

The Reception of Greek Literature in Pre-Revolutionary French Legal Thought

A common misconception about the French Revolution was that it was an insurrection against the monarchy under Louis XVI, when rather it was an insurrection against a social order they termed the *Ancien Régime*. The *Ancien Régime* was the period of monarchy immediately before the outbreak of the French revolution where French citizens fell into rigid social categories termed “orders” with little opportunity for movement across society. This rigidity – especially the limitations on lower class citizens improving their social standing – helped create the hostilities and tensions leading the Revolutionaries in the 1790s CE to swing towards violence and execute aristocrats and church figures in the period known as “the Terror.”

This violence, however, occurred within the context of Charles Loyseau’s contributions laying the legal bedrock for social restrictions in 1610 CE. One review of his career even declared him superior to any contemporary jurist in terms of his influence on social theories.¹ Thus, studying the French revolution requires an understanding of Loyseau’s *Traité des ordres et simples dignités*, published in 1610 CE. This work contained a theory of social order that survived after the fall of the French monarchy as a monument to *Ancien Régime* ideals and early modern absolutism.²

¹ Howell A. Lloyd, “The Political Thought of Charles Loyseau (1564-1627),” *European Studies Review* 11, (1981), 54.

² Peter Burke, “The language of orders in early modern Europe,” in *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in*

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The basic assumption underlying Loyseau's argument is that there are certain principles of nature to which governments must respond with appropriate social and legal institutions. Loyseau extends this assumption to justify the tripartite social system of France, which separated citizens into the First Estate and Second Estate – the clergy and the nobility, respectively – and the Third Estate. The Third Estate carried no specific title, but rather included the vast majority of French laborers and workers who did not hold a position in the church or the French nobility.

The text itself is dense, packed with countless references to contemporary legal tracts, French laws and edicts, and Biblical verses. In addition to these sources, almost a third of Charles Loyseau's citations are to Classical texts.³ Among these citations, Loyseau refers frequently to sources such as Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy and the very semantics of Greek philosophical vocabulary as evidence. This paper will examine the use of such material in Loyseau's legal worldview, first, as support for his claim that social order and differentiation are a fact of existence and, second, to argue that higher social rank is a guarantee of greater virtue, against the idea that higher social rank only promises more potential. To make this argument, Loyseau appeals to the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle and to the poetry of Homer to add gravity to his opinion that France's three-estate system had the authority of tradition behind it.

Social Stratification, ed. M.L. Bush (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1992), 9.

³ Howell A. Lloyd, introduction to *A treatise of orders and plain dignities*, by Charles Loyseau, trans. and ed. Howell A. Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xvi.

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As Howell A. Lloyd points out, one of the main sources of evidence to which Loyseau refers throughout his triad of treatises is “mere semantics.”⁴ Through the *Traité des ordres et simples dignités*, Loyseau carves out space to demonstrate how the origins of French, Latin, and Greek words show the universal nature of a need for order. This approach is evident from the very first paragraph of his treatise, where he discusses the importance of the Greek word κόσμος as the most common Greek word for the world (Loyseau, Pref.1, p. 5).⁵ He makes the claim that “in all things there must be order” and that κόσμος shows how the Greeks perceived the existence of the world as something defined by “beautiful order and arrangement” (Loyseau, Pref.1, p. 5).

Given Loyseau’s citations of Greek texts ranging from Homeric epic to Aristotelian philosophy, he must have encountered the full variety of uses of the term κόσμος. The word originated as the abstract expression for ‘order’ in Homeric Greek, but slowly evolved due to its use in philosophy.⁶ Later testimonies suggest the philosophy of Pythagoras was likely the earliest appearance of κόσμος in the

⁴ Howell A. Lloyd, *The State, France, and the Sixteenth Century*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983, 163.

⁵ The same paragraph also refers to a Latin noun for the world that “evokes the adornment and the grave that proceed from its admirable disposition,” but does not explicitly mention this word, although it seems likely he has *mundus* in mind. I have used the translation by Howell A. Lloyd in this paper, because of his effort in providing citations for Loyseau’s quotations and references. All in-text citations of Loyseau will therefore take the form of chapter and section number, then page number in Lloyd’s edition.

⁶ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 985. According to the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, the word only appears ten times in any Homeric poetry, with a range of connotations including ‘military order’ to ‘decorative ornament’ (*Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, s.v. “κόσμος, -ου, ὁ,” accessed April 20, 2022, <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/Iris/demo/tsearch.jsp#s=3>).

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philosophical sense of a divinely well-ordered world. Parmenides, shortly after, continued to develop the idea of κόσμος as something referring to world-order rather than an organization of daily matters.⁷ By the time of the Ionic-Attic dialect – which Loyseau cites almost exclusively due to the importance of Aristotle and Plato in his arguments – the word had gained a philosophical role referring to “government” in addition to the sense of world-order and rational organization in everyday situations.⁸ Loyseau’s familiarity with later references to Presocratic philosophy is unclear, but he specifically cites both Homer and Plato. Because he demonstrates familiarity with literature using the earliest ideas of κόσμος and the Classical idea of κόσμος, a familiarity with the history of the word’s semantics seems a likely influence for his perception of order as something universal.

Loyseau also refers to the Greek idea of τάξις as the Greek equivalent to his conception of a French ‘estate’ In his first chapter, “Of order in general,” Loyseau juxtaposes several ideas of social orders ranging from classical governments to his era. He identifies the idea that people naturally fall into a ranked hierarchy as something actualized in Greek theory as “τάξις” and in France as “estate” (Loyseau, 1.4, p. 9).

Loyseau’s understanding of κόσμος and τάξις as descriptors of divine, universal order separating classes of humankind informs his first citation of Greek philosophy. In his preface he quotes from Plato’s *Timaeus* that “the perfect workman ‘brought [the κόσμος] from disorder to order’”

⁷ R.S.P. Beekes and Lucien van Beek, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vol. 1. (Boston: Brill, 2010), 759.

⁸ Beekes and van Beek, *Etymological Dictionary*, 759.

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(Loyseau, Pref.1, p. 5). Here, Loyseau condenses a longer passage by Plato on the formation of the κόσμος:

ταύτην δὴ γενέσεως καὶ κόσμου μάλιστ' ἂν τις ἀρχὴν κυριωτάτην παρ' ἀνδρῶν φρονίμων ἀποδεχόμενος ὀρθότατα ἀποδέχοιτ' ἂν. βουληθεὶς γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἀγαθὰ μὲν πάντα, φλαῦρον δὲ μηδὲν εἶναι κατὰ δύναμιν, οὕτω δὴ πᾶν ὅσον ἦν ὁρατὸν παραλαβὼν οὐχ ἡσυχίαν ἄγον ἀλλὰ κινούμενον πλημμελῶς καὶ ἀτάκτως, εἰς τάξιν αὐτὸ ἤγαγεν ἐκ τῆς ἀταξίας, ἠγησάμενος ἐκεῖνο τούτου πάντως ἄμεινον. θέμις δ' οὐτ' ἦν οὐτ' ἔστιν τῷ ἀρίστῳ δρᾶν ἄλλο πλὴν τὸ κάλλιστον.
(Pl. *Ti.* 29e-30a)

It would be entirely correct for us to accept this principle from men of understanding — that this is the supreme beginning of creation and the universe. For the God wanted all things to be good and nothing to be bad wherever possible. So when he took everything that was visible, which was not at rest but moving outrageously and irregularly, he brought it into order from disorder, deciding that the former was better than the latter. Neither then nor now is it right for the best to do anything except the most beautiful thing.⁹

Plato here gives an account of “the god” creating the world by giving an ordered structure to a previously disordered body of material. Loyseau’s mention of κόσμος in the first paragraph of the preface to his work stresses the idea of social subjugation by building upon Plato’s ideas in the *Timaeus*. Loyseau brings these ideas into focus by emphasizing the idea that a universe has “hierarchical orders which are immutable” which an omnipotent creator had included in the pursuit of creating a perfect world (Loyseau Pref.2, pg. 5). The mention in the first paragraph emphasizes the idea of a natural state of social subjugation by building upon Plato’s idea of a universe with essential qualities which an omnipotent creator had included in the pursuit of creating a perfect world. Loyseau’s reading of

⁹ All translations provided are my own.

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this passage emphasized the idea of κόσμος defined by its “beautiful order and arrangement” (Loyseau, Pref.1, pg. 5). Plato’s contrast between “εις τάξιν” and “ἐκ τῆς ἀταξίας” sets a pattern for Loyseau to make a universal claim. Drawing from Plato’s statement that the creation of the world involved putting nature into some kind of order, Loyseau can confidently state that “[men] cannot subsist without order” as a defining characteristic of existence (Loyseau Pref.2, pg. 5).

The *Timaeus* effectively serves as the “cosmology” in Plato’s canon of thought.¹⁰ The passage Loyseau cites falls immediately before a long passage in which the *Timaeus* discusses the concept of a World Soul and its connection with the universe (*Timaeus* 31a-37c).¹¹ In *Timaeus*, Plato relates the creation of the universe as the result of an intentional design by the omnipotent Demiurge, who endowed creation with an apparently rational arrangement. Loyseau, as shown by the excerpt he chooses to characterize the *Timaeus*, identifies the stratification of rational beings as a crucial part of the Demiurge’s creation of the universe. Familiarity with Plato’s idea of creation would influence Loyseau’s thought as much as it contributed to the strength of his argument. Similar to how *Timaeus* attributes Soul to his ordered universe, Loyseau credits God with creating cosmic order. Loyseau’s focus is on how God orders men above the other groups of sentient animals (Loyseau, Pref.2, p. 5). These passages show how Loyseau selectively builds on suitable passages from

¹⁰ H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Literature: From Homer to the Age of Lucian*, 4th rev. ed. (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1950), 267.

¹¹ Proclus, 1.

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Plato's *Timaeus* that support a Christian perspective on the idea of universal order.

Loyseau refers to Plato several more times throughout the following ten chapters, but two references to the *Republic* are especially relevant for continuing his train of thought about universal and social order, even when he disagrees with Plato's conclusions. In chapter four of the treatise, Loyseau refers to an exchange between the interlocutors Socrates and Glaucon, where Socrates "concluded that, 'as the best-bred apple, wine or horse was the best, so is it with the man of the most noble lineage'" (Loyseau, 4.2, p. 66).¹² Lloyd identifies the passage which Loyseau paraphrases as:

S: τόδε μοι λέγε, ὦ Γλαύκων · ὀρώ γάρ σου ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ καὶ κύνας θηρευτικούς καὶ τῶν γενναίων ὀρνίθων μάλα συχνούς · ἄρ' οὖν, ὦ πρὸς Διός, προσέσηκάς τι τοῖς τούτων γάμοις τε καὶ παιδοποιῶι;
G: τὸ ποῖον; ἔφη.
S: πρῶτον μὲν αὐτῶν τούτων, καίπερ ὄντων γενναίων, ἄρ' οὐκ εἰσὶ τινες καὶ γίνονται ἀριστοί;
G: εἰσίν.
S: πότερον οὖν ἐξ ἀπάντων ὁμοίως γεννᾶς, ἢ προθυμῇ ὅτι μάλιστα ἐκ τῶν ἀρίστων;
G: ἐκ τῶν ἀρίστων.
S: τί δ'; ἐκ τῶν νεωτάτων ἢ ἐκ τῶν γεραιτάτων ἢ ἐξ ἀκμαζόντων ὅτι μάλιστα;
G: ἐξ ἀκμαζόντων.
S: καὶ ἂν μὴ οὕτω γεννᾶται, πολὺ σοι ἡγή χεῖρον ἔσεσθαι τὸ τε τῶν ὀρνίθων καὶ τὸ τῶν κυνῶν γένος;
G: ἔγωγ', ἔφη.
S: τί δὲ ἵππων οἶει, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων; ἢ ἄλλη πη ἔχειν;
G: ἄτοπον μεντᾶν, ἦ δ' ὅς, εἴη.
S: βασιᾶ, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὦ φίλε ἐταῖρε, ὡς ἄρα σφόδρα ἡμῖν δεῖ ἀκρων εἶναι τῶν ἀρχόντων, εἶπερ καὶ περὶ τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος ὡσαύτως ἔχει.
(Pl. *Rep.* 5.459a-459b)

¹² Loyseau's supposed quote from the *Republic* is interesting, given that Socrates only discusses birds, dogs, and horses, with no mention of wine or plants at all. It appears Loyseau is simply misquoting Plato, since the intent of the quote does not change when substituting specific elements of nature.

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S: Tell me this, Glaucon: for I notice in your house there are both hunting dogs and a great number of well-bred birds: by Zeus, have you paid any heed to their unions and procreation?

G: What?

S: First of all, although the animals are well-bred, are there not some that are the best?

G: There are.

S: Then, do you breed from all of them equally or do you prefer that you breed mostly from the best?

G: From the best.

S: Then what? From the youngest or from the oldest or from the ones thriving the most?

G: From the ones who are thriving.

S: And should they not be bred like this, do you think that the line either of the birds or of the dogs will be worse off by much?

G: For sure.

S: And what do you think of the horses? And the other animals? In what other way does it work for their breeding?

G: It is certainly not normal if it is different than this.

S: Of course! My dear friend, how very much need we need high rulers, assuming this precept similarly holds the human race.

The most important language here is when Socrates and Glaucon agree on the existence of the *ἄριστοι* among species of animals. Socrates then extrapolates the common practice of breeding the best of animals to say it is only natural to expect that arrangements of the best men and women would produce the most valuable offspring. Socrates, as the voice of Plato, refers to animal husbandry in other parts of the dialogue.¹³ Plato's assumption about nature resurfaces in this analogy in a way that Loyseau sees as relevant to the debate about social order. Loyseau's introduction to the chapter even extends this analogy by discussing how wild animals never produce domesticated animals, while domesticated animals never

¹³ C.f. *Republic* 2.374e-375e and 4.423b-424b where Socrates uses the example of animals reproducing as an analogy for humans begetting new generations.

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produce wild animals (Loyseau, 4.2, p. 66). Plato's intent here is to explore the ramifications of employing eugenics to produce a ruling class, but Loyseau decontextualizes a specific part of the argument to stress Plato's idea of natural hierarchy as a transmissible part of identity.

Immediately after using Socrates' analogy of animal husbandry, Loyseau adds the agreeing sentiment of Aristotle that the definition of nobility is "excellence of birth," rather than anything related to holding an aristocratic office (Loyseau, 4.2, p. 66). In Loyseau's reading, the argument of the philosophers is that nobility, "virtue of lineage," and "excellence of birth" are all synonymous (Loyseau 4.2, p. 66):

(πολιται γαρ μάλλον οί γενναιότεροι τών άγεννών, ή δ' εύγένεια παρ' έκάστοις οίκοι τίμιος) · έτι διότι βελτίους εικός τούς έκ βελτιόνων, εύγένεια γάρ έστιν άρετή γένους.
(Arist. *Pol.* 3.1283a.34-36)

(For the high-born citizens are greater than the low-born, the quality of birth is honorable to each man at home): still because it is like that those from better parents will be better children, for the quality of birth is the virtue of lineage.

The language of Aristotle inherently glorifies the birthright of someone of a higher social order, describing "εύγένεια" as the "άρετή γένους" (Arist. *Pol.* 3.1283a.36). Although Aristotle admits that birth only increases the probability of virtue rather than guarantees it,¹⁴ Loyseau focuses on equating virtue and birth to identify a correlation by Aristotle which he will later subvert when he introduces references to Homer's *Odyssey*.

After the expected allusions to Platonism and Aristotelianism, Loyseau makes a one-off reference to Homeric

¹⁴ Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1282b32-1283a3 where Aristotle discusses how birth is not a perfect predictor of the talent of a flute-player.

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poetry (Loyseau, 4.2, p. 66). A scene from the *Odyssey* supplements the philosophical works to show the deep antiquity of Greek thought regarding transmissible virtue. Loyseau mentions the *Odyssey* in the context of arguing that there is some undeniable personal superiority in those descended from nobility. Loyseau writes of how Homer described Telemachus as carrying on the virtue and wit of Odysseus, despite the fact that Odysseus was absent for Telemachus' formative years:

τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη ξανθὸς Μενέλαος:
ὤ φίλ', ἐπεὶ τόσα εἶπες, ὅσ' ἂν πεπνυμένος ἀνήρ
εἶποι καὶ ῥέξειε, καὶ ὃς προγενέστερος εἴη·
τοῖου γὰρ καὶ πατρός, ὃ καὶ πεπνυμένα βάζεις,
ῥεῖα δ' ἀρίγνωτος γόνος ἀνέρος ὧν τε Κρονίων
ὄλβον ἐπικλῶση γαμέοντί τε γεινομένῳ τε,
(Hom. *Od.* 4.203-208)

Replying to this, fair-haired Menelaus said:/ "Oh friend, when you say such things, you act just like a wizened man/ talks and acts, and as the man born before you might do:/ You are of such a father — and you speak such wise words,/ someone's child is easily known when Zeus/ spins out happiness in marrying and bearing children.

Loyseau's use of this passage to represent Greek poetic ideas about inheritable virtue is especially interesting because it overlooks more conventional readings of the passage to focus on the eugenicist implications. For example, one interpretation more popular among commentators focuses on how the lines take place within a section where Homer emphasizes the unusual wisdom of the young man Telemachus by using a conversation structure typical of Greek oral epic.¹⁵ Another

¹⁵ Irene J. F. De Jong, *Homer: Critical Assignments* (London: Routledge, 1999), 99-100. Emily Wilson (in her introduction to *The Odyssey*, by Homer, trans. Emily Wilson (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 48) also adds that the subplot of Telemachus

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more common understanding is that the scene is a continuation of a plot device where Telemachus' resemblance to Odysseus is so obvious that every Greek old enough to have met Odysseus recognizes the relationship.¹⁶

Histories on the reception of Homer do not provide evidence from social trends that suggest Loyseau reading the *Odyssey* in this way was conventional during Loyseau's life. That is not to say that scholars of Loyseau's era would necessarily have found Loyseau's focus on eugenics and breeding an entirely illogical approach, but the absence of similar analyses and the primacy of the two readings already mentioned suggest this was not the prevailing understanding of the scene. Loyseau did live and write following a resurgence in the popularity of Homeric epic in Europe during the Renaissance, but the early modern period brought no analysis that was notably similar to what Loyseau writes in this section of his treatise.¹⁷ Loyseau summarizes Homer's view in the passage as "that the substance of [Odysseus'] virtues flowed into [Telemachus] with those few drops of the latter's seed" (Loyseau, 4.2, pp.66-7). He argues against this opinion that he believes the Greek thinkers held, saying that instead "the children of the well-off are much more likely to be virtuous" (Loyseau, 4.3, p.67). In the context of Loyseau's argument and the contemporary reception of Homer, it seems this passage deviates from more conventional explications to

assuming his manhood is part of the broader structure of the *Odyssey*, so this exchange between him and Menelaus about preternatural wisdom in his father's footsteps could also reflect this coming-of-age.

¹⁶ Alfred Heubeck, Stephanie West, and J. B. Hainesworth, *A commentary on Homer's Odyssey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 102.

¹⁷ Wilson, Introduction to *Homer's Odyssey*, 8.

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reinforce Loyseau's claim that the Greeks viewed quality of character as determined by parentage.

Finally, Loyseau refers to both Plato and Aristotle to argue that the nobility, especially the ruling class, have a unique quality invested at birth which sets them apart from other orders of men. Loyseau wrote this section particular to praise the monarchy and to say that the transmissibility of excellence overrules the transmissibility of the Third Estate (Loyseau, 7.92, p. 162). Loyseau first argues this by pointing the reader to another passage from Plato's *Republic*:

πάνυ, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, εἰκότως · ἀλλ' ὅμως ἄκουε καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν τοῦ μύθου. ἐστὲ μὲν γὰρ δὴ πάντες οἱ ἐν τῇ πόλει ἀδελφοί, ὡς φήσομεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς μυθολογούντες, ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς πλάττων, ὅσοι μὲν ὑμῶν ἱκανοὶ ἄρχειν, χρυσὸν ἐν τῇ γενέσει συνέμειξεν αὐτοῖς, διὸ τιμιώτατοί εἰσιν· ὅσοι δ' ἐπίκουροι, ἄργυρον· σίδηρον δὲ καὶ χαλκὸν τοῖς τε γεωργοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις δημιουργοῖς. ἅτε οὖν συγγενεῖς ὄντες πάντες τὸ μὲν πολὺ ὁμοίους ἂν ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς γεννῶτε.
(Plat. *Rep.* 3.415a)

"By all means," I said, suitably, "but nevertheless hear what remains of the story. 'For all of you are brothers in the city,' as we will say telling the story to them, 'but the god, while crafting them, mixed in gold in that line, those ones of us capable of ruling, so they are the most honored: the ones who are helpers, he mixed in silver: he mixed the farmers and the other craftsmen in iron and. And because you are all related, you will mostly produce similar offspring to yourselves.

This passage returns to both the idea that biological and spiritual differences exist between the Third Estate and the two higher orders. The men of higher orders with the potential to serve in the ruling class metaphorically consist of gold, while other workers contain silver, iron, and brass as they hold diminishingly valuable roles (Plat. *Rep.* 3.415a).

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This passage is perhaps Loyseau's most interesting Classical citation, given his interpretation directly contradicts the following lines from the *Republic* (*Rep.*3.415b). While Loyseau concludes Plato's intention was to advocate for the idea that the ruling class is immutably different from the working class, Plato specifically discusses how it is possible that "from a golden father, a silver child might be born and from the silver father, a golden child." Although this instance is not Loyseau's only "indiscriminate" use of sources,¹⁸ it is perhaps the most blatant example of decontextualizing Classical thought to be found in the treatise. Loyseau goes on to conclude that, since Greek poets referred to the children of gods as demi-gods, the French could reasonably refer to the children of royalty as "demi-kings" (Loyseau, 7.92, p. 162), since both deities and nobles are substantially different from the average human under in the decontextualized analogy of the metals of mankind.

After the reference to Plato and the metals as qualities of man, Loyseau references a sentiment of Aristotle that kings served as the "mean genus between God and the people" (Loyseau, 7.92, p. 162). Lloyd identifies the relevant passage as:

εἰ δὲ τις ἔστιν εἷς τοσοῦτον διαφέρων κατ' ἀρετῆς ὑπερβολὴν, ἢ πλείους μὲν ἑνὸς μὴ μέντοι δυνατοὶ πληρῶμα παρασχέσθαι πόλεως, ὥστε μὴ συμβλητὴν εἶναι τὴν τῶν ἄλλων ἀρετὴν πάντων μηδὲ τὴν δύναμιν αὐτῶν τὴν πολιτικὴν πρὸς τὴν ἐκείνων, εἰ πλείους, εἰ δ' εἷς, τὴν ἐκείνου μόνον, οὐκέτι θετέον τούτους μέρος πόλεως· ἀδικήσονται γὰρ ἀξιούμενοι τῶν ἴσων, ἄνισοι τοσοῦτον κατ' ἀρετὴν ὄντες καὶ τὴν πολιτικὴν δύναμιν: ὥσπερ γὰρ θεὸν ἐν ἀνθρώποις εἰκὸς εἶναι τὸν τοιοῦτον
(Aris. *Pol.* 3.1284a.3-10)

¹⁸ Howell A. Lloyd, introduction to *A treatise of orders and plain dignities*, xvi.

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But if someone is distinct by such superiority according to virtue, or many are but surely not enough to amount to a complete state, so that the virtue of all other men will not be compared nor will the political capability of others against that of these men, if there are many of them or if there is just one, for his virtue alone, these men should never be counted as a share of the state: for they will be harmed if they are valued as equals, because they are unequal according to such virtue and such political capability: for they will be just like a god among men.

Marguerite Deslauriers' (2013) chapter on political inequality in Aristotelianism frames this elevation of the ruling class as a central feature of Aristotle's thought.¹⁹ In her analysis, Aristotle focuses on the city-state as the primary unit of investigation and how to maintain *κοινωνία* (unity). The important context she points out is that Aristotle's greatest criticism of Plato's *Laws* was how Plato did not clearly enough elaborate on the substantial differences between the ruling class and the subject class. She ultimately argues that Aristotle views unity as a necessary step for stability or prosperity, but that such unity is impossible without inequality.²⁰ Loyseau eagerly seizes a work embracing inequality as a necessity to achieve stability and utilizes material from Aristotle's *Politics* as a whole beyond just this passage about the values of kings.

The idea that the world tends to naturally divide itself into hierarchies outside of the sphere of human government is central to many Classical philosophical works and Loyseau's chapter on the order of Nobility. Loyseau uses these passages

¹⁹ Marguerite Deslauriers, "Political unity and inequality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, ed. M. Deslauriers and P. Destrée (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 131.

²⁰ Deslauriers, "Political Unity," 138.

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to develop the Greek idea that parentage and social order are the determiner of excellence. He also disagrees with his own readings of Plato, Aristotle, and Homer, arguing that order instead brings “a particular aptitude and capacity” rather than an innate goodness (Loyseau, 1.3, p. 8). Although he dissents on one of the two main points about the nature of social order, he successfully uses Greek material to develop a philosophy in which social order is an innate feature of reality and where there is the objective presence of something distinguishing people of higher social orders. Loyseau’s justification for the *Ancien Régime* on the basis of Greek philosophical precedent during a period where scholars revered Classical thought helped strengthen the cultural acceptance of a more rigid social order in the turbulent context of the early 16th century.

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