

## *EVEN FRIENDS CANNOT HAVE ALL THINGS IN COMMON: ARISTOTLE'S CRITIQUE OF PLATO'S REPUBLIC*

### I

References to the *Dialogues*, and critical comments on Plato's views on various themes of theoretical and practical interest, are to be found in all the major works of Aristotle<sup>1</sup>. It was an important part of his method of inquiry to review his predecessors' doctrines on a given subject in order to determine what had been said well and what was in need of improvement<sup>2</sup>. In this respect, the *Politics* is no exception to Aristotle's rule of methodical research<sup>3</sup>. For in it we find dispersed

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1. The list of such works would include the *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Ethics*, *De Anima*, *De Caelo*, *De Generatione et Corruptione*, and the *Politics*. Aristotle's tendency to stress the points on which he differs from Plato can easily mislead one into thinking that the differences between the two philosophers are greater than their similarities; or that Aristotle progressively abandoned his Platonism as W. JAEGER has argued in *Aristotle: The Fundamentals of the History of His Development* (tr. R. Robinson, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934, pp. 3-7, and 259-292); compare, C. LORD, *Education and Culture in the Politics of Aristotle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982, p. 23-28), which is critical of Jaeger and provides the recent bibliogrtaphy on Aristotle's *Politics*. More judicious than Jaeger's claim I find the view of the ancient historians of Philosophy, such as Porphyry, who maintained that Aristotle and Plato belong to the same school of thought in spite of their occasional differences. On this see my *Aristotle's Categories and Porphyry* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1988, p. 5, note 24). H. - G. GADAMER seems to agree with Porphyry; on this see his *The Idea of the Good in Platonic and Aristotelian Philosophy*, P.Ch. Smith, tr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 4.

2. Knowing that the criticism of his teacher could be easily misunderstood as deriving from a spirit of sophistical contention rather than love of the truth about the ideal state, Aristotle took care to reveal his intention clearly, in 1260 b 27-36, as follows: «Our purpose is to consider what form of political community is best of all for those who are most able to realize their ideal of life. We must therefore examine not only this but other constitutions such as actually exist in well-organized states, and any theoretical forms which are held in esteem; that what is good and useful may be brought to light. And let no one suppose that in seeking for something beyond them we are anxious to make a sophistical display at any cost; we only undertake this inquiry because all the constitutions with which we are acquainted are faulty.» (B. Jowett's translation, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, R. McKeon, ed., New York: Random House, 1941). As for the truth, in this and other philosophical matters, Aristotle's view was that: «No one is able to attain the truth adequately, while, on the other hand, we do not collectively fail» (*Metaphysics* 993 a 32-33).

3. I have discussed the question of Aristotle's method and its relation to the medical sciences in





comments on Plato's views, especially the communism which, half seriously and half playfully, was advocated by Socrates in the *Republic* as an effective means to the realization of the ideal city-state<sup>4</sup>.

It is my purpose at the present to examine Aristotle's criticism of the Platonic perfect polity in order to determine the target at which he aimed, his tactics of attacking it, and his reasons for doing it so vehemently. It will become clear from our discussion that Aristotle, much like Popper and unlike Randall, thought that Plato's proposal of political reform deserved serious consideration<sup>5</sup>. Even in his old age Plato continued to consider the communal program, which he had advanced in the *Republic*, as the best organization of the ideal state. This fact clearly indicates the strength of his conviction on this matter. It also provides a context of reading Aristotle's reservations about the desirability and practicality of the Platonic scheme and his counter proposals for political reform<sup>6</sup>.

«Aristotelian Ethics and Medicine», in *Philosophy and the Sciences*, L. Bargeliotes, ed., Athens 1988.

4. References to the *Republic* are to be found in 1261 a 6, 1291 a 11, 1293 b 1, 1316 a 2, 1342 a 32; Aristotle also mentions the *Laws* in 1264 b 27, 1271 b 2, 1274 b 9; and the *Statesman* 1262 b 12.

5. See K. POPPER, *The Open Society and Its Enemies I: The Spell of Plato*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971, especially Chs. 6-9 which are devoted to «Plato's Political Programme;» and J. RANDALL, *Plato: The Dramatist of the Life of Reason*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1970, especially pp. 28-29 and 161-171, where we read comments like this: «To the audience for whom the *Republic* was originally written, it must have been a sustained piece of Plato's dramatic irony, a magnificent defence of the Athenian ideal against the Spartan.» If so, one would be forced to say that either Aristotle was not included in that audience or that he spent twenty years in Academy without learning how to appreciate even Platonic and Socratic irony. The sophisticated scepticism of Professor Randall would not have any difficulty choosing between the two alternatives, since he doubts whether there was an Academy and whether Plato taught anybody anything during his long life! In this respect, Randall's presentation of Plato and his relation to Aristotle is as fictitious and misleading as G. VLASTOS' presentation of Socrates and his relation to Plato in his *Socrates: Ironist and moral Philosopher* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992; and my review of the book in *Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* I (1992): 133-141.

6. The *Laws* are devised for the «second best» state where the rule of law will substitute for the rule of the enlightened philosopher. In what follows, I will concentrate on Aristotle's critique of the *Republic* and the communal organization of the life of the guardians as advocated by the Platonic Socrates. I will leave for another occasion his criticism of the *Laws*, as well as his dependence on that work for his version of the perfected city through education, as developed in Books VII and VIII of the *Politics*. Note also that Aristotle, in his criticism of Plato, does not seem puzzled at all by the question of how to read and interpret a Platonic *Dialogue*. The importance which contemporary scholarship attaches to this hermeneutical question, is illustrated by the contributions to *Platonic Writings and Platonic Readings*, Ch. Griswold, ed., New York: Routledge, 1981.



## II

At the beginning of Book Two Aristotle claims that it would be useful to consider both the existing states which are well governed and those theories about the ideal state which are highly esteemed, in order to determine which is the best state either absolutely, under ideal conditions, or relatively to most peoples, times, places, and ordinary conditions<sup>7</sup>. Such a claim provided him with the opportunity to launch a critique of Plato's provocative proposal as regards the guardians of the *Republic*; that is, the abolition of private property; and the abolition of private family life including women, children, and servants who were to be held in common. It would seem that what provoked Aristotle to undertake a thorough critique of the central proposal of the *Republic* was related to the limits of unity considered as a defining characteristic of the state as well as its basic component, the household. He thought that Plato's criterion of excessive unification must be limited by the more important criterion of self-sufficiency which, for his genetic conception of the state, is the measure delimiting what is best for both the city and its citizens<sup>8</sup>.

Specifically, according to Aristotle, members of a city-state have three options regarding community and sharing of the goods: They may have in common (1) all things, (2) nothing at all, or (3) only some things but not others<sup>9</sup>. Having nothing in common goes against the essence of state as Aristotle understood it and, therefore, the second option is not really an option, for the citizens must have in common at least the place where they live if there is going to be a city-state at all. So we are left with two alternatives: The citizens of a city may have all things in common or only certain things in common and some other things separately. Which is the better option was the question on which Plato's radicalism and Aristotle's traditionalism diverged. Aristotle considered the former as Plato's position

7. In order to show that there is still room for improving upon the proposed ideals, which he would try to fill in Books VII and VIII, understandably, in Book II, Aristotle focuses on the theories about the best state and the presumed best of the existing states, all of which he found faulty in many ways: «We only undertake this inquiry because all the constitutions with which we are acquainted are faulty.» (1260 b 35-36).

8. «When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence... For what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature, whether we are speaking of a man, a horse, or a family. Besides, the final cause and end of a thing is the best, and to be self-sufficing is the end and the best» (1252 b 27-35).

9. In *Republic* 453 a 1-5, Plato raises the same three possibilities regarding the common traits of the male and the female natures: «Πότερον δυνατή φύσις ἀνθρωπίνη ἢ θήλεια τῇ τοῦ ἄρρενος γένους κοινωνῆσαι εἰς ἅπαντα τὰ ἔργα ἢ οὐδ' εἰς ἓν, ἢ εἰς τὰ μὲν οἷα τε, εἰς δὲ τὰ οὐ, καὶ τοῦτο δὴ τὸ περὶ τὸν πόλεμον ποτέρων ἐστίν;»





as expressed in the *Republic*<sup>10</sup>, and was determined to attack it on behalf of common sense as well as what was a common practice at that time: «But should a well-ordered state have all things, as far as may be, in common, or some only and not others? For the citizens might conceivably have wives and children and property in common, as Socrates proposes in the *Republic* of Plato. Which is better, our present condition, or the proposed new order of society? »<sup>11</sup>.

Stripped from its dramatic embellishments, its irrelevant digressions, and its rhetorical devices, the *Republic*<sup>12</sup>, the ideally perfect πόλις built by Socrates and Glaucon in words, appears to Aristotle to be faulty in its odd *status quo*, that is, as a close-knit community of friends who would put into practice the maxim, «Friends have all things in common»<sup>13</sup>. Accordingly, Aristotle's critique falls into three parts. He criticizes the Platonic Socrates for failing to take into consideration all necessary and sufficient elements of the state so that his utopia would not be incomplete in the sense that it has room only for farmers, weavers, shoemakers,

10. This is not true without qualifications. The communal stipulations were intended only for the guardians of the Platonic polity, which is a comparatively small segment of the population.

11. *Politics* 1261 a 2-7. For Plato's proposals for community of property, women, and children, see Books IV and V of the *Republic*, especially 423 a - 462 b. Plato's call for a «new ordering of society» was destined to appeal to all sorts of reformers, revolutionaries, and visionary philosophers of the left and of the right, regardless of whether they agreed or not with the specific Socratic proposals of restructuring of the city-state in search of the perfect political regime in which even philosophers might feel at home. But, unlike the Platonic Socrates, these modern imitators forget that one has to reform himself first from within (τὴν ἐν ἑαυτῷ πολιτείαν, *Republic* 591 e), before he can reasonably claim the right to reform other people, the state, and the society as a whole.

12. It is a characteristic of Aristotle's penetrating mind that he can summarize in less than ten sentences that which took Plato ten books, and has taken other scholars multiple volumes, to convey: «In the *Republic*, Socrates has definitely settled in all a few questions only; such as the community of women and children, the community of property, and the community of the state. The population is divided into two classes - one of husbandmen, and the other of warriors; from this latter is taken a third class of counselors and rulers of the state. But Socrates has not determined whether the husbandmen and the artisans are to have a share in the government, and whether they, too, are to carry arms and share in military service, or not. He certainly thinks that the women ought to share in the education of the guardians, and to fight by their foreign to the main subject, and with discussions about the education of the guardians» (1264 b 29-41).

13. In *Republic* 424 a 1-2, this is presented as a proverb: Δεῖ ταῦτα κατὰ τὴν παροιμίαν πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα κοινὰ τὰ φίλων ποιεῖσθαι. Although Socrates repeatedly reminded his interlocutors, Adeimandus and Glaucon, of the wisdom of this saying and its importance for the erection of the perfect city, Aristotle seems to doubt its power to transform human nature so radically as Socrates would like to believe, or he thinks that he can achieve the same good end by other and more humane means, such as virtue and the Aristotelian principle that recommends «common use of privately owned property» (1263 a 30). Hence his criticism of the proposal.





and builders<sup>14</sup>. He also finds fault with the fictionalized scheme of change by which the Platonic Socrates gets from the philosophical aristocracy of the perfect city to the city ruled by heinous tyranny by way of such progressively degenerated forms of government as timocracy, plutocracy, and democracy<sup>15</sup>. Above all, Aristotle objects to Plato's proposal for radical political reform regarding the guardians' communal life. It is this part of his critique which deserves special attention and will concern us in what follows, since it articulates some serious political differences between the two philosophers regarding the means towards the common goal, the best possible life of man in the best organized city<sup>16</sup>.

### III

In order for the guardians to be able to dedicate their lives to the service and protection of the city from internal disorders and external attacks, the Platonic Socrates proposed that they be freed from the cares and concerns of ordinary domestic living. They were to be carefully selected, thoroughly educated, and their lives completely regulated by philosophical reason from birth to death both individually and collectively. The privilege of being a member of the ruling group in that ideal republic would have to be purchased at the price of sacrificing, at the altar of the common good, the common pleasures of family life and the possession of private property for the common good. More importantly, since the guardians would monopolize the use of weapons and the means of military power, according to Socrates' proposal, they were to keep their hands clean from using gold and silver<sup>17</sup>. They would be the key factor to securing the unity of the city, if and only if

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14. Evidently this remark refers to the so-called «first ideal city», which was characterized by absence of war and luxurious living, and which seemed to Socrates' shocked friends as being fitting for pigs rather than human beings (*Republic* 369 a - 327 b).

15. *Republic* Books VII and IX.

16. On this goal and on the emphasis which they place on παιδεία and ἀρετή, the two philosophers were in agreement as noted above.

17. Part of their education was aiming at instilling in the guardians the belief that their souls were made of divine metals, so that they should not be tempted by golden and silver coins. The Platonic Socrates correctly insists on this point because it is the heart of the matter. His critics, ancient and modern, seem to miss this important point: «Gold and silver, we will tell them, they have of the divine quality from the gods always in their souls, and they have no need of the metal of men, nor does holiness suffer them to mingle and contaminate that heavenly possession with the acquisition of mortal gold, since many impious deed have been done about the coin of the multitude, while that which dwells within them is unsullied» (*Republic* 416 e - 417 a). If any one wishes to reform the education or the political system of a state in hope of improving them, he/she would do well to heed Socrates' teaching.





they were so trained as to perceive their political function as a higher mission to serve the ends of the state virtuously, and to abstain from the attractions of material goods and bodily pleasures<sup>18</sup>. In other words, they would be a new type of man transformed by proper education and dedicated to the service of the city for the sake of the common good. Their disciplined and ascetic way of life would not be envied by the common folks who would enjoy private property, family life and profit-seeking lawfully<sup>19</sup>.

At least that was Socrates' dream as he revealed in the *Republic*. In Aristotle's judgment, behind the Socratic proposal of total communal life for the guardians lies the desire to secure «the greatest possible unity of the whole city» (1261a 15), by shaping it on the model of a well-ordered and enlarged family. However, Aristotle considers questionable both the desirability and the practicality of Plato's proposal, that is, the assumption that the supreme good of the state is to be identified with its perfect unity and the means by which he proposed to achieve it. Given his conception of the nature of the city-state as an aggregation of villages which, in turn, are aggregates of households made up of individuals having specific functions as husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, Aristotle was able to argue that unity naturally decreases as one moves from the concrete individual to family, to village, and finally to the city-state as a whole, while the self-sufficiency increases proportionally.

In this light, Socrates' desire to built a city with «the greatest possible unity» appears to Aristotle as contrary to the nature of the state which would be destroyed by too much unity (1261 b 9). As Aristotle saw it, the largeness of the city-state in conjunction with the fact that its composition includes a variety of distinct elements (i.e. farmers and artisans, traders and merchants, soldiers and rulers, teachers and priests), seems to determine it specifically and to differentiate it from both the tribe and the military alliance the members of which differ only numerically (1261 a 22-24). In addition to this, consideration of the feature of self-sufficiency, which is much greater in the state than in the household or the individual, leads Aristotle to conclude that the Platonic policy of unifying the city-state in excess must be faulty by definition (1261 b 10).

18. Socrates' point here is that political power and wealth should not be in the same hands, of there is to be stability in the state. The wisdom of this insight can cure many civil evils even today.

19. We should keep in mind that the Socratic recommendations for community of women, children, meals and houses, are intended only for the guardians of the state who are a minority. The majority would continue to enjoy all the pleasures of private property, private homes, meals, wives, and children. Sacrifice of these goods is a necessary condition for rising in the state hierarchy, while desire of these pleasures would be sufficient reason for demotion of guardians who had not absorbed the Socratic lesson of virtue.





In fairness to Aristotle, we have to admit that he does not say that a state should aim at the exact opposite of Plato's ideal, that is, to as little political unity as possible. Rather, he seems to be concerned with what he thought was Plato's excessive emphasis on unity and order at the expense of freedom and diversity. When he says that Plato's ideal aimed at moulding the whole city-state into one, just like Aristophanes' portrayal of the pathetic lovers in the *Symposium*, the stress falls on the words «one» and «whole»<sup>20</sup>. But this stress would seem to be unfair to Plato who distinguished the producers and craftsmen from the auxiliaries and guardians of the city. His ideal of perfect unity, with its communal meals and other means by which Plato sought to bring it about, referred only to the latter.

Furthermore, Aristotle correctly implies that, in their collective use, the words «all» and «mine» lose the intensity of feeling which is associated with them in their proper and individualistic usage. For, he says, «Just as a little sweet wine, mixed with a great deal of water, produces a tasteless mixture, so family feeling is diluted and tasteless when family names have so little meaning as they have in a constitution of the Platonic order» (1262 b 17-20). He also speaks of «watery friendship» and concludes with the famous aphorism: «It would be better to be a cousin in the ordinary sense than a son after the Platonic fashion» (1262 a 13-14). Comments like these sound reasonable because they express a common sense view of familial feelings and attitudes, but as criticism of Plato's proposal for radical political reform by means of transforming human nature through philosophical education, seem to miss the point<sup>21</sup>.

The Platonic Socrates' reply to this criticism would be that to apply to carefully selected and properly trained guardians of the ideal city the feelings, concerns and prejudices of ordinary people is not entirely fair. For they were supposed to be, both by conception and education, a new type of man who would have passed the strict test of rising above the sentimentality of the common folks in order to make it to the top of the hierarchy and to rule in accordance with reason and virtue. What Aristotle says about the feelings of attachment to persons and objects, as being depending on subjective feelings and property relations, may apply very well to the Athenian or the European bourgeois. But, under ideal

20. *Symposium* 191 a - 192 b. The hint is Aristotle's, 1262 b 12, and indicates that he had a greater sense of humor than a reading of his logical treatises in the *Organon* might falsely suggest.

21. I think that Aristotle's assumption that even in the Platonic city only the «form», or structure, would be different, while the «material», the human element, would remain the same, is the root of much of his dialectical criticism of Plato. It would seem that Plato, notwithstanding his Sicilian adventure, placed a greater trust than Aristotle in the power of παιδεία to shape the soul of man to divine perfection. Although the history of two and a half millennia has proven that Aristotle was right, ideally our hearts side with Plato in hope that some day his dream may come out true.



conditions, it would be inapplicable to men like the guardians of the Platonic polity who, owing to their excellent training, were to turn out ascetic athletes of virtue.

Another difficulty in the proposal of having the wives in common would be the inability to conceal the identity of children in light of the fact that, in Aristotle's view, many females in the animal kingdom, like the notorious Pharsalean mare of the legend, tend to produce offspring extremely similar to their sires. As a matter of fact there are some African tribes where the women are held in common but, «the children born of such unions can still be distinguished by their resemblance to their fathers» (1262 a 20-21)<sup>22</sup>. The same criticism would hold with regard to transference of children from one rank to the other and the potential danger of quarrels among the persons involved<sup>23</sup>. Aristotle's argument incorrectly assumes that the Platonic guardians would feel, think, and behave just like ordinary people of the petty bourgeois type, which cannot be the case if it be granted that education has some power to mould the human soul and his program of education were to have a chance<sup>24</sup>.

Aristotle is also concerned about such crimes as assault, homicide, slander, etc., which, he thinks, are more offensive to human sensibilities when they are perpetrated against close relatives and demand special purificatory rites. He argues as follows: «Such offenses must happen more frequently when men are ignorant of their relatives than when they know who they are; and when they do happen, the customary penance can be made if men know their relatives, but none can be made if men are ignorant of them» (1262 a 30-32). This is typical of Aristotle's tactics in criticizing Plato's proposal. He assumes that nothing would have changed in the Platonic Republic and that men will go on living and sinning as usual<sup>25</sup>.

22. This is an interesting comment indicative of Aristotle's polymathy and concern with Africa which was called Libya by him and the Greeks. He certainly knew much about Carthage and its form of governments which he praised together with the Spartan and the Cretan as the best actual constitutions: «justly famous» (1273 b 27). He also showed great respect for Egypt, its science and its ancient civilization (1286 a 13, 1329 a 40 - b 35); see my «Ancient Hellenic Philosophy and the African Connection», *Skepsis* IV (1994): 14-76.

23. Socrates knew that, unless the guardians of the city were well educated in the necessary virtues which would allow them (a) to drop from their ranks those whose soul had lost the quality of gold, and (b) to raise up from the lower rank those whose soul had shown signs of divine quality, the perfect city would not last.

24. Books VI and VII of the *Politics*, which are dedicated to the education in his version of the best state, indicate that Aristotle himself had hanged great hope from the peg of *paideia*, even if his was not as great as Socrates' trust. On this see also, C. LORD, *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982.

25. In this regard, Socrates' arrangements become utterly absurd. But when Adeimandus,





#### IV

With regard to the abolition of private property, Aristotle has many objections to Plato's proposal of complete communism. He makes a distinction between ownership and use of property, each of which can be either common or private. Thus the following threefold scheme is obtained:

1. Common ownership and common use;
2. Common ownership and private use;
3. Private ownership and common use<sup>26</sup>.

Of the three alternatives, Aristotle focuses his discussion on the first and third options. He considers the one, that is, common ownership and common use, as the Platonic view, but he declares that private ownership and common use, as had been practiced in some Greek city - states, is preferable<sup>27</sup>. In view of the strict prescriptions of the *Republic* (416 d - 417 b), it is difficult to see the guardians of the Platonic city as owners of anything else other than their virtue and the will to serve the common good. At any rate, Aristotle argues vigorously against the community of property and in support of the private property, provided that it be «adorned by custom and the enactment of proper laws», so that it would combine the merits of both systems and ensure the common use of the private property: «Property should be in a certain sense common, but, as a general rule, private; for, when every one has a distinct interest, men will not complain of one another, and they will make more progress, because every one will be attending to his own business. And by reason of goodness, and in respect of use, «Friends», as the proverb says, «will have all things in common» (1263 a 25-30)<sup>28</sup>.

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*Republic* 420 b, complained that the strict requirements left little happiness to the guardians of the city, Socrates' response was : «We wouldn't be surprised if leading that kind of life made them the happiest of men. Even though our object in founding the city wasn't the exceptional happiness of any one class, but the greatest possible happiness for the whole city.»

26. The fourth alternative «private ownership and private use» is excluded from consideration on the basis that some kind of sharing of the land is a prerequisite for the existence of any state.

27. Aristotle's defense of private property has recently attracted renewed attention, which perhaps, is related to the collapse of the Soviet style socialism, although it has its own disinterested appeal. On this see, R. MAYHEW, «Aristotle on Property», *Review of Metaphysics* XLVI, No. 4 (1993): 803-831; F.D. MILLER, Aristotle on Property Rights», in *Aristotle's Ethics*, J. Anton and A. Preus, ed., Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1991, pp. 227-247; and T. IRWIN, «Aristotle's Defense of Private Property», in *A Companion to Aristotle's Politics*, D. Keyt and F. Miller, ed., Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1990; and by same author, «Generosity and Property in Aristotle's *Politics*», in *Beneficence, Philanthropy and the Common Good*, E. Paul et al., ed., Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1987, pp. 51-51.

28. Aristotle's love of the golden mean is evident here as it is in his ethics, for which see my «A Paradox in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: The Mean which is an Extreme», *Mind and Nature* IV (1979): 8-17.





Aristotle's first argument in defense of private property is not on pragmatic, as one might have expected, but on ethical grounds. It is not based on efficiency and higher productivity but on the intensity of pleasure which the ownership of private property generates and the opportunity of virtuous activity which it affords. Aristotle clearly states that «to think of a thing as your own makes an inexpressible difference» and that «a great pleasure is to be found in doing a kindness and giving some help to friends, or guests, or comrades» (1263 b 5-7). But Plato's Socrates, even if he agreed with Aristotle's evaluations, could and would have probably retorted that to think of the whole city as your own is certainly a source of much greater pleasure than to think of a piece of dry Greek land and a pair of old mules.

Accordingly, it is curious to claim, as Aristotle does, that the virtuous activity of liberality would be thwarted among people who are not landowners, as if virtue were to be measured quantitatively rather than qualitatively. It is equally absurd to claim, as Aristotle does (1263 b 10-14), that community of women would entail the sacrifice of the virtue of temperance by rendering adultery impossible, as if the Platonic city would not be full of temptations for the guardians. Being athletic, handsome, and stalwart, the guardians would have to guard themselves from the lascivious advances of the producer ladies who would have every reason to attract their attention<sup>29</sup>.

There are passages in Aristotle's criticism which clearly acknowledge the seductiveness of Plato's proposal. Consider: «All the writings of Plato are original: they show ingenuity, novelty of view, and a spirit of inquiry. But perfection in everything is perhaps a difficult thing» (1265 a 10-13)<sup>30</sup>. Aristotle also disagrees with Plato's view that the source of all social evils is ἀκοινωνησία (absence of communism); he considers μοχθηρία (wickedness) as a more probable cause (1263 b 15-25). Even if we are inclined to side with Aristotle here, we must not forget that Plato was well aware of the deficiencies of human nature and, for that reason, he placed all his hopes on life-long education in music, gymnastics, mathematics, and philosophy<sup>31</sup>.

In this light Aristotle's surprise as expressed in the following passage would have certainly surprised Socrates: «It is therefore surprising that one who intends

29. But Aristotle is correct in saying that the Platonic Socrates said too little about the other classes of the *Republic* and their relationship to guardians (1264 a 30-33).

30. Again, «Such legislation may have a specious appearance of benevolence...» (1263 b 15-16). But Aristotle wanted to suggest that, when the question is about ideals, there will always be room for improvement, which is the point of his critique of the Platonic ideal πολιτεία.

31. That is to say, the Socratically ὀρθή παιδεία (423 e).



to introduce a system of education, and who believes that his ideal will achieve goodness by means of this system, should none the less think that he is setting it on the right track by such methods as he actually proposes, rather than by the method of social customs, of mental culture, and of legislation» (1263 b 36-40). This line of criticism clearly indicates the contrast between Aristotelian realism and Platonic idealism even at the level of practical politics which perhaps had other and deeper roots<sup>32</sup>.

Another telling Aristotelian criticism is that, in spite of his talk of unification, by sharply dividing the rulers from the ruled, Socrates makes two out of one city-state «the guardians being made into something of the nature of an army of occupation, and the farmers, artisans, and others being given the position of ordinary civilians» (1264 a 25-27). This situation and the fact that Plato's farmers control their holdings will make them insubordinate, in Aristotle's view, especially at the time when the quota of their produce would have to be turned over to the guardians for their consumption. To amend such a Platonic shortcoming, Aristotle proposed in his ideal state that farmers and artisans should not be counted among the citizens<sup>33</sup>.

Aristotle also charges, rather unfairly, that in Plato's polity the politically correct principle «to rule and being ruled in turn» has been abolished. This is only partly true. For one thing the young guardians are ruled at first, and then they themselves rule, if and only if they were able to pass the strict tests of ethical and intellectual excellence successfully. It is true that farmers and artisans have no share in government. But it is doubtful whether they would wish to rule in a city-state which provides for the rulers neither pay nor pleasure<sup>34</sup>.

A last comment of Aristotle's must be mentioned before we close because it is indicative of his political pragmatism. Believing that «almost all good things have been discovered» and pointing at Plato's innovations as historically ungauranteed he states that «We are bound to pay some regard to the long past and the passage of the years, in which these things would not have gone unnoticed if they had been really good» (1264 a 1-3). Perhaps Aristotle was wrong in assuming that,

32. This might be the outcome of the metaphysical disagreement of the philosophers regarding the ontological status of the εἶδη, as Aristotle discussed them in the First Book of *Metaphysics*.

34. Their only compensation for the service to the state regarding its external and internal security, is to receive their modest rations of food and drink, not in money but in kind. For: «Their food, in such quantities as are needful for athletes of war sober and brave, they must receive as an agreed stipend from the other citizens as the wages of their guardianship, so measured that there should be neither superfluity at the end of the year nor any lack» (416 e). One may wonder how many of our rulers would wish to rule under the Socratic specifications which were tougher than Spartan.





politically speaking, all good things had already been discovered in the past, especially at the moment when his pupil Alexander was attempting something very new, that is, the fusion of the Greeks and the Persians in a grand cosmopolis which was to overshadow the old city-states<sup>35</sup>.

However, Plato would have probably agreed with Aristotle's assertion in which case he would have to argue that his proposal of total communism was not an innovation, for it had been in practice in the very distant past not only among primitive African peoples but also among the Athenians and the Atlantians. I would like to suggest that some passages in the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* would make better sense if they were to be read from this perspective; that is, as Plato's attempt to «prove» that the Ideal State, just as Socrates and Glaucon had dreamed of it in the *Republic*, with its abolition of family life and private property, had its roots in the Attic soil and the sanctity of Athens' distant but glorious past<sup>36</sup>.

In conclusion it is evident from the preceding analysis and critical discussion that Aristotle considered as the core of Plato's ideal polity the proposal of communism in its double form, community of women and children and community of property for the guardians who, thus, would be able to provide the means to achieving the perfect unification of the state. Aristotle objected to these innovations and came out as a defender of common sense and common Greek political practice. His arguments were intended to show not only the impracticability of Plato's proposals and their incompatibility with common Greek practices but also their undesirability. He believed that, human nature being what it is, a political reform would have a better chance if it does not aim at realizing heaven on earth but at a political «golden mean» by minimizing the existing evils<sup>37</sup>.

It is perhaps indicative of Aristotle's common sense approach to the political problems of his time that he decided to follow the *Laws* in drawing his own ideal state which was designed to fit most people at most times under more or less normal conditions. In so doing Aristotle was to become the champion of constitutionalism. But neither his nor Popper's criticism of the *Republic* has diminished its appeal as an ideal designed to serve as a source of inspiration for aspiring edu-

35. As a result of these profound changes a new era was born bearing the name Hellenistic as opposed to Hellenic. Aristotle had many talents but political foresight was not one of them.

36. Especially *Timaeus* 20 e - 27 b. One is tempted to speculate that perhaps the critical discussion which the *Republic* received in the Academy, with Aristotle in the role of the protagonist, prompted Plato to moderate his politically radical views in the *Laws* which Aristotle followed prudently when he wrote his version of the best polity in Books VII and VIII of the *Politics*.

37. In this respect, Aristotle anticipated much of the criticism, if not the pathos, of K. Popper and his desire for measured and «piecemeal» political reform.





cators and legislators who refuse to be satisfied in playing the role of the expert practitioners of the art of the probable and the practicable<sup>38</sup>.

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ΚΟΙΝΑ ΤΑ ΤΩΝ ΦΙΛΩΝ:  
ΑΡΙΣΤΟΤΕΛΙΚΗ ΚΡΙΤΙΚΗ ΤΗΣ ΠΛΑΤΩΝΙΚΗΣ ΠΟΛΙΤΕΙΑΣ

Περίληψη

Ὡς εἶναι γνωστό, ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης ἔχει ἀσκήσει κριτική κατὰ πολλῶν πλατωνικῶν θεωριῶν συμπεριλαμβανομένης καὶ τῆς θεωρίας περὶ ἀρίστης πολιτείας. Σκοπὸς τῆς παρούσης μελέτης εἶναι νὰ ἐξετάσει τὴν ἀριστοτελική κριτική κατὰ τῆς πολιτικῆς θεωρίας τοῦ Πλάτωνος, ὅπως αὐτὴ ἐκτίθεται στὸ δεύτερο βιβλίο τῶν *Πολιτικῶν*. Συγκεκριμένα θὰ ἐπιχειρήσουμε νὰ καθορίσουμε ἐκεῖνα τὰ σημεῖα τῆς πλατωνικῆς ἰδεατῆς πολιτείας μὲ τὰ ὁποῖα φαίνεται νὰ διαφωνεῖ ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης, καὶ ὁ ἐλληνικὸς πρακτικὸς κοινὸς νοῦς, καὶ τὸν τρόπο μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο ὁ τολμηρὸς μαθητὴς ἐπεδίωξε νὰ βελτιώσει τὴν θεωρία τοῦ διδασκάλου.

Ἀπὸ τὴν σύντομη κριτικὴ ἀνάλυσή μας θὰ γίνει καταφανὲς ὅτι οἱ συντηρητικὲς ἐπιφυλάξεις τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους σχετικὰ μὲ τὶς καινὲς πλατωνικὲς προτάσεις περὶ κοινότητος οὔσιων, γυναικῶν καὶ παίδων, ἔχουν δικαιωθῇ ἱστορικά, ὅπως κατέδειξε πρόσφατα καὶ ἡ κατάρρευσις τοῦ ρωσσικοῦ κοινωνισμοῦ. Ἐπιπροσθέτως, οἱ προτιμήσεις του ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὴν ἰδιοκτησία, τὶς μονογαμικὲς σχέσεις, καὶ τὴν μεσότητα καθιστοῦν φανερό ὅτι ὁ Σταγίριτης ἦτο περισσότερο προσγειωμένος ἀπὸ τὸν Πλάτωνα πολιτικά, καὶ περισσότερο προσηλωμένος στὴν κοινὴ πολιτικὴ πρακτικὴ τῶν ἐλευθέρων ἐλληνικῶν πόλεων τοῦ καιροῦ του.

Χρῆστος ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΥ

38. A longer version of this paper will be published in *Aristotle's Political Philosophy* to be edited by K. Boudouris.

