

Plato and Aristotle on the Sick, the Deformed, Foreigners and Slaves
Prepared by Dr. Andrew DeCort

PLATO:

Plato, *Republic*, Book II, 371e (on servants):

“There are, I suppose, still some other servants who, in terms of their minds, wouldn’t be quite up to the level of partnership (*koinonia*), but whose bodies are strong enough for labor. They sell the use of their strength and, because they call their price a wage, they are, I suppose, called wage earners.”

Book II, 382c (on enemies): Socrates admits that false stories can be used against enemies like a weapon (he also says they can be used with friends like a drug). Rulers can lie against enemies (389b).

463c: “Doesn’t [the ruler] hold the one who is his kin to be his own, and speak of him as such, while the outsider he does not hold to be his own?” (463c).

Book III 410a (on the sick):

“[Socrates:] ‘Will you set down a law in the city providing as well for an art of medicine such as we described along with such an art of judging, which will care for those of your citizens who have good natures in body and soul; while as for those who haven’t, they’ll let die the ones whose bodies are such, and the ones whose souls have bad natures and are incurable, they themselves will kill?’ ‘Well,’ he [Glaucon] said, ‘that’s the way it looked best for those who undergo it and for the city.’”

Book V, 459e, 460a, and 461c (on eugenics, infanticide, and the deformed):

“‘On the basis of what has been agreed,’ I [Socrates] said, ‘there is a need for the best men to have intercourse as often as possible with the best women, and the reverse for the most ordinary men with the most ordinary women; and the offspring of the former must be reared but not that of the others, if the flock is going to be of the most eminent quality. And all this must come to pass without being noticed by anyone except the rulers themselves if the guardians’ herd is to be as free as possible from faction...’

So, I think, they will take the offspring of the good and bring them into the pen to certain nurses who live apart in a certain section of the city. And those of the worse, and any of the others born deformed, they will hide away in an unspeakable and unseen place, as is seemly.’ ‘If,’ he [Glaucon] said, ‘the guardians’ species is going to remain pure.’ ...

[Socrates:] ‘Now I suppose that when the women and the men are beyond the age of procreation, we will, of course, leave them free to have intercourse with whomsoever they wish, except with a daughter, a mother, the children of their daughters, and the ancestors of their mother, and, as for the women, except with a son and a father and the

descendants of the one and the ancestors of the other; and all of this only after they have been told to be especially careful never to let even a single foetus see the light of day, if one should be conceived, and, if one should force its way, to deal with it on the understanding that there's to be no rearing for such a child.'"

Book V, 469b-c, 470c-d, and 471b (on foreigners and/as slaves):

"First, as to enslavement: which seems just, that Greek cities enslave Greeks; or that they, insofar as possible, not even allow another city to do it but make it a habit to spare the Greek stock, well aware of the danger of enslavement at the hands of the barbarians?"
"Sparing them is wholly and entirely superior."

"I assert that the Greek stock is with respect to itself its own and akin, with respect to the barbaric, foreign and alien... Then when Greeks fight with barbarians and barbarians with Greeks, we'll assert they are at war and are enemies by nature and this hatred must be called war; while when Greeks do any such thing to Greeks, we'll say that they are by nature friends, but in this case Greece is sick and factious, and this kind of hatred must be called faction."

"Toward the barbarians they [the Greeks] must behave as the Greeks do now toward one another [burning houses, destroying fields, killing men, women, and children]."

ARISTOTLE:

Aristotle merely repeats Plato's position on slaves in his *Politics*:

Book I, 1252a25ff: "[the ruler's] mind is naturally ruler and naturally master, and one that can do these things [labor] is subject and naturally a slave [*physei doulon*]; so that master and slave have the same interest. Thus the female and the slave are by nature distinct (for nature makes nothing as cutlers make the Delphic knife, in a niggardly way, but one thing for one purpose; for so each tool will be turned out in the finest perfection, if it serves not many uses but one). Yet among barbarians the female and the slave have the same rank; and the cause of this is that the barbarians have no class of natural rulers, but with them the conjugal partnership is a partnership of female slave and male slave. Hence the saying of the poets, 'It is right that Greeks should rule Barbarians.'

Book I, 1253b1ff: "Household management (*oikonomias*) falls into departments corresponding to the parts of which the household in its turn is composed; and the household in its perfect form consists of slaves and freemen. The investigation of everything should begin with its smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master (*despotes*) and slave (*doulos*), husband and wife, father and children... Just as for the definite arts it would be necessary for the proper tools to be forthcoming if their work is to be accomplished, so also the manager of a household (*oikonomiko*) must have his tools (*organon*), and of tools some are lifeless (*apsycha*) and others living (*empsycha*) (for example, for a helmsman the rudder is a lifeless tool and the lookout man a live tool – for an assistant in the arts belongs to the class of tools), so also

an article of property (*ktema*) is a tool for the purpose of life, and property generally is a collection of tools, and a slave is a live article of property [*ho doulos ktema ti empsychon*]. . . . But life is doing things, not making things; hence the slave is an assistant in the class of instruments of action. And the term ‘article of property’ [*ktema*] is used in the same way as the term ‘part’ [*morion*]: a thing that is a part is not only a part of another thing but absolutely belongs to another thing, and so also does an article of property. Hence whereas the master is merely the slave’s master and does not belong to the slave, the slave is not merely the slave of the master but wholly belongs to the master. These considerations therefore make clear the nature of the slave and his essential quality: one who is a human being belonging by nature not to himself but to another is by nature a slave. . . . Authority [*archein*] and subordination [*archesthai*] are conditions not only inevitable but also expedient; in some cases things are marked out from the moment of birth to rule [*archein*] or to be ruled [*archesthai*]. . . . This characteristic of living things is present in them as an outcome of the whole of nature, since even in things that do not partake of life there is a ruling principle [*arche*], as in the case of a musical scale. . . . it is natural and expedient for the body to be governed [*archesthai*] by the soul and for the emotional part to be governed by the intellect, the part possessing reason, whereas for the two parties to be on an equal footing or in the contrary position is harmful in all cases. Again, the same holds good between man and the other animals: tame animals are superior in their nature to wild animals, yet for all the former it is advantageous to be ruled [*archesthai*] by man, since he gives them security [*soterias*]. Also, as between the sexes, the male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the male ruler [*archon*] and the female subject [*archomenon*]. And the same must necessarily apply in the case of mankind generally; therefore all men that differ as widely as the soul does from the body and the human from the lower animal (and this is the condition of those whose function is the use of the body and from whom this is the best that is forthcoming) – these are by nature slaves [*physei douloi*], for whom to be governed [*archesthai*] by this kind of authority [*tauten ten archen*] is advantageous, inasmuch as it is advantageous to the subject things already mentioned. For he is by nature a slave who is capable of belonging to another (and that is why he does so belong), and who participates in reason so far as to apprehend it but not to possess it; for the animals other than man are subservient not to reason, by apprehending it, but to feelings. And also the usefulness of slaves diverges little from that of animals; bodily service for the necessities of life is forthcoming from both, from slaves and from domestic animals alike. The intention of nature therefore is to make the bodies also of freemen and of slaves different – the latter strong for necessary service, the former erect and unserviceable for such occupations, but serviceable for a life of citizenship (and that again divides into the employments of war and those of peace). . . . It is manifest therefore that there are cases of people of whom some are freemen and the others slaves by nature, and for these slavery is an institution both expedient and just [*dikaion*].”