AIMS AND METHODS IN ARISTOTLE'S *POLITICS*[1]

This paper originated in an attempt to come to terms with the problems which arise from the structure of the *Politics.* It is no news to anyone who has the slightest familiarity with the *Politics* that the work reads, to borrow a phrase of Barker's,[2] not as a composition, but as composite. Broadly speaking, it falls into three parts: Books I–III, Books IV–VI, and Books VII–VIII. Books I–III and VII–VIII seem to belong fairly closely together; IV–VI have traditionally been regarded, with no little justification, as interlopers, breaking the essential continuity of the argument between III and VII. Hence the tendency among earlier scholars to place IV–VI after VIII.[3] The main justification for this procedure is that at the end of III, Aristotle clearly promises an immediate treatment of the subject of the ἀρίστη πολιτεία, and that this promised treatment seems to occur only in VII and VIII; IV–VI are not only not on that subject, but deliberately and explicitly[4] criticize the exclusive preoccupation with the ἀρίστη πολιτεία which seems to characterize both of the other two blocks of books. There are other considerations, too, which support the view that IV does not belong after III: for example the absence of a connecting particle at the beginning of IV; the manner of the opening of IV; and the mutilated sentence at the end of III.[5]

But the trouble is that although IV officially begins a new approach, it is still itself closely linked with III: thus, for example, the opening discussion in the book is formally presented as a continuation of the description of the various types of constitution begun in III.[6] It is this combination, not to say confusion, of aims that is the main cause of the even more than usually jumbled structure of the argument in IV. Significantly, too, the number of certain back-references per Bekker page to I–III is far greater in IV–VI than in VII–VIII.[7] In the light of considerations such as these, the fashion for shifting the position of Books IV–VI has waned.[8] The claim of IV–VI to follow III is at least as strong as that of VII–VIII, and probably stronger. But the fact still remains that there is a clear break between III and IV. We are left with a work which is neither a unity in the sense in which we might apply that term to, say, the *Nicomachean Ethics,* nor simply a collection of independent treatises after the manner of the *Metaphysics.*

[1] This paper was presented, in different forms, at a seminar at the Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington, D.C., in April 1975, and at the 1975 meeting of the Southern Association for Ancient Philosophy in Cambridge. I am grateful for points made in discussion on both occasions.

[2] E. Barker, 'The Life of Aristotle and the Composition and Structure of the Politics', *CR* 45 (1931), 167.

[3] For a partial list of the arrangements adopted by different editors and commentators, see R. Weil, *Aristote et l'histoire,* p. 60.

[4] $1288^{b}21$ ff.

[5] On which see e.g. F. Susemihl and R.D. Hicks, *The Politics of Aristotle, Books I–V,* pp. 47–8, and W. Jaeger, *Aristoteles, Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung,* p. 281.

[6] $1289^{a}26$ ff.

[7] On my own count, the figures are: for IV–VI, ten certain backward references in thirty-three pages; for VII–VIII, two in nineteen (judgements about what constitutes a 'certain' reference may of course differ; but the general conclusion will remain the same).

[8] See n.3 above.

Richard Robinson's suggestion, that it is 'a collection of long essays and brief jottings pretending to be a treatise'[9] seems to me plainly mistaken.

Jaeger's explanation of the state of the *Politics,* from which the argument of this paper will begin, is still perhaps the most plausible of those that have been offered; it has certainly, in its time, enjoyed the most support. In brief, it is that Books II, III, VII, and VIII—which he calls the 'Utopian' books—were originally 'united and independent';[10] and that Aristotle later inserted the 'purely empirical' books IV–VI, which were now to form the foundation of the discussion of the best constitution. But this arrangement, which is announced, so Jaeger holds, at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics,* 'never got beyond the mere intention, and in point of fact [Books IV–VI] do not in any way prepare for and establish the ideal state, or at least not directly'.[11] Jaeger's view of the origin of Book I I shall leave out of account; his reasons for wanting to separate it from II and III seem to me inadequate, as they do, for example, to Moraux.[12] As examples of rival explanations, one may perhaps mention Stark's,[13] which attempts a compromise between the genetic and unitarian views; and Theiler's ingenious solution,[14] according to which the *Politics* as we have it represents a pile of the remains of at least four different, though sometimes overlapping, lecture-courses. Jaeger's hypothesis seems clearly superior to both of these. It takes account (at any rate at first sight) of the salient facts, unlike Stark's; and unlike Theiler's, it is also an economical hypothesis.

In what follows, however, I propose to call Jaeger's position into question. Firstly, I shall examine more closely the nature of the contrast between Books IV–VI, on the one hand (the so-called 'empirical' books), and Books VII–VIII (the 'Utopian' books) on the other. Secondly, I shall consider the extent of the usefulness of the genetic approach as applied in the context of the *Politics* as a whole. There is nothing new in the sceptical tone that I shall adopt on this latter point; so, for example, in the introduction to his translation of the *Politics,* Barker suggests that we should 'abandon the attempt to apply a genetic method to the composition and structure of the Politics, and . . . renounce the search for chronological strata'. Instead, we should 'adopt the view that the six "methods" of the *Politics* all belong to the period of the Lyceum, and are all—so far as chronology goes—on exactly the same footing. There is really no valid reason why we should adopt any other view'.[15] Ross's opinion, too, is much the same.[16] In general, I will claim little originality for my conclusions; only my route to them may be different.

It is sometimes denied that Books VII–VIII are Utopian. Stark, for example, claims that the ἀρίστη πολιτεία of VII–VIII is essentially the 'polity' talked about in the earlier books; it is not simply a matter of 'ein neues Gedankenexperiment

[9] *Aristotle's Politics, Books III and IV,* p. ix.

[10] *Aristoteles,* English translation by R. Robinson, 2nd edn., p. 273.

[11] Op. cit., p. 268.

[12] P. Moraux, in the discussion of R. Stark's paper, 'Der Gesamtaufbau der aristotelischen Politik', in *La Politique d'Aristote, Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* xi, pp. 42–3.

[13] Op. cit. (see preceding note).

[14] W. Theiler, 'Bau und Zeit der Aristotelischen Politik', *Mus. Helv.* 9 (1952), 65–78.

[15] *The Politics of Aristotle,* tr. E. Barker, pp. xliii–xliv.

[16] Sir David Ross, 'The Development of Aristotle's Thought', in *Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century* (*Proceedings of the First Symposium Aristotelicum*, 1957), p. 9.

geläufiger Idealstaatsutopie', but of the construction of a practical model for the foundation of new states and the reform of existing ones.[17] But this view of VII–VIII does not square well with the text; granted that 'polity' (and the 'middle constitution' of Book IV, if this is not actually the same thing) is a practical model in the sense Stark has in mind, the constitution of VII–VIII is not a polity. It is, in fact, although Stark denies it, an ideal aristocracy, for all its citizens are to be good men.[18] (Polity, on the other hand, is typically seen as a mixture of oligarchy and democracy—or, in other words, simply as balancing the claims of rich and poor.)[19] In terms of the distinctions made at the beginning of Book IV, the constitution of VII–VIII is best without qualification; whereas polity and the 'middle constitution' are constitutions which are 'easier and more accessible to all'.[20]

In Aristotle's terms, then, I would claim that the constitution described in VII–VIII is certainly ideal; it is also nowhere (for no existing state—as Aristotle himself recognizes[21] —educates its citizens for virtue as his state will), and it is plainly based, at least to some extent, on analysis and criticism of existing constitutions (whether it is based on the *συνηγμέναι πολιτεῖαι*, the 158 constitutions, is a separate question which will arise later). The constitution of VII–VIII therefore fulfils the criteria suggested by M.I. Finley for distinguishing Utopian from other kinds of speculation: 'The very word Utopia suggests that the ideal society is not actually or wholly attainable. Nevertheless, every significant Utopia is conceived as a goal towards which one may legitimately and hopefully strive, a goal not in some shadowy state of perfection but with specific institutional criticisms and proposals'.[22] (Ferguson, on the other hand, seems to identify Utopianism with 'building castles in clouds';[23] and it is in this sense, I suppose, that he declares that 'Aristotle was not a Utopian'.[24] But in general Ferguson's position seems less than clear.)

It is the second of Finley's two points that I want to stress with regard to Aristotle's description of the ideal constitution in *Politics* VII–VIII: namely that his basic purpose throughout is *critical.* His aim is to provide a standard, either for the reform of existing states, or at any rate for judging them; for as he admits in Book VII, 'it happens that some men can partake in *εὐδαιμονία*, while others can partake in it only a little or not at all; and it is clear that this is why more than one kind and variety of city and more than one constitution come into being'.[25] As we are told repeatedly elsewhere in the *Politics,* for some communities one of the corrupt types of constitution will be appropriate, because of their make-up—they may, for example, contain a very high proportion of the

[17] Op. cit., pp. 32 ff.

[18] $1329^{a}19$ ff.; cf. $1332^{a}28$ ff.

[19] See especially IV.8, 9.

[20] $1288^{b}38$–9.

[21] At *N.E.* $1180^{a}24$–6, he says that 'in the city of the Spartans alone, ⟨or⟩ with a few others, does the legislator seem to have paid attention to questions of nurture and habits (*ἐπιτηδεύματα*)'; at $1102^{a}10$–12, the lawgivers of Crete and Sparta are used to illustrate the point that it is the business of the *πολιτικός* to make the citizens good (see also *Pol.* $1337^{a}31$–2, where the Spartans are mentioned alone). But at *Pol.* $1271^{a}41$ ff., Aristotle explicitly accepts Plato's fundamental criticism of the one-sidedness of Spartan education (cf. $1338^{b}9$ ff.).

[22] 'Utopianism Ancient and Modern', in *The Use and Abuse of History,* pp. 180–1.

[23] J. Ferguson, *Utopias of the Classical World,* p. 88. Stark implies a similar view (see above).

[24] Op. cit., p. 80.

[25] $1328^{a}38$–41.

indigent, in which case some form of democracy will be right for them.[26] No possibility of creating the best constitution here; but at least judgement can be passed—the constitution may be worse or less bad than others, but it is in any case wholly wrong, as Aristotle puts it, uncompromisingly.[27]

My point here is that the enterprise of VII–VIII is in principle perfectly compatible with some sort of empirical study of actual constitutions; indeed, the one is the natural complement of the other. What I want to consider next is whether it is compatible with the kind of enterprise in which we find Aristotle actually employed in Books IV–VI.

I begin by quoting Jaeger:

> Over against [the] speculative picture [of Books VII–VIII] stands the empirical part in Books IV–VI. It shows no trace of the old Platonic spirit of constructions and ideal outlines. Aristotle does, however, expressly define his attitude towards the older part when, at the beginning of IV, he explains that in addition to the construction of the ideal it is a no less important task of the political theorist to examine what is good or bad for a particular state in given conditions. The constitution of an absolute ideal, and the determination of the best politics possible under given conditions, are parts of one and the same science. His remarks on this point show that he felt a certain difficulty in combining Plato's Utopian speculations with this purely empirical treatment, although he believed himself able to overcome it. He tried to escape by pointing to the analogy of a double form of medicine and gymnastics, the one concerning itself with the pure standard and the other applying the knowledge thus gained to the given case. Throughout the introduction to the empirical part one can scarcely help feeling that there is an undertone of polemic against the mere construction of ideals, and that Aristotle was very proud of his innovation. The uncompromising assertion of the unattainable ideal could not help the rent and riven actualities of Greek politics.[28]

This characterization of IV–VI and of the contrast between them and VII–VIII is inadequate (nor, I think, is it improved on in the following pages). The political theorist, as Jaeger puts it, is 'to examine what is good or bad for a particular state in given conditions', or, alternatively, to determine 'the best politics possible under given conditons'. But how does this conflict with the construction of an ideal? Knowledge about the ideal and knowledge about how best to approximate to it will surely be *complementary,* for all but the most uncompromising theorist.[29]

[26] See especially IV.12, VI.1 ff.

[27] $1289^{b}9$–11.

[28] *Aristotle,* pp. 269–70.

[29] On p. 271, Jaeger writes: 'in [IV–VI] the unbiased observation of empirical reality has led [Aristotle] to a wholly different mode of treatment, which starts from the particular phenomena and seeks to discover their inner law, like a scientist observing the characteristic motions and emotions of a living thing. The theory of the diseases of states and of the method of curing them is modelled on the physician's pathology and therapy. It is scarcely possible to imagine a greater contrast to the doctrine of an ideal norm, which constituted Plato's political theory and that of Aristotle in his early days, than this view, according to which no state is so hopelessly disorganized that one cannot at least risk the attempt at a cure. Radical methods would certainly destroy it in short order; the measure of the powers of recovery that it can exert must be determined solely by examining itself and its condition'. According to this account, as I understand it, the difference between IV–VI and VII–VIII is in the type of treatment proposed for diseased states: whereas in VII–VIII Aristotle had envisaged no alternative to large-scale surgery, in IV–VI he accepts that more moderate measures may be in order; for he now sees that some states will be incapable of being completely cured (through the realization of the best constitution), but that these will nevertheless be able to achieve at any rate a partial cure (some approximation to the best). The basis of this interpretation seems to be $1288^{b}37$ ff., which Jaeger takes as self-criticism, but which need not be taken in that way. Even if it is self-criticism, at the worst it would merely suggest a broadening in Aristotle's idea of the concerns of πολιτική—scarcely enough to cause the embarrassment Jaeger detects in IV.1.

The issues emerge rather more clearly in the following passage from G.H. Sabine (who, however, elsewhere follows Jaeger fairly closely):

Plato's prevailingly ethical interest in the subject still predominates; the good man and the good citizen are one and the same, or at all events they ought to be, and the end of the state is to produce the highest moral type of human being. It is not to be supposed that Aristotle consciously abandoned this point of view, since the treatise on the ideal state was left standing as an important part of the *Politics*. At some date not far removed from the opening of the Lyceum, however, he conceived a science or art of politics on a much larger scale. The new science was to be general; that is, it should deal with actual as well as ideal forms of government and it should teach the art of governing and organising states of any sort in any desired manner. This new general science of politics, therefore, was not only empirical and descriptive, but even in some respects independent of any ethical purpose, since a statesman might need to be expert in governing even a bad state. The whole science of politics, according to the new idea, included the knowledge both of the political good, relative as well as absolute, and also of political mechanics employed perhaps for an inferior or even a bad end. This enlargement of the definition of political philosophy is Aristotle's most characteristic conception.[30]

If Sabine's statement is essentially correct, and I think it is, we are faced with a major puzzle about Aristotle's view of the role of πολιτική in IV–VI. The crucial passage in this connection is at (IV.1) 1288^{b}21 ff.

So it is clear [Aristotle says there] that it will be the part of the same science both to consider the best constitution . . . and what constitution fits which people . . . and again, thirdly, that which is based on a presupposition (for [the good legislator and the true πολιτικός] must be able to study any given constitution, both how it might come into existence at the beginning, and once it has come into existence, in what way it might be preserved for the most time; I mean for example if it happens that some city is run neither according to the best constitution, but is unprovided even with the necessary resources, nor according to the best constitution possible from the resources it does have, but some worse one), and in addition to all these πολιτική must discover the constitution that best fits all cities; so that the majority of those who have treated of constitutions, even if what they say may be acceptable enough in other respects, fail to hit on what is *useful*.

Now three of these functions of πολιτική seem on the face of it perfectly compatible: consideration of the absolutely best constitution; of the one that best fits all; and consideration of which constitutions fit which people. It is a standing part of Aristotle's view of a τέχνη that it will not only be concerned with producing ideal results, but also with making the best of the materials at its disposal.[31] So, for example, it is the doctor's business not merely to make people healthy, but to provide the proper treatment for the man who can never be healthy. It follows that the proponent of πολιτική τέχνη will not be exclusively occupied with ideal constitutions, but also with inferior forms of constitution, where the conditions for the highest form are not present. In these cases, he will have to know what the conditions *do* allow; he will also, so Aristotle suggests, have to set up a more accessible ideal to aim at.

Up to this point, all seems to be much as we would expect. But the fourth of the four functions that Aristotle attributes to πολιτική comes as something of a surprise: the study of any given constitution,

both how it might come into existence at the beginning, and once it has come into existence, in what way it might be preserved for the most time; I mean for example if it happens that some city is run neither according to the best constitution, but unprovided even with the

[30] G.H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*,[3] p. 91.

[31] *Top.* 101^{b}5 ff., *Rhet.* 1355^{b}10 ff., *N.E.* 1100^{b}35 ff.

necessary resources, nor according to the best constitution possible from the resources it does have, but some worse one (λέγω δὲ οἷον εἴ τινι πόλει συμβέβηκε μήτε τὴν ἀρίστην πολιτεύεσθαι πολιτείαν, ἀχορήγητον δὲ εἶναι καὶ τῶν ἀναγκαίων, μήτε τὴν ἐνδεχομένην ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων, ἀλλά τινα φαυλοτέραν).

This is Sabine's 'political mechanics employed . . . for a bad end'. Aristotle uses the analogy of the trainer and the coach: 'if a man does not wish to achieve either the physical condition or the knowledge of the competitive skills of which he is capable, it is no less the business of the trainer and the coach to produce this capacity too'.[32] I can see four possible political situations which might come under Aristotle's description, as I understand it: i) where a city is being founded, and chooses a worse constitution than the one it is capable of; ii) where it changes its existing constitution for a worse one; iii) where it retains its existing constitution, and this is worse than it is capable of; and finally iv) where it changes its constitution for a better one, but this is still worse than it is capable of. This last case in the only one where the parallel with the trainer and the coach will in fact work. There is no parallel at least with the trainer in the first case; everyone is in some sort of physical condition, however bad. As for the other two cases, it will be very odd to say, as the analogy will suggest, that it's the trainer's job to help a man get less fit than he is, or conspire with him to keep him flabby; or that it's the coach's job to help him lose his athletic skills, or stop him improving them if he can. The τέλος of medicine, Aristotle says, reasonably enough, at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics,* is health; that of the shipwright's art is a ship, of generalship victory, of household economics wealth.[33] Of course, the proponent of any τέχνη will be capable also of achieving the opposite of the τέλος belonging to his τέχνη, since 'one and the same capacity and science seem to relate to opposite objects'—to use one formulation of a familiar principle.[34] But it will not be his business actually to work for the wrong end, which would be a misuse of his τέχνη. (That, at least, I take to be the moral of the discussion in the first chapter of the *Rhetoric.*)[35] And yet this is precisely what the πολιτικός will be doing, if, as Aristotle suggests, he is to help produce worse constitutions than conditions allow.

One possible escape-route is to suppose that when Aristotle talks about πολιτική 'considering' (θεωρῆσαι) any given constitution, what he has in mind is a purely theoretical, not a practical, concern: just as it is a part of rhetoric to know how to argue on both sides of a question, 'not in order that we may in practice employ our skill in both ways (for we must not make people believe what is wrong), but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are, and that, if a man argues unfairly, we on our part may be able to confute him'.[36] Aristotle several times suggests that the *Politics* as a whole does have a theoretical as well as a practical aim.[37] On the other hand, there is nothing to suggest a merely

[32] 1288^{b}16–19. Strictly speaking, the examples of the trainer and coach are not applied to πολιτική, but are used to illustrate one of the four headings into which all τέχναι generally are said to divide their subject-matter. But since the particular task of πολιτική in question is obviously intended to fall under that general heading (because a) the statement about the aims of πολιτική is derived directly from that about the concerns of all τέχναι (ὥστε, ^{b}21), and b) the other three tasks assigned to πολιτική correspond to the other three assigned to all τέχναι), it is reasonable to expect that the example of the trainer and the coach will throw light on it too.

[33] *N.E.* 1094^{a}8–9.

[34] *N.E.* 1129^{a}13–14.

[35] 1355^{a}28 ff.

[36] *Rhet.* 1355^{a}30–3, in the Oxford translation.

[37] 1253^{b}15 ff., 1258^{b}9–10, 1279^{b}11 ff., 1299^{a}28–30.

theoretical concern in the present passage; and indeed the analogy with the trainer and the coach suggests just the opposite. A second, and more promising, way out is hinted at by Sabine: 'A constitution', he says, 'is not only a way of life for the citizens but also an organisation of officers to carry on public business, and therefore its political aspects cannot be forthwith identified with its ethical purpose'.[38] Thus we might suppose that πολιτική will be involved in setting up, say, an inferior form of democracy, even when this is not the appropriate form of constitution for that city, in so far as political arrangements may be judged by their relative efficiency or inefficiency, quite apart from their ethical aspect. But this route seems ruled out by the fact that wherever Aristotle is occupied with the subject of the 'organisation of officers', the question whether any particular arrangement is efficient or not generally matters less to him than what type of constitution it belongs to.[39]

I confess that I have no solution to offer to this puzzle. But one or two observations may be made: first, that when Aristotle comes formally to announce his programme for Books IV–VI, at the end of chapter 2 of Book IV, there is no item which clearly and unambiguously falls under the heading of 'considering any given constitution'. The main questions included in the programme are i) how many varieties of constitution there are; ii) what the most accessible type of constitution is; iii) which of the other types of constitution is choiceworthy for which people; iv) in what way one should set about establishing these constitutions; and v) what the causes of the destruction and preservation of constitutions are, both generally and with respect to each individual type. It is particularly striking that the question about how constitutions are to be established is brought into connection with the preceding one, about which suit which people; thus here Aristotle does not propose considering how to establish any and every constitution, without regard to the conditions, as he seemed to do in chapter 1: there, Aristotle said that the πολιτικός 'must be able to study any given constitution, both how it might come into existence at the beginning, and . . . in what way it might be preserved for the most time'. (I differ from Newman[40] in thinking that in this instance the question πῶς ἂν γένοιτο is the same as that πῶς δεῖ καθιστάναι.) And as it turns out, Aristotle does indeed discuss the question πῶς δεῖ καθιστάναι in connection with the question τίς τίσιν ἁρμόττει (this mainly in VI). On the other hand, there is much in the discussion of the causes of the destruction and preservation of states in V which plainly *does* belong under the heading in question, 'considering any constitution regardless of the conditions'—most notably, of course, the long treatment of tyranny.[41] So far as I know, Aristotle nowhere suggests that any type of population is suited for tyranny—at any rate any population of *Greeks*. M.I. Finley does not think the treatment of tyranny in V is to be taken too seriously: 'One can be misled by Aristotle's temperament,' he says: 'he was a dazzling virtuoso and could not always resist a virtuoso display'.[42] But it is difficult to accept this, when the treatment is consistent with Aristotle's formal and official statement of the purposes of πολιτική at the beginning of Book IV. A second point worth mentioning is that there is what looks like a close parallel to Aristotle's apparent misdemeanour in IV. This is in Book I, ch. 11, in the course of the discussion of χρηματιστική.

[38] Op. cit., p. 101.
[39] See especially IV.14–16.
[40] Ad loc.
[41] 1313^{a}34 ff.
[42] 'The Ancestral Constitution', in *The Use and Abuse of History*, p. 52.

Aristotle has just distinguished between natural and unnatural forms of χρηματιστική; he then declares 'Since we have adequately discussed the part of our subject that relates to knowledge pure and simple (τὰ πρὸς τὴν γνῶσιν), we must now consider that part of it that relates to practice (πρὸς χρῆσιν). In all such things, theoretical speculation is worthy enough of a free man, but practical experience is not'. He then proceeds to enumerate the parts of both the natural and the unnatural kinds of χρηματιστική, and to give hints about where anyone interested in χρηματιστική of either kind should go to find practical advice. Deplorable, Aristotle's attitude implies; but still a fact of life.

Still, it is unfair to dismiss the whole of IV–VI, as Barker does, as 'The Trimmer's Opinion of the Laws and Government'.[43] (Sabine's account, too, tends perhaps to imply the same view.) For the most part, IV–VI is concerned—as the programme in IV.2 suggests—with the *reform* of existing states, with reference to some kind of ideal. I therefore propose finally to leave behind the problem of Aristotle's Machiavellian mood, and turn back to the other three functions accorded to πολιτική in IV.1: to consider what the best constitution is absolutely; to consider what constitution fits what people; and to consider what constitution most fits all existing states. Now I suggested that these functions were in principle compatible with one another; in each case, it was the business of πολιτική to establish the highest form of constitution of which the conditions allowed. But this is to assume that the lower forms can be arranged in order according to the standard of the ideal constitution; and it is in fact by no means obvious that this is so.

There are at least two difficulties. Firstly, Aristotle holds that the end of a city is τὸ εὖ ζῆν,[44] and this means, ideally, that its end is to provide the conditions for the exercise of virtue by its citizens.[45] But now oligarchy sets *wealth* as its goal;[46] and democracy either wealth,[47] or freedom,[48] understood—probably—as the freedom to do as one pleases.[49] This is the idea that lies behind a passage in Book VII that I have already referred to once before:

> it happens that some men can partake in εὐδαιμονία, while others can partake in it only a little or not at all; and it is clear that this is why more than one kind and variety of city and more than one constitution come into being; for each type of people hunts after this [i.e. εὐδαιμονία] in a different way, and so brings it about that there are different kinds of life and different kinds of constitition.[50]

In so far as πολιτική works within an oligarchic or democratic system, the goals of oligarchy or democracy will become its own; and since these goals, in Aristotle's view, are not just lower down on the same scale as the proper one, but simply *wrong*, it seems to follow that this will be a wrong use of πολιτική. To some extent, this objection can be blunted. As I have said, Aristotle's main emphasis in IV–VI is on *reform*; and on the whole, his suggestions for reform aim at making oligarchies less oligarchical, and democracies less democratic—the ideal, that is in the context of Books IV–VI, being the mean between the two. On the other hand it is quite obvious that the τέλος of the 'mean constitution' is not εὐδαιμονία in

[43] 'The Life of Aristotle' etc., p. 164.

[44] $1252^{b}30$, $1278^{b}20$ ff., $1280^{a}31$–2, $^{b}39$; cf. $1291^{a}16$–18.

[45] In *Rhet.* $1366^{a}5$–6, the τέλος of aristocracy is summed up as τὰ πρὸς τὴν παιδείαν καὶ τὰ νόμιμα.

[46] $1311^{a}9$–10; cf. $1286^{b}15$–16.

[47] $1321^{a}41$–$^{b}1$.

[48] *Rhet.* $1366^{a}4$.

[49] Cf. *Pol.* $1317^{b}11$ ff.

[50] $1328^{a}38$–$^{b}2$.

the true sense; there is no suggestion anywhere in Aristotle's discussion of the μέση πολιτεία that it is systematically concerned with ἀρετή at all. The general implication of the discussion is that this form of constitution has an essentially pragmatic aim, that of ensuring political stability; and it is an excellent form of constitution precisely because of its excellence at fulfilling that aim.[51]

The second difficulty is this. Different kinds of constitution, as Aristotle repeatedly[52] says in the *Politics,* involve different conceptions of justice: under a democracy, there will be democratic justice, under an oligarchy oligarchic justice, and under a tyranny—well, perhaps no justice at all.[53] Only under the correct forms of constitution will we find justice in an unqualified sense—and this is, indeed, what makes them correct.[54] If it is to function inside the παρεκβάσεις, as it evidently is, then to that extent πολιτική will be involved in supporting the appropriate varieties of justice, since it will be responsible for the laws in which they are embodied. And democratic, oligarchic, and tyrannical justice are actually *defective* forms; indeed from the standard of unqualified, or 'natural' justice, as Aristotle calls it in the *Nicomachean Ethics,*[55] they are actually unjust. Thus the role of πολιτική here will be precisely the opposite of the one it has within the best constitution: under the best constitution it will create just laws; under the παρεκβάσεις, it will promote *in*justice.[56]

Once again, it may be replied that this is to ignore Aristotle's preoccupation with reform. What is more, in this case the suggested reforms *will* make the constitution better by the standard of the best; for at least one of their effects will be that it will be more just.[57] The basic tenor of Aristotle's advice is that constitutions generally should be less partisan. He sees oligarchy as the domination of rich over poor, and democracy as the domination of poor over rich;[58] in both cases, one side pursues its own interests at the expense of the other's interests. Each side, he suggests, should be prepared to give more to the other than it does, and should attempt some admixture of the opposite form of constitution.[59] A correct mixture of oligarchy and democracy, such as we would find under a polity, would result in justice being done to both sides.[60]

On the other hand, in IV–VI as a whole we find Aristotle making very little of this point. The general standpoint of the three books as a whole is that injustice is to be avoided because it leads to stasis; it is a means to an end, rather than being an end in itself. One passage where justice *is* the prime consideration is at 1297^{a}38 ff.:

> So that it is clear that if someone wants to make a just mixture, he must bring together the devices used by both sides: the poor must be paid for attending the assembly and the law-courts, the rich fined for not attending; for in this way everyone will have a share, while in the other way [i.e. if one adopted just one of these devices], the constitution would belong to one side only.

[51] N.B. especially 1296^{a}7 ὅτι δ' ἡ μέση βελτίστη, φανερόν· μόνη γὰρ ἀστασίαστος.

[52] e.g. at 1280^{a}7 ff., 1301^{b}35 ff., 1309^{a}36–9.

[53] *N.E.* 1161^{a}32 ff.

[54] 1279^{a}17–21.

[55] 1134^{b}18 ff.

[56] Cf. 1282^{b}11–13 δῆλον ὅτι τοὺς μὲν κατὰ τὰς ὀρθὰς πολιτείας ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι δικαίους τοὺς δὲ κατὰ τὰς παρεκβεβηκυίας οὐ δικαίους.

[57] I assume here that the best constitution will turn out to possess the highest degree of justice (even though this is not the criterion by which Aristotle calls it best)—higher than 'polity', in so far as office is distributed by reference to *virtue.*

[58] 1279^{b}7 ff., etc.

[59] See especially 1309^{b}18 ff.

[60] Cf. 1307^{a}5 ff.

But after this solid sentiment there is a sudden change of tone:

> But [Aristotle goes on] the constitution ought to be only out of those who possess heavy arms; it is not possible to define absolutely what the amount of the property-qualification ⟨should⟩ be, and say that people should have so much, but having considered the highest amount it is possible to require while still leaving those with a share in the constitution in a majority over those without such a share, we ought to fix this amount. For the poor are happy to keep quiet even if they do not possess political privileges, providing no one attacks them or takes away any of their property.

One may surely object that it may be *safe* to exclude the poor in this situation; but is it *just*? Here, as in the discussion of the μέση πολιτεία, on which the present passage depends, it is stability, not justice, that matters most.

Thus when Aristotle finally sets up his 'easier and more accessible' ideal, it turns out to be measured by a different standard from the one it replaces. Political stability and ἀρετή may be perfectly compatible as goals; indeed the achievement of the one may be a necessary condition for the achievement of the other. On the other hand, it patently does not follow from this that a stable constitution will in itself be better in terms of the other standard than an unstable one. But Aristotle nowhere explicitly recognizes that different standards are being used; he talks as if the enterprise of IV–VI were a simple and straightforward extension of that of VII–VIII.

My claim, then, is that Aristotle tacitly attributes at least two quite distinct practical aims to πολιτική: firstly, the creation of a σπουδαία πόλις, or the closest approximation to such a πόλις; and secondly, the achievement of political stability and order. The first of these aims is implicit in Books VII–VIII, whereas it is the second that predominates in Books IV–VI—although the first never disappears entirely; so, for instance, Aristotle concludes his remarks about the preferability of the less traditional method of preserving tyranny by saying that if he adopts this method, the tyrant 'will himself attain a habit of character, if not wholly disposed to goodness, at any rate half-good–half-good and yet half-bad, but at any rate not *wholly* bad'.[61]

The last part of this paper will consider the reasons for this uneasy combination of aims in the *Politics*, in a mainly negative way. My chief purpose will be to argue against any chronological explanation, of the type proposed by Jaeger.

According to Jaeger's account, the 'purely empirical' part of the *Politics* came later than the 'Utopian' part. (Incidentally, it will be clear from what I have said that I regard these tags as misleading: in both cases Utopianism is *combined* with empiricism.)[62] Jaeger refers to the programmatic statement at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which in the English version of his translation runs as follows:

> First, if anything has been said well in detail by earlier thinkers, let us try to review it; then in the light of the constitutions we have collected let us study what sorts of influence preserve or destroy states, and what sorts preserve or destroy the particular kinds of constitution, and to what cause it is due that some are well and others ill administered. When these have been studied we shall perhaps be more likely to see with a comprehensive view which constitution is best, and how each must be ordered, and what laws and customs it must use, if it is to be at its best.[63]

[61] $1315^{b}8$–10, in Barker's translation.

[62] Cf. Ross, loc. cit. (n.16 above).

[63] $1181^{b}15$–22; Jaeger, *Aristotle*, p. 265.

This programme [Jaeger says] obviously implies a turning point in the development of Aristotle's *Politics*. In unambiguous language he here abandons the purely constructive method that Plato and he himself had previously followed, and takes his stand on sober empirical study. What he says is in fact—and nothing but his extreme explicitness has prevented his being understood—: 'Up to now I have been using another method. I have made my ideal state by logical construction, without being sufficiently acquainted with the facts of experience. But now I have at my disposal the copious material of the 158 constitutions, and I am going to use it in order to give to the ideal state a positive foundation.'[64]

Suitably adapted, this could provide an explanation of sorts of the state of affairs I have attempted to describe in the earlier parts of this paper. Early on in his career, Aristotle satisfies himself with writing a Utopia on the Platonic model; later on, he comes to realize that this approach is useless in terms of practical politics, and proceeds to construct a more accessible ideal. On this account, the difference in aim between the two approaches is of no great importance; there is simply an early and a late Aristotle, and we are absolved from trying to make any consistent sense out of the *Politics* as a whole.

One immediate and crucial objection to this is that Aristotle himself suggests in IV that πολιτική will combine both approaches;[65] for, *pace* Jaeger, there is no reason for supposing that the absolutely best constitution talked about at the beginning of IV is not the one described in VII–VIII. Thus even if it turned out that VII–VIII were written early, it would be wrong to suggest—as Jaeger effectively does—that the approach it embodies is *replaced* by that of IV–VI.

All the same, it could be urged that although Aristotle might still theoretically regard discussion of the absolutely best constitution as a proper part of political science, in practice his real interests were now elsewhere—namely with the more realistic concerns of IV–VI. In order to answer this suggestion, I want to look in some detail at the last chapter of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The argument of the chapter runs, briefly summarized, as follows. In the matter of ἀρετή, Aristotle says, knowledge alone is not enough; what we must do is to try to become ἀγαθοί. Argument alone will not suffice for the purpose; the crucial factor is habituation, and we will not achieve this without good *laws*. 'But it is difficult to get from youth up a right training for virtue if one has not been brought up under right laws; for to live temperately and hardily is not pleasant to most people, especially when they are young.'[66] But the process must go on even when they are grown up, so that laws will be necessary here too. At 1180^{a}5–14, Aristotle appeals to the *Laws* for support for his general doctrine. Then he resumes: if a man is to be brought up in the right way, and is to go on to live rightly, and it requires a certain authority to bring this about; if, further, a father's authority is not enough, or indeed that of any single person, unless he is a king, what we will need will be *law*, which does have the necessary compelling force. But only in the Spartan state, or perhaps in a few others as well, does the legislator seem to have paid proper attention to questions of upbringing and people's habits; in most cities, each man lives just as he pleases, Cyclops-fashion. 'It is best, therefore, that there should be public care for such matters; but if they are neglected by the community it would seem right for each man to help his children and friends towards virtue . . . But it would seem from what has been said that he will be better able to do this if he makes himself an expert in legislation.'[67] Public control is exercised through laws; a father's injunctions are like

[64] Loc. cit.

[65] i.e. in IV.1.

[66] 1179^{b}31–4, in the Oxford translation.

[67] 1180^{a}29–34 (Ross's translation here is slightly adapted; similarly in the case of the two following citations from Aristotle).

laws on the small scale. There may actually be some advantage in private control; but in general what is needed is *expert knowledge.* So how does one gain this knowledge? It will be no good going to the politicians, for none of them either promises to teach the art of legislation, or can teach it. Nor will it be any good going to the sophists; they think that all that is necessary is to collect together the best of existing laws, and that that is a simple matter—but how is one to make the right choice? Collections of laws and constitutions will be useful to those who 'are able to study and judge what is good or bad and what enactments suit what circumstances; but those who go through these things without the appropriate ἕξις [i.e. without the necessary critical faculty] will not have right judgement (unless as a spontaneous gift of nature), although perhaps they may increase their understanding of these matters'.[68] So far Aristotle has only told us where not to go if we want to learn the art of legislation: don't go to the politicians; don't go to the sophists. Where we should go, as Aristotle proceeds to imply, is to Aristotle; though he has emphasized before that *experience* will be necessary too.[69] 'So', he says, 'since our predecessors have left the subject of legislation to us unexamined, it is perhaps best that we should ourselves study it, and in general study the question of the constitution, in order to complete to the best of our ability our philosophy of human nature.'[70] Finally, there comes the programmatic statement cited earlier in the English version of Jaeger's translation.

There has been considerable discussion about whether this programme does or does not fit our *Politics.* One particularly debated point is the proper interpretation of the last sentence but one: does the question ποία πολιτεία ἀρίστη mean, as Jaeger takes it to mean, 'what sort of constitution is best absolutely'? Or, as Immisch argues,[71] does it mean ποία ἀρίστη τῶν συνηγμένων—i.e. what is the best out of the types we have collected together? I do not myself think that this particular issue can be resolved; and it is therefore not certain whether the programme contains any reference to the description of the absolutely best constitution in Books VII and VIII—although there is a clear reference to Book II, in which Aristotle discusses the opinions of his predecessors. Taken by itself, then, the programme could at least be consistent with the view that IV—VI are essentially independent of, and perhaps a replacement for, the old method embodied in VII and VIII.

But the chapter as a whole—I mean *Nicomachean Ethics* X.9—is plainly not consistent with such a view. The immediate justification that Aristotle gives for going on to a work on politics—apart from saying that it will complete his study of things human—is that it will help us to acquire the art of legislation; and what we need to acquire the art of legislation for is to help us to produce ἀρετή in others. Now it is Aristotle's complaint that most existing states do not pay attention to the moral health of their citizens at all; only the Spartans do so, 'and perhaps a few others'—among them, presumably, the Cretans.[72] Moreover, when he actually discusses the subject of Spartan education, he explicitly accepts the criticism of it made by Plato in the *Laws.*[73] It therefore seems inevitable that if we are to learn what Aristotle wants us to learn about νομοθεσία, we will be involved in discussing ideal constitutions as well as actual ones; and moreover

[68] $1181^{b}6$–12.
[69] $1181^{a}9$–12.
[70] $1181^{b}12$–15.
[71] O. Immisch, 'Der Epilog der nikomachischen Ethik', *Rh. Mus.* 84 (1935), 54–61.
[72] $1102^{a}10$.
[73] See n.21 above.

they will be of the type put forward in VII–VIII, whose central feature is exactly that it educates the citizens for virtue. Quite apart from X.9, it is not too much to say—and it has been said before, for example by Newman[74]—that VII–VIII represent the proper culmination of 'the study of things human' as understood by the *Nicomachean Ethics* as a whole. Already in Book I, Aristotle has announced that it is the task—or at least the main task—of πολιτική and the πολιτικός to make men good.[75] We can also think of Book VI, in which πολιτική is said to be the same ἕξις as φρόνησις, with the difference that πολιτική is concerned with the πόλις, φρόνησις with the individual.[76] Since φρόνησις by definition is always aimed towards the best ends, the same is presumably true of πολιτική, and therefore also of νομοθεσία, which forms one part of it. And the best end, in the context of the πόλις, is to make men happy, and therefore virtuous.

On the other hand, the programme at the end of the work plainly looks forward to Books IV–VI of the *Politics*. It is fair to say, then, that the *Nicomachean Ethics* lead us to expect a work of more or less exactly the kind we have: one which sets 'die Aufstellung eines absoluten Ideals'[77] side by side with more realistic preoccupations.[78] And this is surely enough to show that Aristotle is serious when he himself claims at the beginning of *Politics* Book IV that both kinds of enterprise are equally parts of πολιτική. We may need the genetic method to explain the peculiarities of the form of the *Politics*; but in the end it will not, I think, seriously affect our interpretation of its contents.[79]

[74] *The Politics of Aristotle*, vol. ii, Appendix A.

[75] $1099^{b}29$–32, $1102^{a}7$–10.

[76] $1141^{b}23$ ff.

[77] Jaeger, *Aristoteles*, p. 282.

[78] That is, if we assume that the programme is of a piece with the rest of X.9. This is doubted e.g. by J.A. Stewart (*Notes on the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, ad loc.), who regards everything from $^{b}12$ to the end as an interpolation. But the chapter plainly cannot end at $^{b}12$, for this would leave us without any positive answer to the crucial question raised at $1180^{b}28$–9. It is possible that Aristotle could have ended with $^{b}15$; but even supposing this were so, the case for which I am arguing could still be made. At $^{b}12$–13, Aristotle begins παραλιπόντων οὖν τῶν προτέρων ἀνερεύνητον τὸ περὶ τῆς νομοθεσίας . . . Now if at this point he had been looking forward to a *Politics* without IV–VI, these words would surely be inexplicable, since Plato must be included among οἱ πρότεροι (*pace* K. von Fritz and E. Kapp, in the introduction to their translation of the *Athenaion Politeia*, p. 43), and VII–VIII, which would then form the main positive part of the work, are beyond doubt heavily indebted to the *Laws* (that the *Laws* predates this chapter of the *N.E.* is established by the unmistakable reference to it at $1180^{a}5$ ff. Morrow's suggestion, in his paper 'Aristotle's Comments on Plato's *Laws*' (*Plato and Aristotle in the Mid-Fourth Century*, pp. 145–62), that not all of the *Laws* may have been known to Aristotle at the time when he was writing his criticisms of the work, seems to me to be based on insufficient grounds). It is IV–VI that are plainly thought of as going beyond Plato (see especially $1288^{b}35$ ff., which may well give at least part of the justification for Aristotle's seemingly extravagant claim in the lines under discussion (i.e. *N.E.* $1180^{b}12$–13); although the main justification for it seems to lie in the reference that has been made to the collected constitutions—no one else, perhaps Aristotle is saying, has done the necessary groundwork, in the way that I have. Cf. Gauthier and Jolif ad loc. X.9 itself is anchored to the rest of the *N.E.* by what looks like a reference to it at V.2, $1130^{b}26$–9—unless we regard the position of Book V itself as doubtful.

[79] Compare the general judgement reached by Augustin Mansion: 'on pourrait, en effet, adopter jusque dans les détails l'hypothèse historique de W.J[aeger] sur la formation graduelle des traités d'Aristote, et même sur l'évolution de ses conceptions philosophiques, on n'aurait de ce chef aucune raison de concevoir autrement qu'on ne l'a fait jusqui'ici, ce qu'on a coutume d'appeler "le système d'Aristote"' ('La genèse de l'oeuvre d'Aristote d'après les travaux récents', *Rev. néosc. de philosophie* 29 (1927), 464; restated by Suzanne Mansion, *Le Jugement d'existence chez Aristote*, p. 4.

I conclude, then, that the difference between the stated aims of πολιτική in Books IV–VI and Books VII–VIII of the *Politics* cannot be explained away simply in terms of a change of mind on Aristotle's part. Rather, we should assume the existence of a fundamental ambivalence in Aristotle's attitude, one that is perhaps not difficult to understand. He is firmly committed to the Platonic ideal of the σπουδαία πόλις; but he is also committed to the idea that πολιτική must have something *useful* to say. In order to do this, he suggests, it must try to do what it can to help existing constitutions, and not satisfy itself with proposing to rub them out and start again.[80] But this effectively rules out the possibility of reforming existing oligarchies and democracies by reference to the standard of the best constitution, for even establishing some approximation to the best would involve what amounts to a *change* of constitution, in so far as its τέλος would be changed—from πλοῦτος or ἐλευθερία in the direction of ἀρετή. In that case the reform of existing constitutions must become just a matter of making them *better oligarchies*, or *better domocracies*; or rather, as Aristotle insists on putting it,[81] less bad oligarchies or democracies. And Aristotle's criterion of superiority and inferiority in this case, the relative orderliness and stability of a constitution, is reasonable enough; at any rate, in an orderly society, an individual might go on to achieve the good life for himself.

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[80] $1288^{b}37$ ff. [81] $1289^{b}9$–11.