

Aristotle *Politics* 3.6

- 1 In Book 3 A. turns to discussion of πολιτεία, 'constitution', 'regime'. But that requires prior discussion of the identity of πόλις, 'city', and πολίτης, 'citizen', both disputed questions (3.1-5). The questions about πολιτεία then to be tackled (3.6, 1278b6-8): should we establish (θέτεον) a single πολιτεία or more [presumably, as correct], if more which and how many, and if so how they differ? [NB **NOT** 'whether there is only one form of government or many', Jowett = Revised Oxford, and Barker = Oxford World Classics translations]
- 2 This approach to πολιτεία was quite likely novel in πολιτεία literature, both in its focus on the citizen and in making an Athenian democratic conception of citizen the initial default (3.1) (cf. Schofield 2011). But in 3.4-5 A. refines the model in a more hierarchical direction, focused more on virtue and the good citizen.
- 3 In 3.6 πολιτεία is initially defined as τάχως ἀρχῶν, 'structuring of offices': again, not hitherto a standard way of conceptualizing it, but reflected also in Plato *Laws* 6.751a (καταστάσεις ἀρχῶν τε καὶ ἀρξόντων) and the *Ath. Pol.* of A's school (3.1, 5.1). A. will focus here on the κύρια ἀρχή. And 'regime' will accordingly shift from connoting a kind of structure to the body principally empowered within such a structure.
- 4 He now elaborates: κύριον μὲν γὰρ πανταχοῦ τὸ πολίτευμα τῆς πόλεως, πολίτευμα δ' ἐστὶν ἢ πολιτεία (3.6, 1278b10-11). Some translations on offer: (a) 'The government is everywhere sovereign in the state' (Jowett); (b) 'For everywhere the ruling body has control in the city' (Phillips Simpson); (c) 'The civic body is everywhere the sovereign of the city' (Barker)'. However (a) and (b) may run the risk of tautology; are 'government' (a) and sovereign' (a) and (c) anachronistic concepts?; does 'has control' (b) lose the evaluative dimension of κύριον?; how could any of (a)-(c) establish that πολίτευμα means what they suppose? Helpful studies on πολίτευμα: Ruppel 1927, Lévy 1993, Hansen 2013.
- 5 Πολίτευμα seems to enter Attic vocabulary in the fourth century, with various connotations. In the orators, it often occurs in the plural as 'policies', 'political measures': the products of οἱ πολιτευόμενοι'. But here in Aristotle it refers to the subject of the verb, the agents who engage and are empowered to engage in political activity, πολιτευέσθαι (Lévy, p.71). Perhaps compare with στρατεύμα: first military expedition, the embodiment of στρατεύεσθαι, then its subject: a military force.
- 6 A. seems mostly to talk of τὸ πολίτευμα in reference to 'the small group of *politai* [in aristocracies and oligarchies] who through virtue or wealth have the sole right to participate in politics' (Hansen, p.41; but here in 3.6 he recognises the existence of a πολίτευμα in any and every *politeia*: 1278b11-15; and in 3.7, 1279a25-31). Two perhaps indicative passages of the *Politics*: (i) aristocracies and oligarchies sometimes survive διὰ τὸ εὖ χρῆσθαι τοὺς ἐν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς γινομένους καὶ τοῖς ἔξω τῆς πολιτείας καὶ τοῖς ἐν τῷ πολιτεύματι (5.8, 1308a5-7); (ii) it is an impossibility that τοὺς ἐν τῷ πολιτεύματι could be numerous enough to overcome all those in the countryside who along with those who are ruled want to initiate another regime (νεωτερίζειν)(7.14, 1332b29-32). My conjecture: A. mostly resorts to this talk of πολίτευμα because in such regimes, others not entitled to engage in πολιτευέσθαι may or may not be recognized as citizens in some secondary sense.
- 7 If there is interest in doing so, and if time allows, we can discuss the two subsequent sections of the chapter, which deal with the object for which the *polis* comes into being (cf. 1.2), and with the different forms of rule of human communities (cf. 1.7,12-13).

References: E Lévy, 'Politeia et politeuma chez Aristote', in M Pierart (ed.), *Aristote et Athènes*. Fribourg 1993, 65-90; M H Hansen, *Reflections on Aristotle's Politics*. Copenhagen 2013, 39-48; W Ruppel, 'Politeuma', *Philologus* 85 (1927) 268-312, 433-54; M Schofield, 'Aristotle and the Democratization of Politics', in B Morison and K Ierodiaknou (eds.), *Episteme, etc.* Oxford 2011, 285-301.