ἀrchαί

AS ORIGENS DO PENSAMENTO OCIDENTAL

THE ORIGINS OF WESTERN THOUGHT

DOSSIER: ANCIENT DEMOCRACY REVISITED

From Rights to Revolutions: on the rise of oligarchies and democracies in Aristotle's political thought

Daniel Nascimento [i]
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5451-7417
danielsimaonascimento@gmail.com

[i] Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro – Rio de Janeiro – RJ – Brasil

NASCIMENTO, D. (2024). From Rights to Revolutions: on the rise of oligarchies and democracies in Aristotle's political thought. *Archai* 34, e03433.

Abstract: This paper offers an interpretation of a certain narrative about the political community, which can be found in Pol. III 10, 1286b7-21; IV 10, 1297b16-28; and VI 4, 1321a5-16, in light of what Aristotle tells us about the causes that lead to revolutions, οἰκονομική, the appearance of money, commerce and the social

changes they caused. According to this narrative, the monarchical regime prevailed in most political communities at first, whereas later, in Aristotle's time, it was the democratic regime which prevailed. Although the explanations given in these passages differ, it is argued that they are compatible and complementary; that, when taken together, they show us causes that could very well complement each other in order to make revolution strongly possible, if not inevitable; that there is an important part of this process, namely, the rise of oligarchies, that they do not explain satisfactorily; and that we can craft a satisfactory explanation of this part of the process if we make use of what Aristotle tells us about οἰκονομική, the appearance of money, commerce and the social changes they caused in book I of the *Politics*.

Keywords: Aristotle, Democracy, Revolution, Rights.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to offer an interpretation of a certain narrative about the political community in light of what Aristotle tells us about the causes that lead to revolutions, οἰκονομική, the appearance of money, commerce and the social changes they caused.[1] According to this narrative, which can be found in (Pol. III 10, 1286b7-21; IV 10, 1297b16-28; and VI 4, 1321a5-16), [2] the monarchical regime prevailed in most political communities at first, whereas later, in Aristotle's time, it was the democratic regime which

---

[1] This work is part of two different research projects: “Capacities and dispositions: explanatory principles of action in Aristotle” and “Hohfeldian intelligence – rights and duties in ordinary language and in the code of Artificial Intelligences”. I would like to thank the Carlos Chagas Filho Foundation for Research Support of the State of Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ) for the funding obtained through the grants “Research Assistance” (E-26/210.241/2019) and “Young Scientist of Our State” (E-26/200.301/2023).

[2] In what follows I’ll use the order of the books and chapters as they appear in Rackham (1932).

prevailed. Since the first two passages I intend to address have already been linked at least since Newman's commentary of the *Politics*, and his interpretation seems to have been very influential,[3] I will start by spelling out how my reading of these passages differs from the reading we find there.

According to Newman (1902a, p. 286) the account we are given in book III, which ties the regime changes in that period to the increase in the number of virtual individuals, is merely aporetic and would not accord with Aristotle's opinion on the subject. This would be proved by the fact that a quite different account is given in book IV, where the same changes are related to changes in the art of war, and by Aristotle's criticism of Plato at the end of Book V, where he denies that there is any regularity in the succession of constitutions (Pol. V 12, 1316b1 sqq.).

In what concerns the compatibility of the two passages, I hope to show that there is one plausible interpretation of these passages according to which they are compatible, although they are also different and complementary. But it is very important to highlight that, according to the interpretation of these passages defended here: Aristotle is attempting to explain a complex and variegated historical process that took place in ancient Greece over a given period of time; there is no reason to suppose that he takes this process to have happened the same way everywhere; nowhere in these passages does Aristotle advance any thesis about any regular form in the succession of constitutions; and these passages show us different causes that could be enough by themselves to explain the revolutionary scenario that he describes, but could also, in principle, have been at work together in at least some, if not all, political communities that went through it.

---

[3] See, f. ex., not only Aubonnet (1971, p. 45-46, and p. 206 n.1), Barker (1977, p. 143) and Simpson (1998, p. 185-186), who quote him approvingly, but also Davis (p. 1908, n. 13), Robinson (1995, p. 56-58), Reeve (1998, p. 95 n. 90 and n. 91), Swanson and Corbin (2009, p. 64) and Accattino (2013, p. 227), who seem to agree with the general lines of his interpretation when they privilege the passage of book IV in detriment to the passage of book III in their commentaries.

The paper is divided in six sections. First the introduction. After, in section I, I delineate my understand of the basics of Aristotle's theory of revolutions that are due to factions. In section II, I offer my interpretation of (Pol. III 10, 1286b7-21). In section III, I offer my interpretation of (Pol. IV 10, 1297b16-28 and VI 4, 1321a5-16), and then I make a quick comparison between the interpretations defended in sections II and III in order to show how they can be taken to be complementary and to highlight that they all assume that before the change into democracy there was a change into oligarchy which they do not explain satisfactorily. In section IV, I try to add to this explanation through an investigation of what Aristotle tells us about οἰκονομική, the appearance of money, commerce and the social changes they caused. At end, I conclude with a brief summary of the argument.

1. Aristotle on revolution: the basics

As we know, Aristotle distinguishes four kinds of cause (Post. An. II.11; Phys. II 3,7; Met. I. 3. 983a26-32, V. 2) - material, efficient, formal and final - and he does give us enough to understand just where to situate the four causes in his explanation of the political community. According to him, the material cause of a city is its population, its territory and its social conditions (Pol. VII, 4, 1325b37-1326a8); its formal cause is its constitution (Pol. III. 1. 1274b38; III, 3. 1276a17-b13; III. 6. 1278b8-10; IV. 1. 1289a15-18, 3. 1290a7-13); its final cause is the end, or goal, of its constitution (Pol. II. 9. 1271b2-3; IV. 1. 1289a15-18; VII. 2. 1324b2-9; VII 14. 1333b12-14); and its efficient cause is the lawgiver, or lawgivers, who designed its constitution (Pol. VII. 4. 1325b40-1326a5).[4]

The changes that are the object of this paper are changes in a political community's formal cause, i.e., in its constitution. Not all changes in political communities are of this kind, and changes of this

[4] This picture follows closely the one given by Keyt (1999, p. 76), but adds the social conditions to the material cause of the city, as suggested, and argued for, by Polansky (1991, p. 327).

kind are presented by Aristotle as consequences of changes in the material cause of the city - namely, in its population and/or social conditions. Indeed, at the beginning of *Politics* V 2 Aristotle states the following:

> Since we are inquiring about the sources from which both factions and changes with respect to constitutions come about, we must first understand in a general way what are the origins and causes of these. They are, roughly speaking, three in number, which we must mark out each by itself in outline first. For we must understand (1) the disposition of those who form factions, and (2) for the sake of what, and thirdly (3) what are the origins of political tumults and of factions against one another. (Pol. V 2, 1302a16-22, translated by David Keyt, 1999).

As we can see, in this passage Aristotle seems to link faction with regime change as if regime change was the only possible goal of factions. But we must bear in mind that at this point he had already recognized the existence of factional conflict between proponents of the same regime, e.g. where there is an oligarchy, to make it more or less oligarchic (Pol. V 1, 1301b13-17), and that later on he states that there can be regime change without faction, e.g. when the property assessment of democracies and oligarchies becomes heavier or lighter depending on the economic circumstances (Pol. V 6, 1306b6-16).

In the rest of the chapter Aristotle clarifies that (1) the disposition of those who form factions is the thought they get less than they deserve from the present constitution (Pol. V 1, 1302a22-31); (2) those who form factions do it either for honor and/or gain (Pol. V 1, 1302a31-34); and (3) "the causes and origins of the changes by which those who form factions are affected in the way spoken and concerning the things mentioned" are thinking that others are getting more honor and/or gain than they deserve, insolence, fear, superiority, contempt, disproportionate growth, electioneering, belittlement, smallness or dissimilarity (Pol. V 1, 1302a34-b4).

For the purposes of this paper, we don't need to engage in an in-depth discussion of these three causes.[5] All we need is the general idea that a faction must be explained with reference to (3) actions from others which are perceived as unjust by those who will form a faction, (1) the feeling of getting less honor and/or gain than is deserved by those who form a faction and (2) the goal of getting the honor and/or gain which they think they deserve through a change in the constitution. All these, of course, are changes in what has been taken above to be a part of the material cause of the city - namely, in the individuals that compose its population. As we shall see shortly, these are precisely the changes to which Aristotle attributes the process he described in books III, IV and VI, and in all these passages it is strongly suggested that the revolutions described there are due to faction.

2. The rise of democracies in Pol. III 10

The passage in Book III that interests us comes right after Aristotle's famous discussion of the relative merits of the government of the best man and the government of the best laws (Pol. III 10, 1285b33-1286b7). For the purposes of this paper, the argument can be summarized as follows.

The ruler must necessarily be a lawgiver and the laws must exist, but they must be authoritative only in so far as they do not deviate from what is right (Pol. III 10, 1286a21-25). Even if, everything else being equal, the law is superior to the individual because it does not have the element of passion, the law cannot accurately prescribe the course that will result in justice being done for every case, which means that the individual will judge better about exceptional cases (Pol. III 10, 1286a17-21). Even so, Aristotle insists that rulers must be free people who do nothing against the law except where it fails,

[5] Such discussions can be found in Pellegrin (2019, p. 240-243), Skultety (2009, p. 349), Weed (2007, p. 52-60), Kalimtzis (2000, p. 103-156), Keyt (1999, p. 78) and Polansky (1991, p. 324-332).

which means they must be good people and good citizens (Pol. III 10, 1286a36-b1).

After establishing this, Aristotle inquires, with regard to those things about which the law cannot judge well, what kind of government is best – the government of one man (monarchy), of the few (aristocracy), or of the many (polity, Pol. III 10, 1286a21–25). In the end, he concludes that the government of a number of people who are all virtuous is more worthy of choice than the government of a single virtuous person if the single virtuous person is not too dissimilar in virtue to the several virtuous people.[6]

It is only then that he presents his theory about the generalization of democracy. According to what is said there:

> [A] It was probably because of this that there used to be kings, namely, because it was hard to find men that excelled much in virtue, since they inhabited in small political communities. They chose their kings on the basis of their virtuous deeds, and these are jobs for virtuous men. [B] But as (ἐπεὶ δὲ) there came to be many men who were alike in virtue, they no longer submitted, sought for something common and established a *politeia* (ἐζήτουν κοινόν τι καὶ πολιτείαν καθίστασαν). [C] As (ἐπεὶ δὲ) they got worse and gained at the expense of the common funds, it was reasonable that oligarchies would arise as a result. For they made wealth an honorable thing. [D] After that (ἐκ δὲ) there was a change to tyrannies, [E] then from (ἐκ δὲ) tyrannies to democracies. For by always concentrating power into ever fewer hands, because of a vile desire for profit (δι'αἰσχροκέρδειαν), they strengthened the multitude, it attacked them, and democracies arose. As (ἐπεὶ δὲ) cities have become larger, it is probably not easy for any political community to emerge that is not a democracy. (Pol. III 10, 1286b8-23, my translation).

[6] As we know, Aristotle does concede that if there is a whole family, or even one individual, that is way above everyone else in regards to virtue, then the best course of action would be to adopt monarchy and make such a family the royal family and/or such person the king (Pol. III 11, 1288a15-19).

Commentators agree that this passage describes a process of change between five types of government. Each step has been marked with a different letter. Aristotle postulates that the first change in regime comes as a result of the proliferation of virtuous individuals. For those who understand how the philosopher conceives the political community, it is not difficult to see how one thing may lead to another.

Indeed, according to one of the guiding principles of Aristotelian political philosophy, the Principle of Natural Government, in communities in which certain individuals have their normal rational potential fully developed and others do not, the first are natural rulers for the latter, cf. Miller (2013, p. 47-53). Since virtue presupposes this development, this must be the case in the first communities mentioned by Aristotle. This principle is the principle proposed by Aristotle in order to determine, judge and justify the distribution of the claim-right to political participation in any political community,[7] and it is this principle which explains and justifies the choice of monarchical government in the first political communities even in light of considerations about the efficiency of the virtuous multitude with regard to exceptional cases - for there is yet no virtuous multitude in those communities.

However, according to Aristotle one of the main functions of every well-governed political community is the moral education of individuals (Pol. VII 12 1331b23-1332a39-b11; VIII 1, 1337a10 sq.).

---

[7] As has already been remarked by Miller, although Aristotle certainly did not have a concept of individual right we have good textual evidence to recognize not only that Aristotle had and employed terms and locutions which can be profitably understood in terms of the hohfeldian analytical system for describing rights (Miller, 1997, p. 94-107), but also that he did recognize the existence of one political right based on nature (Miller, 1997, p. 109-111), namely, the right to take part in government in accordance with one's virtue, which is established by the Principle of Natural Government. This right can profitably be understood in hohfeldian terms as a claim, which is a right to an action that is to be performed by another person or group and which, for that person or group, is a duty. On the use of the hohfeldian analytical system in general see Wenar (2023, p. 7-12). On its use to clarify rights locutions not only in Aristotle, but also in ancient authors in general, see Miller (2013).

Since this cannot take place without the development of the rational part of their souls (NE, II 6, 1106b35-1107a1),[8] the more successful the political communities are in educating individuals, the more the number of virtuous citizens with their rational potential fully developed will rise, which means that the difference in virtue and rational potential that exists between them will decrease, so that eventually the disparity in virtue which justifies monarchical government will cease to exist. If this process is not accompanied by an extension of citizenship rights, it may very well give the excluded citizens reason enough to form factions and to attempt a revolution - and that is certainly what is suggested when Aristotle states that "they no longer submitted to royalty". After all, political offices are honors (Pol. III 6, 1281a31), which are part of the rewards of virtue (NE, IV 3, 1123b35), and, therefore, divergences about the level of political participation that is to be granted to different groups of citizens can generate factions (Pol. V 1, 1301a37-39).

What we have here, then, is a cause that operates against the maintenance of the monarchical regime, and which is none other than the one mentioned by (Pellegrin, 1990, p. 131-134) when he spoke of the existence of "a certain tendency towards the eventual establishment of more popular governments" that would be inherent in the political community as conceived by Aristotle. Once such pressure produced a revolution in a monarchical system, it would be natural to expect a more inclusive regime to be born. But it is when it comes to determining which regime is born in [B] that matters get more complicated.

For Weldon (1912, p. xvi) and Pangle (2013, p. 160), the sentence ἐζήτουν κοινόν τι καὶ πολιτείαν καθίστασαν should be interpreted as stating the establishment of a polity (πολιτεία). But even though πολιτεία is used by Aristotle to name one particular form of government, it is also used by him to name constitutional government in general. So, it is possible that he is using the term here

[8] In what follows I'll use the order of the books and chapters as they appear in Rackham (1934).

to designate some other form of regime, such as an aristocracy, as suggested by Aubonnet (1971, p. 206) and Accattino (2013, p. 227).

Besides, although both interpretations assume that [B] and [C] describe two different steps of the process, taking each ἐπεὶ δὲ to mark a different step, it seems that the Greek can equally be read as if both [B] and [C] were one and the same step. If we adopt that reading, we would then say that men's becoming equal in virtue would be a complicated process in which the level of virtue of the average citizen grew, so that they did not tolerate not taking part in government anymore, but it did not grow enough so as to make them avoid the collective choice of a deviated form of government.

For the purposes of this paper, we need not choose between these three interpretations. In fact, this would be a good place to emphasize something that was already said at the beginning, namely, that the process Aristotle is describing is a variegated process that could very well have happened differently in different political communities. So, based on my reading thus far, we will have a process of constitutional change that either has three stages - (1) from monarchy (correct) to oligarchy (deviant); (2) from oligarchy (deviate) to tyranny (deviate); and (3) from tyranny (deviate) to democracy (deviate) - or four stages - (1) from monarchy (correct) to politeia or aristocracy (correct); (2) from politeia or aristocracy (correct) to oligarchy (deviant); (3) from oligarchy (deviate) to tyranny (deviate); and (4) from tyranny (deviate) to democracy (deviate).

Be that as it may, what we are told about the revolution in the monarchical regime seems to agree with what is said about the general causes of revolutions in monarchies, aristocracies and polities in Book V. As we know, Aristotle thinks that the causes of revolutions in these regimes are very much alike (Pol. V 7, 1307a5-9, V 10, 1311a23-30). Besides, as already noted by Keyt (1999, p. 115), in V 7 Aristotle discusses four causes of faction and constitutional change in aristocracies: (1) the exclusivity of rulers, (2) the disproportionate power of the rich (3) the greed of rulers, and (4) gradual, unnoticed changes, and in V 6 he also claims that the exclusivity of rulers causes faction especially when coupled with

such factors as unhonoured virtue, great disparity in wealth, or a great man's desire to rule alone (Pol. V 6, 1306b22-1307a5).

Since Aristotle does not present these causes as being necessary for revolutions in monarchical and aristocratic regimes, but rather as causes that can, by themselves and depending on their context, trigger revolutions, the presence of one of them could be enough for an explanation to be viable. Looking once more at the passage from III 10 we just quoted, if we adopt the four-stage interpretation mentioned above we can find at least one of the four factors mentioned in V 7 present in the first revolution, the exclusivity of the rulers, and we find it coupled precisely with the unhonoured virtue which is mentioned in V 6. If we adopt the three-stage interpretation, on the other hand, we can find a second factor in the greed of rulers mentioned in V 7, which seems to be present in the vile desire for profit mentioned in III 10. The same vile desire for profit, of course, would be present in the passage from politeia, or aristocracy, to oligarchy, which is assumed by the four-stage interpretation.

In what concerns this somewhat mysterious desire and its consequences, it is worth noting Aristotle's rather vague description of a process of moral decay and increasing concentration of wealth, which is supposed to lead all the way from the first or second stage, depending on the reading adopted, all the way to the appearance of tyrannies. At first glance, it might seem plausible to assume that Aristotle is telling us that this concentration of resources became so extreme that one man came to be more powerful than all the others and seized the sovereign power for himself before the democratic forces had come together. But later Aristotle will mention two different possibilities: the emergence of a popular leader from inside the oligarchy who becomes a tyrant with the support of the people because of the unjust behavior of the oligarchs (Pol. V 5, 1305b36-41) and the installation of a tyrant by oligarchs who have squandered their own property with the objective of stealing from others (Pol. V 5, 1305b39-1306a12).

As for how this whole process strengthens the multitude to the point of creating the necessary conditions to explain why tyrannies

are substituted for democracies, and not monarchies, aristocracies, oligarchies or even polities, the only things that seems certain from this passage are that he takes the process of increasing concentration of wealth mentioned above to have become somewhat self-defeating, for he does state that it caused the strengthening of the masses, the overthrow of tyrannies and the establishing of democracies, and that he takes the growth of cities to have played some role in the final outcome of this process.

All in all, then, this passage portrays the revolutionary process that led from monarchy to democracy as being as much a question of a change in the quality as in the quantity of the citizens of the city - i.e., of its material cause - for it takes the growth in numbers, the proliferation of virtuous individuals and the base desire for profit of the ruling classes to be causes of this process. A most intuitive reading of the passage explains easily how these three changes lead in the direction of democracy. In the case of the increase in numbers, it is enough to concede that population growth has occurred disproportionately among the less well-off, who were excluded by the oligarchic regime. In the case of the proliferation of virtuous individuals, we have seen how it leads to the rise of a right to political participation amongst the excluded. And the vicious behavior of the ruling class all but adds to their reason to revolt.

So much for the process as described in book III. It is now time to look at the descriptions that are given of it in books IV and VI.

3. The rise of democracies in Pol. IV 10 and VI 4

Once again, before coming to the passage of book IV that interests us here, it will be useful to take a quick look at some of what precedes it in that same book. Shortly after announcing his inquiry into which regime is advantageous for which political communities and for what kind of people, Aristotle asserts that there is a principle that holds for all regimes and peoples generally, namely, that the part of the city that wants the regime to continue must be superior

(κρεῖττον) to the part that does not want it (Pol. IV 10, 1296b13-16). Aristotle's advice for finding the best regime for a given city can be summarized in two steps: (1) find out (a) what are the parts of the city (Pol. IV 3, 1289b27-1290a5) and (b) which part, or parts, is superior and which is inferior (Pol. IV 3, 1290a6-13), and then (2) choose a form of regime where the intermediate parts and the superior parts are included in the government (Pol. IV 9, 1295b34-39), and which is as fair and moderate as possible (Pol. IV 9, 1296b25-1297a14).

Although Aristotle says little here about superiority, stating only that it is made up of two factors, quality and quantity, which are to be judged in relation to each other (Pol. IV 10, 1296b13–24), the reason the ruling parts have to be superior to the non-ruling parts is clear enough: their superiority is what guarantees the stability of the regime. If that's true, the superiority we're talking about here really seems to be the same that Benveniste (1995, p. 71) showed us in his famous analysis of the term κράτος in the Indo-European vocabulary, where it means ‘predominance’ in combat or in the assembly. Superiority thus conceived is a relative attribute whose achievement in the context we are considering depends on the political engagement of individuals, and Aristotle seemed to have in mind both contexts mentioned by Benveniste when he warned that a democracy can turn into an oligarchy if the multitude neglects politics and the wealthy devote themselves to it (Pol. V 10, 1316b9-13) and advised that rights of citizenship should be given to those who bear, or have once possessed, arms (Pol. IV 10, 1297b1-5).[9]

This criterion for the distribution of citizenship is especially interesting for us because everything indicates that Aristotle sees it “at work”, so to speak, in the description of the process of change from monarchy to democracy he describes in book IV. According to what he says there:

> And the first type of regime that arose among the Greeks after [A] the monarchy was constituted by [B] the warriors, and initially by the knights (τῶν ἱππέων).

[9] See (Pol. II 6, 1265b28 sq. and III 7, 1279a39-4).

> For strength and superiority in warfare belonged to the knights. Without organization the heavy infantry (τὸ ὁπλιτικόν) is useless. Since experience and strategy in such matters were lacking among the ancients, their strength was in the knights. [C] But as cities grew and the heavy infantry became stronger, more people participated in the regime. So the regimes that we call polities were first called democracies. That the first political communities were oligarchic and monarchic is reasonable. Because of the lack of men, they did not have much of a middle element. Since the number of people was small, and they were poorly organized, they submitted to being governed. (Pol. IV 10, 1297b16-24, my translation).

As far as I can tell, there has been no disagreement as to the overall meaning of this passage. What we have here is a description of a revolutionary process that goes hand in hand with the evolution of military tactics and technology. A process in which what determines the extension of citizenship rights over time is a growth in the numbers of citizens and the increase in the relative military strength of different sections of the army.[10]

Once again a change in the quantity of the citizens of the city is mentioned, but this time it is accompanied by a change in their social conditions, the evolution of military tactics and technology, which brings about a qualitative change of military importance in the different groups that compose the political community. And, once again, a most intuitive reading of the passage seems to easily explain how these two changes lead in the direction of democracy. In the case of the increase in numbers, it is enough to concede, as we did before, that population growth has occurred disproportionately among the less well-off. In the case of the relative importance of cavalry and infantry, it is enough to remember that at this point Aristotle had already told us that the cost of breeding horses made it difficult for those who were not rich, and that was the reason why the ancient

[10] See Newman (1902b, p. 232-234), Aubonnet (1971, p. 133), Barker (1977, p. 187), Robinson (1995, p. 109-111), Reeve (1998, p. 124) and Swanson and Corbin (2009, p. 75-78).

political communities whose military power resided in the cavalry were oligarchies (Pol. IV 3, 1289b33-40). The military ascension of the heavy infantry, which was less costly, made it possible for the less well-to-do to be strengthened, for it was within their means to possess their instruments and, therefore, their art.

If this interpretation is correct, then we can easily take this passage to be saying that the transition from cavalry to infantry coincides with the transition from oligarchy to the next regime. Besides, one might be tempted to deduce from what was said above that this next regime would be a polity or a democracy. But Aristotle goes in a different direction when he says the following in Book VI:

> As there are four parts of the multitude, the husbandmen, the artisans, the merchants, and the workmen, and four parts of the city which are useful for war, the horsemen, the heavy infantry, the light infantry (ψιλὸν), and the sailors (ναυτικόν), wherever the country is fit for horses, conditions are naturally propitious for instituting a strong oligarchy (because the preservation of the inhabitants derives from such a force, and the breeding of horses is done by those who have large estates); where it is suitable for heavy infantry, the next type of oligarchy (as the heavy armed element is composed more of the rich than the poor). The light infantry and naval armed forces, on the other hand, are wholly democratic. At present, therefore, wherever they are numerous, when there is a division, their rivals generally get the worse of it. (Pol. VI 4, 1321a5-16, my translation).

According to this passage, then, the regime that is installed with the rise of the heavy infantry is not a democracy or a polity, but a kind of oligarchy - presumably, a more relaxed kind - and it is only when the light infantry and/or naval forces rise in power that we find the installment of democracies. I believe this passage and the passage from book IV can and should be read together, and we should take the passage from book IV as describing the meaning and internal logic of this process and the passage from book VI as giving us all the stages it may have included - always keeping in mind, of course, that the process could have happened differently in different political

communities, depending on how the social and economic conditions impacted the overall access to military equipment. What we know for sure is that the innovations in the art of war in ancient Greece did not stop at the increase in the relative strength of heavy infantry, also leading to the rise of light infantry and naval forces,[11] and these, according to book VI, would in fact be one of the causal factors responsible for the political rise of the multitude and, consequently, of democracy.

If we accept this suggestion and apply what we find here to the scheme offered in book IV, we would then have a process that looks as follows: (1) From monarchy (correct) to strict oligarchy (incorrect, governed by the knights); (2) from strict oligarchy (incorrect, governed by the knights) to relaxed oligarchy (incorrect, governed by the hoplites); from (3) relaxed oligarchy (incorrect, governed by the hoplites) to democracy (incorrect, governed by the light and naval armed forces).

As we can see, the process as described in books IV and VI is indeed slightly different from the one described in book III, and the first difference that comes to mind is the difference in the causes to which the process is attributed. Although both descriptions mention the growth in numbers, the proliferation of virtual individuals, the creation of a claim-right to participate in government and the vile desire for profit among the ruling classes are completely absent from books IV and VI. On the other hand, there is no mention of changes in military tactics and technology in book III.

Nevertheless, I believe we can, and should, take these descriptions as complementary. If we take the versions of the process described in books III, IV and VI and analyze it bearing in mind what book IV has told us about a regime's stability, we can easily interpret these two versions as giving us three causes that could very well have contributed to the process separately. The proliferation of virtuous individuals and the vile desire for profit among the ruling class

[11] On the different sections of the army mentioned in IV 10 in VI 4, see f. ex. Lee (2006) and Naiden (2021).

mentioned in book III explain how and why the people who were excluded from government came to desire to take part in it, and the evolution of military tactics and technology explain how these people came to be strong enough so as to eventually impose their desire in the political communities they were a part of.

Each of those causes could, in principle, have brought about the revolutionary process described by Aristotle on their own. The vile desire for profit among the ruling class gives the political community a reason to change its rulers, and a change of regime is a way to change its rulers. The proliferation of virtuous individuals gives the community a reason to extend political participation in order to accommodate all those who deserve to govern. The evolution of military tactics and technology gives the community a reason to extend political participation in order to satisfy the principle of stability. The point I'm trying to make is not that they must necessarily accompany each other, but that they could, in principle, do so, and that it is reasonable to think that at least in some of the political communities where this process took place they did so. That is enough for us to concede that they complement and are compatible with each other in Aristotle's description of this complex and variegated historical process.

But there are also differences and similarities in the passages we have analyzed that bear further scrutiny. In what concerns the differences, we could begin by noting that book III could be read both as stating that either aristocracies or polities came after the first monarchies, or, in line with what is said in books IV and VI, that oligarchies came right after monarchies. Nevertheless, the fact is that book III states that tyrannies came after oligarchies and before democracies, while book IV states that oligarchies underwent one internal change before they changed straight into democracy.

As it must be clear by now, I don't believe we should be bothered by these differences. Things could have gone either way in different political communities, depending on their population, territory, social conditions, etc. - i.e., on how it's material cause was constituted in the first place, and on which factors of change acted upon it.

Nevertheless, we can speak of a core description of this process, which is present in all passages, according to which monarchy stood as the first regime, oligarchy as an intermediate regime and democracy as the final regime, and, in what concerns this core description, it seems pertinent to ask why oligarchy appears in it. We know why Aristotle assumes that monarchy was the first and we understand the logic that, according to him, eventually led to the rise of democracy. But why, exactly, does oligarchy appears as an intermediary stage in his description of this process? What, exactly, caused its generalization?

Aristotle does speak in book III of a vile desire for profit and in books IV and VI he does suggest that the choice of oligarchy had to do with the search for stability in the political community. Nevertheless, it is striking that these passages do not explicitly say anything about how these factors led to the kind of change in the goal and citizenship criterion of the political communities in question which would be necessary to turn them into oligarchies, and those changes cannot follow immediately from the factors mentioned in them.

In what concerns the change in goal, we would do well to remember that, as has already been remarked by Reeve (1998, xvi), the goal of both monarchy and aristocracy (Pol. IV 1, 1289a30-32) is unqualified happiness (Pol. VII 2, 1324a23-25) understood as "the complete activation and use of virtue" (Pol. VII 13, 1332a9-1 0), but the goal of oligarchy is wealth or property (Pol. III 5, 1280a25-28) because this regime values life above living well (Pol. I 3, 1257b40-1258a14). One could try to point at the vile desire for profit mentioned in book III in order to explain both the change in goal and in the citizenship criterion. But Aristotle himself, when criticizing Plato at the end of book V, says that it is strange to assert that the greed of the rulers explains a shift to oligarchy, and not the fact that those who are very prominent suppose that it is unjust for those who do not own a certain amount of property to have an equal share in the political community (Pol. V 10, 1316a39-b2).

As far as I can see, the only clue we find in these passages to answer this question lies in the following sentence from the passage in book III: "because they made wealth an honorable thing" (ἔντιμον γὰρ ἐποίησαν τὸν πλοῦτον). If I understand Aristotle correctly here, he means that in such societies it was not just the case that people wanted and pursued wealth, but that they honored it so much that it led them to make it the criterion for citizenship. The reason for that, or so I'll argue, lies in a change in the way the end of political community was conceived and, consequently, in the bond of friendship that structures it. In the following section I try to reconstruct one way, if not the only one, in which this change could have happened according to what Aristotle himself tells us in book I of the *Politics*.

4. Money, commerce, οἰκονομική and the rise of oligarchies

Aristotle thought both that the variation in the ways of life of different animals was partly explained by the fact that all animals live in ways that are advantageous for their nutritive habits (Pol. I 3, 1256a19-22) and that this should not be taken as a matter of luck, but as a sign of a natural order. This is why he claims that "plants exist for the sake of animals" and "plants and other animals exist for the sake of human beings" (Pol. I 3, 1256b14-22).

In the case of human beings, he divides their ways of life into nomads, hunters, farmers, and those who combine several ways of life to compensate for the shortcomings of any one way of life (Pol. I 3, 1256a40-b5). But even though he takes nature to have placed human beings in an environment in which they can sustain themselves, this does not mean that he thinks this task is particularly easy. Indeed, Aristotle claims that the family and the village have as their goals, or at least among their goals, to provide sustenance for their members, which means that their members have a duty to

cooperate to achieve that goal,[12] and that there is an art, which is a part of the art of acquisition (κτητική), which arises by nature (1256b40-1257a5), being by nature both part of the art of family government (οἰκονομική) and subordinate to it, whose function is to provide what the art of family government uses (Pol. I 3, 1256a10-12, 1258a30-37) and which is concerned with obtaining goods that are necessary and useful for families and cities (Pol. I 3, 1256b26-30).[13] The aim of this part of the acquisitive art is genuine wealth (ἀληθινὸς πλοῦτος), which is defined both as sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια) in goods of the kind that are necessary for living and living well and as the aggregate of instruments that are necessary to one who governs a family or a political community (Pol. I 3, 1256b26-39).

As we know, Aristotle maintains that human beings first gathered in families and only later formed villages - which are communities composed of a group of families (Pol. I 1, 1252a24-b28). According to him, before the village there was no bartering (ἀλλαγήν), because family members shared the same things. It was only when the village appeared that it became necessary to barter, because people separated into different families did not share their possessions and needed many things that others had (Pol. I 3, 1257a19-25). As long as useful things were bartered one for another and nothing else, Aristotle tells us, this too was in accordance with nature (Pol. I 3, 1257a25-30). The problem began after the appearance of money, commerce and the development of an art whose objective was unlimited wealth.

According to Aristotle, money first appeared when communities came to rely more on bartering for satisfying their needs (Pol. I 3,

---

[12] On the rights and duties of friendship, see Nascimento (2017 and 2018).

[13] In (NE, I 1, 1094a6-9) Aristotle says that the object of οἰκονομική is wealth and in (Pol. III 4, 1277b21-25) he states that the function (ἔργον) assigned by this art differs in the case of the husband, whose aim is the acquisition (κτᾶσθαι), and of the woman, whose purpose is guardianship (φυλάττειν). We follow Newman (1887, p. 166) in this interpretation that Aristotle would be speaking here not of this science as it is, or as he thinks it is, but rather as it is seen by his contemporaries, given that both in the aforementioned passage of Book I and in other places (7. 1255b31 sq.; c. 10. 1258a21 sq.; 3.4.1277a35) he says that using these goods is the function of οἰκονομική.

1257a30-41). Money facilitated bartering because not all things are easily portable and money, which is a deposit of value, can replace them in barter (Pol. I 3, 1257a34-41), becoming a kind of representative of men's needs (NE, V 5, 1133a29) and acting as a measure which makes everything commensurable (NE, V 5, 1133b18-23). It was only once money appeared that commerce (καπηλικόν) appeared, first simply and then as an art form (Pol. I 3, 1257a41-b5), and it was only when this happened that it became true to say, as Aristotle does, that every possession (κτήματος) has a double use which belongs to it as such, but not in the same way, one being its proper use, and the other a use which is common to everything, namely, exchange (μεταβλητική, Pol. I 3, 1257a5-10).[14]

Although the appearance of commerce seems to constitute a flagrant innovation in relation to the ways of life of human beings previously described by Aristotle, until that point, says the philosopher, everything was still according to nature (Pol. I 3, 1257a41-b5). Aristotle does not seem to have anything against commerce, and everything indicates that this is the activity practiced by the merchants (ἀγοραῖον) who will later be taken by Aristotle as an integral part of the multitude in the ideal city (Pol. I 3, 1321a5-16). But commerce gave rise to at least two arts which were not according to nature. These arts were both parts of a third art, the art of obtaining goods (χρηματιστική),[15] which also aims at acquiring wealth, but sets no limits to the wealth to be acquired and does not arise from nature, but through a certain experience (ἐμπειρίας) or art (τέχνης, Pol. I 3, 1256b40-1257a5).

In the art of obtaining goods wealth is often defined as a given amount of money (Pol. I 3, 1257a41-b5) and all who engage in the art of obtaining goods increase their money without limits (Pol. I 3,

[14] On the importance of this passage for the history of economic thought, see Meikle (1997, p. 8).

[15] On the use of χρηματίζω and its cognates in ancient Greek literature, see Schaps (2012).

1257b30-34).[16] The first part of the art of obtaining goods that arises after the emergence of trade is not named, being qualified as an art that was concerned only with how to obtain the greatest profit from exchanges (Pol. I 3, 1257a41-b5). The second part is usury (ὀβολοστατικὴ), which according to Aristotle is even more contrary to nature and objectionable, since in it "money is born of money" (Pol. I 4, 1258a37-1258b4).

The importance of all this for our present investigation will become apparent if we bear in mind that, although Aristotle asserts that the art of governing the family is different from the art of obtaining goods thus understood, he recognized that these two arts stood in close relations to each other (σύνεγγυς), that some believed that the art of governing the family and the art of governing the political community were the same art (Pol. I 3, 1252a7 sq.), that some also believed that the function (ἔργον) of household government was to preserve and increase its money without limit (Pol. I 3, 1257b38-41), and that one of the ways of life that men in his own time thought to be the most conducive to happiness - which is the goal of the political community - was precisely the chrematistic way of life (χρηματιστὴς βίαιός, NE I 5 1096a5-7).

Once we put these propositions together, we have a conception according to which the art of preserving or increasing wealth without limit is the art that would guide human beings to happiness, and the art that should govern both the family and the political community. Now, it is obvious that these are not Aristotle's opinions, and Aristotle himself does not always feel he should give them much attention, but they are important for us insofar as they reveal some possible errors that seem to have been common and influential enough to have been analyzed, recorded and refuted by Aristotle and which, once assumed at the stage in which the base desire for profit is postulated by him as a potent force of social change, would better

[16] Because of this, it seems doubtful that the distinction between the four forms of art proposed by Saunders (1995, p. 88) can be accepted, for the distinction proposed by him would put the direct acquisition from nature, barter and trade within χρηματιστική.

explain the type of social dynamics that would lead to the revolutionary scenario described by him.

If we accept that these opinions became widespread at that moment, it would stand to reason that the unlimited accumulation of money would become the purpose of several political communities, and, therefore, of the bond of friendship that structured them. Such a change in the purpose of the bond of friendship would bring a change in the normative relations that govern this bond and, consequently, in the content of what I have previously called the rights and duties of friendship.[17]

In such a scenario, a minimum property requirement could be thought to be useful for establishing a baseline that would eliminate those who do not have a minimum of wealth from the political community, and to provide an incentive for those who wished to become a part of the political community to become richer and for those who were a part of the community never to allow themselves to fall below it. Thus, oligarchy would be born, first as an ideal, then as a practical purpose, until it eventually established itself as one of the existing regimes, and finally as the prevailing regime.

According to this hypothesis, the rise of oligarchies would be explained, at least in part, by a generalized change in the mentality of the societies in question. This change explains how the base desire for profit came to be so powerful in the process described by Aristotle, insofar as it enshrines the object of this desire as the most legitimate goal for individuals, families and political communities.

It is now time to conclude.

Conclusion

Aristotle's theory of revolutions that are due to factions, as exposed in (Pol. V 2, 1302a16-22), postulates that they were always due to changes that happened in the material cause of these political

[17] See n. 10.

communities. This is in line with the process described in (Pol. III 10, 1286b7-21; IV 10, 1297b16-28; and VI 4, 1321a5-16). According to all these passages the revolutions that happened in this process could be traced to changes in their population and social conditions. But the causes and stages mentioned in them are indeed different.

In (Pol. III 10, 1286b7-21) the main revolutionary forces at work were the growth in the numbers of citizens, a vile desire for profit and the educational process. In (Pol. IV 10, 1297b16-28; and VI 1321a5-16) the growth in numbers is once again mentioned, but this time it is accompanied by the mention of changes in military tactics and technology that resulted in the strengthening of parts of the army, and of the city, that were not as important before.

When taken together, the passages from book III, IV and VI show us five revolutionary forces that could very well complement each other in order to make revolution strongly possible, if not inevitable. Whenever these forces are together at work in a political community, then the current regime is seriously threatened, and even the citizens that are most resistant to change have to consider changing it both to accommodate all those who deserve to govern and to avoid bloodshed.

Although these causes explain the extension of citizenship rights, they are not sufficient to explain why, exactly, the change into oligarchy is taken by Aristotle in all these passages as an intermediary step in the process. But we can craft an explanation for if we make use of what Aristotle tells us in book I about οἰκονομική, the appearance of money, commerce and the social changes they caused. If the vile desire for profit that is mentioned in book III was indeed accompanied by a generalized change in the mentality of the societies in question, a change that would make the accumulation of unlimited wealth the most legitimate goal for individuals, families and political communities, then we can see how the necessary changes in the aim of these political communities and in their criterion of citizenship that would lead to the rise of oligarchies could have happened.

Bibliography

ACCATTINO, P. (ed.) (2013). Aristotele. *La Politica. Libro III*. Testo a cura di Michele Curnis, introduzione, traduzione e commento di Paolo Accattino. Roma: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider.

AUBONNET, J. (1971). Aristote. *Politique : Tome II, Première Partie. LIVRES III-IV*. (Texte établi et traduit). Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

BARKER, E. (1977). *The Politics of Aristotle.* (Translated with an Introduction, Notes and Appendixes). London: Oxford University Press.

CORNFORD, F. M; WICKSTEED, P. H. (eds.) (1957). Aristotle. *The physics: Books I-IV*. London: Harvard University Press.

DAVIS, H. W. C. (ed.) (1908). Aristotle. *Aristotle's Politics*. (With Introduction). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

FORSTER, E.; TREDENNICK, H. (ed.) (1960). Aristotle. *Posterior analytics. Topica*. London: Harvard University Press.

KALIMTZIS, K. (2000). *Aristotle on Political Enmity and Disease: An Inquiry into Stasis*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

ROBINSON, R. (1995). Aristotle. *Politics: Books III and IV*. (Translated with Introduction and Comments. Supplementary Essay by David Keyt). New York: Oxford University Press.

KEYT, D. (1999). Aristotle. *Politics: Books V and VI.* (Translated with a Commentary). New York: Oxford University Press.

LEE, J. W. I. (2006). Warfare in the Classical Age. In: KINZL K. H. (ed.) *A Companion to the Classical Greek World*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, p. 480–508.

MEIKLE, S. (1997). *Aristotle's Economic Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MILLER, F. D. (1997). *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's Politics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

MILLER, F. D. (2013). The Rule of Reason. In: DESLAURIERS, M. (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle's Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 38-66.

NAIDEN, F. S. (2021). The Organization of Greek Armies. In: HECKEL, W. (ed. et al.) *A Companion to Greek Warfare*. Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, p. p. 119–36.

NASCIMENTO, D. S. (2017). On the Normative Consequences of Virtue and Utility Friendships in Aristotle. *Revista Latinoamericana de Filosofia* 43, n. 2, p. 263–284.

NASCIMENTO, D. S. (2018). Aristotle on the Normative Value of Friendship Duties. *Revista Latinoamericana de Filosofia* 44, n. 2, p. 201–224.

NEWMAN, W. L. (1887). *The Politics of Aristotle.* Vol. II. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

NEWMAN, W. L. (1902a). *The Politics of Aristotle*. Vol. III. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

NEWMAN, W. L. (1902b). *The Politics of Aristotle.* Vol. IV. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

PANGLE, T. L. (2013). *Aristotle's Teaching in the Politics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

PELLEGRIN, P. (1990). Naturalité, Excellence, Diversité. In: PATZIG, G. (ed.) *Aristoteles "Politik"*. Akten Des XI Symposium Aristotelicum. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 125-152.

PELLEGRIN, P. (2019). Aristotle on Stasis as a Natural State of Cities. In: RIEDWEG, C. (ed.) *Philosophie Für Die Polis.* Akten Des 5. Kongresses Der Gesellschaft Für Antike Philosophie 2016. Berlin: De Gruyter, p. 235–248.

POLANSKY, R. (1991). Aristotle on Political Change. In: MILLER, F. D.; KEYT, D. (eds.) *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics*. Oxford: Blackwell, p. 323–345.

RACKHAM, H. (ed.) (1932). Aristotle. *Politics*. London: Harvard University Press.

RACKHAM, H. (ed.) (1934). Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

REEVE, C. D. C. (1998). Aristotle. *Politics*. (Translated, with Introduction and Notes). Indianapolis: Hackett.

SAUNDERS, T. J. (1995). Aristotle. *Politics: Books I and II*. (Translated with a Commentary). Oxford: Clarendon Press.

SCHAPS, D. M. (2012). Chrematistike. *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*. ERSKINE, A. (ed. et al.) Disponível em: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah06067 . Acessado em 24/04/2024.

SIMPSON, P. L. P. (1998). *A Philosophical Commentary on the Politics of Aristotle*. London: University of North Carolina Press.

SKULTETY, S. (2009). Delimiting Aristotle's Conception of Stasis in the Politics. *Phronesis* 54, n. 4–5, p. 346–370.

SWANSON, J. A.; CORBIN, C. D. (2009). *Aristotle's Politics: A Reader's Guide*. London: Continuum.

WEED, R. L. (2007). *Aristotle on Stasis: A Moral Psychology of Political Conflict*. Berlin: Logos-Verlag.

WELDON, J. E. C. (ed.) (1912). Aristotle. *The Politics of Aristotle*. (Translated with Analysis and Critical Notes). London: MacMillan and Co.

WENAR, L. (2023). Rights. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward N. Zalta (ed.). Disponível em: http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/rights/. Acessado em 24/04/2024.

Submitted in 07/04/2023 and accepted for publication 05/03/2024
