

For Friends, All Is Shared

Friendship and Politics in Ancient
Greek Political Thought

Edited by

Jakub Jinek and Veronika Konrádová

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PREFACE

It is not surprising that, over the last few decades, philosophers manifest an increasing interest both in the topic of friendship and in its political role. This development seems to well agree with some more general trends in contemporary political thinking and practice. In a period that started with the deconstruction of the bipolar world order, accomplished by two leaders who subsequently confessed to be personal friends, in a period that has experienced an increasing scepticism towards modern state institutions, followed by the rise of pluralism, yet on the other hand has invited profound sympathy for the emotional aspects of politics, interpersonal ties in communities, personal identities, and so forth, it has been felt as desirable and necessary to re-establish the concept of friendship, neglected throughout the modern era, and ascribe it a crucial role in the political analysis. Moreover, since friendship lies at the core of Greek and Roman political thought, the classical conceptions of ancient Greek authors have been recently evoked with the purpose to improve our own thinking. In any recent publication addressing some of the problems indicated above, reference to the theories of Plato and Aristotle seems to be almost obligatory.

However, as classicists are well aware, the ancient concept of *philia* is much broader than our modern concept of friendship, understood as a personal emotional relationship. The ties and obligations implied by *philia* outreach by far the feelings that Mikhail Gorbachev might have felt to George Bush while meeting on board of the cruise ship Maxim Gorkiy. The specific consequences of the relationship of being “political friends” could be quite astonishing to us. In order to better understand consequences and the role friendship was supposed to play in the ancient Greek *polis*, the proverb *koina ta tôn philōn*, “things of friends are in common”, is telling. It embraces the idea that

guardians in the *Republic*. There he claims common possession explicitly only of women and children, however, this claim in the *Republic* is mere lip service, since the goods to be shared are spread so wide and thin that it is only a small additional step when Plato himself insists that no one individually shares the company of any woman. Common “ownership” of women and children does not entail an individual share in the “property” commonly owned.

Aristotle does not regard the prohibition of private possession as gain, neither for the individual nor the *polis*. He restores private possession since he believes that the act of sharing with others requires possessing the thing to be shared, and by restoring private property he restores the emotion of pleasure to its citizens. The right use of possessions — use is a category he introduces into this debate — is guaranteed by character education. Instead of having to obey a ban of property as the guardians in Plato’s *Republic* have to, the citizens in Aristotle’s best state are given the responsibility for their own actions, in accordance with their values. Instead of being inmates of military institutions living almost like soldiers on a campaign⁷⁸ with limited access to culture — the literature the guardians in Plato’s *Republic* read or listen to has been censured and the music they listen to has been deprived of all variety in tunes, melody, rhythm so that the means of musical expression that are left foster their military qualities as if they did not have another, we would say: softer side in their natures — instead of being subjected to these restrictions, the citizens of Aristotle’s best state have been given back what he considers natural,⁷⁹ we would call it human dignity.⁸⁰ His approach combines the recognition of the individual’s personal needs with those of the community. The citizens will not look the other way when some of them would starve since “no citizen should lack food”.⁸¹ This is not a bad state to live in, neither as a well-to-do citizen hoplite nor as a less well-off member of the community.

⁷⁸ Plato, *Resp.* III, 416c4.

⁷⁹ See above p. 144.

⁸⁰ See E. Schürumpf, *Erziehung durch den Staat. Beschränkung und Befreiung der Individualität in Aristoteles’ bestem Staat*, pp. 239–254.

⁸¹ Aristotle, *Pol.* VII, 10, 1330a2: οὐτ’ ἀποπέτην οὐδένα τῶν πολιτῶν πρῶφις.

IX

ARISTOTLE’S CRITICISM OF PLATO’S
“COMMUNIST IDEALS”

Aristotle’s Critics and the Issue of the City’s
Appropriate Degree of Unity

Manuel Knoll

1. Aristotle as a Critic of his Predecessors

Aristotle was only seventeen when he joined Plato. He remained the student of the Athenian for 20 years. It must have been shortly before Plato’s death, when Aristotle left the Academy.¹ According to Diogenes Laertius, Plato commented on his departure: “Aristotle spurns me, as colts kick out at the mother who bore them” (*Vitae*, V.2).² We are not able to verify whether this comment is authentic. However, we have good reasons to believe that Plato might have said or thought something similar because Aristotle’s later writings are full of criticisms of the philosophy of his former teacher.

In Book II of the *Politics*, Aristotle investigates both good constitutions that existed at his time — the Lakedaemonian, Cretan and Carthaginian form — and good constitutions outlined by political philosophers. In the first part of the Book, Aristotle criticizes Plato’s two main political dialogues. In chapters 2 through 5, he attacks the

¹ Aristotle was born in 384 B.C. He became Plato’s student in 367 B.C. According to our sources, Plato died approx. 347 B.C. (Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae*, III.2; V.9).

² Transl. R. D. Hicks (*Diogenes Laertius. Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, I, pp. 445–446).

constitution of Plato's *Politeia*, and in chapter 6, he criticizes the constitution of the *Nomoi*. In chapters 2 through 5, Aristotle argues mainly against Plato's "communist ideals" that call for a community of women, children and property to be provided for the warriors and philosophers (*Resp.* V.457b-466d) and against the main objective linked to these ideals: the highest possible degree of unity of the city (*polis*). In this critique, Aristotle never talks about Plato, but only mentions Socrates and what he proposes. However, at the beginning and at the end of Book II Aristotle explicitly states that the idea of having women, children and property in common is peculiar to Plato (*Pol.* II, I, 1261a6, 12, 1274b9-11).³

In the literature, Aristotle's criticisms have often come under attack. Julia Annas characterizes Aristotle's critique of "Plato's political theory" (*Pol.* II, I-6) as "often surprisingly crass and literal-minded, much below Aristotle's best".⁴ Seth Benardete concludes: "Aristotle's objections to the communism of women and children are so obvious that it is hardly necessary to prove that Socrates was as aware of them (Aristotle *Politics* 1261a10-1262b35)."⁵ E. Bornemann, who in 1923 undertook a comprehensive investigation of Aristotle's judgment of Plato's political theory, claims that Aristotle completely misunderstood Plato.⁶ The list of critics of Aristotle's critique of Plato's political philosophy is long and substantial.⁷

³ These statements are evidence for the prevailing view that Plato uses Socrates as "mouthpiece" in order to present his own philosophy in the *Politeia* or at least in Books II-X of the work.

⁴ J. Annas, *An Introduction to Plato's Republic*, p. 188.

⁵ S. Benardete, *Socrates' Second Sailing: On Plato's Republic*, p. 117.

⁶ Bornemann admits that his treatise turned out to be an "Art Anklage gegen Aristoteles" (E. Bornemann, *Aristoteles' Urteil über Platons politische Theorie*, p. 73).

⁷ For more literature see R. Mayhew, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic*, pp. 1-2, 8. Mayhew summarizes the criticism of Aristotle's critique of Plato: "He is often brief, obscure, and incomplete. This is perhaps the strongest criticism that can be leveled against *Pol.* II 1-5" (*ibid.*, p. 2). For 19th century literature see E. Bornemann, *Aristoteles' Urteil über Platons politische Theorie*. According to Bornemann, in assessing Aristotle's critique only Wilamowitz-Moellendorf deserves a "special status" (*Sonderstellung*) because only he repeatedly and firmly supports Plato against Ar-

In the first volume of his *History of Political Thought*, Henning Ottmann remarks about the critics of Aristotle's critique of Plato's political philosophy: "Such criticism of the critique is insofar understandable as Aristotle does not take up many central topics of the *Politeia*. Neither the teachings of the rule of the philosophers nor on justice are addressed. The critique of the *Nomoi* passes by almost all important teachings of the late work."⁸ One of the main critiques of Aristotle's criticisms is that they are incomplete and neglect the most important topics. Why does Aristotle not mention or deal with Plato's theory of justice, the main topic of the *Politeia*, or Plato's claim that philosophical theory is necessary for good practical politics? A similar criticism of Aristotle has been pronounced by R. F. Stalley: "He says nothing about such important matters as the education of the guardians and the requirement that philosophers should rule. The picture he offers of the *Republic* is thus incomplete and misleading."⁹ Though Stalley tries to defend Aristotle against his critics, he is convinced that Aristotle does not offer "a full and fair assessment of the *Republic* as a whole".¹⁰ One explanation Stalley offers for the seeming incompleteness of Aristotle's critique is highly speculative. For him, Book II of the *Politics* "does not look like a finished work. If what we have is, in effect, a set of notes, it is not surprising that they should appear incomplete and unbalanced".¹¹

It is possible to give a satisfactory reply to the widespread criticism that crucial topics are missing in Aristotle's treatment of Plato's *Republic* in *Pol.* II, 2-5, without having to resort to speculation. Such is the objective of the second section of this article. In brief, the reply is quite simple: The chapters in Book II of the *Politics* are not

Aristotle's attacks (*ibid.*, p. 72; U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Griechisches Lesebuch*, I, p. 113; U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Platon. Leben und Werke*, I, pp. 578, 647-648).

⁸ H. Ottmann, *Geschichte des politischen Denkens. Die Griechen. Von Platon bis zum Hellenismus*, I, 2, p. 186 (transl. by M.K.).

⁹ R. F. Stalley, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic*, p. 182.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 183. In regard to *Pol.* II, 2-5, Stalley also states: "The main difficulty is the apparent absence of any serious attempt to discuss the *Republic* as a whole" (*ibid.*, p. 182).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

the only ones of his work in which Aristotle criticizes Plato's philosophy. What is missing in Book II, Aristotle has mostly developed elsewhere. This article will not give a detailed analysis and defense of each of the arguments Aristotle develops against Plato in *Pol. II* using a telephoto lens. This has been sufficiently accomplished by Robert Mayhew in his monograph on *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic*, in which he presents a comprehensive examination of *Pol. II.2-5*.¹² Rather, the second section of this article chooses a wide-angle lens to look at Aristotle's criticisms of Plato's political philosophy as a whole in order to place *Pol. II* into its context. In the third section, the article focuses on Aristotle's remarkable critique of Plato's objective that the best city, Callipolis, should achieve the highest possible degree of unity.¹³ It compares Plato's and Aristotle's opposing views on the appropriate degree of unity of the city and defends Aristotle against the criticism of Jonathan Barnes who claims that Aristotle has a "tendency towards totalitarianism".¹⁴ This defense also shows that in *Pol. I.2*, Aristotle does not advocate an organic theory of the political community that subjugates the individual to the city. In the fourth and final section, this article briefly addresses Aristotle's often criticized claim that Plato is not clear whether the third "class" or estate in Callipolis is to live "communistically" or not. The section suggests that there are good reasons for the interpretation that Plato does not consider the workers of the third "class" as a part of Callipolis.

The question of how to judge Aristotle's criticisms of Plato is of great importance for almost everyone working on ancient Greek philosophy. Aristotle is one of our main sources for most of the philosophy before Plato. Often it is not easy to judge how reliable Aristotle is as a source on early Greek philosophy since we have no or only a few other sources. However, as we have Plato's dialogues, we can

¹² R. Mayhew, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic*.

¹³ Already Mayhew states in the introduction of his book: "I hope to show that in *Pol. II.1-5* Aristotle is presenting his views on what turns out to be an extremely fundamental issue: the unity of the city" (*ibid.*, p. 2; cf. pp. 124-25).

¹⁴ J. Barnes, *Aristotle and Political Liberty*, p. 259; cf. R. Mayhew, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic*, p. 125.

compare them with Aristotle's criticisms and try to judge his way of treating his forerunners and his critical capabilities in general. From this we can draw conclusions about Aristotle's reliability as a source for early Greek philosophy.

If we consider Aristotle's account of early Greek philosophy in Book I of his *Metaphysics*, we can seriously doubt whether he looks at his philosophical forerunners according to the ideal of modern science in an "objective" and "disinterested" way.¹⁵ In the *Metaphysics*, he interprets the early Greek philosophers in his own terminology and applies his teaching of the four causes and principles. According to him, the first philosophers, like Thales and Anaximenes, were only aware of one principle or the material cause (*Met. I.3, 983a24 ff.*). Later philosophers also discovered other principles and causes like the efficient cause (*Met. I.3, 984a25 ff.*). Aristotle presents the history of philosophy as an ongoing progress that leads to himself as the most advanced philosopher who is aware of all four causes. We find a similar self-centered understanding of the history of philosophy in Hegel who was a good student of Aristotle. Aristotle, a child of an agonal culture, is certainly competing with his forerunners. As such he especially competes with Plato. This article argues that despite the doubts we should have about Aristotle as a historian of early Greek philosophy, in his critique of Plato's *Politeia* he spotted some serious problems.

2. The Problem of the Seeming Incompleteness of Aristotle's Criticisms of Plato's *Politeia*

In *Pol. II.2* through 5, Aristotle criticizes mainly Plato's "communist ideals" and the main objective linked to them: the highest possible degree of unity of the city. For Plato, the arrangements concerning a community of women, children and property are not primarily ends in themselves, but means to achieve this objective of unity. They are also a means to combat corruption on the side of the rulers and a means to ensure that they govern for the common good (*koinon sympheron*) and not for their personal benefit. If the rulers don't have

¹⁵ Cf. Harold Cherniss's critique that Aristotle is not interested in a historical account of early Greek philosophy (H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy*).

a family, they are not tempted to embezzle money for its members or to give a position in the administration or the military to their unqualified children or heirs.

In the *Politeia*, Plato identifies the objective of the highest possible degree of unity of the city with its "greatest good (*megiston agathon, meizon agathon*)" (*Resp.* V,462a-b). There are good reasons for the interpretation that Plato's objective is derived from his teaching that among the order of ideas there is one highest idea, the *one universal idea of the good* (*Resp.* VI,505a-517c; VII,540a-b). For Plato, everything good is good because it participates in the one universal idea of the good. As Henning Ottmann has put it, Plato is a "Einheitsdenker", a thinker of unity, while Aristotle is a "Vieltheitsdenker", a thinker of plurality.¹⁶ The highest possible cause of unity, for Plato, is the one universal idea of the good.

At the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in Book I,4, Aristotle gives a detailed critique of Plato's doctrine of the one universal idea of the good. For Aristotle, there exists a plurality of distinct meanings of the term "good". Like "being", "good" is said in all the ten "categories" which Aristotle understands as the ten supreme kinds of propositions:

"Again, things are called good in as many senses as they are said to exist; for they are so called in the category of substance (e.g. god or mind) and in quality (the virtues) and in quantity (what is moderate) and in relation (what is useful) and in time (opportunity) and in place (habitat) and so on. Clearly, then, there cannot be a single universal common to all cases, because it would be predicated not in all the categories but in one alone."¹⁷ (*Eth. Nic.* 1096a23-29)

In the literature, there are different interpretations of how Aristotle's argument exactly goes.¹⁸ According to a prevailing interpretation, the term "good" is predicated on items in different categories like "God

¹⁶ H. Ottmann, *Geschichte des politischen Denkens*, pp. 114, 119.

¹⁷ Transl. J. A. K. Thompson (*Aristotle. The Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 10). Cf. Aristotle, *Cat.*

¹⁸ Cf. J. L. Ackrill, *Aristotle on "Good" and the Categories*; H. Flashar, *Die Platonkritik (I 4)*.

is good", "The virtues are good", "The moderate is good" and so on. Therefore, goodness cannot be a single common universal.

One does not need to go into the details of Aristotle's critique of Plato's doctrine of the universal idea of the good in order to see that this critique is related to his attack on Plato's objective of a unified city. And it is also evident that Aristotle's critique of Plato's idea of the good in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I,4, is a part of his general critique of Plato's theory of forms. This critique is in particular the topic of Books XIII and XIV of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but it is also found in other books and works.¹⁹ Therefore, Aristotle does not need to repeat his criticism of Plato's theory of forms in the *Politics*.

In the *Politeia*, after having professed his famous claim that the philosophers should rule, Plato starts introducing his theory of forms (*Resp.* V,473c ff.). Plato's claim obliges him to define the qualities of the philosophers who should obtain political power. The long argument that follows till the end of Book VII of the *Politeia* can be easily summarized: Like one needs a specific knowledge in order to be a good pilot of a ship, one needs knowledge (*epistēmē*) in order to be a good political leader. The appropriate knowledge of such a leader is not knowledge of the sea, the wind, and the stars, but of the forms and especially of the ideas of the just, beautiful, and good. The appropriate virtue of a good political leader is in particular wisdom (*sophia*), as Plato already made clear in Book IV (*Resp.* IV,428a-429a).

In Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle criticizes Plato's view that philosophical theory is necessary for good practical politics. Aristotle mentions Thales and Anaxagoras as philosophers who achieved theoretical knowledge through their wisdom (*sophia*). However, for Aristotle such wisdom is not useful for a political leader because it is not related to human goods (*Eth. Nic.* VI,7,1141b3-8). For a good political life one does not need wisdom but prudence (*phronēsis*). Prudence, which includes experience, is the main topic of Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In Book VI, Plato not only examines the main intellectual virtue of a political leader. The Book is likewise a critique of Plato's view that philosophical theory is needed for practical politics. Together with his arguments against Plato's

¹⁹ Cf. H. Cherniss, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, I; G. Fine, *On Ideas. Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Theory of Forms*.

theory of forms and against the doctrine of the one universal idea of the good, Aristotle has sufficiently criticized Plato's views that the philosophers should rule and that philosophical theory is necessary for good practical politics. Therefore, in *Pol.* II,2–5, no criticism of these central ideas of Plato's *Politeia* is missing.

Aristotle's critics object that he does not mention Plato's theory of justice in *Pol.* II,2–5, which Plato presents as the main topic of the *Politeia*. The appropriate response to this accusation is a reminder that the whole of Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is devoted to justice. In Book V, Aristotle first divides this ethical virtue in universal and particular justice. Then he goes on to subdivide particular justice in distributive and rectificatory justice. The latter form of justice concerns transactions both voluntary and involuntary. The main voluntary transaction relevant to rectificatory justice is the exchange of goods. Involuntary transactions cause injustice that needs to be rectified by a judge.²⁰ With his successful distinction of a plurality of spheres of justice in Book V, Aristotle has sufficiently criticized the one notion of justice that Plato presents in his *Politeia*. However, there might be another reason why Aristotle prefers not to touch this subject in *Pol.* II,2–5. Aristotle's own theory of justice, in particular his theory of distributive justice, owes its main ideas and principles to Plato.²¹ The same is true for Aristotle's theory of education which is indebted both to Plato's account of the education of the guardians in the *Politeia* and to the pedagogic theories he presents in the *Nomoi*. Finally, as he makes clear in the last paragraphs of Book V of the *Politics*, the whole theory of political change (*metabolē*) and factional conflict (*stasis*) that Aristotle develops in the Book is directed against Plato's account of the progressive decay of Callipolis in Books VIII and IX of the *Politeia* (*Pol.* V,12,1316a1–1317b27; *Resp.* VIII,543a–IX,576e). Firstly, Aristotle criticizes Plato's rigid and non-empirical scheme, according to which the best constitution transforms initially into tyranny, then into oligarchy and democracy, and finally into tyranny. Aristotle claims instead that our experience shows that constitutions

²⁰ For an interpretation of the divisions of Book V of the *Nicomachean Ethics* see M. Knoll, *Aristokratische oder demokratische Gerechtigkeit? Die politische Philosophie des Aristoteles und Martha Nussbaums egalitaristische Rezeption*, ch. I–III.

²¹ Cf. M. Knoll, *Die distributive Gerechtigkeit bei Platon und Aristoteles*.

change and transform into each other in many different ways and for many different reasons. Secondly, Aristotle claims that Plato is not aware that there are many forms of democracy and oligarchy (*Pol.* V,12,1317b25–27). In Books III, IV, and VI of the *Politics*, Aristotle distinguishes between three and five subspecies of kingship, aristocracy, polity, oligarchy, and democracy. These distinctions are directed against Plato's constitutional theory, which unduly reduces the complexity of the empirical political world.

3. Plato's and Aristotle's Opposing Views on the Appropriate Degree of Unity of the City

At the beginning of Book II of the *Politics*, Aristotle clearly states that his investigation and critique of constitutional drafts of other thinkers serve to prepare the ground for his own outline of a city according to our wishes (*kat' euchen*), which he presents in Books VII and VIII. For Aristotle, the "natural beginning (*pephyken arche*)" of such an undertaking is an examination of how much "sharing (*koinōnein*)" and "community (*koinōnia*)" is appropriate for a good city (*Pol.* II,1,1260b37–1261a9). This is without doubt a very important question for a political philosopher and as an author and researcher Aristotle has every right to choose and focus on any topic. The question of the appropriate degree of community (*koinōnia*) or unity of the city is – as this section will demonstrate – highly relevant and important. Furthermore, the concluding phrase of *Pol.* II,5 shows that Aristotle is clearly aware that more difficulties are connected with Plato's Callipolis than the ones he mentioned in the preceding chapters (*Pol.* II,5,1264b24 f.).

In *Pol.* II,2–5, Aristotle's critique of Plato's Callipolis focuses first on its objective, the highest possible degree of unity of the city. Plato is unable to demonstrate that this is the right objective and a possible end for the political community. And even if it were, Aristotle criticizes, secondly, the notion that the community of women, children and property is an adequate means to realize this objective. *Pol.* II,2, contains mainly Aristotle's critique of Plato's objective:

"(1) Having women common to all involves many difficulties; but a particular difficulty is that the reason Socrates gives as to why there should be legislation of this sort evidently does not result

from his arguments. Further, with respect to the end which he asserts the city should have, it is, as has just been said, impossible: but how one should distinguish a sense in which it is possible is not discussed. (2) I mean, that it is best for the city to be as far as possible entirely one; for this is the basic premise Socrates adopts. And yet it is evident that as it becomes increasingly one (*mia*) it will no longer be a city. *For the city is in its nature a sort of aggregation (plêthos ti), and as it becomes more a unity (mia) it will be a household (oikia) instead of a city, and a human being (anthrôpos) instead of a household; for we would surely say that the household is more a unity than a city, and the individual than the household. So even if one were able to do this, one ought not to do it, as it would destroy the city.* (3) Now the city is made up not only of a number of human beings, but also of those differing in kind (*eider*): a city does not arise from persons who are similar."²² (*Pol.* II,2,1261a10–24)

In this quote, Aristotle primarily refers to a passage in Book V of the *Politeia*. Before analyzing Aristotle's critique, it is beneficial to look at Plato's objective for the city, the highest possible degree of unity. As mentioned before, there are good reasons for the interpretation that this objective is derived from Plato's doctrine of the *one* universal idea of the good. Plato devises several means in order to promote the unity of the city and to avoid faction and dissension among citizens. In all existing political communities a good number of men try to rule because they all hold political power to be the best way to achieve the goods they desire.²³ Plato's solution to this universal problem is the education of morally and intellectually virtuous rulers who are not interested in accumulating material goods because they don't consider them as an essential means of achieving happiness. If the majority of citizens who strive for making money and buying goods are aware that truly virtuous rulers don't abuse their political power in order to accumulate material goods, they don't need to struggle for political

power and as a consequence faction and dissention between citizens will end. Therefore, the minding of one's own business of each the rulers, their auxiliaries, and the money-makers – Plato's definition of justice – is an important means of achieving the unity of the city (*Resp.* IV,423d, 433a–b).²⁴ The same is true for another virtue of Callipolis that is linked to justice: temperance (*sôphrosynê*). This virtue unifies the citizens because it equals harmony (*sympbonia*), friendship (*philia*), and the agreement of all citizens about the question of who should rule (*Resp.* IV,430d–432a; cf. 442c–d). As an additional means of achieving the unity of the city Plato decrees that both poverty and wealth should be prevented from developing in the city. Because a city in which there are poor and rich citizens is not one but two, a city of the poor and one of the rich warring with each other (*Resp.* IV,421c–423a). Finally, the growth of the city has to be limited to the point that it can still be one (*Resp.* IV,423b–c). Though these measures and the realization of justice and temperance in the city create unity, this is not enough for Plato. According to his *analogy of soul, man, and city*,²⁵ he wants the unity of the city to resemble as much as possible the unity of a single person:

"Is there any greater evil we can mention for a city than that which tears it apart and makes it many instead of one (*mia*)? Or any greater good (*meizon agathon*) than that which binds it together and makes it one (*mia*)? There isn't. And when, as far as possible, all the citizens rejoice and are pained by the same successes and failures, doesn't this sharing of pleasures and pains bind the city together? It most certainly does. ... *What about the city that is most like a single person (anthrôpos)?* For example, when one of

²² Cf. *ibid.*, pp. XV f., 31–37.

²³ According to Plato's psychology, the human soul is composed out of three parts: reason (*logistikon*), spirit (*thymoeides*), and appetites or desires (*epithymêton*). Plato conceives of the good city as a big human being (*macroanthrôpos*) and as an analogy to the well-ordered soul (*Resp.* IV,435e). The Callipolis is divided into three parts: the most reasonable persons rule it, the spirited ones defend it, and the majority has to work in order to sustain every member of the city. The division of three estates or "classes" in the city corresponds to Plato's division of three types or kinds of persons: the wisdom-loving, victory-loving, and gain-loving. In each type or class of human being one of the three matching parts of the soul rules (*Resp.* IX,581b–c).

²² Transl. C. Lord (*Aristotle. Politics*, p. 26) (all Greek words in the English translations of Plato and Aristotle in Latin transcription are inserted by M.K.; italics by M.K.).

²³ Cf. J. F. M. Arends, *Die Einheit der Polis. Eine Studie über Platons Staat*, p. XV.

us hurts his finger, the entire organism that binds body and soul together into a single system under the ruling part within it is aware of this, and the whole feels the pain together with the part that suffers. That's why we say that the man has a pain in his finger. And the same can be said about any part of a man, with regard either to the pain it suffers or to the pleasure it experiences when it finds relief. Certainly. And, as for our question, the city with the best government is most like such a person."²⁶

When Aristotle mentions in the paragraph quoted above that "the household is more of a unity than a city, and the individual than the household", he shows that he interprets Plato's objective correctly. Plato understands the best city as a big human being (*makroanthropos*), as an organism or quasi-organism, and his model for the desirable unity of the city is the unity of an organism (*Resp.* V.462c).²⁷

This kind of unity is a highly problematic objective because the parts of a city are—as opposed to the parts of a person—not continuous because they are not physically connected. This objective is also problematic from the modern perspective that values human equality and individualism. From a modern perspective of human equality, the three different kinds of persons from which the three "classes" are composed are in no way as different as especially the appetitive part (*epithymetikon*) and the rational part (*logistikon*) of the soul.²⁸ Plato's view of the extreme inequality of men is an important premise for understanding his objective of the organic unity of the city. From the perspective of individualism, Plato's ideal of a community of pleasure and pain abolishes essential features of the individual. Furthermore, as a part of the whole, the individual in Plato's best city gets transformed into a means for the whole like a hand is a means for a living organism. In short, from a modern perspective Plato's objective of the highest possible unity of the city could be called "totalitarian" and thus rejected.

²⁶ Plato, *Resp.* V.462a–d, transl. G. M. A. Grube (*Plato. Republic*, pp. 1089–1090) (italics by M.K.).

²⁷ Cf. E. Bornemann, *Aristoteles' Urteil über Platons politische Theorie*, p. 121–122.

²⁸ Cf. footnote 25.

The crucial question here is whether Aristotle shares this modern perspective or not. Aristotle's main opposition to Plato's objective for the city is expressed in his statement quoted above: "For the city is in its nature a sort of aggregation or multitude (*plēthos ti*)."²⁹ For Aristotle, the city is essentially a multitude of persons. Also Plato starts off by saying that human beings are different and have different natural capabilities. Aristotle certainly agrees with Plato's view that human beings are extremely unequal and that in a city one needs different kinds of persons. Both would certainly reject modern views of human equality as completely mistaken. However, while Plato wants to transform the rulers and warriors into a big family (*oikia*), Aristotle defends not only the traditional family but also both a "pluralist" society and the private sphere of all citizens. The unity of a household and, more extremely, of an individual, is, for Aristotle, inappropriate to a city.

It is important to notice that one can learn from Aristotle's critique of Plato's objective something essential about his own political philosophy. In the conclusion of his monograph, Robert Mayhew states: "In summary, how should we characterize Aristotle's political philosophy? It is difficult using modern terminology. Suffice it to say that he believes a rather high degree of individual independence is necessary for the fullest human life (and in this sense perhaps we can call his political philosophy 'liberal')."³⁰ Here is not the place to discuss the anachronistic and difficult question whether Aristotle was actually a "liberal" in one of the modern senses of the word. However, Aristotle's critique of the highest possible degree of unity of the city allows us to rule out Jonathan Barnes's accusation that he was a "totalitarian" *avant la lettre*. Barnes claims that Aristotle has a "tendency towards totalitarianism" and speaks in regard to his argument of the natural priority of the city in *Pol.* I, 2, of "Aristotle's implicit totalitarianism."³⁰

²⁹ R. Mayhew, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic*, p. 127.

³⁰ J. Barnes, *Aristotle and Political Liberty*, pp. 259, 263. In his response to Barnes, Richard Sorabji objects to Barnes's accusation by emphasizing that Aristotle's political philosophy moves away from Plato's totalitarianism in the *Politika* (R. Sorabji, *Comments on J. Barnes*, pp. 267–273).

In *Pol.* I,2, Aristotle substantiates his famous two theses that the city exists by nature and that man is by nature a political animal. In order to support these two claims, he advances his argument of the natural priority of the city:

"The city is thus prior (*proteron*) by nature to the household and to each of us. For the whole must of necessity be prior to the part; for if the whole body is destroyed there will not be a foot or a hand, unless in the sense that the term is similar (as when one speaks of a hand made of stone), but the thing itself will be defective. Everything is defined by its function and its capacity, and if it is no longer the same in these respects it should not be spoken of in the same way, but only as something similarly termed. That the city is both by nature and prior to each individual, then, is clear. For if the individual when separated from it is not self-sufficient, he will be in a condition similar to that of the other parts in relation to the whole."³¹ (*Pol.* 1253a18-27)

A thorough examination of Aristotle's criticism of Plato's Callipolis and in particular of the objective of the highest possible degree of unity of the city shows that Barnes' accusations are not warranted. *Pol.* II,2, sheds some light on how Aristotle's argument of the natural priority of the city should *not* be understood. It should not be misconstrued as an "organic" theory of the city according to which the individual is completely subordinated to the city.

Even if one interprets Aristotle's claim of the natural priority of the city independently from Aristotle's critique in *Pol.* II,2, it does not yield Barnes's accusation. David Keyt and Fred D. Miller treat the natural priority of the city as a thesis and theorem that is independent from the two theses that the city exists by nature and that man is by nature a political animal.³² Such kind of treatment is highly problematic and encourages such misunderstandings as that of Barnes. To be sure, Aristotle talks about an analogy between the relation of a human organism to its organs and the relation of a city to its individual members. Just

as the organism as a whole is by nature prior to its parts, the city is by nature prior to its citizens. But that does not mean that Aristotle understands the city ontologically and literally as an organism or a natural substance or aims at transforming it into an organism. It also does not mean that Aristotle sees the individuals merely as subordinated and dependent parts or only as means of the city. Both of these views can be associated with totalitarianism. And there are certainly good reasons for the claim that these views are held to some extent by Plato.

On the contrary, with his claim of the natural priority of the city Aristotle wants to demonstrate that without the political community man is only nominally a man because he cannot fully realize his nature, or himself, as a man. The fact that man's realization as a man unalterably depends on the city is a strong argument for Aristotle's thesis that man is by nature a political animal and also supports his thesis concerning the natural existence of the city. However, with his claim of the natural priority of the city Aristotle does not intend to make a statement about the ontological status of the city. Such a claim we only find in *Pol.* II,2, when Aristotle says that "the city is in its nature a sort of aggregation or multitude of persons".

In *Pol.* I,2, Aristotle defines the city through its self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) and argues that the individual, separated from the city, is not self-sufficient (*Pol.* I,2,1253a26-27). Also his argument for the natural priority of the city is partly based on the argument that the individual, separated from the city, is not self-sufficient. The concept of self-sufficiency, which is clearly something good and choiceworthy for Aristotle, connects *Pol.* I,2, in one more aspect with *Pol.* II,2. Because in *Pol.* II,2, Aristotle bases one argument against Plato's objective of the highest possible degree of unity of the city on the concept of self-sufficiency:

"It is evident in another way as well that to seek to unify the city excessively is not good. For a household is more self-sufficient than one person, and a city than a household; and a city tends to come into being at the point when the community formed by a multitude is self-sufficient. If, therefore, the more self-sufficient is more choiceworthy, what is less a unity is more choiceworthy than what is more a unity."³³ (*Pol.* II,2,1261b10-15)

³¹ Transl. C. Lord (*Aristotle. The Politics*, pp. 4-5).

³² D. Keyt, *Three Basic Theorems in Aristotle's Politics*. In treating the natural priority of the city as an independent third thesis and theorem, Fred D. Miller follows Keyt (F. D. Miller, Jr., *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle's Politics*, pp. 45-56).

³³ Transl. C. Lord (*Aristotle. The Politics*, p. 27).

Aristotle's argument is difficult to understand. It seems to be a variation of his former arguments that a city is in its nature a sort of multitude and that a too high degree of unity destroys it. For him, the higher the degree of unity, the lower the degree of self-sufficiency. A higher degree of unity reduces or even destroys the self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) of a city. As for Aristotle a *polis* is defined through its self-sufficiency, a too-high degree of unity destroys a city.

If one understands self-sufficiency in an economic sense, then Aristotle's argument is not convincing. Also in Plato's unified Callipolis there are different kinds of people and a division of labor that allows the city to satisfy all material human needs. For a military alliance, that has less unity than a city, such different kinds of people are not needed. If one understands self-sufficiency in a wider sense that a city also satisfies the intellectual and other needs of its citizens, then it makes some sense to say that too much unity reduces or destroys a city's capability to satisfy all such needs.

4. The Extent of the Community of Women, Children and Property

This article has shown that Aristotle has indeed some good arguments against Plato's outline of the best city and in particular against his objective that Callipolis should be as unified as possible. It has also demonstrated that the criticism Aristotle advances in *Pol.* II,2–5, is only one part of his comprehensive criticism of Plato's *Politika*. If it is recognized and assessed as such, it is not incomplete and the accusation that Aristotle neglects the most important topics is refuted. Finally, it is necessary to briefly address an important passage in *Pol.* II,5, that outraged Bornemann and led him to say that unless someone can prove that it is not original, it is clear that "Aristotle completely misunderstood Plato in respect of abolishing marriage and private property".³⁴ The passage runs:

"Neither, for that matter, has Socrates told us what the matter of organization of the regime as a whole will be for those sharing in it; nor is it easy to say. At all events, the bulk of the city is

³⁴ E. Bornemann, *Aristoteles' Urteil über Platons politische Theorie*, p. 118 (transl. by M.K.).

the multitude of the other citizens, and yet there is no discussion of whether the farmers too should have property in common or each individual should have private property as well, or further, whether women and children should be private or common."³⁵ (*Pol.* II,5,1264a11–17)

Most scholars have found this passage "puzzling".³⁶ In the passage, Aristotle claims that Plato is not clear whether his arrangements concerning a community of women, children and property should also be applied to the third "class" or estate – the farmers, craftsmen, and traders – and therefore to the majority of working citizens. In his book, Mayhew presents an impressive list of scholars who "hold that it is quite clear that the lower class is not to live communistically".³⁷ Mayhew summarizes the reasons generally given for this view:

"(1) Socrates frequently speaks of his proposals as applying to the rulers without any suggestion that they would apply to anyone else (in fact, the entire discussion of communism comes up only when Socrates is discussing the rulers); and (2) some of the arguments he uses could apply only to the rulers. These two points certainly count as evidence, but are they enough to support their conclusion? I do not think so. I believe Aristotle is right, and his modern critics wrong. A consideration of some key passages from the *Republic* shows that the question of how the lower class is to live (and particularly, whether the lower class is to live communistically) has not been fully or clearly answered by Plato's Socrates and that Aristotle is therefore justified in thinking it unresolved."³⁸

In the appendix to his book, Mayhew offers some strong arguments for the claim that Plato is indeed not clear whether the third "class" is to live communistically or not.³⁹ As Stalley already has noticed, the strongest argument is connected to Plato's objective for Callipolis. If Plato were not to extend his arrangements concerning a community

³⁵ Transl. C. Lord (*Aristotle. The Politics*, p. 33).

³⁶ R. F. Stalley, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic*, p. 186.

³⁷ R. Mayhew, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic*, p. 129.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 130; cf. p. 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129–138.

of women, children, and property to the workers as well, he would be inconsistent with his statement that the *highest* possible degree of unity of the city is its greatest good. From this statement, logically only the unity of all three "classes" or estates can be deduced. Stalley points out correctly: "If the lowest class does not partake in the communal arrangements, how can the city as a whole be a unity?"⁴⁰

The problem addressed by Mayhew and Stalley is significant and not easy to solve. One possible solution could take as point of departure the observation that in the *Politeia* Plato shows no interest and concern about the workers and their lives. One might even speculate whether the status of the third class corresponds to the one of slaves. It is remarkable that throughout the whole *Politeia* nowhere does Plato address the question of slavery and its role in Callipolis.⁴¹ These are good reasons for the interpretation that Plato does not see the workers of the third "class" as a part of Callipolis. Such a reading can be supported by Nietzsche's interpretation of the *Politeia*, according to which Plato cares about the workers only in so far as they are necessary means and tools for the upper two "classes".⁴² If the workers are no part of Callipolis, Plato does not have to extend his arrangements concerning a community of women, children, and property to them in order to achieve the highest possible degree of unity of the city.

Against this interpretation, one could object that Plato several times declares that what matters in Callipolis is not the happiness of a specific estate. Rather, the goal is that the whole city flourishes and becomes happy and that every estate obtains the part of happiness that nature has intended for it (*Resp.* IV,420c–421c; V,466a). However, Plato has very little to say about the good life of the lowest "class" in Callipolis and conceives of his best city as a community with a hierarchical social structure. In Book IX, he argues for an objective

⁴⁰ R. F. Stalley, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic*, p. 186; cf. R. Mayhew, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato's Republic*, p. 135.

⁴¹ Cf. G. Vlastos, *Does Slavery Exist in Plato's Republic?*, in: *id., Platonic Studies*, pp. 140–146.

⁴² F. Nietzsche, *Der griechische Staat*, pp. 764–777. According to Bornemann, the point of view of Zeller, Gomperz, and Wundt is that Plato does not care at all about the workers of the third "class" (E. Bornemann, *Aristoteles' Urteil über Platons politische Theorie*, p. 119).

hierarchy of the three different understandings of happiness according to which the good life and pleasure of the workers is extremely devalued and assigned an inferior rank (*Resp.* IX,581d–e, 586b). Plato's constitutional outline is based on the fundamental inequality of men and of parts of the soul. For Plato, this inequality exists by nature and constitutes the basis for the order of rank and difference in worth that exists among men. According to his analogy of soul, man, and city, the men of the lowest and the highest estate are in such a radical way as different as appetite or desire, the lowest part of the soul, differs from reason, the highest part of the soul (*Resp.* II,370a–b; IV,435b–441c). Regarding the fundamental anthropological convictions that Plato expresses in the *Politeia*, the view is warranted that, in the end, he only cares about the members of the two highest estates and doesn't consider the workers as a part of Callipolis.