

Aristotle on the justice of farming (*Oec.* 1.2.1343a28–31)

Forthcoming in E. Irrera, A. Fermani and F. Piangerelli, eds., *Oikos Nomos. Politics and Economics in Ancient Thought*. Pistoia: Petite Plaisance.

Thornton Lockwood
Quinnipiac University

ABSTRACT: I argue that the claim made in the Aristotelian *Oeconomica* 1.2 (1343a28–31) that farming is just is a point about what Aristotle calls justice as the whole of virtue (*EN* 5.1.1129b11–19), namely a notion of justice that embodies what is lawful rather than a notion of particular justice within the framework of human exchanges. The first part of the chapter shows why it is problematic to interpret *Oec.* 1.2 as a claim about particular justice: whereas Aristotelian particular justice consists in finding the mean between gain and loss in inter-personal (or *pros heteron*) exchanges between two or more parties, *Oec.* 1.2 juxtaposes farming with all human exchanges, including those that Aristotle clearly recognizes as just. Indeed, *Oec.* 1.2. seems to claim that farming is just precisely because it is *not* involved with other humans. The second part of the chapter considers whether one can illuminate *Oec.* 1.2 by means of Xenophon's account of the justice of farming in his *Oeconomicus* (e.g., 5.12); but careful examination of what “the earth teaches” the farmer for Xenophon is a function ultimately of care (*epimeleia*) rather than the exchange-based model of justice assumed in *Oec.* 1.2. The third part of the chapter proposes an alternative basis for understanding the text, namely that *Oec.* 1.2 ultimately assumes the framework of what Aristotle calls universal or complete justice, much like one finds in Hesiod's account of divine justice in relationship to work and agriculture (e.g. *WD* 230–243). Such a solution views the farmer in an exchange with the earth, but Aristotle usually (for instance, in *Politics* 1.8–11) characterizes such an exchange as either in accord with nature or contrary to nature (e.g., *Pol.* 1.10.1258a35–b5), rather than in terms of what is just or unjust. The chapter suggests that the Aristotelian *Oec.* 1.2 thus shows that claims about “natural” and “unnatural” forms of property appropriation have some affinity with the theocentric framework of Hesiod's account of justice.

Keywords: Aristotle, Xenophon, Hesiod, farming, justice, ethics of care

Word count: 6,800 words

INTRODUCTION

The first book of Aristotle’s *Politics* (*Pol.*) includes an extended discussion of the relationship between household management (οικονομική), namely, expertise in how to run a household, including all its animate and inanimate components, and the nature of “money-making” (χρηματιστική), a term that appears to be contested in 4th century Greece.¹ Aristotle clarifies that relationship by identifying two different kinds of “money-making,” what one might call a “non-commercial” form of money-making that uses currency to facilitate the household’s agricultural production (for example, purchasing seeds from household revenues for the next season’s crop) and a “commercial” form of money-making that uses currency to make more currency (for example, lending money to others to generate revenue from interest).² Here is Aristotle’s characterization:

T1: Since [money-making] is of two sorts, as we said, one belonging to the craft of commerce and the other to household management, and the latter is necessary and praiseworthy, whereas the craft of exchange is *justly blamed* (for it is not in accord with nature but involves taking from others), usury is most reasonably hated, because it gets wealth from money itself, rather than precisely what money was provided for. For money was introduced for the sake of exchange, but interest makes money itself grow bigger. That in fact is how it got its name; for offspring (τικτόμενα) resemble their parents, and interest (τόκος) is money that comes from

¹ For contestations of money-making among 4th century Greek intellectuals, see M. Leese, *Making Money in Ancient Athens*, University of Michigan Press, 2021, pp. 1–56; É. Helmer, *Oikonomikē. Philosophie grecque de l’économie*, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2021, 119–42 ; S. Eich, *The Currency of Politics: The Political Theory of Money from Aristotle to Keynes*, Princeton University Press, 2022, pp 22–46; and D. LévyStone, “À propos de la pensée économique pré-aristotélicienne en général et de celle de Platon en particulier”, *ΠΗΓΗ / FONS*, 7–8 (2022–2023), pp. 21–47. For overviews of Aristotle’s account of money-making, see C. Natali, “Aristote et la chrématistique”, in G. Patzig (ed.), *Aristoteles Politik*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1990, pp. 296–324; and F. Masi, “Wealth, Habits and Happiness. Chrematistics in Aristotle’s Ethics”, *Revue de philosophie économique* 23, (2023), pp. 95–118.

² See further *Pol.* 1.8. 1256^b26–39, 1.9.1257^b17–23. I provide my own characterization of the two kinds of money-making in T. Lockwood, “Aristotle’s *oikonomikē* as an environmental ethic”, in C. Addey, M. Tuominen, and S. Connell (eds.), *Animals and the Environment in Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy*, London, Routledge, forthcoming.

money. And so of all the sorts of crafts of wealth acquisition this one is the most unnatural.³ (*Pol.* 1.10.1258a40–b9, emphasis added)

[Διπλῆς δ' οὔσης αὐτῆς, ὥσπερ εἶπομεν, καὶ τῆς μὲν καπηλικῆς τῆς δ' οἰκονομικῆς, καὶ ταύτης μὲν ἀναγκαίας καὶ ἐπαινουμένης, τῆς δὲ μεταβλητικῆς ψευδομένης δικαίως (οὐ γὰρ κατὰ φύσιν ἀλλ' ἀπ' ἀλλήλων ἐστίν), εὐλογώτατα μισεῖται ἢ ὀβολοστατικῆ διὰ τὸ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ νομίματος εἶναι τὴν κτῆσιν καὶ οὐκ ἐφ' ὅπερ ἐπορίσθη· μεταβολῆς γὰρ ἐγένετο χάριν, ὃ δὲ τόκος αὐτὸ ποιεῖ πλέον (ὄθεν καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦτ' εἴληφεν· ὅμοια γὰρ τὰ τικτόμενα τοῖς γεννώσιν αὐτὰ ἐστίν, ὃ δὲ τόκος γίνεται νόμισμα ἐκ νομίματος)· ὥστε καὶ μάλιστα παρὰ φύσιν οὗτος τῶν χρηματισμῶν ἐστίν.]

Quite clearly, Aristotle finds something problematic with commercial money-making which he characterizes in several places as being “contrary to nature,” namely it uses money in a fashion that is contrary to the purpose or function of money. But throughout the discussion of household management in *Politics* 1.8–11, Aristotle fails to characterize money-making in terms of justice. The closest he comes to such an assertion is his claim that “the craft of exchange is *justly blamed* (ψευδομένης δικαίως);” but otherwise, the terms justice and injustice (and their various cognates) are generally absent from the discussion of money-making in *Politics* 1.8–11.⁴

Scholars are thus fortunate to have a discussion, admittedly brief, of the relationship between justice and farming in the Aristotelian *Oeconomica* (*Oec.*) which claims that

T2: farming is most important to household management because it is just, for it does not derive property from men, either when they voluntarily [make exchanges]

³ My translations of Aristotle’s *Politics* are based on W.D. Ross (ed.), *Aristotelis Politica*, Oxford, Oxford Classical Texts, 1957; and C.D.C. Reeve, *Aristotle Politics. A New Translation*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 2017. O. Goldin, “Aristotle, Usury, and Nature”, *Akropolis: Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1 (2023), pp. 42–63, explores the medieval and exegetical interpretations of this passage (which goes beyond the goals of my own chapter).

⁴ The discussion of commerce in *Politics* 1.9–10 begins with the claim that “there is another kind of craft of property acquisition which they most of all call—and *justly so*—the craft of commercial wealth acquisition” (“Ἔστι δὲ γένος ἄλλο κτητικῆς ἢν μάλιστα καλοῦσι, καὶ δίκαιον αὐτὸ καλεῖν, χρηματιστικὴν [*Pol.* 1.9.1256b40–41, my emphasis]); *Pol.* 1.8.1256b25–26 is the only other reference to justice in the discussion of property acquisition (and it does not concern money-making).

(such as trade or in wage-labor) or involuntarily (just as when forms of military expertise are used to acquire property).⁵ (*Oec.* 1.2.1343a28–31)
[ἡ δὲ γεωργικὴ μάλιστα ὅτι δικαία· οὐ γὰρ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων, οὔθ’ ἐκόντων,
ὥσπερ καπηλεία καὶ αἱ μισθαρνικαί, οὔτ’ ἀκόντων, ὥσπερ αἱ πολεμικαί.]

But although we are fortunate to have a discussion that characterizes aspects of household management in terms of justice, **T2** is not only brief; it has received almost no commentary in secondary literature on Aristotle and some of its claims appear to be at odds with standard Aristotelian views articulated in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*EN*) and the *Politics*. Before scholars can take advantage of **T2** in interpreting Aristotle’s understanding of household management, we must first determine what precisely is the basis of its argument.

My chapter argues that the claim that farming is just is a point about what Aristotle calls justice as the whole of virtue (*EN* 5.1.1129b11–19), namely a notion of justice that embodies what is lawful rather than a notion of particular justice within the framework of human exchanges. The first part of the chapter shows why it is problematic to interpret **T2** as a claim about particular justice: whereas Aristotelian particular justice consists in finding the mean between gain and loss in inter-personal (or *pros heteron*) exchanges between two or more parties, **T2** juxtaposes farming with all human exchanges, including those that Aristotle clearly recognizes as just. Indeed, *Oec.* 1.2. seems to claim that farming is just precisely because it is *not* involved with other humans. The second part of the chapter considers whether one can illuminate **T2** by means of Xenophon’s

⁵ My translations of the Aristotelian *Oeconomica* derive from T. Lockwood and B.R.W. van Velthoven (trans.), Aristotle, “Oikonomika”, in C.D.C. Reeve, ed., *Aristotle Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing, forthcoming; and M. Valente, [*Aristotele*]: *Economici. Introduzione, testo rivisto, traduzione e commento*. Alessandria, Edizioni dell’Orso, 2011. The *Oeconomica* is often characterized as “Pseudo-Aristotle,” namely written by another author (albeit possibly a member of Aristotle’s Lyceum). For the purposes of this chapter, I consider the *Oeconomica* as Aristotelian in the same fashion as is the *Athenian Constitution*: although Aristotle may not have written the treatise itself, the treatise is genuinely Aristotelian in content and consistent with texts such as the *Politics* whose authenticity is not in doubt.

account of the justice of farming in his *Oeconomicus* (e.g., 5.12); but careful examination of what “the earth teaches” the farmer for Xenophon is a function ultimately of care (*epimeleia*) rather than the exchange-based model of justice assumed in **T2**. The third part of the chapter proposes an alternative basis for understanding the text, namely that **T2** ultimately assumes the framework of what Aristotle calls universal or complete justice, much like one finds in Hesiod’s account of divine justice in relationship to work and agriculture (e.g. *WD* 230–243). Such a solution views the farmer in an exchange with the earth, but Aristotle usually (for instance, in *Politics* 1.8–11) characterizes such an exchange as either in accord with nature or contrary to nature (e.g., *Pol.* 1.10.1258a35–b5), rather than in terms of what is just or unjust. The chapter suggests that the Aristotelian *Oec.* 1.2 thus shows that claims about “natural” and “unnatural” forms of property appropriation have some affinity with the theocentric framework of Hesiod’s account of justice.

PART 1: The justice of farming in the Aristotelian *Oeconomica* (*Oec.* 1.2)

The Aristotelian discussion of the justice of farming is located within the first book of the *Oeconomica*, which is devoted to examining the two parts of the household, namely humans and property (1.2.1343a18). In the former case, the *Oeconomica* devotes chapters 1.3–1.4 to an analysis of the “human” part of the household—namely the household manager’s wife.⁶ But whereas the discussion of property in the *Politics* begins with an analysis of human property,

⁶ Both the *Politics* and the *Oeconomica* cite Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (405) as the source of the claim that the household has two fundamental parts (*Pol.* 1.2.1252b10–12, *Oec.* 1.2.1343a22–23). Plato similarly examines the human part of the household and then its animate property (*Lg.* 6.772d–776a: wife; 6.776b–778a: slaves). But although the *Politics* recognizes paternal expertise as one of the three parts of household management, (e.g., *Pol.* 1.3.1253b5–13, 1.12.1259a38–40, 1.13.1260b8–21), the *Oeconomica* discusses parental roles primarily with respect to the wife’s duties.

namely slaves, the *Oeconomica* commences with non-human property; the text begins with a presentation of four abbreviated arguments in support of the claim that farming (γεωργική) is the primary care (πρώτη ἐπιμέλεια) for property within the domain of household management. The complete passage (in which **T2** is embedded) claims that

T3: With respect to property, the first care is for that which is in accord with nature. The expertise of farming comes first with respect to the property that is in accord with nature; second are those forms of expertise that extract property from the earth, such as the expertise of mining and if there are any others.⁷ Farming is most important to household management [for four reasons]: First, because farming is just, for it does not derive property from men, either when they voluntarily [make exchanges] (such as trade or in wage-labor) or involuntarily (just as when forms of military expertise are used to acquire property). Secondly, farming concerns property that is in accord with nature, for all forms of life derive their food from their mother in accord with the nature [of different species] and so too do humans derive food from the earth.⁸ Third, in addition to the first two reasons, farming contributes significantly towards the virtue of bravery, for farming is not like the servile trades that make bodies useless, but the expertise of farming is able to make bodies able to live out in the open and work hard. Fourth, the expertise of farming makes men able to take risks against their foreign enemies, for farmers alone among citizens have property that falls outside the fortification of urban centers. (*Oec.* 1.2.1343a26–b7, enumeration added)

[κτῆσεως δὲ πρώτη ἐπιμέλεια ἢ κατὰ φύσιν· κατὰ φύσιν δὲ γεωργικὴ προτέρα, καὶ δεύτεραι ὅσαι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, οἷον μεταλλευτικὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἄλλη τοιαύτη. ἢ δὲ γεωργικὴ μάλιστα ὅτι δικαία· οὐ γὰρ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων, οὔθ’ ἐκόντων, ὥσπερ καπηλεία καὶ αἱ μισθαρνικαί, οὔτ’ ἀκόντων, ὥσπερ αἱ πολεμικαί. ἔτι δὲ καὶ τῶν κατὰ φύσιν· φύσει γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς μητρὸς ἢ τροφῆς πᾶσιν ἐστίν, ὥστε καὶ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς. πρὸς δὲ τούτοις καὶ πρὸς ἀνδρίαν συμβάλλεται μεγάλα· οὐ γὰρ ὥσπερ αἱ βάνουσοι τὰ σώματα ἀχρεῖα ποιοῦσιν, ἀλλὰ δυνάμενα θυραυλεῖν καὶ πονεῖν, ἔτι δὲ δυνάμενα κινδυνεύειν πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους· μόνων γὰρ τούτων τὰ κτήματα ἔξω τῶν ἐρυμάτων ἐστίν.]

⁷ The *Politics* also elevates farming above extractive expertise like mining and forestry (*Pol.* 1.11.1258b12–22).

⁸ The *Politics* claims that nature itself differentiates non-human species and kinds of humans into different “ways of life” (βίοι) on the basis of their habitats and food sources (*Pol.* 1.8.1256a20–31). For the image of “mother earth” as that which feeds us like a mother, see Aesch. *Sept.* 16; Xen. *Oec.* 5.2, 19.17, 20.13; and Pl. *Lg.* 12.958e; for the notion of “mother earth” and Athenian autochthony, see Pl. *Resp.* 4.414e, *Menex* 237d–e; and Isoc. 4.24–28, 8.49, 12.124–25

T3 offers several different kinds of argumentation. The second argument concerns the primacy of natural resources that involve the fertility and productivity of nature with respect to food, which appears to echo claims found in the *Politics*.⁹ The third and fourth arguments both appear to concern the way that farming as a practice inculcates the virtue of bravery among farmers who are also citizen-soldiers: outdoor agricultural labor strengthens the body and prepares one for conditions often experienced while on military campaign and the rural land-holdings of farmers provide them with first-hand experience with hostile border incursions that urban non-farmers lack.¹⁰

By contrast, the argument about the justice of farming seems to concern the actual practice of farming itself rather than its effects upon farmers or the value of the resources farming produces for the community. The first argument claims that farming is most or especially the first care of household management because it is just (ἡ δὲ γεωργικὴ μάλιστα ὅτι δικαία); the subsequent explanatory (γάρ) clause gives the reason: farming “does not derive property from men, either when they voluntarily [make exchanges] (such as trade or in wage-labor) or involuntarily (just as when forms of military expertise are used to acquire property)” [οὐ γὰρ ἀπ’ ἀνθρώπων, οὔθ’ ἐκόντων, ὥσπερ καπηλεία καὶ αἱ μισθαρνικαί, οὔτ’ ἀκόντων, ὥσπερ αἱ πολεμικαί. (*Oec.* 1.2.1343a28–b31)].¹¹ The argument about justice juxtaposes the relationship between a farmer

⁹ *Pol.* 1.8 notes that nature provides food to both incomplete and complete animals (*Pol.* 1.8.1256b9–27).

¹⁰ Aristotle notes in several places that the agrarian way of life makes better soldier-citizens, especially those who serve in hoplite or heavy-infantry formations, who often need to “live outdoors” (θυραυλεῖν) when on military campaign (see *Pol.* 1.11.1258b37, 6.4.1319a21–24, 8.2.1337b2–15; cf. *Xen. Oec.* 4.2, 6.6–10). The *Politics* also notes that citizens with urban and rural properties have different attitudes towards military invasions, like those that Sparta conducted against Athens during the Archidamian phase of the Peloponnesian Wars (*Pol.* 7.10.1330a9–25; cf. *Thuc.* 2.13–20).

¹¹ **T3** may be a source of a claim found in the *Epitome of Peripatetic Ethics* of Arius of Didymus (fl. 1st century CE), which states that “The administrator of the household (τὸν οἰκονομικόν) needs first to take care of these necessities, either by increasing the income through money-getting

who exchanges with other humans (for instance, in commerce) and a farmer who interacts directly with the earth and thus participates in an “exchange” between farmer and “mother earth” that in principle excludes other humans (although in practice it may include human and non-human intermediaries, like oxen, an overseer, or slaves). The farmer cultivates the soil and sows the seeds; natural sunlight bakes the earth and seasonal rains irrigate the crop; finally, the farmer harvests the produce which nature gives to the farmer, in bountiful exchange for the farmer’s labor.¹² Such an exchange differs not only from voluntary exchanges, such as the commercial one between buyer and seller or the wage-labor exchange between employer and employee; it also differs from the involuntary martial “exchange” between conqueror and conquered.¹³ On the basis of such a reading, one might argue that Aristotle’s claim about the justice of farming juxtaposes, on the one hand, some sort of “primordial” or fundamental exchange between a human and the land; and, on

activities which pertain to a free person (διὰ πορισμῶν ἐλευθερίων), or else by reducing the expenses; for this is the chief point of household management (τὸ κεφάλαιον τῆς οἰκονομικῆς). That is why the administrator of the household needs to be experienced in many things: in agriculture, keeping of sheep, and mining, in order to discern the most profitable and, at the same time, most just resources (τοὺς λυσιτελεστάτους καρπούς ἅμα καὶ δικαιωτάτους διαγινώσκη(ι))” (Stobaeus, *Eclogai*, 149.14–21, Tsouni trans., in W.W. Fortenbaugh, ed., *Arius Didymus on Peripatetic Ethics, Household Management, and Politics. Text, Translation, and Discussion*, Routledge, 2018). The next line characterizes two kinds of wealth acquisition (τῆς χρηματιστικῆς [149.22–24]) as worse or better, quite similar to **T1** above. *Oec.* 2.1.134615–17 may be the source of Arius’ claim about balancing revenue and expenses.

¹² Xen. *Oec.* 16.9–18.9 depicts the various stages of the “exchange” between farmer and nature. In the *Physics*, Aristotle provides a teleological account of winter rains irrigating crops although its interpretation is contested and goes beyond the scope of my chapter. See *Phy.* II.8.198b34–199a8.

¹³ The history of revenue schemes in *Oec.* 2 includes several examples of warfare-generate property: Dionysius’ enslavement of Rhegium (in 386 BCE), Timotheus’ confiscation of land during the siege of Samos (in 366 BCE), and Datames’ seizure of food and temple robbery to support his troops. See *Oec.* 2.2.1349b17–27, 2.2.1350b4–7, and 2.2.1350b16–30.

the other hand, all other inter-personal exchanges that inevitably involve injustice that is interwoven into human exchange in forms of loss, gain, and exploitation.¹⁴

Although such an interpretation seems correct to emphasize the exchange-like or reciprocal relationship between the arduous and careful farmer and bountiful nature, to characterize farming as a primordial exchange that escapes the injustice that plagues human exchanges ignores that in numerous places Aristotle characterizes human exchanges as just.¹⁵ For example, the account of “corrective justice” in exchanges in *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.4 is invoked only when voluntary and involuntary exchanges result in *unequal* gain or loss; it presupposes the possibility of voluntary exchanges that are fair or equal between two or more parties (*EN* 5.4.1132b11–20). In *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.5, Aristotle characterizes as just the reciprocal proportionality in exchange found in Socrates’ “city of necessity” in the 2nd book of *The Republic*, namely a form of barter exchange that takes place on the basis of individual’s lack of self-sufficiency.¹⁶ *Politics* 1.8 also claims that there are conditions under which military conquest of those suited for domination is

¹⁴ See, for instance, Valente, [*Aristotele*]: *Economici*, who claims that “Il primato dell’agricoltura sulle altre attività umane deriva dal suo carattere naturale: mentre il piccolo commercio e i lavori salariati da una parte e la guerra dall’altra dipendono dalla volontà degli uomini, le prime per suo impulso, la seconda suo malgrado, l’agricoltura non trae i propri frutti dall’iniziativa umana, bensì dai ritmi del clima e dalla successione delle stagioni” (p. 98); see also and U. Victor, [*Aristoteles*], *Oikonomikos. Das erste Buch der Ökonomik—Handschriften, Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Königsten, 1983, who claims that „Man kann vielleicht vermuten, das die ‚Ungerechtigkeit‘ beim Leben ap’ anthron, darin besteht, das z.b. beim Handel die Gewinnspanne auf Kosten des Käufers verschieden groß sein kann. Zwischen Preis und Ware besteht kein Verhältnis, das von vornherein objektiv festzulegen wäre“ (p. 115).

¹⁵ Thus, I agree with Helmer, *Oikonomia*, pp. 136–37, and Victor, [*Aristoteles*], *Oikonomikos*. p. 115, that Aristotle (and Hesiod and Xenophon, for that matter) find in the farmer/earth relation forms of “l’idée de réciprocité” or “Gleichheit.” But **T2** implies not only that farming is a reciprocal exchange between farmer/earth, but also that its justice contrasts with human exchanges that categorically lack such justice in reciprocity.

¹⁶ *EN* 5.5.1132b31–33a5. On Aristotle’s account of justice and proportionate reciprocity, see further T. Lockwood, *Aristotle on Justice: The Virtues of Citizenship and Constitutions*, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming, chapter 3.

just, even if it is involuntary (*Pol.* 1.8.1256b25–27, 7.2.1324b23–1325a1). Although the *Oeconomica* does not examine justice at length, it claims that one who wishes to practice economy (οἰκονομεῖν) requires justice and that incentivizing slaves to be loyal and work hard on the basis of future emancipation is both just and beneficial (*Oec.* 2.1.1345b8–9, 1.6.1345b15–16). Both inside and outside of the Aristotelian *Oeconomica*, there is no sense in Aristotle’s writings of a “primordial” justice between humans and the land that is categorically different from justice in human exchanges.¹⁷

PART 2: The justice of farming in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* (*Oec.* 5.12)

To interpret **T2** as implying that Aristotle views farming as a primordial exchange between humans and the earth is at odds with both his treatment of just exchange in his other ethical and political writings and with the depiction of justice more generally within the *Oeconomica*. But Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, which sometimes overlaps with Aristotle’s *Oeconomica*, also presents a claim about the relationship between farming and justice. Might not we interpret **T2** as an abbreviated but derivative form of the more detailed claim that Xenophon puts into the mouth of Socrates? By means of context, Xenophon’s depiction of Socrates’ discussion of estate management (περὶ οἰκονομίας [*Oec.* 1.1]) includes an extended critique of servile or banausic labor through the praise of Persian and Greek aristocratic farming practices (*Oec.* 4.1–5.20).

¹⁷ Most discussions of justice in the *Oeconomica* concern marital fidelity between spouses; Aristotle praises reciprocal fidelity and criticizes at length Agammemnon’s decision to take Chryseis as a sex-slave in the *Iliad* (*Il.* 1.109–120). See further *Oec.* 1.4.1344a8–12, 3.2.144.3–5, 3.3.145.1–4, 3.3.146.3, 3.4.147.6–7. In the *Politics*, Aristotle also condemns marital infidelity (*Pol.* 7.16.1335b37–42) and both the *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*) and *EN* recognize numerous permutations of justice in the household, for instance between husband and wife, father and sons, and between siblings. See further Lockwood, *Aristotle on Justice*, chapter 9.

Similar to **T3**, Socrates' praise of farming includes arguments about the natural resources that the earth provides (*Oec.* 5.2) and the ways that the agricultural life also promotes martial excellence (*Oec.* 5.5, 5.13–16). But Socrates also makes a claim about the justice of farming; he says that

T4: Yet again, because the earth is divine, she teaches the virtue of justice to those who have the ability to learn. She gives the greatest benefits in return to those who cultivate her best.¹⁸ (*Xen. Oec.* 5.12)

[Ἐτι δὲ ἡ γῆ θεὸς οὔσα τοὺς δυναμένους καταμανθάνειν καὶ δικαιοσύνην διδάσκει· τοὺς γὰρ ἄριστα θεραπεύοντας αὐτὴν πλεῖστα ἀγαθὰ ἀντιποιεῖ.]

At first glance, Socrates' claim in **T4** itself seems a bit enigmatic: Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* depicts justice as concerning proper rewards and benefits for members of the household (administered by either the husband or the wife) and prohibitions against theft of the household's property.¹⁹ In what sense does “divine earth” teach the virtue of justice?

Catana persuasively argues that **T4** is best understood in terms of the agricultural expertise that the natural world teaches the person who exercises care (ἐπιμέλεια) for the natural world.²⁰

According to the gentleman farmer Ischomachus, a character in Xenophon's dialogue,

T5: farming is such a humane and gentle occupation that she [i.e., divine earth] makes those who see her and hear her immediately knowledgeable about her. And she herself, he continued, also gives many lessons about how one might treat her

¹⁸ My translations of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* are based on the Greek text and translation in S.B. Pomeroy (ed. and trans.), *Xenophon Oeconomicus. A Social and Historical Commentary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. Helmer, *Oikonomia*, bases his claim about the reciprocity of farming on both **T2** and **T4**. Whether one should take Socrates' claims about farming at face value or as undermined by features of the dialogue is a matter of interpretive disagreement that goes beyond my chapter; see further G. Danzig, “Why Socrates was not a farmer: Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* as a Philosophical Dialogue”, *Greece & Rome*, 50 (2003), pp. 57–76; D. M. Johnson, *Xenophon's Socratic Works*, London, Routledge, 2021, pp. 232–35; and C. Atack, *Xenophon*, Cambridge University Press, 2024, pp. 23–50.

¹⁹ For examples of “distributive” justice in *Xen. Oec.*, see 7.33–34, 9.13, 13.6–12, 14.6–10; for examples of corrective justice, see 11.22–24, 14.2–5, 15.6.

²⁰ See L. Catana, “Care and Land Ethic in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*”, in C. Addey, M. Tuominen, and S. Connell (eds.), *Animals and the Environment in Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy*, London, Routledge, forthcoming.

best. For example, the vine, by climbing up the trees, when it has a tree nearby, teaches us to prop it up. By spreading its leaves around, when its bunches of grapes are still tender, it [i.e., the vine] teaches us to provide shade for the parts exposed to the sun at that season. But when it is time for the clusters to be sweetened by the sun, it sheds its leaves, and so it teaches us to strip it and allow the fruit to ripen. And by showing through its productiveness that some bunches are ripe, but others still sour, it teaches us to gather the fruit just as people pluck figs as each of them becomes plump. (Xen. *Oec.* 19.17–18; cf. 15.4, 20.13)

[ὅτι ἡ γεωργία οὕτω φιλόανθρωπός ἐστι καὶ πραεῖα τέχνη, ὥστε καὶ ὀργῶντας καὶ ἀκούοντας ἐπιστήμονας εὐθύς ἑαυτῆς ποιεῖν. πολλὰ δ' ἔφη, καὶ αὐτὴ διδάσκει, ὡς ἂν κάλλιστά τις αὐτῇ χρῶτο. αὐτίκα ἄμπελος ἀναβαίνουσα μὲν ἐπὶ τὰ δένδρα, ὅταν ἔχη τι πλησίον δένδρον, διδάσκει ἰστάναι αὐτήν· περιπεταννύουσα δὲ τὰ οἴναρα, ὅταν ἔτι αὐτῇ ἀπαλοὶ οἱ βότρυνες ᾧσι, διδάσκει σκιάζειν τὰ ἡλιούμενα ταύτην τὴν ὥραν· ὅταν δὲ καιρὸς ἦ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἡλίου ἤδη γλυκαίνεσθαι τὰς σταφυλάς, φυλλορροοῦσα διδάσκει ἑαυτὴν ψιλοῦν καὶ πεπαίνειν τὴν ὀπώραν, διὰ πολυφορίαν δὲ τοὺς μὲν πέποντας δεικνύουσα βότρυν, τοὺς δὲ ἔτι ὠμοτέρους φέρουσα διδάσκει τρυγᾶν ἑαυτήν, ὡσπερ τὰ σῦκα σκιάζουσι, τὸ ὀργῶν ἀεί.]

Catana seems right to claim that we should understand the “justice” that divine earth teaches (according to **T4**) in terms of the specific agricultural lessons that she teaches in the example of the natural growth of a vine (according to **T5**). On this interpretation, “the virtue of justice” (δικαιοσύνη) that she teaches seems very similar to (if not identical with) the care (ἐπιμέλεια) that distinguishes the good farmer from the bad farmer. Such care resembles a sort of distributive justice: the person who cares most about what divine earth teaches will best reap her natural gifts, namely well-cultivated and prosperous farms.²¹

But although I agree with Catana that Xenophon’s **T4** is best interpreted in accord with his passage **T5** and that **T2**, **T4**, and **T5** all discuss aspects of justice, **T2** seems to present a significant contrast to **T4** and **T5**. Although Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* announces itself as a study of the science or expertise of “estate management” (Xen. *Oec.* 1.1–4, 6.4, 6.8), its paradoxical conclusion

²¹ So argue Victor, [*Aristoteles*], *Oikonomikos*, p. 115; Johnson, *Xenophon’s Socratic Works*, p. 245; and Helmer, *Oikonomia*, pp. 136–37.

undermines the opening epistemic characterization of estate management. At the close of the dialogue, Ischomachus tells Socrates that

T6: it is not knowledge, or lack of knowledge, on the part of the farmers that causes some to prosper and others to be poor. You are not likely, he said, to hear a rumor circulating that an estate has been ruined because the sower did not sow evenly, or because he failed to plant in straight rows, or that someone planted vines in unsuitable soil, because he did not know what kind of soil is suitable for vines...But you are much more likely to hear people say ‘The fellow gets no grain from his earth because he isn’t concerned that its sown or fertilized.’ Or ‘The fellow has no wine, because he isn’t concerned to plant vines or to see that the vines that he has are productive for him.’ Or ‘The fellow has neither olive nor fig, because he isn’t concerned and he doesn’t do anything in order to get them.’²² (Xen. *Oec.* 20.2–4)

[οὐ γὰρ ἡ ἐπιστήμη οὐδ’ ἡ ἀνεπιστημοσύνη τῶν γεωργῶν ἐστὶν ἡ ποιοῦσα τοὺς μὲν εὐπορεῖν, τοὺς δὲ ἀπόρους εἶναι· οὐδ’ ἂν ἀκούσαις, ἔφη, λόγου οὕτω διαθέοντος, ὅτι διέφθαρται ὁ οἶκος, διότι οὐχ ὁμαλῶς ὁ σπορεὺς ἔσπειρεν οὐδ’ ὅτι οὐκ ὀρθῶς τοὺς ὄρχους ἐφύτευσεν οὐδ’ ὅτι ἀγνοήσας τις τὴν φέρουσαν ἀμπέλους ἐν ἀφόρῳ ἐφύτευσεν οὐδ’ ὅτι ἠγνόησέ τις...ἀλλὰ πολὺ μᾶλλον ἐστὶν ἀκοῦσαι, ἀνὴρ οὐ λαμβάνει σῖτον ἐκ τοῦ ἀγροῦ· οὐ γὰρ ἐπιμελεῖται, ὡς αὐτῷ σπεύρηται ἢ ὡς κόπρος γίγνηται. οὐδ’ οἶνον ἔχει ἀνὴρ· οὐ γὰρ ἐπιμελεῖται, ὡς φυτεύσῃ ἀμπέλους οὐδὲ αἰ οὔσαι ὅπως φέρωσιν αὐτῷ. οὐδὲ ἔλαιον οὐδὲ σῦκα ἔχει ἀνὴρ· οὐ γὰρ ἐπιμελεῖται οὐδὲ ποιεῖ, ὅπως ταῦτα ἔχη.]

Although Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* includes an extended discussion of the “craft of farming” (τὴν τέχνην...τῆς γεωργίας [*Oec.* 15.3; cf. 16.1–19.14]), what one might call Xenophon’s “ethics of care” locates excellence in care rather than science or craft knowledge.²³ Although Aristotle and Xenophon, in **T2** and **T4**, characterize farming in terms of justice, Aristotle’s

²² Ischomachus’ counter-intuitive answer—that prosperous farming is more a function of attention or care than expertise or knowledge—is repeatedly anticipated in the dialogue by the question of what distinguishes the successful and unsuccessful farmers; see Xen. *Oec.* 3.5, 6.11, 13.1, 15.2. See further Johnson, *Xenophon’s Socratic Works*, pp. 260–62, and Atack, *Xenophon*, pp. 34–35

²³ The notion of care (ἐπιμέλεια) is ubiquitous in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*: its presence or absence is what distinguishes not only the successful farmer, but also the successful wife, housemaid, housekeeper, steward, loyal slave, and general of an army (*Oec.* 7.7, 7.22, 7.30, 9.14, 12.9, 12.17, 20.6); see further Catana, “Care and Land Ethic in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*”, n. 8, p. 28 for a comprehensive list of references to the term in the dialogue; and Johnson, *Xenophon’s Socratic Writings*, pp. 262–66, for the relationship between care and farming.

Oeconomica quite clearly and explicitly is a form of science or craft knowledge rather than an ethics of care.²⁴ Although **T2** and **T4** share a verbal echo, their notions of justice seem quite different. Whereas **T2** characterizes farming as a kind of exchange between a farmer and the earth that is fundamentally different from the exchanges that take place between other humans (such as commerce or conquest), **T4** and **T5** characterize the relationship between the successful farmer and the earth as just one of numerous instances where humans exhibit care in their relationships to others.²⁵ Xenophon's agricultural ethics of care fails to pick out what is fundamentally distinctive about the craft of farming, which is the goal of the Aristotelian *Oeconomica* 1.2.

PART 3: The justice of farming in Hesiod's *Works and Days* and justice as the whole of virtue

Part 1 of my chapter considered, but then rejected, the claim that **T2** depicted farming as a primordial form of exchange between farmer and the earth that exemplified particular justice in a way that was impossible for human exchanges. Part 2 of my chapter considered, but then rejected, the claim that **T2**'s remarks about justice and farming were derivative from a parallel passage in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*. Rather than think of the justice of farming in terms of particular justice or in terms of Xenophon's ethics of care, I would like to argue that the justice that **T2** attributes to farming most closely fits what Aristotle calls justice as the whole of virtue that he seems to identify

²⁴ See, for instance, *Oec.* 1.1.1343a5–9; cf. *Pol.* 1.8.1256a1–18.

²⁵ As Atack, *Xenophon*, notes “The household is a microcosm of larger forms of human coexistence: the polis, the army, and the empire. Xenophon regards the management of all as similar exercises undertaken at different scales” (p. 27). By contrast, **T2** presents farming as unlike apparently all human exchanges and interactions.

with the notion of justice articulated in Hesiod's *Works and Days*.²⁶ Consider, for instance, how Hesiod characterizes agriculture in his poem:

T7: Men whose justice is straight know neither hunger nor ruin,
but amid feasts enjoy the yield of their labors.
For them the earth brings forth a rich harvest; and for them
the top of an oak teems with acorns and the middle with bees.
Fleecy sheep are weighed down with wool,
and women bear children who resemble their fathers.
There is an abundance of blessings and the grainland
grants such harvest that no one has to sail on the sea.
But far-seeing Zeus, son of Kronos, is the judge
of wanton wrongdoers who plot deeds of harshness.
Many times one man's wickedness ruins a whole city,
if such a man breaks the law and turns his mind to recklessness.
Then the son of Kronos sends a great bane from the sky,
hunger and plague, and the people waste away.²⁷ (*WD* 230–243)
[οὐδέ ποτ' ἰθυδίκησι μετ' ἀνδράσι λιμὸς ὀπηδεῖ
οὐδ' ἄτη, θαλίης δὲ μεμηλότα ἔργα νέμονται.
τοῖσι φέρει μὲν γαῖα πολὺν βίον, οὖρεσι δὲ δρυῶν
ἄκρη μὲν τε φέρει βαλάνους, μέσση δὲ μελίσσας·
εἰροπόκοι δ' οἷες μαλλοῖς καταβεβρίθασι·
τίκτουσιν δὲ γυναῖκες εἰκότα τέκνα γονεῦσιν·
θάλλουσιν δ' ἀγαθοῖσι διαμπερές· οὐδ' ἐπὶ νηῶν
νίσονται, καρπὸν δὲ φέρει ζεῖδωρος ἄρουρα.
οἷς δ' ὕβρις τε μέμηλε κακὴ καὶ σχέτλια ἔργα,
τοῖς δὲ δίκην Κρονίδης τεκμαίρεται εὐρύσπα Ζεὺς.
πολλάκι καὶ ξύμπασα πόλις κακοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἀπηύρα,
ὅστις ἀλιτράινει καὶ ἀτάσθαλα μηχανάσται.
τοῖσιν δ' οὐρανόθεν μέγ' ἐπήγαγε πῆμα Κρονίων,
λιμὸν ὁμοῦ καὶ λοιμόν· ἀποφθινύθουσι δὲ λαοί·]

By means of context, *Works and Days* purports to be advice from Hesiod to his brother Perses for the reasons he should “obey justice and restrain reckless wrongdoing” (*WD* 213), since such justice consists in a law-governed order that Zeus established uniquely for humans (*WD* 276–281). But

²⁶ Although it goes beyond the scope of this chapter, in Lockwood, *Aristotle on Justice*, chapter 1, I argue that Aristotle conceives of “whole” justice along the lines of what I call Hesiodian justice, namely the notion of justice as lawfulness that one finds articulated in *Works and Days*.

²⁷ My translations of Hesiod's *Works and Days* are based on A. Athanassakis, *Hesiod, Theogony, Works and Days, Shield*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

as **T7** makes clear, such justice extends to the farmer’s relationship with the earth: those who work the land honestly and arduously are assured nature’s bounty as a function of Zeus’ justice.²⁸ I believe it is precisely the framework of Hesiod’s poem that is the basis for Aristotle’s claim in **T2** that farming is the first care of household management “because it is just.”

Although Aristotle offers a secular or political account of justice in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, one can detect hints of the divine justice that Hesiod attributes to Zeus within the framework of what Aristotle calls justice as the whole of virtue. Aristotle describes such a sense of justice as follows:

T8: But since, as we saw, an unlawful person is unjust and a lawful one just, it is clear that all lawful things are somehow just, since the things defined by legislative science are lawful and each of these, we say, is just. The laws, for their part, pronounce about all matters, aiming either at the common advantage of all or at that of the best people or of those who—in accord with their virtue or in accord with some other such thing—are in control. So, in one way, the things we call “just” are the ones that produce and safeguard happiness and its parts for the political community... This sort of justice, then, is complete virtue—not unconditionally but in relation to another person. And that is why justice often seems to be the most excellent of the virtues, with the result that “neither the evening star nor the morning star is so wondrous,” and, as the proverb says, “in justice is all virtue summed.” (*EN* 5.1.1129b11–18, 25–31)

[ἐπεὶ δ’ ὁ παράνομος ἄδικος ἦν ὁ δὲ νόμιμος δίκαιος, δῆλον ὅτι πάντα τὰ νόμιμά ἐστὶ πῶς δίκαια· τὰ τε γὰρ ὠρισμένα ὑπὸ τῆς νομοθετικῆς νόμιμά ἐστι, καὶ ἕκαστον. τούτων δίκαιον εἶναι φαμέν. οἱ δὲ νόμοι ἀγορεύουσι περὶ ἀπάντων στοχαζόμενοι ἢ τοῦ κοινῆ συμφέροντος πᾶσιν ἢ τοῖς ἀρίστοις ἢ τοῖς κυρίοις κατ’ ἀρετὴν ἢ κατ’ ἄλλον τινὰ τρόπον τοιοῦτον· ὥστε ἓνα μὲν τρόπον δίκαια λέγομεν τὰ ποιητικὰ καὶ φυλακτικὰ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας καὶ τῶν μορίων αὐτῆς τῆ πολιτικῆ κοινωνία... αὕτη μὲν οὖν ἡ δικαιοσύνη ἀρετὴ μὲν ἐστὶ τελεία, ἀλλ’ οὐχ ἀπλῶς ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἕτερον. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο πολλάκις κρατίστη τῶν ἀρετῶν εἶναι δοκεῖ ἢ δικαιοσύνη, καὶ οὔθ’ ἔσπερος οὔθ’ ἐῴος οὔτω θαυμαστός· καὶ παρομιμαζόμενοί φαμεν ἐν δὲ δικαιοσύνη συλλήβδην πᾶσ’ ἀρετῆ ’νί.]

²⁸ Pomeroy, *Xenophon Oeconomicus*, p. 259, claims that Xenophon is more optimistic than Hesiod about the agricultural life, but it seems a false comparison to contrast Xenophon’s view with that of Hesiod’s “golden age” (e.g., *WD* 119–21). Xenophon’s view of the necessity of hard work and care seems quite similar to Hesiod’s view of work in the iron age (e.g., *WD* 298–320).

Aristotle's notion of justice as the "lawful" appears to be a secular echo of Hesiod's notion of justice ordained by the law of Zeus. For Hesiod, following Zeus' law results in the general well-being of individuals and their communities, including in their agricultural labor; for Aristotle, the person who possesses justice in the sense of the lawful possesses all the virtues insofar as they benefit other members of one's community.

What remains peculiar about the claim that farming is just is that as **T8** makes clear, Aristotle repeatedly claims that justice is an inter-personal virtue, namely one that concerns our relationship to others; within the framework of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the claim that justice is inter-personal is opposed to the claim that justice is intra-personal, namely that it concerns the ordering of the parts of one's soul, similar to the account of justice that Plato provides in the *Republic*.²⁹ When **T2** claims that farming is just since it produces property that is "not from humans" (οὐ γὰρ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων), it produces a tension since if the farmer is not in an inter-personal relationship then it appears that the farmer cannot be exhibiting justice in the strict sense of the term. But the notion of "agricultural justice" in Hesiod provides a way to make sense of such other-relatedness: the farmer is in relationship with "mother earth" in the same sense that Hesiod's farmer is in relationship with Zeus the lawgiver. One finds additional evidence that Aristotle's *Oeconomica* presupposes a cosmos like that described in Hesiod's *Works and Days* in its numerous references to what "the god" has established with respect to household management.³⁰ The view that farming is justice towards the land seems to articulate a way-station of sorts between Hesiod's theocentric view of cosmic obligation and Aristotle's distinction

²⁹ See *EN* 5.1.1129b25–27, 5.2.1130a32–5, 5.11.1138b5–14.

³⁰ See *Aris. Oec.* 1.3.1343b26–28, 3.1.141.8–10, 3.1.142,11–12, 3.2.143.23–26, 3.4.147.19–23; cf. *Xen. Oec.* 5.12, 7.18, 7.22–30, 8.16, 17.2–3.

between what is in accord with or contrary to nature. But as **T3** makes clear, the Aristotelian *Oeconomica* distinguishes the first argument, that farming is just, from the second argument, namely that the products of farming are in accord with nature. The position of the Aristotelian *Oeconomica* 1.2 seems consistent with, but not identical with, that of *Politics* 1.