Politics Book III on 'he ariste politeia'

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In the second half of Book III, Aristotle discusses the question of who ought to be sovereign [to kurion] in a state (1281a12). He goes on to examine the various constitutions [politeiai] and to rank them from best to worst. One would expect Aristotle to tell us that the ideal constitution of Book VII is best. Yet most scholars of the Politics have argued that he does not in fact do so.1 Indeed, most take Aristotle to endorse pambasileia and traditional aristocracy by the end of Book III.2 The most elaborate defense of the latter interpretation can be found in Richard Kraut’s recent book on the Politics.3

1 Robinson, for example, thinks that the discussion of Book III is aporetic until the end, when Aristotle concludes that “different sorts of peoples require different sorts of constitution (Politics, 65).”

2 Newman reads Aristotle’s conclusion in Book III as follows: “Aristotle passes on to inquire in c. 18 which is the best of the normal constitutions, and he finds that the best is kingship or aristocracy (Politics v. III, xxxiii).” According to Newman, the best constitution in Book III is different in a number of ways from the best constitution of Book VII (ibid, xxxvi). Newman explains the discrepancy as a change of mind on Aristotle’s part: “The Fourth (old Seventh) Book appears to be written with a closer regard to what is practicable than the Third (ibid).” The reason is that “some interval of time having elapsed between the composition of the two Books, Aristotle saw, when he came to depict the ‘best State’ in the Fourth (old Seventh) Book, that some things of which he had dreamed in the Third were but dreams. Thus the absolute kingship of which we hear so much in the Third is dismissed in the Fourth as no longer practicable, and the aristocracy described in the Third assumes a much more practicable form in the Fourth (ibid).” Newman speculates further about the reasons for the change: “In writing the Fourth and Fifth (old Seventh and Eighth) Books Aristotle has three States especially before him, the weak points of which he does his best to avoid. These are the two ideal States sketched by Plato in his Republic and Laws and the Lacadaemonian State (ibid, xxxvii).” Newman’s reading has been influential. Keyt tells us that “It can be argued that on Aristotle’s own principles absolute kingship does not deserve its premiera ranking in his hierarchy of constitutions (‘Supplementary Essay,’ 144).” The assumption here is that pambasileia is ranked first by Aristotle in Book III. Alexander argues that Book III describes a second best regime, in addition to the one discussed in Books VII-VIII. This regime is “the same as the best regime of Plato’s Republic in being ruled by Philosopher-kings (‘Best Regimes,’ 189).” Vander Waerdt disagrees with this reading in part in that he takes both Books III and VII to endorse pambasileia over politikê archê. Kelsen too takes pambasileia to be Aristotle’s preferred regime throughout the Politics, claiming that Aristotle was politically motivated in endorsing this as his preferred regime (‘The Philosophy of Aristotle’).

3 Richard Kraut, Aristotle: Political Philosophy. (In the rest of the paper the book will be referred to as “APP.”) Kraut says, for example, that “... Book III... comes to the conclusion that although three constitutional forms are correct, two of them—kingship and aristocracy—are superior to the third. Rule by one or a few is better than rule by many.” He tells us, furthermore, that the “assumption of Book III is that if a city is to be ruled by those who are fully virtuous, their numbers must be small, and power must be unequally distributed” (417-18). Of the state described in Book VII, on the other hand, it “seems far better to say that it is ruled by many: for those who constitute the principal ruling element are the entire body of citizens.” (359-60). Kraut also tells us that, in Politics III Aristotle is merely “rehearsing” the arguments against kingship and that “he is not swayed by these arguments because within III.17 and III.18 he concludes that kingship and aristocracy are superior to other forms of government” (413). Kraut’s explanation of the apparent discrepancy between Books III and VII that Aristotle is concerned with the ideal state in Book VII and actually existent states in Book III: “Book III is an examination of the merits of traditional political systems, and is not a proposal for the transformation of civic life. That is why Aristotle assumes in Book III that, in one way or another, one will have to accept serious imperfections even in well-governed cities... In the absence of institutions that morally educate the whole citizenry, we will have to settle for kingship, aristocracy, or polity. All of them are fine political systems, but only when they are compared with their corrupt counterparts” (420).
In this paper I argue that there is no discrepancy between these two books of the Politics of the sort alleged by advocates of this interpretation. We shall see that Aristotle refers explicitly to the constitution of Book VII in Book III, and that he does so in a way that suggests that he thinks in both books that this is the best constitution. We shall see, furthermore, that Aristotle’s somewhat puzzling final word on the best constitution, as well as his claim that absolute monarchy is sometimes advisable, are consistent with his endorsement, in Book VII, of the constitution described in that book.

Aristotle begins the discussion of who ought to be sovereign in a state at 1281a12. Early on in this discussion Aristotle says that the view that the plêthos ["multitude"] ought to be sovereign rather than the few best is “probably true” (1281a40-42). For, he tells us, the many, when they come together, be better than those who are good, just as public dinners to which many contribute are better than those provided by one person (1281a42-1281b3). Together they become one person with respect to character and intellect (1281b7). It is interesting that, in arguing for the sovereignty of the plêthos, Aristotle uses the criterion for distributing political offices that is characteristic of the best state, namely virtue.

Aristotle later qualifies his endorsement of the sovereignty of the plêthos. He warns us that, in a constitution based on virtue, if it is proper for the multitude to be sovereign if they are better than the few, then it is also proper for the one or a few to be sovereign if they are better than the multitude (1283b21, b23-27). Aristotle’s conclusion is that no criterion [horos] that is used to justify a form of rule works in the way that its partisans want it to. The partisans of traditional aristocracy—the rule of the few educated citizens—appeal to virtue as a criterion of rule. Yet, as Aristotle points out, the multitude might be better than the cultivated few (1283b30-35). Indeed, Aristotle concludes that none of the horoi that can be used as a basis for a claim to political power in a state is “orthos” [“correct,” “straight”] (1283b27-30).

Thus Aristotle’s basic claims in this discussion are, first, that the part of the state outstanding with respect to virtue ought to be sovereign; and, second, that, although it is more likely that the plêthos will be outstanding—and, therefore, ought to be sovereign—this will not be true universally. Sometimes an individual or small group will be outstanding with respect to virtue and ought to be sovereign. We shall see that Aristotle reaches basically the same conclusion in his two discussions of kingship at the end of Book III.

In the first discussion of kingship, Aristotle repeats the argument for the sovereignty of the plêthos presented earlier in Book III. He notes that, while it is true that any of the individual citizens in a state is inferior when compared with the best person, in many cases a crowd (ochlos) will judge better than any single person, just as a feast to which many contribute is finer than a single dinner 1286a29-31). In the first discussion of kingship, Aristotle also says that the multitude is more incorruptible [adiaphthorðerôn] than a few people (1286a31-33). For, while the judgment of the individual will be corrupted when overcome by anger or some other emotion, it is hard for everyone in a population to get angry at the same time and to err (1286a33-35).

In the second discussion of kingship, Aristotle introduces a new argument for the rule of the plêthos. He tells us that “some say” that it is contrary to nature [kata phusin] for one person to be sovereign over all citizens [to kurion hena pantôn einai tôn politôn] wherever the state consists of people who are alike (1287a10-13). The reason for this opposition to kingship is that people who are alike in nature [tois homoiois phusei] must necessarily have the same justice and the same value in accordance with nature (1287a13-14). For, just as it is harmful to the body for people who are unequal in nature to have the same food and clothing, and the same holds for honors, so too it is wrong for those who are equal to be treated unequally (1287a14-16). Therefore, it is just that no one person should govern or be governed more than others [dioper ouden mallon archein è archeosthai dikaios] (1287a16-17); and everyone should govern and be governed in turn and in like manner [kai to ana meros toinun hôsautós] (1287a17-18).

The argument from equality is repeated later, this time without the qualifier “some say.” Indeed, he precedes this statement of the argument with “all’ ek tôn eiremenôn ge phaneron hos...,” which suggests that he endorses what follows. Among people who are alike and equal [tois homoiois kai isois] it is neither advantageous

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4 Mulgan also reads Books III and VII in this way. According to Mulgan, “the ideal state described in Books Seven and Eight is to be identified with Aristotle’s true or ideal aristocracy (Aristotle’s Political Theory, 100-101).”

5 It is also a background concern in the discussion of citizenship, where it is determined that a virtue-based state must restrict citizenship, and that citizens are in charge of deliberation and judgment. There the question “who ought to be a citizen?” amounts to the question of who ought to be sovereign, given that citizenship is defined as participation in judgment and deliberation, and sovereignty in terms of power over judgment and deliberation.

6 Even the appeal to wealth as a criterion doesn’t work in the way that partisans of oligarchy want it to. For, the multitude might collectively be richer than the wealthy (1283b30-35).
nor just [oute sumpheron oute dikaión] for one person to be sovereign over all [hena kurion einai pantón] (1288a1-2).

Just as he does in the earlier discussion of the rule of the plêthos, in the second discussion of kingship Aristotle tells us that no absolute criterion has been established. He says that the principle of equality requires that one person should not be sovereign over all even if the person is superior in virtue “except in a certain way” [ei mé tropon tina] (1288a4-5). When it comes about that there is either a whole family or an individual [genos holon é hena tina] outstanding with respect to virtue then it is just that the outstanding family should be royal and the outstanding individual king and sovereign over everyone (1288a15-19). Aristotle makes the same point later, when he says that, while it is not natural that a part should overpower the whole [ou gar pephuke to meros huperchelein tou pantos], this is what has happened to the person of such great superiority [toi de tê tropon tôn huperbolên echonti touto sumbebêken] (1288a26-8). The only option is to obey such a person and for such a person to be sovereign not in turn but absolutely [kurion einai me kara meros touton all' haplôs] (1288a28-9).

Again the argument turns on who is outstanding with respect to virtue in the state. There is “equality” of all if no individual or small group is outstanding with respect to virtue, and when there is such equality among citizens, rule should be shared. The qualification “ei mé tropon tina” at 1288a4-5, and the passage concerning the outstanding person at 1288a26-9 are allusions to the discussion of ostracism which preceded the two discussions of kingship. In the discussion of ostracism, Aristotle tells us that, if there is one person or a group whose virtue exceeds that of the multitude, such a person or group should not be counted as part of the state [meros poleôs] (1284a3-9). If they are so superior to the other citizens in virtue and political ability, they will be treated unjustly if they are treated as the equals of other citizens (1284a9-10). A person so outstanding in virtue is “like a god among men” (1284a10-11). Since legislation must necessarily be concerned with those who are equal in birth and in ability, for those who are outstanding there is no law, for they are themselves law (1284a11-14). Such people would say to a state attempting to impose laws on them what the lions said in Antisthenes’ story when the hares made speeches in the assembly and demanded that all should have equality (1284a15-17).

Thus we have seen that the two discussions of kingship at the end of Book III are in full agreement with the earlier qualified endorsement of the rule of the plêthos. In both parts of Book III, Aristotle argues that the rule of the plêthos is better than the rule of an individual or small group, but when there is an individual or family outstanding with respect to virtue, they ought to be sovereign.

The absence of an absolute criterion, which has been a recurring theme in the passages we have examined, is reflected in the final word of Politics Book III on the best constitutional arrangement, at 1288a32-33. He tells us here that there are three correct constitutions. Of these, “necessarily the best is the one governed by the best” [touton d' anankaios aristêin einai ten hupo tôn aristôn oikonomomenên] (1288a33-34). This is the constitution “in which there happens to be one person or a family or a whole plêthos outstanding in virtue” [toiautê d' estin en hèi sumbebêken e hena tina sumpantôn ê genos holon ê plêthos huperechon einai kat' aretên] (1288a34-37).

This is a very puzzling passage. Why does Aristotle describe the best constitution as one that has several forms—rule by one or a genos or a plêthos? In what way can this description be construed as describing one constitution rather than three? And, if he has one constitution in mind here, what constitution is it? The rule of the plêthos cannot be the constitution which is called a politeia because the latter sort of constitution is not the best of the three constitutions. In order to interpret this passage correctly it is, first of all, important to ascertain what Aristotle means by “plêthos” here.

Some have taken Aristotle to mean by “plêthos” here, not a “multitude” but a “group of people.” However, Aristotle is consistent in Politics III in using “plêthos” to mean “majority” or “multitude.” It is used in the former sense in the discussion of democracy and in the latter sense in the discussion of the aristocracy of Book VII (1326a2). He always uses it when talking about decisions made by the citizen body, presumably by majority vote. At 1281a42 “hoi polloi” is used as a substitute for “to plêthos,” suggesting that Aristotle sees them as equivalent in meaning.

In the passage we are concerned with, at 1288a34-37, “plêthos” cannot mean a traditional aristocracy, which is defined as a state in which a minority is sovereign (1279a34-35). Nor can Aristotle be referring to the sort of plêthos sovereign in a democracy. For Aristotle is talking, in this passage, about the best of the correct constitutions, and that surely cannot be a democracy. Nor, as noted above, can Aristotle have the constitution called

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7 The precise wording of the first part of the concluding sentence is: “Epeiri de treis phamen einai tas orthas politeias (1288a32).”
8 Rackham translates “plêthos” with “group” in this passage (Aristotle, 273).
9 The following is a list of some occurrences of this word in Book III: 1281 a12, 1281a24, 1281a 26, 1281a40, 1281b6, 1286a36.
"politeia" in mind here, since that too cannot be the best of the correct constitutions. The only remaining sort of "plêthos" that he might plausibly have in mind here is the plêthos of the best constitution in Book VII.

At least on one occasion when Aristotle talks about the rule of a "plêthos," in Book III, he seems to have something like the plêthos of Book VII in mind. This occurs at 1286a36-b6, where Aristotle tells us that the superiority of the plêthos is likely to hold in the best constitution. He has just told us that a multitude of citizens is more incorruptible than a few [to plêthos tôn oligôn adiapthoríteron] (1286a32). He now adds the following proviso: the multitude must include only those citizens who are free [êstô de to plêthos hoi eleútheroi] (1286a36); and they must do nothing contrary to the law [para ton nomon] except on issues on which the law is deficient (1286a36-37). Just after this, he says the following: if this is not easy to ensure for the most part, if those who are both good men and good citizens were in the majority [ei pleious eien agathoi kai andres kai politai], would an individual be a more incorruptible ruler or rather those who are a multitude but all good? It is obvious that it would be the multitude (1286a38-1286b1). And just after this he says that, if the rule of the multitude when these are all good people is to be called aristocracy and that of one person, kingship, aristocracy is preferable to kingship (1286b3-6).

Aristotle also seems to be alluding to the ideal constitution of Book VII when he says, at the end of Book III, that in the best state [hê aristê politeia] the virtue of a man and that of a citizen are the same (1288a38-9). He also tells us here that a person becomes good in the same way that one establishes an aristocracy or monarchy (1288a40-41). This means that the same education and habits that make a good person also make a politically capable person or king (1288b1-2). Furthermore, Aristotle talks about the best polis in his discussion of ostracism. Aristotle concludes the discussion of ostracism by considering how such people ought to be treated in the best constitution [hê aristê politeia]. He says that, in the best constitution, the citizens would not think that they ought to rule over such a person. That would be the same as if they claimed to rule over Zeus, dividing the offices [merizontes tas archas]. It remains for all citizens of the best constitution to obey such a person (1284 b25-34).

The discussion of the outstanding individual also appears in Book VII. In the constitution of Book VII the citizenry in charge of the constitution are described as a "plêthos." We see this, for example, when he says that the quality of a state is determined by the outstanding character of the plêthos which is part of the state (1326a21-2). Though the plêthos is in charge of the constitution of Book VII, their right to rule is qualified, just as it is in Book III. Aristotle says, for example, that, if there were some type of person differing from others as gods and heroes differ from ordinary human beings—with superiority in soul and in body—so that their outstanding character [huperochê] was evident to all subjects, "it is obvious that it would be better for the same persons to rule and the same persons to be ruled (1332b16-23)." But since this is not easy to ensure [ou rhâidion labain] and since there is nothing like the difference that Scylax claims exists between rulers and ruled in India, it is necessary for all to share alike in ruling and being ruled (1332b23-27).

There are other important parallels suggesting that Aristotle is talking about the same best state in both books of the Politics. He tells us in Book VII that a polis that aims at virtue cannot allow certain classes of people to be citizens. In the best state citizens cannot live a "mechanic or mercantile life" [banauson bion out' agoraioten] (1328b39). They also cannot be farmers [geôrgous] (1328b41); for leisure is needed for virtue and for practicing politics (1329a1-3). Similarly, in Book III, Aristotle says that the best polis [hê belistê politeia] will not make manual laborers [banausoi] citizens (1278a8). In any constitution that is called aristocratic and in which honors are bestowed according to goodness or merit, Aristotle tells us, citizenship cannot be extended to banaustoi and thêttes because these cannot practice the pursuits in which goodness is exercised (1278a20-21).

Just as in Book III, the multitude in Book VII will be in charge of election, deliberation and judgment. We see this when he says that citizens in the best state will have to know each other's character in order to be able to judge lawsuits and elect officials (1326b14-16). We also learn in Book VII that older citizens will be in charge of deliberating about the good [to bouleuomenon peri tôn sumpheromên] and judging about matters of justice [krinon

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10 It is important to note that when Aristotle talks about a plêthos he is not talking about a majority of people living in a state. The plêthos is the majority of citizens. Citizenship requirements might be so restrictive that only a minority of people living in the state would qualify. Indeed, such would be the case in the ideal state described in Book VII.

11 He also says, in the discussion of ostracism, that "ept tês aristês politeias echei pollên aporian" (1284b25)." The aporia relates to the use of ostracism. The best polis presents a difficulty for the argument for the permissibility of ostracism, which he presented just before this passage in Book III. In the best polis ostracism cannot be used against those who are outstanding in virtue.

12 Here we see that Aristotle assumes that citizens will be electing officials in the politeia described in Politics VII, pace Kraut, who suggests that offices would be filled "through a system of rotation" (APP 227).
peri tôn dikaiōn] (1329a3-4). Similarly, in Book III, Aristotle says that a citizen is one who has the right to participate in deliberative or judicial office [archēs bouleutikēs é kritikēs] (1275b18-19). Aristotle does not mention scrutiny in Book VII, but there is no reason to suppose that this would not be among the powers of citizens in the best polis, given that they would also be electing officials.

In both Books VII and III Aristotle talks about learning to rule by being ruled.13 The passage at the end of Book III makes the same point. Aristotle has just said that, of the three correct constitutions, the best is the one that is governed by the best people, and this is the constitution in which there happens to be one person or a family or a whole plēthos outstanding in virtue [ê genos holon ê plēthos huperechon einai kat’ aretēn] (1288a33-37). This sentence continues with “tōn men archēthai dunamenōn, tōn d’ archein pros tēn hairêt ataên zōn.” This last phrase refers, presumably, to the rule of the plēthos.14 If the plēthos rules, then what does Aristotle mean when he says that, among the members of this plēthos, some are capable of ruling and some being ruled? The plēthos is sovereign by being sovereign in the assembly and the courts. They are also sovereign, therefore over election and scrutiny. They elect the best among them for the higher offices on the basis of merit. Those elected are the ones “capable of ruling.” Those who elect them to office cede their own claim on these higher offices and on the powers of these offices and, in doing so, are archēthai dunamenoi.

We can now venture to explain Aristotle’s conclusion, at the end of Book III, that the best constitution is the one in which there is one person, family or multitude outstanding in virtue (1288a34-37). Whatever the interpretation of this passage, it has to explain the following facts: (1) Aristotle describes this constitution as the best of the three correct types (1288a32). (2) On this constitutional arrangement an individual or a genos or a plēthos might govern. (3) The government of this constitution is ordered “pros tēn hairêt ataên zōn (1288a37).” The only plausible interpretation of this passage is that Aristotle has the constitution of Book VII in mind here. In this constitution, the plēthos is in charge, but this plēthos might grant sovereignty to an individual or a genos outstanding with respect to virtue. Given Aristotle’s arguments against hereditary kingship, it does not seem plausible that he would have a traditional kingship in mind here. For there is no way to ensure that a traditional kingship, in which power is passed on by heredity, would always guarantee that an individual outstanding with respect to virtue will rule.

As we noted in the introduction, there is an important alternative interpretation of Aristotle’s views in Book III. The most comprehensive statement of the evidence for this interpretation is found in Richard Kraut’s recent excellent work on Aristotle’s political philosophy.15 According to Richard Kraut there is a tension between Books III and VII. On Kraut’s reading, the latter describes a constitution in which the multitude rules whereas the former affirms that the best constitutions are kingship and traditional aristocracy. Kraut explains this discrepancy by saying that Book III is concerned with existing constitutions whereas Books VII and VIII are concerned with the best possible constitution.

This interpretation seems problematic given Aristotle’s view that kingship thrives when a population is underdeveloped. It would be odd if Aristotle thought that the best constitution is one in which a population is most underdeveloped. Moreover, there is no need to resort to this interpretation because there is no evidence of a discrepancy between Books III and VII. According to Kraut, Book III affirms the superiority of kingship and aristocracy whereas Book VII describes a state in which the majority is superior. But the conclusion of Book III is, in fact, that the best polis is one in which an individual family or multitude is sovereign (1288a33-37). Book VII, furthermore, recognizes that if some outstanding individual were to arise that individual ought to be sovereign (1332b16-23). In other words, Book VII recognizes the same principle—that that part of the city outstanding with

13 “...but there exists a sort of rule [tis arche] in which one rules over those who are equal in kind and free [kath’ hēn archei tōn homoïōn tōi genei kai tōn eleutherōn] which is described as political rule [politikē arche] and this the ruler should learn by being ruled (1277b8).”

14 Rackham’s translation of this passage is: “...we pronounce the right constitutions to be three, and of these the one governed by the best men must necessarily be the best, and such is the one in which it has come about either that some one man or a whole family or a group of men is superior in virtue to all the citizens together, the latter being able to be governed and the former to govern on the principles of the most desirable life (Aristotle, 273).” Here “the latter” and “the former” is not an accurate translation of “... tōn men...tōn de...,” especially given the fact that “the latter” refers, in the translation, to “all the citizens together,” which is supplied in the translation and is not found in the Greek.

15 Though Kraut’s defense of this view is the most comprehensive, he is by no means alone in holding it. Indeed, Kraut’s is an elaborate version of what has been, since Newman’s commentary on the Politics, the standard interpretation. Some of the literature is listed in notes 1 and 2 of this paper.
respect to virtue ought to be sovereign—and recognizes that that principle would require monarchy under certain circumstances.

Kraut supports his interpretation by pointing to the statement, in Politics Book IV, that the best state—which can be characterized as an aristocracy or kingship—has been discussed, suggesting that this was the conclusion of Book III. But, as Kraut himself notes, Aristotle characterizes aristocracy in ways which might be used to include the rule of the majority where the majority is good. Furthermore, Aristotle recognizes the possibility that “aristocracy” might apply to the rule of a πλεῖθος when he says that “we call the rule of the many who are all good men aristocracy, and the rule of one good person kingship, then aristocracy is better for cities then kingship (1286b3-5).” Aristotle also talks about aristocracy and kingship in the concluding remarks of Book III (1288a41). This passage occurs just after he has concluded that the best polis involves an individual family or majority outstanding with respect to virtue. This also suggests that Aristotle might have this sort of best polis in mind when he talks about aristocracy at this point in Politics III, as opposed to a traditional sort of aristocracy in which the minority is sovereign.

Kraut argues that his interpretation is supported by Politics III.4. He cites, first of all, an argument in this book that concerns “the best polis” [peri tês aristês politeias] (1276b37). The argument shows that the good man and the good citizen are not the same “if it is impossible for a state to consist entirely of good men” [ει...adunaton ex hapantôn spoudaiôn ontôn einai polin] (1276b37-8). Kraut argues that Aristotle must endorse the hypothesis if he endorses the conclusion and if the conclusion requires the hypothesis. But this is not Aristotle’s only argument for this conclusion in III.4. There is no reason why he might not include a hypothetical argument, a premise of which he does not endorse, among arguments the premises of which he does endorse. Furthermore, questions have been raised about the text. Kraut also says the following about III.4: “Aristotle never speaks of this ruler as someone who is, during certain periods of his adult life, ruled by others. He is assuming, in other words, that he will hold office permanently, and that his position will be one of supreme authority. By contrasts, he speaks throughout this chapter of the excellent citizens of the ideal city as individuals who are good at both ruling and being ruled (APP 367).” But the conclusion of the discussion initiated in III.4, at 1278b1, concerns the politikos, who controls, alone or with others [ὁ kath' hauton è met' allôn] common concerns [tês tòn koinôn epimeleias]. When Aristotle says what he does about the ruler as opposed to the citizen he is most likely just talking about a ruler qua ruler. A person is a good citizen if he is good both at ruling and being ruled. A person is a good ruler if he is good at ruling. It is not correct, furthermore, to suggest that the conclusion about the ruler is about the best polis. The claim about the best polis might apply only to the first (hypothetical) argument.

Therefore, there is no reason to conclude, as Kraut does, that Aristotle does not endorse the arguments against kingship. Kraut tells us that Aristotle is merely rehearsing the arguments against kingship and that “he is not swayed by these arguments because within III.17 and III.18 he concludes that kingship and aristocracy are superior to other forms of government” (APP 413). But this, as we saw, is not the case. Aristotle’s conclusion about the best constitution in Book III is consistent with his views on the subject in Book VII.

Conclusion
The thesis of this paper has been that, contrary to the common reading of Book III of the Politics, the constitution identified by Aristotle as best in this book is the ideal constitution of Book VII. I presented my argument for this thesis in the first part of the paper, where I examined Aristotle’s statements about the best polis,
the most important of which was Aristotle's final word on the matter, at the end of Book III. In the second part of the paper, I examined and criticized the most comprehensive argument for the common reading of Book III, presented in Richard Kraut's recent work on the Politics.

Works cited