they are most qualified to assess, then the collective judgement of the special multitude may not be epistemically superior to the judgement of an ordinarily excellent citizen or the collective judgement of a small group of ordinarily excellent citizens.

A1 may explain the epistemic superiority of the collective judgement of the special multitude if coupled with the following assumptions:

(A2) The individual members of the special multitude are inclined to base their judgements about the political merits of a policy as whole on their assessments of the political merits of those parts of that policy that they are most qualified to assess.

(A3) Between them the individual members of the special multitude assess all parts of a policy.

(A4) In forming their judgement about the political merits of a policy as a whole the individual members of the special multitude aim at serving the good of the city.

A2 rules out the possibility sketched in the penultimate paragraph. A3 rules out the possibility that the ordinarily excellent individuals may base their judgement about the political merits of a policy on reasons not considered by any individual members of the special multitude. A4 precludes the possibility that, even though the members of the special multitude can correctly assess the merits of a part of a policy, they may intentionally try to harm the city, for example, in order to satisfy some personal short-term benefit.

A3 is nothing other than a restatement of the completeness difference. And A2 is a plausible pre-supposition of the diversity difference. The collective judgement of the special multitude reflects more diverse reasons than the collective judgement of a small group of ordinarily excellent citizens only if its members are inclined to base their judgements about the value of a policy as a whole on their assessment of the value of those parts of that policy

that they are most qualified to assess. If they were not so-inclined, they might all focus on the same part of a policy which not everyone may assess competently.

A2 may be understood in two different ways. On the one hand, it may be an empirical generalisation about the formation of political preferences. Aristotle may believe that in forming their political preferences people in general tend to focus on those aspects of a political issue that they have superior competence in assessing. On the other hand, it may be a thesis about the moral psychology of the special multitude in particular. Aristotle may be assuming that, since its members possess some practical wisdom, they have sufficient self-knowledge to avoid forming judgements about issues that they are not competent to judge.

A4 is supported by the consideration that the members of the special multitude contribute to the governance of a correct constitution. As we have seen, a correct constitution aims at the common good. Since polity is a correct constitution and the members of the special multitude contribute to its governance, it is plausible to assume that their political decisions aim at the common good.

The conjunction of A1, A2, A3 and A4 explains the epistemic superiority of the collective judgement of the special multitude without ascribing to its members either individually or collectively political understanding.[38] Rather the superiority of its collective judgement is based on the aggregated ability of its individual members to assess the political

[38] A1-A4 do not clarify how rankings of the importance that each part of a policy has for an assessment of the political merits of that policy as a whole will be decided. For the military strength of one's army may be a more important factor to consider than, say, the potential displeasure of a weak ally in assessing whether to declare war against another city. Given the abstractness of Aristotle's arguments, we cannot tell how he thought that possible disagreements about the relevant rankings would be settled (whether, for example, by a decision of an assembly of all members of the special multitude or by a decision of a smaller body of ordinarily excellent citizens, say, a council).

merits of parts of policies, that is, political particulars. In the following section I clarify what that ability consists in.

7 Political universals and particulars

I start by explaining the epistemic state that members of the special multitude both individually and collectively lack, namely, political understanding. For Aristotle the end of political understanding, and thus the relevant political universal that its possessor has an explanatory theory about, is the political good (*politikon agathon*) which is equivalent to justice and the common benefit (*koinê sumpheron*) (*Pol* III 12, 1282b14-18). The members of the special multitude lack an explanatory theory of the political good that is based on an understanding of the *eudaimonia* of the city-state. Someone who possesses understanding of that kind of political universal will be able to explain, *inter alia*, what the best life for men is (whether, for example, it is some form of political life or the theoretical life) or how virtue and practical wisdom relate to *eudaimonia*, and to provide a blueprint of the best constitution (VII 13, 1332a3-7). It is plausible to assume that that kind of political understanding calls for exceptional intellectual abilities and complete excellence and thus belongs only to those qualified to be absolute kings or the aristocratic best.

The members of the special multitude do not lack only that kind of 'high-level' understanding of the political good. IT shows that they also lack the type of political understanding that ordinarily excellent individuals may attain. Given that the latter lack complete excellence, they should not be considered to possess high-level understanding of the political good. It is more likely that they possess understanding of two other types of universal truths about politics: (a) those relating to the principles and causes of changes of constitutions and political factions (V 2, 1302a16-18) and (b) those relating to the universal

prescriptions contained in laws (III 15, 1286a10-11; cf. *EN* V 14, 1137b13). As we have seen, Aristotle requires that all rulers possess knowledge of (b). And he takes knowledge of (a) to be a necessary component of knowledge of (b) (*Rh* I 4, 1360a18-36).

Understanding the laws of one's city-state does not amount to simply knowing the laws in the sense of knowing their content. Even those who lack high levels of ordinary political excellence but are ordinarily good, for example, members of the special multitude, may know the laws. Rather understanding the laws of a city-state means understanding how the laws relate to the constitution of that city-state.[39] As Aristotle explains, knowing which laws are appropriate for which constitution is a constituent of political knowledge (*phronêseôs*) (*Pol* IV 1, 1289a12-13). For, 'the laws should be promulgated for the sake of the constitution and all laws are so promulgated, and not the constitutions for the sake of the laws' (1289a13-15). A constitution is an organisation of the political offices that ultimately serves an end (*telos*) that is specific to that society (1289a15-18). Each constitution has a different end or defining mark (*horos*): for example, for aristocracy, it is excellence, for oligarchy wealth, and for democracy freedom (IV 8, 1294a10-11; cf. V 10, 1311a9-11, VI 2, 1317a40-b11 and *Rh* I 8, 1366a2-6).[40] So, understanding the laws of a city-state ultimately involves knowing the end or defining mark of its constitution. Knowledge of the end or the defining mark of a constitution enables one to assess whether its laws undermine the constitution (*Pol* II 9, 1269a32-4). If the laws undermine the constitution, then they may generate faction or lead to a gradual, non-violent change of the constitution.

[39] *nomoi* and *politeia* are frequently contrasted in the *Politics*: see II 6, 1265a1-2, 12, 1273b32-4, 1274b15-16, III 15, 1286a2-3.

[40] Aristotle uses *telos* and *horos* interchangeably in those passages. For an account of their relation see Reeve (2012), 134-47.

So, an ordinarily excellent individual may have an understanding of the end or defining mark of polity, namely, ordinary military excellence, and an explanatory theory about how the laws promote ordinary military excellence and preserve the constitution. His understanding of the conditions that preserve polity is further supported by his grasp of universal truths about the causes of changes of constitutions.

That kind of explanatory understanding about laws, constitutions and political change is useful for the ordinarily excellent individual in two ways. First, it makes him the most appropriate person in a polity to decide about issues of legislation, that is, issues relating to the change of old laws or the introduction of new ones. Legislative issues are extremely important since 'the salvation of the city depends on the laws' (*Rh* I 4, 1360a19-20). Second, it allows him to reach the kind of unifying account about the political merits of different parts of a policy that Aristotle refers to in T2. That is, he can explain why a certain policy that on his assessment has parts with such and such features may better promote the political good than a different policy that on his assessment has parts with opposing features. For example, he can explain why forming an alliance with a neighbouring city that on his assessment involves having a peaceful attitude towards a militarily stronger city and facilitating imports of necessary goods is more beneficial than forming an alliance with its opponent.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle acknowledges that practical wisdom requires not only adequate understanding of the universal but also knowledge of the particular (VI 7, 1141b14-16). But understanding the universal does not entail knowing the particular or vice versa: some people may excel in their capacity to identify the particular while having inadequate understanding of the universal while others may understand the universal but have a poor capacity to identify the relevant particular (1141b16-21). Those who know the particulars but lack understanding of the universal are (merely) 'experienced' (*empeiroi*, 1141b18). That is in line with Aristotle's account of experience at *Metaph* A 1, 981a15-16

according to which, experience is defined as cognition of particulars and involves at most the ability to spot similarities between particular cases and possibly grasp some relevant empirical generalisations.[41] The merely experienced lack the unifying ability associated with understanding of the universal – they are like artisans (*cheirotechas*) who produce things through habit (*di' ethos*) while they lack genuine knowledge of their products (981b1-2).

So, an ordinarily excellent individual's explanatory understanding about laws, constitutions and political change need not always help him to correctly assess the political merits of parts of particular policies. For example, even though he may understand the reason why the preservation of polity requires that no family within the city-state acquires excessive political influence, he may fail to see that a part of a particular policy, say, the abolition of a certain tax as part of a commercial treaty with a neighbouring city may excessively benefit a particular family. His failure to see through the political effects of a part of that particular policy may be due to various factors, for example, oversight, miscalculation or lack of information about the specific financial situation of that family. Or even though he may have an explanatory understanding of the general military interests of the city, for example, the reason why its military prowess depends on the control of the sea, he may support a naval expedition that is militarily inexpedient. This could be again due to various factors such as miscalculation of the current military strength of the city or misinformation about the military strength of the enemy.

[41] For the view that for Aristotle experience involves grasping some empirical generalisations which nevertheless fail to identify an appropriate reason why see Frede (1996), 160-3. I cannot explore here the significant literature on Aristotle's account of experience (for a useful overview see Hasper and Yurdin (2014)). Throughout this article I assume that experience may involve grasp of some generalisations which nevertheless lack explanatory power.

By contrast, as per IT, the members of the special multitude lack the kind of explanatory understanding about laws, constitutions and political change that the ordinarily excellent individual possesses. That is presumably why, as we have seen, Aristotle restricts the authority of the special multitude to issues that the laws do not fix and does not ascribe to them legislative powers. But since their collective political excellence is about the particular and experience is cognition of particulars, they may be considered to collectively possess greater political *experience* than a single ordinarily excellent individual or a small group of ordinarily excellent individuals. First, as per A1, there are always some members of the special multitude that individually have greater political experience about some parts of a policy than an ordinarily excellent citizen. For example, some may have greater experience in fighting against an enemy at sea and thus they may be better in assessing the strength of the enemy's navy. Or others may have greater experience in dealing financially with a certain family and thus they may be better in assessing how a tax reform may affect its finances. Second, as per A2 and A3, the members of the special multitude base their individual judgements about the political merits of a policy as a whole on their judgement about the part of that policy they are most experienced in and between them they have experience in all parts of a policy.

As we have seen, Aristotle thinks that for artisans experience is the result of habit. We may similarly understand the political experience of individual members of the special multitude to be the result of some kind of habituation. First, experience is necessary for taking care of military issues (*Pol* VI 8, 1322a32-3) that are the type of issues a polity is most concerned with. For example, someone who has experience in military logistics may have seen how others have been planning military campaigns and may continue to follow their lead for years internalising a pattern of military preparations even though he cannot explain the rationale behind that pattern.

Second, habituation may also be the cause of experience in assessments of the justice of parts of policies and their contribution to the common benefit. The members of the special multitude have been habituated in the laws of their polity that prescribe what is just and beneficial for it.[42] That is, they have been brought up within the context of its particular legal regime and have repeatedly witnessed how decisions are made in the assembly and the courts. They thus have acquired a 'sense' of the political good of their polity even though they may be unable to explain its principles of political justice or its strategic ends.[43] As those merely experienced in medicine can identify correctly particular treatments for patients without understanding why those treatments improve their health or what the cause of the disease is (*Metaph* A 1, 981a5-12 cf. *EN* X 9, 1180b16-20) so members of the special multitude may be able to correctly identify particular policies that promote the political good without understanding why they do so or what the good of their polity consists in. The relevant habituated 'sense' of the political good may be understood as an ability to spot similarities between particular cases and potentially grasp some relevant generalisations about justice and the common good. For example, the members of the special multitude may see the similarities between the justice of a previous tax and a proposed new one or believe that certain offices should be filled by election even though they cannot explain why those arrangement are just and beneficial for the city.

Experienced people can make correct judgements because they have an 'eye' shaped by experience (*EN* VI 11, 1143b12-15). In other words, political experience shapes political

[42] For Aristotle, 'law has no power to convince the citizens other than habit' (*Pol* II 8, 1269a20-1; cf. *EN* X 9, 1180a1-5)

[43] We should then understand that the political excellence of the members of the special multitude, which, as I explained in section 3, consists primarily in military excellence, is the result of habit. For the notion of political excellence being the result of habit see *Pol* VI 13, 1332a37-b11.

perception. Individual members of the special multitude can 'see' that particular parts of a certain policy may promote the political good.[44] So, the collective epistemic superiority of the members of the special multitude is ultimately based on their individual political perception as shaped by their individual political experience. But since they lack an explanatory account of laws, constitutions and political change and in general of the political good of their polity, they do not 'understand' their political judgements. They are like artisans who manage to produce good things without understanding what they are producing.[45]

8 Aggregation, deliberation and political legitimacy

Aristotle relies on the general thesis that whatever is attested by a large number of perceivers, each one of whom has presumably a functioning perceptual capacity, is more likely to be true than whatever is attested by only one or few perceivers. As he puts it, it is absurd to believe that one person who judges relying only on a pair of eyes and ears and acts using only a pair of hands and feet judges and acts better than many people who rely on many pairs (*Pol* III 16, 1287b26-9). So, the combination of the individual judgements of members of the special multitude about the political merits of a policy as a whole, each one of which is based on some reliable political perception of a different part of that policy and all of which cover between them all parts may be more likely to identify the particular policy that promotes the

[44] Cf. *Pol* I 1, 1253a17-18 for the idea that human beings may perceive (*aisthêsin echein*) what is beneficial or harmful and just or unjust.

[45] That analysis also helps us understand the full nature of ordinary political excellence. An ordinarily excellent citizen, like any of his ordinarily good fellow-citizens, would have considerable experience relevant to some part of a policy. But he will in addition possess explanatory understanding about laws, the constitution and political change. That type of political understanding differentiates him from the majority of his fellow-citizens and explains why he is not simply ordinarily good but ordinarily excellent.

political good of the polity than the political judgements of one or few ordinarily excellent citizens that are based on less diverse and incomplete political perceptions.

How should we understand the relevant combination? There are, broadly speaking, two main alternatives. The first is aggregation: each member of the special multitude forms a judgement about the political value of a policy as whole based on his perception of the value of a part of it and then through some process of aggregation (say, equal voting in the assembly) the collective judgement of the special multitude emerges. There might be some form of consultation among members of the special multitude (say, informal discussions among friends prior to an assembly meeting) or exposure to arguments from experts (say, in an assembly meeting) prior to the relevant process of aggregation. But any relevant dialectical engagement is rather minimal and each member of the special multitude relies primarily on his personal experience in forming his political judgement.

The second alternative is that the combination emerges as a result of public deliberation that involves significant dialectical engagement between the members of the special multitude. That is the understanding of combination advanced by supporters of a recent influential interpretation of III 11 which I label the 'deliberation interpretation'. As Waldron puts it, for Aristotle 'deliberation among the many is a way of bringing each citizen's ethical views and insights – such as they are – to bear on the views and insights of each of the others, so that they cast light on each other, providing a basis for reciprocal questioning and criticism, and enabling a position to emerge which is better than any of the inputs and much more than an aggregation or function of those inputs'.[46] The outcome of public deliberation is a 'synthesis' of the views of individual citizens[47] that is held by (all or

[46] Waldron (1995), 569-70.

[47] Waldron (1995), 569.

most of) the individual citizens[48] and approximates Aristotle's account of the rule of reason.[49] On the dialectical understanding of combination, the collective judgement of the special multitude would be not an aggregation but a dialectical synthesis of the views of the individual members of the special multitude guided by reason.

I am sceptical about the dialectical account of combination. First, the idea that the dialectical synthesis of their individual political views is held by individual citizens and is akin to the rule of reason suggests that the individual citizens attain some kind of explanatory understanding after the process of public deliberation is completed. For they should be able to explain the rather complex structure of reasons that support their chosen policy and defend it against criticisms. But, as I have explained, the idea that the members of the special multitude possess any relevant explanatory understanding conflicts with IT and thus should be rejected. Second, in order to engage in dialectical public deliberation, the citizens need to possess significant abilities to rationally reconstruct and communicate their views. For example, Waldron claims that participants in public deliberation should possess the ability to explain the 'tentative synthesis one has arrived at for the benefit of others'.[50] But if, as I have argued, the members of the special multitude are merely experienced, it is doubtful that they possess the relevant abilities. For in *Metaph* A 1 Aristotle appears to relate the skills of rationalisation and communication with understanding while mere experience is associated with the rather unreflective and inarticulate state of habit. That is clear from his claim that only those who have understanding and not the merely experienced can teach (981b3-10). For those reasons it is more plausible to assume that for Aristotle the collective judgement of the special

[48] Waldron (1995), 571.

[49] Wilson (2011), 260-2.

[50] Waldron (1995), 575.

multitude is the result of mere aggregation of the political judgements of its individual members as opposed to dialectical public deliberation.

As Aristotle clarifies in III 12, one's claim to rule should be proportionate to one's political excellence in accordance with his principle of political justice.[51] This means that if X has greater political excellence than Y, then X should have greater political power than Y (and that the amount of X's political power depends on the extent to which X's political excellence surpasses Y's). It is plausible to assume that for Aristotle the superior collective capacity of the special multitude to identify particular policies that promote the political good entails that its collective political excellence is greater than the political excellence of a single ordinarily excellent individual or of a small group of ordinarily excellent individuals. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle acknowledges that the capacity to identify the correct particulars is a more important aspect of practical wisdom than knowledge of the corresponding universal because that capacity is more directly related to action (VI 7, 1141b16-23). In a similar manner, the capacity of the special multitude to identify particular policies that promote the political good is more directly related to political action and thus is a more important aspect of political excellence than the understanding about the political good that the few excellent citizens possess. So, in line with Aristotle's principle of political justice the members of the special multitude may have collectively a stronger claim to rule than the latter.

9 Conclusion

[51] For an analysis of which see Keyt (1991).

To sum up, Aristotle's arguments at *Pol* III 11, 1281a40-b21 concern the excellence in political decision-making of a special multitude, that is, the ability of a special multitude to make political judgements that correctly identify what is good and just for the city. That multitude is best understood on the model of the multitude that rules in polities and its members are best considered to be accomplished in military excellence. The collective political judgement of its members is contrasted with and is deemed to be epistemically superior to the political judgement of the best citizens in polities, that is, those who individually exceed their fellow citizens in military excellence. The collective judgement of the special multitude concerns political particulars, that is, specific policies, for example, policies about engagement in or the conduct of military conflicts. Its epistemic superiority is partly a function of the diversity of the individual political judgements of its members and is ultimately grounded not in their collective political understanding but in their collective political experience. The collective political judgement of the special multitude does not result from dialectical public deliberation but from mere aggregation (for example, through some form of voting) of the individual political judgements of its members about the value of specific policies.

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