

**VISIONS OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
IN THE ‘COMMENTARY ON ARISTOTLE’S
POLITICS’
BY MICHAEL OF EPHEBUS**

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In this work, in the fragmentary Commentary on Aristotle’s Politics, Michael of Ephesus (1059–1129) says that in nature there are relations of sovereignty and subordination. This relationship validates the view of natural slavery, that there are masters by nature and slaves by nature. The organic use of the slave by the master or of the subject by the sovereign resembles the sovereignty of the soul over the body. In addition, Michael points out that the differentiation between politicians and citizens is not just about governance and subordination, but also about the issue of virtues. A real political man would be an exemplary form of expression of the private and public application of the virtue of justice. This article, I think, highlights the political philosophy in Byzantium and specifically the Aristotelian political philosophy, as it is understood and developed by important thinkers of the same period, such as Michael of Ephesus.

If we want to deal with political philosophy in Byzantium, and specifically with Aristotelian political philosophy, we cannot ignore the fragmentary commentary on Aristotle’s *Politics* by Michael of Ephesus (1059–1129). In this study, the Byzantine thinker addressed the basic problems of Aristotelian thought and political philosophy in general, attempting to interpret basic directions of Aristotelian political philosophy, but also to integrate them into the political model of the Byzantine Empire.

The ruler as a simulation of the divine mind

A structural parameter of Michael’s thought is the perception of political governance as a simulation of divine dominance in the universe. This idea is not new but is inherited from the ancient Greek tradition and specifically from the Pythagoreans. According to the Pythagoreans, the communication between the parties of a political community must be modelled on the communication between the different parts of the universe. The universe, however, was not created acciden-

tally, but it was a product of rational design. The divine creator constructed the world and used its parts in order and rationality to achieve harmonious arrangement and seemliness. The creator and ruler of the universe is the rational god, who excels in his creation; having full knowledge of its essence and purpose, he is the cause and purpose of everything. In an absolute analogy, the political governor—since he first imitates the creator himself and establishes order and harmony within his individual nature, having attained self-knowledge of the essence and purpose of the man and becoming virtuous himself among the other political parts of the political entity—must properly assemble the political whole to give it a seemliness¹ and harmonious arrangement that is analogous to the universe.² This image of the political governor as an imitator of the divine ruler of the universe is used by Michael to establish the superiority of the emperor in virtue in relation to his own citizens, thus linking political and ecclesiastical power. However, Michael's interpretation attempts to rely on an Aristotelian basis,³ as it adopts Aristotle's interpretation of the natural sovereignty of the rational part over the irrational.⁴ Michael carries this interpretation into the political field by identifying the governor with the rational part.

The concept of natural slavery

Paradoxically, the notion of political sovereignty as an imitation of the divine ruler is founded in Aristotle's well-known view of natural slavery. The expression slave by nature (*φύσει δοῦλον*) is a conspicuous Aristotelian assumption of natural slavery based on the difference in natural abilities between human beings and in the political union of people into the background of natural bliss-integration.⁵ The relationship between their sovereignty and the subordination of the other which

¹ C.f., Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, 293 (*Aristotelis Politica*, ed. Otto Immisch [Leipzig, 1929], 293–327), (*Aristotle, Politics*, 1252b, 6).

² C.f., Joannes Stobaeus, *Anthology*, Ὑποθήκαι Περί βασιλείας ΜΗ', 61–66, Διωτογένεος Πυθαγορείου ἐκ τοῦ Περί βασιλείας (περ. 400 π.Χ.): βασιλέως ὥσπερ θεῷ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ὡ ἀγεμῶν τε καὶ προστάτας ἐντί, ξυνᾶ μὲν τὸ ποτὶ μίαν ἀρχάν τε καὶ ἀγεμονίαν τὸ ὅλον ξυναρμόσθαι, καθ' ἑκάστον δὲ τὸ καὶ τὰ κατὰ μέρος ποττὰν αὐτὰν ἀρμονίαν τε καὶ ἀγεμονίαν συναρμόζεσθαι.

³ C.f., Aristotle, *Politics*, 1284a. 9–15: Ἀδικήσονται γὰρ ἀξιούμενοι τῶν ἴσων, ἄνισοι τοσοῦτον κατ' ἀρετὴν ὄντες καὶ τὴν πολιτικὴν δύναμιν· ὥσπερ γὰρ θεὸν ἐν ἀνθρώποις εἰκὸς εἶναι τὸν τοιοῦτον. Ὅθεν δῆλον ὅτι καὶ τὴν νομοθεσίαν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι περὶ τοὺς ἴσους καὶ τῷ γένει καὶ τῇ δυνάμει, κατὰ δὲ τῶν τοιούτων οὐκ ἔστι νόμος· αὐτοὶ γὰρ εἰσι νόμος. Καὶ γὰρ γελοῖος ἂν εἴη νομοθετεῖν τις πειρώμενος κατ' αὐτῶν.

⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a: τὸ μὲν γὰρ δυνάμενον τῇ διανοίᾳ προορᾶν ἄρχον φύσει καὶ δεσπόζον φύσει, τὸ δὲ δυνάμενον [ταῦτα] τῷ σώματι πονεῖν ἀρχόμενον καὶ φύσει δοῦλον. 'For that which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature intended to be lord and master, and that which can with its body give effect to such foresight is a subject, and by nature a slave.' C.f., Joannes Stobaeus, *Anthology*, Περί Πολιτείας, Ἀρχύτα Πυθαγορείου ἐκ τοῦ Περί νόμου καὶ δικαιοσύνης, ΜΓ', 132. 22: συνείρονται μὲν γὰρ τὰ πράξεις ἐκ τοῦ ἄρχειν καὶ τοῦ ἄρχεσθαι καὶ τρίτον ἐκ τοῦ κρατεῖν. Τὸ μὲν οὖν ἄρχεν τῷ κρείσσονος οἰκῆον, τὸ δ' ἄρχεσθαι τῷ χερήονος, τὸ δὲ κρατεῖν ἀμφοτέρων· ἄρχει μὲν γὰρ τὸ λόγον ἔχον τὰς ψυχὰς, ἄρχεται δὲ τὸ ἄλογον, κρατοῦντι δὲ τῶν παθέων ἀμφοτέρω. Γίνεται γὰρ ἐκ τὰς ἐκατέρων συναρμογὰς ἀρετά. C.f. Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, 293 (*Aristotelis Politica*, ed. Otto Immisch [Leipzig, 1929], 293–327), (*Aristotle, Politics*, 1252b, 6): τὸ φύσει ἄρχον ἦτοι τὸν νοῦν.

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a.8.

takes place in the context of civil society is seen by Aristotle as evident and non-negotiable; there can be no political entity without the relations of sovereignty and subordination that underpin the concept of justice,⁶ which is the cornerstone, the foundation of the human political road towards natural bliss.

Michael uses the Aristotelian terms *tool* and *acquisition* (ὄργανον-κτῆμα) to establish his position on power relations within the political community. The *tool* is considered as a means of producing other things and is defined as a *creative tool* (ποιητικὸν ὄργανον), while the *acquisition* is a simple tool and defined as a *practical tool* (πρακτικὸν ὄργανον).⁷ The slave by nature is also a *practical* and *creative tool* in his relationship with his master.⁸ When subordinate to the master in a direct way, he is a *practical tool*. This domination resembles the dominance of the soul over the body. Just as the soul does what it wants to the body, so the master does whatever he wants to the slave. The soul uses the body as a *tool* and an *acquisition*. The body as an *acquisition* is nothing but a *tool* of the soul. On the contrary, when a slave is a *creative tool*, he serves the master by executing orders or creating something without the ability of mental processing.⁹ It could be said that the relationship between the governor and the subject parallels for Michael the relationship between master and slave with the Aristotelian justification of the natural superiority of the rational over the irrational part. From this point of view, the subjugated, either as a slave or as a subject, is a living *acquisition* of the mentally superior governor-master. Indeed, the relationship of sovereignty and subordination is inevitable by nature because there cannot be a political society consisting only of sovereigns or only of subjects. The necessity of nature is inevitable.

Here, Michael, in order to be understood, uses another Aristotelian distinction between *mind* (νοῦς) and *appetition* (ὄρεξις). *Appetition* is presented in three forms: as *thymic*, as *desire*, and as *will*.¹⁰ *Appetition* as a desire for pleasure is an irrational urge of the soul inherent in all living beings. The *thymic*, also inherent in all living beings, is an instinctive urge to punish another being for something evil that has come from it. On the contrary, *appetition* as *will* exists only in man. The *appetition* of a virtuous man with the function of rational judgment, with the function of mind, is transformed to *will*.¹¹ This ability of the *mind* to dominate the *appetition* defines the

⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a.37.

⁷ Σωτηρία Τριαντάρη, *Οι πολιτικές αντιλήψεις των Βυζαντινών διανοητών* (Αθήνα: Ηρόδοτος, 2002), 61.

⁸ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics* (1254a), 293–94: ὁ δοῦλος ποτὲ μὲν πρακτικὸν ὄργανον ῥηθήσεται, ὅτε δὲ ποιητικόν.

⁹ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics* (1254a), 294: Φύσει δοῦλος ἐστὶν ὁ μὴ διορατικὸς τῶν πρακτέων δι' ἀφυσίαν ἀλλ' ὑπηρετικός.

¹⁰ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics* (1254b), 294: Ἡ ὄρεξις ἀναιρεῖται εἰς θυμὸν καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν καὶ βούλησιν.

¹¹ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics* (1254b), 294: Τῶν ἀγαθῶν ὄρεξις μετὰ κρίσεως γινομένη βούλη καλεῖται.

will and, by extension, the ability to engage in political or royal science.¹² It is worth noting that Michael argues that not all people can attain the right *will*, an essential requirement for political science. Not everyone can impose the dominance of rationalism on the desperate appetite of desires. This parameter also separates the majority decisions of the parliament from the decisions of a real political scientist. The parliament or the people decide and do anything they like with everything they please, while the political scientist decides and acts in accordance with the correctness that stems from the absolute dominance of rationalism over irrational impulses. The political scientist and the mind can make good use of the *will*, while the parliament or the people cannot, and this is a fundamental difference (in the good use of the *will* by the political scientist and by the parliament) in Michael's thought.¹³

The sovereign and the subjects

Thus, Michael provides four arguments detailing the difference between the sovereign and the subjects:

- 1) In nature there are relations of sovereignty and subordination. This relationship validates the view of natural slavery; there are masters by nature and slaves by nature. The slaves by nature have the function of a living tool (*ἐμψυχον ὄργανον*) for their masters. The difference between sovereign and subject, master and slave, is not conventional or arbitrary, but is based on the difference in the rational ability of every human being.
- 2) The organic use of the slave by the master or of the subject by the sovereign resembles the sovereignty of the soul over the body. The slave-subject is either a means of producing other things (*creative tool*)—for example, the hands construct/create something by obedience to cognitive commands without themselves having the ability to think—or a simple utilitarian tool (*practical tool*)—such as a hammer. The same is true in the case of civil governance, in which the rationalists have a commander position, while those who cannot adequately develop their rational ability are utilitarian tools of the government authority.
- 3) Within the human organism, there are the *appetition* and the *mind*. The blind sovereignty of the appetite to the mind is an animal process rather than a human process. Those who can impose the rationality of sovereignty on the irrational appetite of desires are proclaimed by Michael as sovereigns, while those who are driven by their desires through neglecting their

¹² Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics* (1254b), 294: ἀρχει ὁ νοῦς τῆς ὀρέξεως βασιλικὴν καὶ πολιτικὴν. C.f., Katerina Ierodiakonou, 'Some Observations on Michael of Ephesus' Comments on *Nicomachean Ethics* X, in *Medieval Greek Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics*, eds Charles Barber and David Jenkins (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 185–202.

¹³ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics* (1254b), 294: Διαφέρει δὲ ὅτι ὁ μὲν βασιλεὺς καὶ ὁ νοῦς δύνανται βουλευέσθαι ἐκεῖνα δὲ οὐ.

rational ability are subjects. Indeed, Michael defines political science as the sovereignty of rationality over appetite within the human soul. The real possibility of the *will* belongs to the rationalist man. Michael expresses his reservations about whether it is possible to have proper consultation in a democratic assembly, considering that political science can only be found in very few individuals.

4) Michael then draws another argument, this time not from Aristotelian but from Platonic philosophy (which Aristotle¹⁴ also attempts to overturn). He refers to the argument of social mobility in Plato's *Republic* to prove that the city is not a single entity but is divided into subjects by the sovereigns because of their difference in virtue. According to the Platonic argument, the class of guardians must communicate with the class of creators so that there is unity in the city. If there was no communication between the social classes, we could not talk about a city but about two or more. The argument of social mobility validates, according to Plato, this position of political unity through the demotion to the class of creators those of the guardians' children who do not respond adequately to educational processes. On the contrary, the children of creators demonstrating remarkable skills in educational processes are promoted to the upper class of guardians, where there is also a reproductive community (the erotic companions of the guardians in the Platonic State are determined by the dominant class of philosophers-kings at a directed festival. The choice of erotic companions is based on the individual nature of the guardians). This mobility among members of civil society maintains its unity and certifies that it is a common political organisation. The whole city is common to Plato, whether we refer to guards or creators, the whole city is governed by unity, the city is a common natural and political organisation. However, Michael disputes the unity of the city as portrayed in the Platonic view. In fact, he notes that there are two opposing political parties within the city. The separation of the city into two parts is ratified by the enforcement of justice only in one place and not in both. The class of creators is subject to a justice process for the injustices committed by its members among themselves. On the other hand, there are no judicial proceedings in the class of the guardians because its members excel in virtue and rationality. There is no need for law enforcement in people who excel in virtue and have settled inside their souls through rationality the idea of justice, and thus never commit injustices.¹⁵ Consequently, civil society is not

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1261a–b.

¹⁵ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1261a) 297: *κοινωνεῖν δὲ ἀλλήλοις ἀναγκαῖον δι' ἓν μὲν, ὅτι δεῖ μίαν εἶναι τὴν πόλιν [...]. Εἰ γὰρ τοῖς γεωργοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὑπάρχειν ἀνάγκη δίκας καὶ ἐγκλήματα κατ' ἀλλήλων, τοῖς δὲ φύλαξι διὰ τὴν παιδείαν μηδὲν τούτων, πῶς οὐχ ὑπενάντιοι; ἐνάντιοι γὰρ πῶς οἱ δικαζόμενοι καὶ ἀπαιδευτοὶ τῶν μη δικαζομένων καὶ παιπεδευμένων.*

unified but consists of sovereigns and subjects according to the difference they have in virtue.¹⁶

Citizen and statesman

Aristotle states that the intellectual virtue of prudence (*φρόνησις*) as a structural catalyst of knowledge and the practice of political science is the property of the superior political man only, who is a political governor in the principles of natural right (i.e., the natural justice-order governing human nature and the political community. According to Aristotle, the distinctive feature of the mind is the point of differentiation between man and the other animals, but also between men as citizens or statesmen). The subjects do not have the virtue of prudence, but they participate in it through their consensual or coercive agreement on legal provisions, which are not active agents of prudence, but the reflection of supreme governmental prudence as a *true opinion* (*δόξα ἀληθής*).¹⁷ *True opinion* (*δόξα ἀληθής*) is not a political science that can rationally prove its principles and steadfastly direct the will of the state towards the good human purpose of bliss,¹⁸ but a declaration of faith without reason in the blissful political venture of the ruling prudence. This is the essential difference between the concept of citizen and the concept of the political man-statesman,¹⁹ while prudence is the virtue that differentiates the political man from the ordinary citizen.²⁰ The real political man differs from the common citizen in that he possesses the virtue of prudence, which thus becomes the hallmark of the political man. A real political man,²¹ through the virtue of prudence, defines scientifically rational rules of political virtue, in which ordinary citizens voluntarily submit to obedience to legal provisions by their uniform adherence to the true political opinion, which is not a rational prudence, but a mimetic reflection of it.

Also, following the Aristotelian vision, Michael differentiates the virtue of the citizen from the virtue of the virtuous man, who is essentially identified with the political man. The virtuous or political man is the only one who can rule—because of the virtue of prudence, as Aristotle has told us—while the virtuous citizen can

¹⁶ C.f., George Arabatzis, 'Michael of Ephesus on the Empirical Man, the Scientist and the Educated Man (*In Ethica Nicomachea* X and *In de Partibus Animalium* I)', in *Medieval Greek Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics*, eds Charles Barber and David Jenkins (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 163–184.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1277b.25–29: Ἡ δὲ φρόνησις ἄρχοντος ἴδιος ἀρετὴ μόνη. τὰς γὰρ ἄλλας ἔοικεν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι κοινὰς καὶ τῶν ἀρχομένων καὶ τῶν ἀρχόντων, ἀρχομένου δὲ γε οὐκ ἔστιν ἀρετὴ φρόνησις, ἀλλὰ δόξα ἀληθής.

¹⁸ Charles H. Kahn, 'The Normative Structure of Aristotle's *Politics*', in Günther Patzig, ed., *Aristoteles' 'Politik'* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 369–384.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1275a.23: Πολίτης δ' ἀπλῶς οὐδενὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὀρίζεται μᾶλλον ἢ τῷ μετέχειν κρίσεως καὶ ἀρχῆς.

²⁰ Ἡ δὲ φρόνησις ἄρχοντος ἴδιος ἀρετὴ μόνη.

²¹ Terence H. Irwin, 'Moral Science and Political Theory in Aristotle', *History of Political Thought* 6 (1985): 150–68.

lead and follow²² by participating in the governmental and judicial processes of civil society. In addition, Michael points out that the differentiation of politicians and citizens is not just about governance and subordination, but also about the issue of virtues. For example, the virtue of bravery exists both to the ruler and to the ruled, but in a different way.²³

The virtue of justice

Michael attributes an important role to the virtue of justice for the functioning of the city as well as for the formation of the individual's moral identity and of the political man. At this point, a connection between Platonic and Aristotelian thought is attempted. From the beginning, Michael notes that justice and the just man are the greatest goods of the city,²⁴ the prerequisite, coherent ties to the political edifice. Also, the commentator of the text states that justice is part of the sphere of political science; justice is a predominantly political thing.²⁵ Then justice is defined as a permanent mood of the souls of people who cohabit and form a political society. Michael is completely clear that without justice, there can be neither cohabitation nor a political community.²⁶ In fact, it includes not only the political actors (i.e., rulers and ruled) but also those who live only within the city boundaries, such as the inhabitants,²⁷ thus recognizing the important role that they can play in the pursuit of politics. Then, Michael ends up defining justice as an order of political society, as an organisation that governs the political whole from one side to the other and determines its quality and stability.²⁸ The political nature of justice is once again highlighted. Here, Michael also mentions the justice that exists within the human soul by defining it as universal justice. Indeed, the existence of this universal justice guarantees the existence of the other three virtues of *bravery*, *prudence*, and *saneness* (ἀνδρεία, φρόνησις, σωφροσύνη).²⁹ Even here, Platonic influence is obvious.

²² Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1277b) 303: οἱ δὲ πολῖται διάφοροι [...] δῆλον, ὡς καὶ αἱ τούτων ἀρεταί [...] ὅστις πολιτικός εὐδαίμων καὶ ἄρχειν μόνον δύναται, οὐ μὴν καὶ ἄρχεσθαι μέχρις ἂν εὐδαιμονήσῃ [...] Διαφέρει δὲ ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἀνὴρ τοῦ σπουδαίου πολίτου, ὅτι ὁ μὲν σπουδαῖος πολίτης δύναται καὶ ἄρχειν καὶ ἄρχεσθαι, ὁ δὲ ἀγαθὸς ἄρχειν μόνον.

²³ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1277a) 303: Ἀνδρεῖος καὶ ὁ ἄρχων καὶ ὁ ἀρχόμενος, ἀλλ' ἕτερον εἶδος ἀνδρείας [...]. Ὡστε οὐ ταυτὸν ἐστὶν ἡ ἀνδρεία τοῦ ἀρχοντος τῇ τοῦ ἀρχομένου ἀνδρεία.

²⁴ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1253a) 293: ὁ δίκαιος καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη μέγιστα ἀγαθὰ τυγχάνουσιν.

²⁵ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1253a) 293: ἔστι δὲ ἡ δικαιοσύνη πολιτικόν.

²⁶ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1253a) 293: ἡ δικαιοσύνη ἕξις τῶν συζώντων καὶ συμπολιτευομένων.

²⁷ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1253a) 293: συμπολιτεύονται καὶ οἱ ἐν πόλει οἰκοῦντες.

²⁸ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1253a) 293: Ἡ δικαιοσύνη ἐστὶ τάξις ἐστὶ πολιτική.

²⁹ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1253b) 293: ἡ καθόλου δικαιοσύνη διαιρεῖται εἰς τὴν ἀντιδιηρημένην δικαιοσύνην τῇ ἀνδρείᾳ καὶ φρόνησει καὶ σωφροσύνῃ.

Universal justice is contradicted by the four virtues: justice (in its individual form), *bravery*, *prudence* and *saneness*. (It is important to demonstrate the two-way course from universal justice to the four virtues, but also from the four virtues to universal justice. Universal justice is defined by the four virtues). It is particularly important that Michael does not restrict the functioning of justice to the political man but extends it to every citizen individually, recognizing in the virtue of justice respect for citizens in the political order of the system and the implementation of laws.³⁰ Justice justifies the orderly and correct functioning of the political system, which stems from the permanent mood of the soul in the virtue of justice in the souls of all members of the political community. In this respect, political justice is a function of the individual ethics of citizens. Citizens obey the laws, but they do so voluntarily, provided they have a permanent mood of virtue of justice within them without having to enforce the order of law.

Moreover, Michael notes that the law itself is not wrong, but the people who enact the laws are enslaved to their passions. That is why a real political man would be an exemplary form of expression of the private and public application of the virtue of justice. Subjects or citizens, imitating the justice inherent in the form of the true political man or the laws that are his creation, will be able to acquire more easily in their soul a permanent mood and a choice of the virtue of justice.³¹

The constitutions

Michael then approaches the issue of the distinction and comparison of the constitutions. Its purpose is to highlight the qualitative superiority of the royal constitution by strengthening the existing state of the Byzantine Empire. The king, having established justice through the justice in his soul and becoming a virtuous, true political man, must be able to apply law to the state, as God rules in the universe. However, Michael does not leave the subject with a superficial interpretation but tries to justify why a king is necessary if there is a law that is universal for every political member. The weakness of the law lies precisely in its universality.³² The law, being universal, cannot intervene in the individual circumstances. While the king as a supreme legislator holds the rationality behind the legislative system, he can also intervene in individual circumstances to be more flexible or more objective in the administration of justice.³³ The same issue was raised by Plato in the *Statesman*, who wanted to demonstrate the rigidity of the law. Plato likens the law to a trainer giving universal/identical commands to a group of athletes, although each needs a different

³⁰ Τριαντάρη, *Οι πολιτικές αντιλήψεις των Βυζαντινών διανοητών*, 64–66.

³¹ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1281a) 306.

³² Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1286a) 307–308: ὁ νόμος τὸ καθόλου διορίζει.

³³ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1286a) 307–308: Οὐδὲν γὰρ διαφέρει τὸν νόμον λέγειν ἄρχειν ἢ τὸν θέντα τὸν νόμον.

kind of training. He also likens the law to a doctor who leaves for a business trip and leaves his orders in written text. But the doctor's orders relate to a specific phase of the illness of sick people and if the illness or the conditions vary, the written advice will be useless, and the result could prove fatal. The doctor must intervene to change the form of therapy through knowledge of medical science. But the doctor is absent, and people have to interpret his advice.³⁴ However, Michael stresses the need for the enforcement of universal law. Without it, political men could not intervene in individual cases of justice. Actually, Michael proposes that the law should co-operate with the political man, so that universal justice is imposed on political situations.³⁵

Michael then analyses the Aristotelian division of the constitutions and highlights the difference between the perfect constitution of the *Republic* and the other six.³⁶ The excellent constitution is structured by a mixture of elements of other constitutions and aims at the equality of citizens.³⁷ Also, the preservation of the form of an excellent constitution is the consensus of the people in the exercise of power. This last parameter is used by Michael to support the royal constitution. Using the Aristotelian distinction between tyranny and reign, it concludes that tyranny aims at the prosperity of the tyrant and succeeds in doing this through the violent subordination and coercion of members of the political community. On the contrary, the royal constitution is based on the consensus of the political body in the rule of the king; the king desires to be honoured by his people and does not desire their oppression. In this sense, the kingdom is a kind of agreement-consensus between the governor and the political body and is not based on the arbitrariness of power, such as tyranny.³⁸ The royal constitution is based on the legitimacy resulting from the consensus of the citizens to the exercise of power by the king. Therefore, the aim of

³⁴ Plato, *Statesman*, 295b–c.

³⁵ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1286a) 307–308: κρείσσον τὸν νόμον ἄρχειν, οὗ χωρὶς ἀδυνατοῦσιν οἱ ἄρχοντες τὰ καθέκαστα πράττειν.

³⁶ C.f., Arist., *Pol.* 1279a.20–1279b.10:

Correct constitutions	Incorrect constitutions
Monarchy One Ruler Aim is the common good	Tyranny One Ruler Aim is the good of the Tyrant
Aristocracy Few Rulers Aim is the common good	Oligarchy Few Rulers Aim is the good of the few - wealthy
Republic Many Rulers - the people Aim is the common good	Democracy Many Rulers - the people Aim is the good of the many - poor

³⁷ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1293a–1293b) 312, (1294a) 313.

³⁸ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1311a) 321: Ὁ πλεονεκτῶν εἰς χρήματα τύραννος, ὁ δὲ εἰς τιμὴν βασιλεὺς. Ὁ πλεονεκτῶν εἰς χρήματα καὶ τοῦτο σκοπῶν, λέγω δὴ τὸ πτωχίζειν τοὺς πολίτας, τύραννος, ὁ δὲ τιμῆς μόνως ἐφιέμενος βασιλεὺς [...]. Ἡ δὲ βασιλεία καὶ ἡ ἀριστοκρατία ἐναντιοῦνται τῇ τυραννίδι ὡς τὰ ἐναντία καὶ βουλόμενοι καὶ πράττοντες. C.f., Τριαντάρη, *Οἱ πολιτικές αντιλήψεις των Βυζαντινῶν διανοητῶν*, 70–71.

the reign is the common good, the pursuit of benefit for the entire political body and not just for the political governor. Just as God would not have created the world if he had only thought of himself,³⁹ so the king is not a real king if he does not care for the good of the political society that he has in his care but only for his self-interest. Michael's goal, ultimately, is the emergence of royal power, established in the king's superiority in virtue.

³⁹ Michael of Ephesus, *Commentary on Aristotle Politics*, (1325b) 324.