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## Men at Work: *Poesis*, Politics and Labor in Aristotle and Some Aristotelians\*

*Abstract:* In Book 3 of his *Politics*, and again in Book 7, Aristotle makes explicit his disdain for the *banausos* (often translated ‘mechanic’) as an occupation qualified for full civic life. Where modern admirers of Aristotle, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, have taken him at face value concerning this topic and thus felt a need to distance themselves from him, I claim that the grounds that Aristotle offers for the exclusion of *banausoi* from citizenship are not consistent with other important teachings (found in the eighth book of the *Politics* as well as in several of his other writings) about the nature of *poesis* (‘productive science’, which is the form of knowledge characteristic of the so-called ‘mechanical arts’). I further support this claim with reference to the role played by the mechanical arts within the Aristotelian framework of knowledge that one encounters in medieval European thought between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, with particular reference to Hugh of St. Victor, John of Salisbury, and Marsiglio of Padua.

### 0. Introduction

One of the greatest challenges facing recent thinkers who wish to recuperate Aristotle’s moral and political philosophy for a contemporary audience has been the exceedingly exclusionary, some might say ‘elitist’, qualifications that he demanded for achieving practical virtue.<sup>1</sup> Women, slaves, barbarians and *banausoi* (a term often translated ‘mechanics’) need not apply, according to Aristotle, because their natures and/or occupations disqualify them from full participation in civic affairs. Only free, adult, Greek males of leisure and at least moderate wealth possessed the conditions of life necessary in order to learn and practice the moral virtues and to engage as citizens ruling and being ruled in turn. Given modern predilections for both natural and political equality, and thus for a far more inclusive view of moral and political life, Aristotle’s position would not appear to be very congenial to the concerns of current philosophy as well as practice.

Consequently, some modern Aristotelians have sought to explain away or diminish the significance of Aristotle’s exclusions by ascribing them to cultural

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<sup>1</sup> A valuable appraisal of the recent revival of Aristotelianism in political theory is offered by Wallach 1992. See also the contributions to Tessitore (ed.) 2002.

prejudices or blindness that he shared with his times. On this account, there is nothing inherent in Aristotle's own philosophy that warrants or requires exclusion. Hence, what he says concerning the moral and political capacities of free, adult, Greek males of leisure and wealth can be extended to apply equally to all human beings, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, or occupation. Alasdair MacIntyre, for one, has adopted a version of this thesis in several of his important books. Discussing the problem at greatest length in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre declares that

“the claim that in the best kind of *polis* the distribution of public offices and the honoring of achievement will be in accordance with excellence, that is, with virtue, is independent of any thesis about what kinds of persons are and are not capable of excellence. What Aristotle's invalid arguments direct our attention to is that in the best kind of *polis* the participation of women or of artisans would require a restructuring of their occupational and social roles of a kind inconceivable to Aristotle himself [...]. What therefore remains so far at least unscathed in Aristotle's account of the best kind of *polis* is the thesis that a political constitution which is designed to promote the exercise of virtue in political life will need to concern itself with the occupational structure of the *polis*.”<sup>2</sup>

If MacIntyre is correct, then we should be able to detach Aristotle's theory of distributive justice from his account of the virtues in such fashion as to permit all of his excluded categories of citizens to realize their faculties and capacities in a manner congruent with the moral purposes for which the civic body exists. Where Aristotle (wrongly, MacIntyre contends) presumed that the excellences of women and *banausoi* were worthless to the ultimate ends of the *polis*, one may still be a perfectly coherent Aristotelian and subscribe to the view that such groups do indeed contribute to the overall good of the community. This is what I take MacIntyre to mean by his assertion that the *polis* can and must revalue ‘occupational and social roles’ in a more inclusive manner.

Is MacIntyre right? The question of the status of women has been taken up by various feminist theorists, whose work I do not need to recapitulate here (see Freeland 1998). Likewise, much has been said regarding Aristotle's views on slavery.<sup>3</sup> In the present paper, I propose to concentrate on the question of whether ‘mechanics’ may be included in the just Aristotelian political order in a way that remains consonant with fundamental features of Aristotle's philosophy. In my view, there is an additional dimension, unnoticed by MacIntyre, to the occupational revaluation of *banausoi* that he advocates. This factor stems from Aristotle's own organization of the realms and domains of human knowledge. As MacIntyre accurately insists in several of his books, it is necessary to set Aristotle's account of moral and political life in the context of his distinction

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<sup>2</sup> MacIntyre 1988. See also MacIntyre 1981, 158–160 and MacIntyre 1999, 6–7.

<sup>3</sup> For instance Smith 1991, 142–155; Frank 2005, 26–32. Eugene Garver very recently shared with me an unpublished paper entitled “Aristotle's Natural Slaves: Incomplete *Praxis* and Incomplete Human Beings” that does much to unravel the questions surrounding this topic.

between theoretical or contemplative virtue and practical or active virtue (see MacIntyre 1989, 91–93; 1990, 111). Each realm depends upon different forms of knowledge: the former seeks universal first principles for their own sake; the latter aims at particular precepts of action for the sake of something else, namely, *eudaimonia*. Aristotle believes that both are necessary for full human flourishing, albeit in different ways: he posits an ordering between them, such that the exercise of active virtues is a necessary but subordinate condition for the acquisition of theoretical excellence. As MacIntyre properly acknowledges, the acquisition and use of practical intelligence, *phronesis*, is a worthy pursuit because it simultaneously confers *eudaimonia* and makes possible the ‘higher’ satisfactions afforded by *episteme*, theoretical inquiry. As MacIntyre concludes, “[a]lthough Aristotle does indeed contrast the *episteme* of universals with the particularity of *phronetic* concerns, the two are clearly linked.” (1989, 93)

What MacIntyre, curiously, does not appear to recognize is that Aristotle’s division of knowledge throughout his corpus is actually tri-partite: in addition to the theoretical and practical realms of inquiry, Aristotle talks repeatedly and at length about ‘productive’ science (*poesis*).<sup>4</sup> This is not an insignificant omission, I think, because the ‘productive’ domain of knowledge is precisely that which guides the activities associated with the ‘mechanical arts’. In order to understand adequately the difficulties attendant upon Aristotle’s insistence on the ‘practical’ incompetence, and thus political exclusion, of *banausoi*, I contend that we must investigate this third classification of the sciences. I hold that Aristotle’s attitude in the *Politics* and elsewhere toward ‘mechanics’, to the extent that it represents a conventional and uncritical contempt for the manual trades, stands in tension with his systematic organization of human knowledge. If true, this claim supports a far stronger and more compelling reason than MacIntyre imagines to suppose that one may adopt a genuinely Aristotelian stance favoring the inclusion of ‘mechanics’ into the life of wisdom and hence moral and political virtue. In sum, I identify a conceptual struggle internal to Aristotle’s own thought that opens the way to Aristotelian inclusiveness. Nor do I think that this is mere hermeneutical cleverness (some might say ‘trickery’) on my part. Rather, it is telling that many medieval readers of Aristotle, who were familiar with his general systematization of knowledge well before they had access to the *Politics* or the *Nicomachean Ethics*, adopted essentially the same position, jettisoning his exclusion of ‘mechanics’ from public life on largely the same grounds that I do.

In the present paper, then, I first turn to the writings of Aristotle himself in order to examine more carefully his arguments about both the alleged incapacities of *banausoi* and the nature of the ‘productive’ sciences in order to highlight the tension that I have located. Thereafter, I investigate some features of the medieval reception of Aristotle by authors who refused the conclusion that the exercise of the mechanical arts is incompatible with the possession of practical intelligence and virtue, and consequently with political engagement.

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<sup>4</sup> My position in what follows shares some common features with that of Knight 2007, esp. 16–34, although it will become apparent that we disagree on many specifics of interpretation.

## 1. Aristotle

As I have mentioned already, Aristotle's *Politics* leaves no doubt that in a well-ordered or just regime, the status of citizen would only be accorded to those whose areté (excellence, virtue) qualifies them to participate fully in office-holding and the functions of ruling. He admits that constitutions do indeed vary concerning who is to be admitted into citizenship: democracies including all (or at any rate most) free males born of citizen parentage, oligarchies establishing more stringent limitations on citizenship. But he declares that his concern is not merely to engage in the descriptive enterprise of determining citizenship in a relative sense; he is instead interested in defining 'citizen in the strictest sense', that is, those individuals who are competent to exercise the civic rights associated with judicial and official tasks.<sup>5</sup> While civic excellence is not identical to personal virtue, individuals who possess both—that is, who are both good citizens and good men—will tend to coincide in the best constitutional arrangements (1276b16–1277b33). For this reason, the citizen can never be a “mechanic,” since the menial laborer necessarily lacks the excellence associated with just judgment and wise rule.

“It must be admitted that we cannot consider all those to be citizens who are necessary to the existence of the *polis* [. . .] In ancient times, and among some nations, the artisan class were slaves or foreigners, and therefore the majority of them are so now. The best form of polis will not admit them to citizenship; but if they are admitted, then our definition of the excellence of a citizen will not apply to every citizen, or every free man as such, but only those who are freed from necessary services. The necessary people are either slaves who minister to the wants of individuals or mechanics and laborers who are the servants of the community.” (1278a2–12.)

Aristotle reaffirms this position in his discussion of the ideally best regime in Book 7 of the *Politics*. There he distinguishes the ‘citizens’ properly speaking—whom he terms the ‘parts’ of the *polis* and who discharge the properly political functions of defense, religious worship, and deliberation—from the ‘conditions’ of the *polis*, whose responsibility is to meet its physical needs by engaging in farming, craftsmanship, and commerce. He argues that

“since we are speaking here of the best form of government, that is, the one under which the *polis* will be happiest (and happiness, as said before, cannot exist without excellence or virtue), it clearly follows that in the *polis* that is best governed and includes only men who are just absolutely, rather than just relative to the principle of the constitution, the citizens must not lead the life of artisans

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<sup>5</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1275a3–20. In general, English translations are based on the versions found in Richard McKeon (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, New York: Random House 1941, although I have occasionally modified them in consultation with the Greek texts of the works of Aristotle published in the Loeb Classical Library edition.

or tradesmen, for such a life is ignoble and inimical to excellence.”  
(1328b32–41)

Thus, in his ideal regime, those who earn their living necessarily possess the status of outsiders within their own community. They would not be the same as slaves or foreigners, in the sense that they could presumably own property and determine the conditions of their own labor; but for all intents and purposes, their status would otherwise not be much different from the unfree and the alien.

What justification does Aristotle offer for such exclusion from the community? Two main arguments stand out. First, practitioners of the mechanical arts necessarily lack the free time that he regards to be crucially important for a perfected civic life. “Citizens being compelled to live by their labor have no leisure,” he asserts. (1292b26–27) Leisure is required for citizenship both because it permits citizens a full opportunity to participate in all aspects of community activity and because it affords the chance to acquire the moral and intellectual qualities indispensable for wise rule. “Leisure”, Aristotle observes, “is necessary both for the development of excellence and the performance of political duties.” (1329a1–2) The man of leisure, as he says in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, stands a better chance of obtaining excellence and happiness than does one constantly consumed by daily cares and woes. (NE 1177b4–27)

The second rationale for the exclusion of mechanics from citizenship is the incompatibility of the aims of their occupation with the true nature of the *polis*. Aristotle had famously held that the *polis* exists not in order simply to preserve the biological lives of its members, but to promote their virtue and happiness; its purpose is not mere life, but a ‘choiceworthy’ life. “The *polis* exists for the sake of a good life, and not for the sake of life only: if life only were the object, slaves and brute animals might form a *polis*, but they cannot, for they have no share in happiness or in a life based on choice”, Aristotle asserts (*Politics* 1280132–34). The end of the mechanical arts does not measure up to this vaunted goal of ‘the good life’; those who work with their hands create at best merely the conditions for a materially adequate existence. Of course, a man must have access to the means of physical life as a pre-requisite to living well, that is, virtuously and happily; the goods of the soul assume at least a modicum of “external” goods (NE 1177a28–31). But those who provide such sustenance are themselves engaged in an enterprise that limits their appreciation of the ultimate excellence that the *polis* exists to achieve. Their conception of the good life involves the amassing of wealth or gathering of property or enjoying of physical pleasure, rather than the genuine happiness afforded by the practice of the moral and intellectual virtues. The life of mechanics, in sum, decisively disqualifies them from realizing completely their political natures.

At one point in the *Politics*, Aristotle draws an explicit connection between his exclusion of the practitioners of the banausic arts and his conception of knowledge,<sup>6</sup> remarking

“any task, craft, or branch of learning should be considered vulgar if it renders the body or mind of free people useless for the practices

<sup>6</sup> A useful survey is provided by van den Hoven 1996, 81–86, 103–105.

and activities of virtue. That is why the crafts that put the body in a worse condition and work done for wages are called vulgar; for they debase the mind and deprive it of leisure.” (*Politics* 1337a10–11)

This would seem to suggest a more-or-less absolute dividing line between the so-called ‘productive’ forms of science and the other realms of knowledge. Yet such a complete division is not sustained by discussions elsewhere in his corpus. As I have already mentioned, a number of Aristotle’s writings distinguish between ‘contemplative’ or ‘theoretical’ or ‘speculative’ knowledge, on the one hand, and ‘practical’ and/or ‘productive’ knowledge, on the other. Although his terminology is not always entirely consistent, his basic insight is evident: ‘contemplative’ inquiry is devoted to inquiry into pure truth, whereas ‘practical’ and ‘productive’ disciplines aim at the correct conduct of activity. Aristotle comments in the *Eudemian Ethics* that

“the theoretical sciences [. . .] [such as] astronomy and natural science and geometry have no other end except to get to know and to contemplate the nature of things that are the subjects of the sciences; [by contrast,] the end of the productive sciences is something different from science and knowledge, for example, the end of medicine is health and the end of political science is good order.” (EE 1216b11–18)

As he elaborates in the *Metaphysics*,

“There is a science of nature, and evidently it must be different both from practical and from productive science. For in the case of productive science the principle of movement is in the producer and not in the product, and is either an art or some other faculty. And similarly in practical science the movement is not in the thing done, but rather in the doer. But the science of the natural philosopher deals with the things that have *in themselves* a principle of movement. It is clear from these facts, then, that natural science must be neither practical nor productive, but theoretical [. . .]” (*Metaphysics* 1064a10–18)

‘Productive’ and ‘practical’ sciences seek a good action or a result, rather than knowledge for its own sake; moreover, the source of ‘practical’ and ‘productive’ knowledge is the human being himself, while the origin of theoretical knowledge lies rather within nature. (EE 1218b1–8) Thus, the study of the active or human domain was not valuable for its own sake, but for the sake of something else, namely, the improvement of human behavior (and ultimately the attainment of *eudaimonia*) in moral, public and material spheres. This, in turn, requires the development of a theory of moral psychology designed to teach people to develop characters conducive to the performance of virtuous acts and a conception of statesmanship and legislation aimed at promoting the moral improvement of citizens and inhabitants, as well as a standard of judgment for the value of the products yielded by the mechanical arts.

While Aristotle says much less about ‘productive’ knowledge than about the other domains of human science, he nonetheless makes a case for its validity as well as its usefulness and thus treats it as a legitimate branch of human inquiry. In his most extensive discussion of the subject, in the opening chapter of the *Metaphysics*, he acknowledges the unique role played by ‘productive’ sciences, in the sense that “actions and productions are all concerned with the individual; for the physician does not cure *man*, in some incidental way, but Callias or Socrates or some other called by some such individual name, who happens to be a man.” (*Met.* 981a16–20) By contrast, theoretical knowledge treats only of universal or general causes and principles.

On the one hand, Aristotle regards the theoretical sciences as ultimately superior because they yield superior knowledge of causes and are most akin to divinity. (*Met.* 982a20–983a23) Hence, “theoretical kinds of knowledge [...] [partake] more of the nature of wisdom than the productive.” (*Met.* 982b35) Still, on the other hand, Aristotle admits that “if a man has the theory without the experience, and recognizes the universal but does not know the individual included in this, he will often fail to cure; for it is the individual that is to be cured”. (*Met.* 981a20–24) Although Aristotle proposes a clear hierarchy of knowledge, then, he admits that a ‘productive’ science does demand some knowledge of causes and principles—if only in a particular and applied way in order to achieve a result—and thus has value. For this reason, while he condemns the mindlessness of the manual laborer, he also recognizes that “the master-workers in each craft are more honorable and know in a truer sense and are wiser” precisely because they have acquired a modicum of knowledge about specific causes. (*Met.* 981a30–32). Moreover, he avers that “he who invented any art whatsoever that went beyond the common perception of man was naturally admired by men, not only because there was something useful in the invention, but because he was thought wise and superior to the rest”. (*Met.* 981b13–16) Aristotle does not dispute this assessment, but instead criticizes those who hold in higher esteem inventions that resulted in recreation in contrast to the crafts that alleviate the necessities of life, the latter of which permit the leisure that is a pre-requisite for advanced theoretical pursuits and contemplation. (*Met.* 981b16–24)

In sum, Aristotle concedes that ‘productive’ knowledge not merely produces useful results, but additionally affords us some grasp on the understanding of true causes and principles. In line with MacIntyre’s observation about the linkage of ‘theoretical’ to ‘practical’ knowledge, the contrast drawn between them and the ‘productive’ sciences does not entail the failure of the latter to partake of the essential principles constitutive of human knowledge. (Here I disagree with what I take to be the claim of Kelvin Knight that Aristotle sought to detach *poesis* entirely from both *theoria* and *praxis* (Knight 2007, 16)). ‘Productive’ sciences may be of a lesser order than their ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’ counterparts (just as ‘practical’ knowledge is subordinated to ‘theoretical’), but one might readily conclude that it is impossible for human beings to live a fully flourishing life without some grasp of ‘productive’ knowledge just as of *phronesis* and *episteme*.

This impression is reinforced by some of Aristotle’s comments in the unfin-

ished Book 8 of the *Politics*, where he confronts a tension between ‘production’ and *phronesis* implicit in the education of the citizens under the best constitution. As we have seen, Book 7 insists upon a firm distinction in such an ideal polity between its ‘parts’ and ‘conditions’, the latter constituting the ‘vulgar’ mechanical occupations that are excluded from citizenship. In Book 8, Aristotle agonizes about how this separation is to be maintained in matters of instruction which clearly require the acquisition of ‘productive’ knowledge. He adopts a studied ambivalence concerning such learning:

“That children should be taught those useful things that are really necessary, however, is not unclear. But it is evident that they should not be taught all of them, since there is a difference between the tasks of the free and those of the unfree, and that they should share only in such useful things that will not turn them into vulgar craftsmen. [...] Even in the case of some of the sciences that are suitable for a free person, while it is not unfree to participate in them up to a point, to study them too assiduously or exactly is likely to result in the harm just mentioned.” (*Politics* 1337b3–6, 14–17)

These remarks seem to support the position of the *Metaphysics* that there is some value to the realm of ‘productive’ knowledge. On the one hand, Aristotle apparently realizes that an education in the practical and theoretical virtues presupposes the acquisition of forms of ‘productive’ knowledge. On the other hand, he deeply fears that too much knowledge of this sort demeans people and renders them unfit to pursue the ‘higher’ ends of humanity. His proposed solution—that instruction in ‘productive’ learning be guided by the goal of enhancing noble leisure, rather than giving pleasure or generating servility—strikes me as somewhat strained and vague. (*Politics* 1337b21–1338a13) Aristotle leaves it an open question how much education in the ‘productive’ sciences is too much, although some is clearly desirable.

Aristotle’s ambivalence regarding ‘productive knowledge’ is perhaps even more evident in the discussion of musical instruction that closes off the extant portion of Book 8. He agonizes at length about the reasons why music (by which he means singing and playing instruments, not merely the study of harmony) should be incorporated into the communal curriculum in the best city. He admits that music is neither “necessary for life”, nor useful, nor good for the soul; instead, music should be counted among the “leisured pursuits counted as appropriate for free people”. (1338a13–25) But, at the same time, encouraging (even requiring) citizens to learn how to play instruments and sing poses the risk of permitting their degeneration into base men, since “musicians are vulgar craftsmen, and [...] a true man would not perform music unless he were drunk or amusing himself”. (1339b8–9) If the appreciation of music is indeed part of the “leisured life of the free man”, would it not be safer and more sensible for citizens to listen to music rather than to perform it? Aristotle responds negatively: a musical education demands hands-on experience, because “if someone takes part in performance himself, it makes a great difference in the development of certain qualities, since it is difficult if not impossible for people to become excellent



judges of performance if they do not take part in it". (1340b21–24) As is generally the case with his attitude toward “productive” forms of knowledge, Aristotle asserts the validity of acquiring *some* musical skill precisely because it facilitates a more noble way of life; this end must be kept clearly in view. Consequently, he insists that exercise in voice and instruments should be confined to youth: “[...] since one should take part in performance in order to judge, for this reason they should engage in performance while they are young and stop performing when they are older, but be able to judge which melodies are noble and enjoy them in the right way, because of what they learned when they were young.” (1340b34–39) The case of music illustrates clearly that “productive” knowledge is linked, if subservient, to more elevated human pursuits associated with *phronesis* and *arête*. Given this connection, even though Aristotle realizes that there is some merit to the objection “that performing music makes one vulgar” (1340b39–40), he still upholds the positive contribution that learning musical performance makes to the characters of the future citizens of the perfectly just community. Of course, he stipulates a specific curriculum in order to ensure that the goal of leisure, rather than the promotion of vulgarity, is achieved. (1341a8–1341b18) Aristotle certainly fears the consequences of putting “productive” knowledge to the wrong sorts of uses, on the one hand, yet he is loathe to surrender it entirely, in recognition of the foundation it provides for leading a life of noble leisure.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Later Reception

It is apparent, then, that Aristotle struggled (somewhat unsatisfactorily) in the *Politics* with the tension between the value of ‘productive’ knowledge for human flourishing and the exclusion of the ‘mechanical arts’ and their practitioners from a full share of moral and political life. If he were consistent in the application of his systematic classification of knowledge, which posits linkages between the three main categories of science, he would perhaps have surrendered the insistence that the practice of arts and crafts associated with ‘productive’ knowledge is incommensurable with citizenship properly conceived. Failing this, I think that we should conclude that Aristotle neglects to provide compelling philosophical grounds to follow him in his view that the rights and offices of citizenship must be unavailable to ‘mechanics’ in a just regime. Not only does ‘productive’ knowledge share some important characteristics with other forms of knowledge, but it affords a precondition for the capacity of human beings to become good and wise. There is nothing about the acquisition of ‘productive’ knowledge that renders people unqualified for virtue and *eudaimonia* per se—on Aristotle’s own grounds.

One reason why I find this thesis plausible is that it seems to have been widely adopted by medieval Latin authors familiar with Aristotle’s conception of the ordering of the human sciences, both before and after the translation and transmission of his main writings during the late twelfth and early thirteenth

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<sup>7</sup> Eugene Garver has suggested to me that echoes of a similar position may be found in *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a29–b4.

centuries. Even without access to Aristotle's own treatises, there were numerous intermediary sources that propounded the basic Aristotelian scheme, among them Boethius's *Commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge* and Cassiodorus's *Institutes* as well as Isidore's *Etymologies*.<sup>8</sup> These works were widely disseminated during the twelfth century, so Aristotle's categorization of the forms of philosophical knowledge formed a common feature of medieval learning. Probably the first thorough use in the twelfth century of the Aristotelian division of the scientific disciplines was made by Hugh of St. Victor (Wieland 1981, 23–25). In his *Didascalion*, which dates to the late 1120s, Hugh upheld a four-fold division of the sciences into the contemplative, practical, logical and mechanical realms.<sup>9</sup> His analysis of these fields of knowledge is clearly indebted to Aristotle's framework.<sup>10</sup> Of particular interest in the present context, Hugh incorporated the practice as well as the theory of the mechanical arts into the realm of human 'wisdom', rendering them thereby worthy to be pursued by human beings. He reasons that earthly wisdom extends to all acts for which "the end and the intention" is "the restoring of our nature's integrity or the relieving of those weaknesses to which our present life lies subject".<sup>11</sup> The former actions are, of course, spiritual and pertain to the condition of the human soul, the goal of which is "to restore in us the likeness of the divine image". The latter type of act concerns the circumstances of the body and "the necessity of this life, which, the more easily it can suffer harm from those things which work to its disadvantage, the more does it require to be cherished and conserved".<sup>12</sup> While 'divine' matters may take ultimate priority for Hugh over 'human' ones, he concludes that the necessity imposed upon us by our god-given nature constitutes a dilemma whose remedy deserves to be accorded the name of knowledge (*scientia*) just as much as the theoretical or practical fields of reason (1.8, 55–56). The purpose of the mechanical arts is to overcome or combat the natural deficiencies of human life.

The unique predicament of human beings, then, demands the 'invention' or 'discovery' of the arts, according to Hugh (1.11, 57–58). "Necessity", he observes with reference to the proverb, "is the mother of arts". (1.9, 56) He refuses to disdain the fact the God has left us to our own devices to meet our needs: "A need is something without which we cannot live, and [with which] we would live more happily [...] For the sake of our needs, the mechanical arts were discovered." (6.14, 152) In turn, because humanity has multiple needs, there must be many different sorts of occupations to meet them. Thus, mechanical knowledge comprises seven arts—fabric-making, armament, commerce, agriculture, hunting, medicine, and theatrics—of which the initial three pertain to the external protection of the body, while the other four concern internal nourishment

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<sup>8</sup> See Boethius, *Commentaria in Prophyrium*, 1.3 (Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 64.11–64.12); Cassiodorus, *Institutiones*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors 1937, 2.3.7; and Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, ed. W. M. Lindsay 1911, 2.24.16.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh of St. Victor 1961, *Didascalicon*, Jerome Taylor (trans.), Appendix A, 152–154. I have occasionally corrected the translation when it seemed to depart too greatly from the Latin version of the *Didascalicon*, ed. Charles H. Buttmer (1933).

<sup>10</sup> As has been emphasized by Haren (1992), 112.

<sup>11</sup> Hugh, *Didascalicon*, 1.5, 51–52.

<sup>12</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, 1.7, 54.

(2.20, 74). The practitioners of each of these arts redress some defect of natural human existence by manufacturing an artificial product in imitation of nature itself: they provide for us what nature does not, yet in a quasi-natural way (1.4, 51).

“From nature’s example, a better chance for trying things should be provided to man when he comes to devise for himself by his own reasoning those things naturally given to all other animals. Indeed, human reason shines forth much more brilliantly in inventing those very things than ever it would have had man naturally possessed them.” (1.9, 56)

Hugh thus refutes the accusation that mechanics live contrary to nature because their products are mere ‘artifice’: “We look with wonder not at nature alone but at the artificer as well.” (1.9, 56) Such remarks clearly correlate to the Aristotelian conception of ‘productive’ knowledge. For Hugh as for Aristotle, the ‘productive’ sciences contain a measure of wisdom which, if not as venerable as that possessed by the theologian and the philosopher, still possesses inherent worth that demands the respect of humankind. But Hugh does not take the step of concluding that the practitioners of the ‘mechanical arts’ are thereby disqualified from acquiring the practical and even theoretical forms of knowledge. On the contrary, he stresses to an even greater extent than Aristotle the interdependence of the various classes of knowledge: “the mechanical arts [...] are altogether ineffective unless supported by knowledge of” logic, the practical arts, and the theoretical sciences. (Appendix A, 154)

Soon after Hugh wrote, and perhaps under the considerable weight of his influence, we find a large body of literature emerging that addresses the organization of human knowledge generally and that specifically valorizes ‘mechanics’ and their distinctive form of inquiry (Van den Hoven 1996, 178–200). During the late 1150s, John of Salisbury went so far as to insist that the practitioners of the ‘mechanical arts’ deserve to be accorded an official status within the body politic and are to be treated with dignity and respect. Without referring directly to the *Didascalicon* or other Aristotelian-inflected schemes of the sciences, John lists the various mechanical pursuits in some detail, making it clear that he is speaking not just of master artisans but of the full range of what he calls ‘the humbler offices’.

“Among these are to be counted the husbandmen, who always cleave to the soil, busied themselves about their plough-lands or vineyards or pastures or flower gardens. To these must be added the many species of cloth-making and those mechanical arts that work in wood, iron, bronze, and the different metals; also the menial occupations, and the manifold forms of making a livelihood and sustaining life, or increasing household property, all of which, while they do not pertain to the authority of the governing power, are yet in the highest degree useful and advantageous to the corporate whole of the community.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> John of Salisbury, in: C.C.J. Webb (ed.), *Policraticus 2* 1909, 6.20. The translations here are based on my English version (Cambridge University Press 1990), 125–126.

John even claims that the welfare of such ‘mechanics’ constitutes the very rationale for the government of the king: “That course is to be pursued in all things that is of advantage to the humbler classes, that is, the multitude; for small numbers always yield to great. Truly, the reason for the institution of officials was to the end that subjects might be protected from wrong, and that the republic itself might be ‘shod,’ as it were, by means of their services.” (6.20) Thus, where Aristotle had excluded precisely such mechanical occupations from having a part in the just *polis*, John places them at the center of the healthy and well-ordered political organism. John recognizes that the body politic requires the “services” provided by practitioners of the “mechanical arts” in order to survive and thrive: “It is they who raise, sustain, and move forward the weight of the entire body. Take away the support of the feet from the strongest body, and it cannot move forward by its own power, but must creep painfully and shamefully by its own hands, or else be moved by means of brute animals.” (5.2) Consequently, on the principle of “reciprocity” that informs John’s political theory generally (6.20), the other parts of the body owe it to the manual occupations to ensure that they are treated justly and shown due honor as befits their contributions to the common good. This position seems to be consonant with and warranted by the twelfth-century reception of the Aristotelian idea of “productive” knowledge as one among several valid sciences, all of which contribute to an overall human good.

It may be surprising to discover that the situation was not radically transformed in the course of the thirteenth century when Aristotle’s complete *oeuvre* (including the *Ethics* and *Politics*) had been translated into Latin and circulated widely among Europe’s intelligentsia. Of course, some authors did follow Aristotle in insisting upon the exclusion of artisans, farmers and other *banauoi* from the ranks of citizens. But there was by no means universal agreement about this topic. A survey of the main scholastic commentaries and *quaestiones* on the *Politics* dating to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries demonstrates that the nature of qualifications for citizenship was a matter of wide dispute.<sup>14</sup> My own research into some of the major political theorists of the same era—including Brunetto Lani, Ptolemy of Lucca, and Marsiglio of Padua—likewise indicates a willingness to consider the ‘functional’ contributions of ‘mechanics’ to constitute sufficient reason to accord them full status as citizens (Nederman 2002; 2003; 2004). Marsiglio is perhaps the most extreme in this regard. In his *Defensor minor*, a summary recapitulation and application of the precepts of major treatise, *Defensor pacis*, written around 1340, he unambiguously proposes that ‘mechanics’ are qualified for active participation in civic life. Addressing the question of who enjoys the proper authority to punish or remove negligent rulers, Marsiglio reasserts the teaching of the *Defensor pacis* that no single part of the community has the rightful power to correct the governor; instead, it is a matter for the whole citizen body to address. He then adds an intriguing qualification:

“And I say furthermore that if such correction pertains to some particular part or office of the civic body, then under no circumstances

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<sup>14</sup> See Dunbabin 1982, 723–737.

does it pertain to priests, but instead to prudent men (*prudentes*) or learned teachers, indeed preferably to the workman or craftsmen or the rest of the laborers (*mechanicis*).”

Whereas priests are forbidden to have a hand in political affairs, Marsiglio explains, it is permitted “by human reason or law [...] for these men to involve themselves in civil or secular affairs.”<sup>15</sup>

The *Defensor minor*’s remark confirms, at minimum, that he regarded practitioners of the mechanical arts to be full members of the community, competent to participate in important public decisions such as the punishment of an errant ruler. Marsiglio’s wording, moreover, suggests that he may subscribe to an even more expansive view: he hints that those engaged in manual occupations may enjoy special rights or responsibilities in cases of judging and correcting the mistakes of governors. Evidently, given the orientation of his conception of community toward functional inclusion, he believed that practitioners of the ‘mechanical arts’ possessed a special stake in ensuring the communal good, requiring that they be accorded a citizen status that confers upon them a remarkably large share of authority in the governance of their own communities. In any case, Marsiglio, who is often considered to be the arch-Aristotelian of the fourteenth century, departs explicitly and markedly from Aristotle’s evaluation of the political competence of ‘mechanics’, in line with what appears an established tradition of respect for the value of the knowledge and activity that they bring to the community.

### 3. Conclusion

How widespread was the position adopted by Marsiglio and other scholastic authors concerning the qualifications of ‘mechanics’ for public life based precisely on the merits of their occupations? It would require a far more extensive survey of the medieval literature than is possible at present to answer this question adequately.<sup>16</sup> It seems evident, however, that numerous medieval authors regarded the nature of ‘productive’ knowledge and its application by various types of manual laborers in a far more positive light than did Aristotle himself. An important reason for this, I surmise, stems from the broad commitment to Aristotle’s own plan of organizing and analyzing the sciences, which stood at the

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<sup>15</sup> Marsiglio of Padua, *Writings on the Empire: Defensor minor and De translatione Imperii*, trans. Cary J. Nederman 1993, 2.7. The Latin edition is to be found in *Oeuvres Mineures*, ed. Colette Jeudy and Jeannine Quillet, Paris: Éditions de CNRS, 1979.

<sup>16</sup> Let me mention just two more, and very different, examples of the medieval valorization of the mechanical as important contributions to the communal good. Pierre DuBois in *The Recovery of the Holy Land*, trans. Walther I. Brandt (New York 1956, 136–138) integrates the study of the mechanical arts quite centrally into his curriculum for the instruction of young men. Moreover, Constant Mews of Monash University has pointed out to me that Johannes de Grocheio’s *Ars musicae*, a work of the mid-thirteenth century, contains extensive defense and praise of the so-called *musica vulgaris* (simple or civil music) on grounds of its moral and political value, and also associates directly this form with the mechanical arts. (Professor Mews is part of a team that is presently editing and translating this treatise.)

intellectual core of the Middle Ages, especially—but not only—after the emergence of the Arts curriculum during the early thirteenth century. To the extent that Aristotle’s arrangement of knowledge incorporates ‘production’ as one of its dimensions, his exclusion of *banausoi* from political affairs would have seemed as inexplicable and indefensible to them as it does to us. Of course, the fact that so many medieval authors disagreed with Aristotle on this point does not ‘prove’ the validity of my claim that a tension exists within his writings in regard to the status of ‘productive’ knowledge. But such considerable divergence from Aristotle, especially in a world in which commitment to human equality and basic civil rights was far more tenuous than in our own times, is at least suggestive.

To conclude, I hope to have offered some compelling reasons to suppose that there are much better reasons than MacIntyre adduces to insist that Aristotle’s exclusion of *banausoi* from access to full political engagement is essentially incorrect. Aristotle’s own attitude toward the interconnections between different fields of knowledge affords a sufficient foundation for us to reject his statements in the *Politics* concerning the necessary incapacity of ‘mechanics’. We need not fall back entirely on culturalist or historicist grounds in order to save Aristotle from his errors. Rather, Aristotle himself provides us with the resources for building a more inclusive and egalitarian vision of a political community. In reaching this conclusion, I concur broadly with the spirit of Kelvin Knight’s recent book on *Aristotelian Philosophy* in promoting a ‘reformed’, even a ‘revolutionary’, Aristotelianism (Knight 2007, 220–221). I would simply add that I believe we may reasonably look for the grounding of such an Aristotelian renewal in the works Aristotle himself as well as in the medieval reception of his ideas.

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