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## THE SECOND BOOK OF ARISTOTLE'S *POLITICS*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The second Book of the *Politics* has been object of multiple considerations, but it has called the attention of the scholars mainly because of its detailed criticism of Plato's political projects, especially the *Republic*. In fact Aristotle devotes 6 of the 12 chapters of Book II to examine Plato's proposals. Most of the scholarly contributions are focused on the criticism of Plato trying either to demonstrate the justice of Aristotle's reproaches or to invalidate his chapters on the basis of a supposed inexactness of his words. My attempt will not follow these lines of argumentation, but I will consider the whole book, in order to:

- 1) determine the function of the book in the structure of the *Politics*
- 2) clear the intention of the criticism of the political systems and the method of analysis and criticism Aristotle applies: is he always using the same criteria?  
What is the aim of this book?

### 2. THE PLACE OF THE SECOND BOOK IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE *POLITICS*

The problem of the structure of the *Politics* cannot be posed without referring to the analytical method of the Wilamowitzian school as it finds its most characteristic expression in W. JAEGER's work (1923). The analytical German school is actually the result of a longer development in the interpretation of the Aristotelian treatise that begins partially in the 14th. century when N. d' Oresme proposed a change in the order of the Books as we have them today (cf. J. TOULOUMAKOS 1993, 227). During the 19th. century, many scholars accepted as a fact that the original place of the Aristotelian ideal state (Books VII and VIII) was after the criticism of the so called 'best' constitutions in the second Book. JAEGER's innovation consisted in the attempt to link the supposed layers with the intellectual life of Aristotle. The importance of JAEGER's work has been

so strong that even those which supported an unitary view of the *Politics* accepted the *petitio principii* about the nature of the work, namely that it was "manifestly a collection and union of lectures which were written at different epochs" ("offenkundig die Sammlung und Zusammenstellung zu verschiedener Zeiten niedergeschriebener Lehrvorträge"; R. STARK 1964, 3). The representation of an Aristotle who like a German professor delivers his lectures after having written them does not lack of a humoristic touch (similar J. FERGUSON 1985, 268). The explanation of the structure of an ancient work should help in the first place to understand its real nature. And it is a matter of fact that the author of the *Politics* wanted it to be read as a unity and, probably, in the order it has now.

It is also evident, I believe, that the *Politics* in its present state is an incomplete text, since the treatment of the best state is not finished. But what we still have is enough to make some sure statements about its nature and structure. The work, for instance, was not conceived as a Platonic dialogue. Its unity will be therefore not an aesthetic one, but the unity of a conception that cares more for stating his case than for respecting the aesthetic laws of a literary work. That means that the author does not worried about repetitions or obscurities in the text. The concentration of the style can awake the feeling of some contradiction in the reader. More important than that is the question if the *Politics* manifests an unity of conception that expresses the unity of the political thought of its author.

The first Book describes the basic elements of the political organization (R. STARK 1964, 6) and shows that the organization of the city -state is the natural end of the teleological evolution of humanity (1, 1252b29-32: J. FERGUSON 1985, 26ff.).<sup>1</sup> The human nature tends to a form of political organization in which free men are the heads of the households that are part of the state. Each free man acts therefore as natural ruler of a household composed by lower natures that need his guide. All members of the society ought to look for their individual good and for the good of the community, which should be expressed in the political organization as such. The book finishes by asserting that the individuals are part of the households as the households are part of the state "and the virtue of the part should look at the virtue of the whole", so that the members of the household, children and women, should be educated according the

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<sup>1</sup>T. J. SAUNDERS (1995, xi) has underlined that the natural teleology as it is exposed in the first Book is the central idea of Aristotle's political thought.

political order of the city (I 13, 1260b13-18), a crucial idea of the political treatise that can be also found in the famous final chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This formulation of the one of the main premises of the Aristotelian political program shuts the first book. And it is natural that the continuation should be the critical consideration of the contribution of his predecessors in this field, in order to put out their weakness and determinate where the political research should begin. In other words, the first Book set the basis for the construction of his own political theory. This allows him also to establish the criteria of his criticism.

The review of the political proposals and of the existing constitutions in the second Book is made on such a basis. The discussion does not pretend to give an historical account in our sense (R. STARK 1964, 11). Aristotle wants only to show why these *politeiai* fail to achieve the goal they are supposed to achieve, namely the fulfillment of the happiness of the community and of every member of it. This implies that the best constitution should respect the different levels of the organized multiplicity that a state is.

The criticism provides the foundation for the beginning of the analysis of the basic concepts of the political science that the third book deals with. The definition of the polis as a multiplicity of citizens, which is organized in a *politeia* (chap. 1) leads to two basic questions: how to define the citizen (chaps. 1-2,4-5) and the relation between state and political system (chap. 3). Both questions are related to the different kinds of regimes and the way in which the constitutions define the central political virtue of justice (chaps. 6-12). The final theme of the book is crucial for the political science: what is the relation between the political virtue and the absolute virtue of a good man. This introduces the contrast between the rulers and the ruled, and within this frame the kingship and Plato's theory of the philosopher king (chaps. 13-18) are considered.

The analysis of the different kinds of political systems defined as a task of the political science (chap. 1) occupies the fourth Book. The hierarchical consideration of the different constitutions has the aim of determining the best possibility in each specific case (chap. 2). A broader classification of the different ways of organizing the society (chap. 3) precedes a determination of the two basic kinds of constitutions: oligarchy and democracy (chap. 4), whose different classes are explained in the following chapters (5-6). The analysis of the right forms of this regimes (chaps. 7-8)

and of the tyranny close the first part (chap. 9) closes the first part of the Book. A general view of the different institution and the way in which they are organized ends the consideration of the different constitutional kinds (chaps. 11-16).

The overview of the real existing constitutional forms opens the way to the second part of the treatise and hints to one of its most powerful ideas: the mixed constitution, which is considered not so much a specific *politeia* but a general principle that should exist in every society: the balance between the different forces actin in it. The fifth Book that somehow echoes the third Book of the Platonic *Laws* is mainly dedicated to the search of the causes of the constitutional changes. Constitutional diversity origins in different and erroneous agreements about justice and proportional equality (V 1, 1301a25-28). The following discords produce the civil wars. The book presents first a typology of different kinds of constitutional changes (chaps. 1-4). Its second part analyzes the particular causes of changes in the different constitutions (chaps. 5-7, 10, 12) and to the measures that should be taken to hinder them (8-9, 11).

The *methodos* of the sixth Book is intended not only to continue the analysis of the different constitutional systems, but above all to give an account of the two basic political systems: democracy and oligarchy (chap. 1). The analysis of both constitutions (democracy, chaps. 2-5; oligarchy, chaps. 6-7) and the measures proposed to preserve them try to show the necessity of moderation in the constitutional types, i.e. to include some elements coming from the opposite kind of constitution. The Book finishes by pointing to the offices that are needed for granting the good functioning of a regime (chap. 8).

Usually the two last books are considered to be the specific Aristotelian proposal of the best political order. In fact what we have treats only incompletely this issue. The seventh Book begins with an introduction about the best sort of human life (chap. 1-3), that points to the philosophical rulers that the best constitution should have. The next step is the determination of an adequate matter for the construction of the best community (chaps. 4-7): the number (chap. 4) and characteristics (chap. 7) of the population, the nature of the land (chap. 5) and its geographical location (chap. 6). Chapter seven serves as mediation with the next subject: the organization of the population, in order to foster the happiness of the state and its parts (chaps. 8-9). This supposes the division in classes and the arrangement of property (chap. 10) that should

find its expression in a well ordered urbanization that must be in agreement with the chosen political system (chap. 11). The second part of the Book (chaps. 12-17) begins with the description of the good practice of a virtuous life by the citizens from the very beginning. It implies the action of three factors: nature (already discussed), and character and reason, which are the product of education. To education is devoted the final book of the treatise. The political program that the final books expose is incomplete, as I have argued before, but the fragment we have goes through the same topics as Plato's *Laws*, and in the same order. The differences do not need to be considered here, then they are evident (for instance the estimation of the sea), more interesting is the fact that the books reveal the function of the criticism of the different models of best constitutions in the second book: as in the rest of the Aristotelian treatises it should become clear what advances had to achieve the political theory. What the predecessors had reached was the solid basis for the advancement of science.

The work shows also a progressive development from the third book on: from the real constitutions the research proceeds by showing the political principles a politician should apply and ends naturally in the consideration of Aristotle's own political program. So as it stands, the *Politics* evidences coherence in the planning and the conception rather than contradiction or chance in its organization. The plan of the treatise corresponds in its major lines with the plan proposed at the end of Book one (1260b13-24).

### 3. ARISTOTLE'S CONSIDERATION OF THE THEORETICAL PROJECTS

The second book is clearly divided into two parts: the first and larger one is devoted to an analysis of the relevant theoretical forerunners (chaps. 2-8). The second one deals with actually existing constitutions. The initial words of the Book determine what is central in the Aristotelian approach: (Saunders, 22, §1, lesen).

This passage not only introduces the second Book, but also the rest of the research and the following points are especially related to the rest of the treatise<sup>2</sup>:

- The discussion of the best constitution is posed in the most radical terms: it is 'ideal' in the sense that it is not limited by specific conditions, it is *kat'*

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<sup>2</sup>R. MAYHEW (1997, 3f.) has also related this introduction to the final books of the *Politics*

*euchén*. This stresses the theoretical character also of the *Politics* and aims at the seventh and eighth Books.<sup>3</sup>

- More important than the inclusion of the analysis of both historical states and theoretical projects, is the fact that his purpose is to "see what is right and useful in them". The research tends to determine the positive elements of those constitutions, in order to incorporate them in the new theoretical model. The results will be applied in the different books of the *Politics* and especially in the seventh and eighth Books.

The particular aim of the second Book is clearly expressed, when he says that he wants to "avoid giving the impression that a search for something different from them is the result of a desire to be clever at all costs" (*sophizesthai*, SAUNDERS), but that his research has its reason in the failure of the existing proposals. The aim of the Book must be therefore to show the failures of the considered constitutions, in order to allow a clearer differentiation of the positive elements.

The next passage determines the central point the criticism will take: the question of the dimensions of the partnership (so C. LORD 1984, 55) or association (so T. J. SAUNDERS 1995, 22), and this poses a central question for the Greek political theory, namely how the highest degree of unity in the polis can be achieved, in order to avoid civil strife and destruction of the state. In face of the historical experience it was natural to consider that one of the crucial problems was to clear the relations of property which should exist in a given society<sup>4</sup>. This will be the main perspective in Aristotle's consideration of the other constitutions. How far can the analysed constitution avoid civil strife, maintain the unity of the society and guarantee justice, i. e. a right distribution of property and honors? He wishes also to find out, what elements of the studied constitutions are in contradiction with the expressed aims. This issue is particularly important in the case of the existing constitutions and shows another interest of the Aristotelian *Politics*: to offer also practical solutions for the preservation of the existing political systems.

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<sup>3</sup>Contrary to the assumption of T. J. SAUNDERS (1995, 105), the passage speaks of the absolutely best constitution not of a "second best version" of it. Saunders seems to give a limitative sense to the οἱ τι μαβλιστα κατ ἰ ευχων at 1260b28-29, without realizing that the passage of the IV Book repeats the same expression for the absolutely best constitution (μαβλιστ ἰ[α]... κατ ἰ ευχων).

<sup>4</sup>R. MAYHEW (1997, 2) considers this the central issue in Aristotle's criticism of Plato's *Politeia*.



#### 4. 1 Aristotle's image of Plato

According to these premises Aristotle makes a very differentiated criticism of the Platonic projects. The critical points are different in each case and, as we will see, they presuppose a good acquaintance with both works, the *Republic* and the *Laws*. The criticism of the former is longer, because he considers that this dialogue is the foundation of the Platonic political theory, while the *Laws* are a kind of deviation, the second best state (Leg. V 739a-e). But the reason is also that Aristotle's disagreement with the *Republic* work is stronger and in points that are more crucial than in the case of the *Laws*. In fact his conception of a state *kat' euchén* does not mean the construction of an 'ideal model' in the Platonic sense as it is expressed in the *Republic*. The *politeia* of the last two books of the *Politics* takes into account the physical conditions in which the state has to live, in a way which is very similar to what Plato had done for his Magnesia. As in the rest of his philosophy Aristotle has abandoned the unrealistic features of Plato's idealism and preserves what he considers the more realistic aspects of his philosophy. It is very meaningful that, as T. J. SAUNDERS (1995, 105) remarks, against what Plato had done in the *Statesman* and even in the *Laws*, Aristotle takes no interest in the community of the mythical Golden Age as model for his best state.

##### 4. 1. 1 Criticism of the Republic

The criticism of the *Republic* occurs between chapter 2 and 5 (1261a10-1264b25). Aristotle presents an abstract of the main arguments at the very beginning of chapter 2 (1261a10-14): (a) the institution of the common sharing of wives cannot be derived from Socrates arguments, (b) the proposed goal is impossible (c) it is nowhere defined, in what it consists.

Aristotle first topic is a rather logical criticism about the predication of unity to the state and a refusal of unity as supreme political criterium. Plato applies to the community a concept of unity that corresponds rather to an individual without realizing the different kinds of entities they are. The polis is by nature a multiplicity to which the unity should be predicated in a different way than the corresponding to a house or an individual. Plato is mistaken because  $\text{pollacw}'' \text{ levgetai to; e}\{n$ . The terms Aristotle applies remind the Academic methodology. Then they presuppose the ontological hierarchy of the Platonic ontology. The ontological priority of the more

general class over the individual makes the unity the city must have superior and at the same time more general and different from the *atomo eide* it contains.<sup>5</sup> Its unity is also less than in the case of the concrete idea. So the supposed good for the state becomes its contrary, then it destroys its object instead of preserving it. The good of the state is more self-sufficiency than unity in a radical sense (1261b11-15; cf. V 1264b31-32: leer T. J. SAUNDERS 1995,29 § 8, marcado ).

When Plato makes the unity the supreme criterium of its political theory, he makes another mistake, because the unity of the plurality called state is based on the hierarchical order of his different elements. The preservation of the state is based on reciprocal justice and this implies one important rule: among those who are equals and free the rule by turns is the best arrangement. The natural equality among the members of the polis excludes the permanent rule of the same people. It is hard to see what is the point of this criticism on the side of Aristotle. As several scholars have pointed out, this criticism cannot be applied to the *Republic* (cf. e. g. T. J. SAUNDERS 1995, 108s.). A possible answer to this problem could perhaps be found in the definition of citizen, Plato is using there. For Aristotle a good constitution can exist only among people who have equivalent natures and are able to partake in the different offices. The unity of the city means that it requires a hierarchical order where only the best are citizens in the full sense and partake in the essential functions for the community, the main of whom is the government. This kind of hierarchical unity is apparently one of the characteristics of the Platonic Callipolis. But by making all its inhabitants citizens of it, Aristotle supposes, Plato contradicts the principles he has adopted. In fact, in Aristotle's 'ideal state', all citizens are *andres agathoi* in the full sense. The coincidence between virtuous citizen and virtuous man can hardly be stated for Plato's Callipolis.

The most important consequence of this argument should be also a refutation of the link Plato establishes between community and unity, individuality and difference. In other words, Plato believes that individualism destroys the unity of the city and the city as such. For Aristotle the unity of the city requires precisely a certain amount of individualism. and difference in order to attain self-sufficiency. Plato's conception of unity of the state leads directly to a loss of autarchy and to the destruction of the community. If this interpretation is right, the criticism of the second chapter tries to demonstrate that Plato's Callipolis (a) contradicts the principles of the Platonic ontology

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<sup>5</sup>This explanation could help to understand the passage of *Politics* I 2 (1253a3-29), where Aristotle applies the analogy of city and man as Plato does.

and (b) that even this ontology requires that the supreme criteria of the political organization cannot be the unity. In his criticism Aristotle makes evident that he has left the common horizon of the Platonic ontological foundation of politics. Further the criticism implies that Plato's best state is not a natural state as he pretends. As the criticism of Plato's communism will show, by annulling so far as possible the difference between individual and society Plato identifies three different levels (man, family and state), and makes the existence of a well-ordered society quite impossible.

The second line of criticism attacks the idea of communism, i. e. the abolition of property among the citizens, what in Plato's eyes was directly related to the goal of unity for the state. The promotion of the common good implies for Plato the annihilation of individuality as far as possible. In private property Plato saw the most important foundation of social individualism. Aristotle divides his censure of Plato's communism into two issues: the communism of women and children (chaps. 3-4) and of property (chap. 5). In the first case, the basis of Aristotle's criticism remains the main criterium of Plato's politics. His argument can be better understood, I think, if we realize that the main allegation is that Plato confuses the unity of the family with the unity of the city. The two chapters concentrate in different issues. In fact Plato's proposal in the *Republic* tries to make at least the class of the guardians an unique family where the multiplicity of *patres familias* will act as a personal unity because of the kind of unity of feelings and thought their education has produced. The unity discussed in the former chapter is also the foundation of this disposition in Plato's state and is not meant metaphorically nor is it an accidental feature of it. The confusion between the unity of the city and the unity of the family has for Aristotle to crucial consequences for the development of the individual in the fields of his responsibilities and of his feelings. In the first case, the communism of children and women hinders the development and exercise of care to the relatives (chapter 3). In the second one, the adequate feelings to his relative do not exist nor any sense of real friendship (chapter 4). In these conditions the practice of virtue and the achievement of happiness is impossible.

In chapter 3 Aristotle's discussion of the ambiguity of the word "all" in the expression "if all say "mine" and "not mine" at the same time" (*Pol.* 1261b18-19) underlines rightly that Socrates uses the word in the corresponding passages of the *Republic* (e. g. 462e) in the strong, exclusive sense. His arguments attempt to demonstrate that such a predication, that supposes necessarily the existence of a community organized as society is now ordered, belongs only to the reality 'family' and

cannot be generalized to the whole universum comprised by the state or by a class in it. The kernel of the argument in this chapter is teleological. It is the supposition that family as part of the city is the natural way of organization of human beings. Communism is unnatural and worse for the state, because it goes against the natural tendency that makes people care more for their own property than for what is common. Secondly, it is also impossible because this law cannot prevent people from assuming who are their own relatives. In this case human nature will again break such an order and rebuild the structure of the family (as indeed happens in the eighth Book of the *Republic*).

The results obtained in the former chapter serve as basis for the reasons adduced in chapter 4. The "watering" of the family and its bonds results in two kinds of disadvantages. There will be numerous crimes against the natural relatives that can neither be avoided nor repaired. On the other side the development of positive feelings towards the nearest relatives will be not strong enough. This will produce the loss of friendship, "the greatest good for the states" (1262b7-8). The additional argument of the transfer of children abounds in this point. Again the fundamental mistake in Plato's schema is the confusion of the different levels of analysis, in this specific case the assimilation of the state to a family.

The analysis of the communism of property (chap. 5) has the same central point than the former criticism: apart from the practical difficulties it has, the excessive unity of the state hinders the practice of virtue and friendship. A life, which does not provide the good of virtue, is an utterly unbearable life. Private property is necessary for at least two fundamental virtues: moderation and liberality. Contrary to Plato's intention the common property will be the origin of more depravation and faults than the present situation (1263b23-25).

The chapter ends with a series of arguments against Plato's proposal, the most important being the inadequacy of the political system for a state where the different classes are all citizens. This will divide the city in two contrary factions and originate dissense and revolt, then Socrates explicitly denies the alternance in power. Finally, the central criticism is repeated: the guardians will not be happy. The lacking of happiness in a part of the city invalidates the happiness of the whole.

Aristotle's criticism advances on three levels. He points to central aspects of the metaphysical conception of Plato, who transposes the category of unity to the political field without noting that different kinds of unity are necessary to keep the natural order.

According Aristotle Plato's state is not natural because of his mistake of the different ontological levels that a society has. Secondly, he stresses practical disadvantages that are related to Plato's basic mistake. This prevents the practise of virtue and the happiness of the city. In other words, Plato's state does not give a solution to the central question his thought wished to solve. Thirdly, Aristotle considers that the present structure of the polis is the result of a natural evolution and this development should already have imposed Plato's measures, if they were good enough (1264a1-3). The political measures should try to improve the present situation, but there is no need of a completely new reorganisation of society. Reform is needed, not revolution (cf. C. ROWE 1977, 172).<sup>6</sup> The whole criticism of the *Republic* has tried to demonstrate, that against Plato's claims Callipolis is not the most natural form of political organization, but an unnatural state. It is not the most fuvsei state, but para; fuvsin.

#### 4. 1. 2 Criticism of the Laws

According to Aristotle the state of the *Laws* has many points in common with the *Republic* He sees in the former only a light retouched version of the later, that has more points in common with the usual states (1265a3-4). He considers that the main difference between the two works lies in the question of property: "For, apart from the sharing of wives and property, in other matters, he assigns the same practice to both constitutions- the same education, the life of freedom from essential tasks, and the common meals on the same lines-except that in this state women also are to have common meals, and whereas the former state consisted of 1,000 arms-bearers, this one consists of 5,000" (1265a4-10; T. J. SAUNDERS 1995). As G.R. MORROW (1960, 147) has pointed out, Aristotle has done more than to read the text, then he thought out the its implications in more than one point. It is true that the most part of the *Laws* are concerned with particular laws and that only the first half of the sixth Book considers what the Greeks called the *politeia*, i. e. the arrangement of the offices in the state (G.R. MORROW 1960, 147f.). Plato, as Aristotle points out, saw one of the main differences between both constitution in the question of the common property of wives, children and other goods (for Plato, cf. *Leg.* V 739a-e). And the Stagirite is surely right when he points to the fact that in both constitution the citizens will be free from menial tasks.

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<sup>6</sup>C. ROWE (1977, 166) has rightly seen that in books IV to VI the main emphasis is reform. That could be extended to the whole *Politics*. The 'ideal' (κατὰ εὐχὴν) constitution acts rather as a regulative idea.

Even in the case of the separate common meals of women Aristotle seems also to render the Platonic point (G. R. MORROW 1960, 148).

On the other hand, Aristotle seems not to realize that in the *Laws* Plato makes a clear difference in the education of women and men, what was not the case in the *Republic*. He also distinguishes between a more general and 'popular' education and a philosophical one, which is reserved only for the members of the nocturnal council. The philosophical education in the *Republic* seems to have a much broader basis and its basics extended to all the guardians. In this last work nothing is said about the education of the third class as citizens. Have they to partake in the basic education of the guardians? Should their children be educated together with the children of the guardians? It does not seem to be the case. There are radical differences in the issue of education between both states.

The presence of family and private property in the *Laws* should have been an important difference in Aristotle's view, then this new organization of the society answered most part of his previous criticism. And in fact his critical observations have now a less theoretical character. He attacks specific points of Plato's Magnesian constitution, but not central metaphysical issues. The number of citizens and the characteristics of the region, where the state has to be located, is the first issue Aristotle criticizes. The arbitrary character of his disapproval has often been underlined (cf. G.R. MORROW 1960, 156ff.; T. J. SAUNDERS 1995, 125f.).

More substantial from a theoretical point of view is his criticism of the way in which private property is regulated. His censure of Plato's unclear definition of the minimal amount of property that a citizen may have points to a central aspect of Aristotle's moral theory, then he accuses Plato of not having a complete schema of human virtues. For Aristotle there are two virtues related to the use of property, moderation and liberality. Liberality does not constitute indeed a part of the Magnesian moral system and Aristotle's claim sounds in this point clearly external.

His objection that Plato has not brought the supply of potential inheritors into balance with the number of estates to be inherited (1265a38-b17) points also to a matter that Plato had amply discussed (cf. Leg. 740a-741e, 745cd, 784<sup>a</sup>-b, 845aff., 930cd). It is

clear that Aristotle prefers birth regulation as method for keeping a constant number of citizens, but it is doubtful if his solution is more effective than the Platonic one.

Aristotle considers also that Plato had not sufficiently cleared the question of the relationship between political power and private property (1265b18-19; cf. T. J. SAUNDERS 1995, 131) and that the regulation about the property of land and its distribution in two parts is faulty. Later he will take a similar regulation by dividing the estates into two parts (1330a15-19). He seems also to ignore the function the division of the estates has in Plato's project (cf, T. J. SAUNDERS 1995, 132).

The most important criticism against the *Laws* is Aristotle's evaluation of its constitution. In fact it is directed against one of the pillars of Plato's proposal, since the fundamental assumption is that the right mixture of the political system, the balance between freedom and authority, is the guaranty of its goodness. Aristotle has detected one of most important failures in Plato's proposal. The *Laws* actually incline more to an oligarchic system, because Plato applies some of the usual tricks of the oligarchies, in order to give more power to the richer classes. In the Platonic State there is an unsolvable tension between the expressed goal of virtue and wisdom and the practical measure the lawgiver has taken for enforcing it. The decisive power lies in the hands of the higher class and is determined by external property, an actual contradiction of the basic principles of Plato's political thought. Less accurate is his assertion of the superiority of the mixture of different kinds of constitution. It contradicts also his own doctrine in Books IV and V, where he also sees the mixture not as a simply mechanical aggregation of different kinds of constitutions, but rather in a Platonic way as the result of the action of different political principles, which balance the system in a moderate mean.

Aristotle's criticism shows that he knows very well the text and that he has reflected on it. The main criticism makes manifest that the basic difference between Plato and Aristotle remains the relationship to private property. Aristotle has found out in the *Laws* that Plato contradicts his own principles. On the one side he sees private property as a hinder for the practice of virtue in a full sense. He accepts it only as a second best solution. On the other side he puts the power in the hand of the most powerful, not necessarily the most virtuous. It is true that he tries to assure through different controls that the most virtuous will always attain the "first price in the competition of virtue".

But one has the right, as Aristotle does, to wonder if his measures are enough to achieve his goal. The oligarchic character of his state is manifest. Further for Aristotle the practice of virtue makes necessary a political system which acknowledges private property in a measure unacceptable for Plato. The Stagirite offers a more complex system of virtues that incorporates the basic structure of the Platonic theory. Virtues as liberality or equity do not have any function in Plato's political system. But it is also true that even from the perspective of the Platonic theory, the lower part of the soul should practice not only the negative virtue of moderation, but also the positive one of liberality.

#### **4. 2 Aristotle's image of Phaleas of Chalcedonia**

The extension and depth of Aristotle's analysis of Plato's theory shows the importance he gave it and the link that bounds his politics to the theory of his master. Aristotle points out that Plato's proposal is the only one, which has such a revolutionary character, then the other proposals are nearer to the constitutions of his days. The communism of wives and children and the common meals for wives are the two characteristics that Aristotle underlines as most striking.<sup>7</sup> He pays also attention Phaleas of Chalcedonia and Hippodamus of Miletus, a very significant selection indeed if we take into account that there were other thinkers and a literary genre devoted to the description of more or less ideal constitutions. Phaleas' work is introduced as a sample of the thinkers who considered the right distribution of property the most important issue in a political system, in order to avoid social unrest. Aristotle's exposition shows that this chapter continues one of the arguments advanced against Plato: there cannot exist a safe regulation of property without birth control. Aristotle sees overpopulation as a danger for keeping the necessary balance imposed by the law. And he adds: "apart from the abrogation it is undesirable that many should become poor after being rich; for it is a job to prevent such people from becoming revolutionaries"(1266b12-14, SAUNDERS).

Aristotle's perspective makes it very difficult to reconstruct the chief lines of Phaleas thought, but apparently the main innovation of his state was the equality of

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<sup>7</sup> Aristotle does not seem to take into account the ideal constitution described by Aristophanes in the *Eccleziastusae*. The situation described in the comedy has striking similarities with Socrates' ideal state of the *Republic* and it seems very improbable that Aristophanes does not make a reference to a specific writing or theory.



the landed property and of education. We cannot verify Aristotle's allegations when he says that Phaleas does not take into account the other forms of private property as slaves, cattle, money or movable property (1267b9-11). Although he explicitly states that Phaleas is exclusively concerned with landed property, the dispositions about dowry and about the artisans could indicate that he had included in his considerations the problem of other kinds of property, at least of movable property. Aristotle is very interested in underlining what he considers the substantial failure of Phaleas' constitution: the imposition of equality in property. The advantages of the economical equality are only of minor importance, and it does not achieve its main aim: the prevention of civil war. For that it is necessary to have a good system of education, what in Aristotle's eyes does not mean to have the same education, as Phaleas proposed. He also attacks the lacking treatment of the problem of property of the state as a whole, in other terms, the power that the state should have for attaining the goal of autarchy, the main criterion for Aristotle.

In this chapter Aristotle has adopted a similar argumentative line as in the criticism of Plato's economic proposals. It is preferable to let aside the regulation of property if it is not accompanied by an acceptable education of character, which allows the individual the practice of virtue.

#### **4. 3 Aristotle's image of Hippodamus of Miletus**

Aristotle's review of Hippodamus has a different nature. He offers first a more detailed exposition of Hippodamus' proposal, where the democratic features of his constitution are clearly visible. Aristotle overlooks in his criticism some points as the number of citizens, that in Plato's case was object of hard censure. It is very probable that Aristotle had a more positive opinion of Hippodamus' work. The Stagirite centers his criticism in three issues: the social organization of the state, the juridical system and the rewards for change in the legislation. The main objection is that the apparently democratic character of Hippodamus' constitution is contradicted by the power the warriors have. They will concentrate the main offices and the rest of the citizens will not be able to partake fully in the constitutions, contrary to Hippodamus' assumption that all should partake in all offices. This explains why they are practically slaves of the arms bearers in Aristotle's eyes. Another important point of criticism consists that the presence of farmers as a separate class is not enough founded. Aristotle also rejects Hippodamus' reform of the voting system in the juries, although he tacitly accepts the proposal of the appeal courts.

He sees also with reluctance the suggestion of establishing a reward for the innovations in legislation.

It is evident that Aristotle tries a more complete analysis of Hippodamus constitution. Perhaps he has taken Hippodamus work as a sample of a democratic proposal that opposed to the oligarchic views of Plato and of Phaleas, and feels he should give a more detailed and more sympathetic overview. Nevertheless, he seems to be more conservative (in a democratic sense) in the question of the jury system and of the inalterability of legislation. On the other side, he states the importance of the artisans for society, but refuses to see in the farmers a politically independent class. But the two main issues remain for him the questions of the distribution of property and of power.

## **5. ARISTOTLE'S ANALYSIS OF THE EXISTING CONSTITUTIONS**

It is not without importance the fact, that Aristotle devotes quite two thirds of the Book to the discussion of the theoretical proposals of the best constitution. The treatment of the three real existing constitutions, that he has chosen for discussion is still more condensed than in the case of the theorists. The objectivity of the Aristotelian analysis and the aim of criticism are far from being a matter of agreement among scholars. Contrary to the established opinion that here Aristotle brings little or no political theory at all (so, e.g., SAUNDERS 1995), I believe that Aristotle's criticism continues the work he had begun in the first part of the Book. The common criticism to the three constitutions is their overestimation of private property for the organization of the state. This finds its expression in the oligarchic features the three systems have in common.

### **5.1 Sparta**

As in the former cases, Aristotle criticizes in the case of Sparta mainly the property relation with its social implications and the distribution of power in the system of government. Finally he disapproves of specific Spartan institutions. Aristotle saw as a failure of the Spartan system the overemphasizing of the virtue that is connected with the warriors.

Aristotle sees that the position of the helots and the external policy of the Spartans endanger one right aim of their political system: the practice of leisure. This has a direct consequence on the property relations of the State, since the continuous state of internal

or external war has led to a maximal degree of freedom for women. Aristotle connects this with a change in the scale of values in the society: women deprivation causes an inadequate love for money, which at the same time produces a capital concentration and a class division that are dangerous for the stability of the political system. This prevents the happiness of the city.

The second main criticism against the Spartan constitution is that it does not warrant the rule of the best citizens. The ephors, who represent the democratic element in it decide about the most important issues, and even very poor people can be appointed. The evaluation of the *gerousia* is similar. The members of the institution have an absolute power that would require a higher degree of education. Finally kingship is not by election according to a virtuous life, but hereditary.

On the ethical level the Spartan lawgiver has fostered according to Aristotle the love of money among the citizens, while he made the state into a pauper. But worse than that the lawgiver has made the courage into the basis of his legislation.

## 5.2 Crete

In his analysis of the Cretan constitution, Aristotle makes a rather comparative review. He knows the tradition that affirms the Cretan origin of the Spartan constitution. There are two features that Aristotle approves: the common meals, which are better organized than in Sparta and the dispositions about birth control. He does not mention the issues related to private property explicitly and points to a situation that implies a relative well ordered system of property. The helots who work the land for the citizens are under control, the women have not undue freedom, the common meals are financed by the state and the population number is controlled. However the extreme oligarchic features of the Cretan *politeia* point to an excessive importance of private property.

Aristotle's main criticism is the distribution of power. The Cretan constitution has clear oligarchic features, since the power concentrates in the hand of few families, and the most powerful ones have a practically unlimited might, which in the practice makes the system into a *dynasteia*, an extreme form of oligarchy. In any case, the Cretan system does not assure the rule of the best people. The result is a weakened state that cannot be autarchic enough.

### 5.3 Carthage

Aristotle seems to be sympathetic with the Carthaginian constitution in some points. He is convinced of the existence of a strong relation between the three constitutions considered in this part of the Book. Aristotle believes that the political system of the Carthaginian give disproportionate importance to wealth over virtue. It is manifest that the Carthaginian regulation of the property is in Aristotle eyes inadequate.

The basic principle of the Carthaginian constitution is aristocracy and polity, but it is contradicted by specific measures, which introduce oligarchic and democratic features in it. However Aristotle acknowledges the importance of virtue in the Carthaginian scheme, even if it gives a crucial importance to money.

### 6. THE LAWGIVERS

The last chapter concentrates a series of remarks about different lawgivers among whom probably the most notorious reference is to Solon's reform. It has no clear function in the structure of the Book. Many hypotheses have been made about this state of affairs (cf. L. BERTELLI 1977, 79ff.; J. J. KEANEY 1981; E. SCHÜTRUMPF 1991, 362-369) and they cannot be analyzed here. But as it stands the chapter has very little relation to the rest of the Book and does not correspond with the expressed aim of it.

### 7. CONCLUSIONS

The second Book of the *Politics* puts the basis for the further development of the work. The weak points that Aristotle shows in the systems of his forerunners are especially considered in his political theory. The political system should warrant the happiness of the whole and of the individual through the practice of virtue. This principle supposes two basic conditions. The relations of property should allow this exercise of virtue for both the state as a whole and the individual. This means on the one side the necessity of private property, but of a property, which makes possible not only moderation but also prosperity –practically the wealth amount of the Athenian middle class. On the other a State whose fortune would be also moderate and enough for an adequate defense of its interests. The second condition is education. It has to form the character of virtuous citizens, who are loyal to ruling constitution. Besides the *politeia* has to take the measures that make possible the rule of the best elements of the society and that all citizens partake actively in the different offices of the state.

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