

Articoli/2

Love of Beauty in Aristotle's Politics **The Case of Ostracism**

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In this paper I examine love of beauty (φιλοκαλία) in Aristotle's thought, and suggest that he treats it as an emotion (πάθος) able to develop and strengthen good moral habits. I propose that Aristotle appeals to the love of beauty of some of his addressees – namely, those who are particularly sensitive to the “aesthetic” aspect of politics – to persuade them about the appropriateness of political measures which, if taken at a face value, might not appear ethically sound. After a preliminary discussion of the power of emotions to shape virtuous conditions of the soul, I briefly address the issue of the main properties of beauty: order, proportion and definiteness. Finally, I introduce the issue of ostracism discussed in Book III of the *Politics* and present it as a paradigmatic case of a political procedure which can be justified on grounds not only of common utility, but also of beauty.

Introduction

Over the last four decades, philosophical scholarship has experienced a lively interest in the notion of τὸ καλόν (which is often translated as “beauty”, “the noble” or “the fine”¹) and its supposed capacity to promote an understanding of various areas of Aristotle's thought. In the first place, as it has been noticed by several authors², τὸ καλόν proves to be a central element in

¹ In Ancient Greek, the substantive adjective τὸ καλόν encompasses a rich semantic area whose prominent meanings are the one of “beauty” (a sense which, due to its predominantly aesthetic connotations, may be associated with the Latin word “pulchrum”) and the one of “the fine” (i.e. one which, in virtue of its moral implications, we may compare to some notable employments of the Latin “honestum”). Although believing that the Aristotelian τὸ καλόν designates a range of issues extending over and above the purely aesthetic domain, in this paper I shall use the words “beauty” (i.e., a word generally employed in everyday language with reference to the sphere of physical appearance and human appreciation of it) and “the fine” as interchangeable.

² See for instance D.J. Allan, *The Fine and the Good in the Eudemian Ethics*, in *Untersuchungen zur Eudemischen Ethik: Akten des 5. Symposium Aristotelicum*, ed. by P. Moraux and D. Halfinger, Berlin 1971, pp. 63-71; cf. Ch.V. Mirus, *Aristotle on Beauty and Goodness in Nature*, «International Philosophical Quarterly», LII, 2012, 1, pp. 79-97.

Aristotle's investigation of nature and its governing principles. By identifying it as a metaphysical mode of causation that contributes to conceptually shaping Aristotle's teleological approach on φύσις, these scholars have suggested that, on Aristotle's view, this notion would shed light on the process of development of living beings towards the achievement of their distinctive, functional form.

In the second place, beauty was also discussed by a number of Aristotelian scholars in terms of an ethical concept, that is, as an orientative ideal for excellent individual action, both in the domain of theoretical contemplation and in the one of practical deliberation and agency. By indicating the ultimate aims, as well as the strategies and the psychological motives, of both a correct human behaviour and an authentically virtuous attitude, τὸ καλόν proves itself to be an ideal of human perfection which helps to understand the nature of virtue and the meaning of a genuinely happy life³. While in recent years much attention has been devoted by Aristotelian scholars to the theoretical and the ethical implications of beauty, not as much consideration has been paid to the role which the notion at stake supposedly plays in Aristotle's political thought. What is more, left unaddressed is (at least to my knowledge) the question of the possible ways in which the supposed emotional dimension of beauty can be canvassed out of Aristotle's account of the aims and strategies of virtuous political life. In this paper I shall discuss the idea of love of beauty (φιλοκαλία), and suggest in the first place that Aristotle treats it as a passion (πάθος) which contributes to developing and strengthening good moral habits. Most crucially, I will propose that Aristotle appeals to the love of beauty of some of his addressees – namely, those who are particularly sensitive to the “aesthetic” aspect of politics – to persuade them about the appropriateness of political measures which, if taken at a face value, might not appear ethically sound. In the last section of this paper I will introduce the issue of ostracism as Aristotle discusses it in the third Book of the *Politics*, and present it as a paradigmatic case of a political procedure which can be justified on grounds not only of common utility, but also of beauty.

1. Φιλοκαλία as an Emotion

The Greek word ‘φιλοκαλία’ is generally employed in the literary production of V-IV century b.C. to indicate a form of love and an inclination for either physical or ornamental beauty. The corresponding adjective, ‘φιλόκαλος’ denotes either a quality which certain persons are credited to possess⁴, namely

³ For discussions of the καλόν as an ethical concept, see for instance J. Owens, *The καλόν in Aristotelian ethics*, in *Studies in Aristotle*, ed. by D.J. O'Meara, Washington D.C. 1981, pp. 261-277; T.H. Irwin, *Aristotle's Conception of Morality*, «Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy» I, 1986, pp. 115-143. G. Richardson Lear, *Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine*, in *The Blackwell's Guide to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. by R. Kraut, Oxford 2005, pp. 116-136.

⁴ See for instance, Xenophon, who in the *Cyropaedia* describes the future king of Persia (and founder of the first Persian empire) Cyrus as «a boy fond of beautiful things (φιλόκαλος) and

the tendency to desire and appreciate beautiful things, or an ideal property to which well-educated people ought to aspire⁵ in relation to physical beauty and various forms of embellishment. If understood in this light, φιλοκαλία is not by itself related to the human pursuit or possession of excellence (either moral or intellectual). By contrast (as I hope to show in this essay), Aristotle presents the emotion of φιλοκαλία as a passion endowed with the capacity to successfully guide human beings to knowledge of goodness and to its practical realization in several areas of human life.

Before examining the distinctive object of the Aristotelian φιλοκαλία, it is perhaps appropriate to delve into the emotional nature of φιλία. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary⁶, the word “emotion” began to be used only in the sixteenth century, being adapted from the French word *émouvoir*. This verb, which derives from the Latin *emovere*, means not only “remove” or “displace”, but also, and more pertinently to our concerns, “stir up”, to “drive from”. By carrying an implication of excitement (either mental or physical or both), the word “emotion” seems to denote a subjective response to the stimuli provided by the external environment (consisting in persons, objects or situations). Along a similar line, the Greek word πάθος (a noun deriving from the verbal base ‘πάθ’; see the verb πάσχειν) includes a cluster of meanings ranging from passive “suffering” to proper “experiencing”.⁷ The power of reason to captivate the emotions of listeners and address them towards specific assessments, choices and behaviours is one of the central objects of concern in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. Although Aristotle believes that true aim of rhetoric is to guide listeners and addressees of speech to truth and virtuous practical agency⁸, he is well aware that any speech is able to elicit reactions of pleasure and pain (independently of the ethical and intellectual soundness of the reasons advanced through the speech), and produce by consequence a change in one’s rational beliefs. In *Rhetoric* II, 1.1378a21-22 he offers the following account of emotions: «The emotions (πάθη) are all those things that bring men to change in regard to their

eager for distinction”, and also as one «pleased with his dress» (Xen. *Cyrop.* 1.3.3.4; transl. by W. Miller in *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, Cambridge, MA and London 1914).

⁵ At *Cyrop.* 2.1.22 Xenophon says that Cyrus recognizes the need for the private soldier that he show himself not only obedient to the officers, but also ‘lover of beauty’ in the care of his equipment (φιλόκαλον περί ὄπλα). See also Isocrates in the speech *To Demonicus*. At I. 27.1-2 the orator invites the young Demonicus to be φιλόκαλος in relation to dress (τὰ περί τὴν ἐσθῆτα). As Isocrates explains in that passage, the lover of beauty, who is marked by elegance (φιλοκάλου μὲν τὸ μεγαλοπρεπέες) is to be distinguished from the καλλωπιστής, i.e. a fop, one who pays excessive attention to dress (καλλωπιστοῦ δὲ τὸ περίεργον).

⁶ See *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, Springfield (Mass.) 2005.

⁷ Cf. H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, P.G.W. Glare, H.S. Jones, *A Greek English Lexicon*, Oxford 1996 (first ed. 1891). Other English translations of *pathos* are “passion”, “affection”, “feeling”.

⁸ See *Rhet.* I, 2.1356a25-26, where Aristotle says that rhetoric is an offshoot of dialectic and also of ethical studies, which may fairly be called ‘political’ (and deal with the realization of the human good). See also *Rhet.* I, 1.1355a22-b7, where he explains that rhetoric is useful in that true and just things are naturally inclined to prevail over their opposites, and also that true and better things are by nature practically easier to prove and more persuasive than others.

rational judgements, which are attended by pain and pleasure, such as anger, pity, fear, and all the other emotions and their contraries» (my translation).

The emotional responsiveness of human beings to recognition of beauty is fostered by speeches capable of instilling the characteristic pleasure which accompanies love. As Aristotle explains in *Rhetoric* I, 2.1356a13-15, «persuasion may come through the hearers, when they are induced by the speech towards the emotion» (my translation).

A speech aiming to stir up love of beauty must be able to present beauty itself as an appetible ideal, which is to say, one worth pursuing. This might become a difficult task when the beauty at stake is not a property eliciting physiological reactions of pleasure, but a practical ideal, i.e. one concerning actions of a virtuous nature. As Aristotle himself explains in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (especially in Book II), people not accustomed to performing virtuous actions and without spontaneous tendencies to morally good agency generally require painful efforts to learn acquire virtuous habits⁹. To be persuasive, a speech on moral beauty must successfully convey specific reasons to persons with a capacity not only to recognize that kind of beauty, but also to feel pleasure at it. Persons of this sort might already have a firmly established and fully developed virtuous character, such as the ‘lovers of beauty’ mentioned in *NE* I, 9.1099a12-13. As lovers of beautiful actions, the things they find pleasant are the same that are ‘pleasant by nature’, that is to say, pleasant in the same way as objective¹⁰, perfect virtue can be for those who are able to recognize both its inner worth and its practical import in human life in terms of happiness¹¹. In this passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, lovers of beauty are distinguished from ‘the many’ (οἱ πολλοί), for whom pleasant things are in conflict with one another, supposedly because of their lack of virtue and insensitivity to moral beauty.

At any rate, there seems to be another type of lovers of beauty which Aristotle allows us to identify in his ethical discussions: those who, although lacking a stable virtue, are pursuing a successful path towards a full-fledged virtuous nature. These can profitably listen to his lectures on matters of human goodness. In the first Book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* – precisely at *NE* I, 1.1095a2-5 – he initially addresses such persons without explicitly characterizing them as φιλόκαλοι, and he confines himself to distinguishing this sort of persons from those unable to listen to practical speeches, such as young or simply

⁹ Many Aristotelian scholars, referring to the books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* concerning virtue, lay emphasis on Aristotle’s concern for the ability of human beings to internalize (with time and effort) from scattered particular cases a general evaluative attitude. Cf. for instance M. Burnyeat, *Aristotle on Learning to Be Good*, in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. by A. Oksenberg Rorty, Berkeley 1980, pp. 69-92, especially p. 72.

¹⁰ On the idea that, in Aristotle’s practical thought, good upbringing and φιλοκαλία are a mark of the capacity to recognise objectively good moral principles see I. Vasiliou, *The Role of Good Upbringing in Aristotle’s Ethics*, «Philosophy and Phenomenological Research» LVI, 1996, 4, pp. 771-797.

¹¹ On the possibility to see virtue as an inherently valuable good and also as a means to happiness see *NE* I, 5.1097a33-b6.

immature people. As Aristotle explains, the second type of people would be able to apprehend a theoretical knowledge, but their shared inclination to follow passions makes them unable both to listen to speeches on the human good and, by consequence, to translate their content into virtuous practical agency. In the following lines, however, he makes reference to the ideal of beauty in the context of a discussion on the most appropriate way to get knowledge of the first principles of a certain subject. After pointing out that one must start from things known *by us*, and not in absolute, he says: «This is why anyone who is going to be a competent student in the spheres of what is noble and what is just – in a word, politics – must be brought up well in his habits (*NE I*, 1.1095b4-6)»¹².

It is only in the tenth Book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that Aristotle explicitly addresses the issue of emotional sensitivity to beauty by drawing a distinction between the ‘lovers of beauty’, who might profit from speeches concerning virtue so as to acquire it fully (which implies that such people are not yet fully virtuous), and “the many”, who are both subservient to passion and ill-inclined to listen to reasons of beauty. In this context of investigation, he is not specifically referring to the issue of the most appropriate listeners to his own ethical speeches, but appears mainly committed to an investigation of the requirements for an acquisition of moral virtue guided by virtuous lawgivers. It is likely that, by speaking of such requirements, Aristotle is addressing not simply people who wish to improve their character on their own, but also (and perhaps more crucially) to those who, willing to become lawgivers, ought to strive to the real and ultimate goal of virtuous political activity and expertise: that of «producing citizens of a certain kind, namely, those who are both good and the sort to perform noble actions (*πρακτικῶς τῶν καλῶν*; *NE I*, 10.1099b30-32)»¹³.

On the one hand, we might notice that the same task is pursued by Aristotle’s own ethical speeches, given that, as he claims on several occasions, the task of ethics is not to produce a purely theoretical understanding of the good, but rather to make people effectively virtuous¹⁴. On the other hand, while Aristotle declares that his speeches are exclusively addressed to one kind of people, the *φιλόκαλοι* (both those who already possess and those who are about to attain stable virtue)¹⁵, the virtuous lawgiver, instead, ought to be able to speak to different types of people (including also those who are not sensitive

¹²The English translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* adopted in this essay is by R. Crisp, Cambridge 2000. As we see in this passage, Crisp translates “beautiful things”, τὰ καλὰ, as “the noble”.

¹³Cf. *NE I*, 1.1094a14-15, where Aristotle says that politics investigates beautiful and just things.

¹⁴See *NE I*, 1.1.1095a6; cf. *II*, 2.1103b27-31; See also Aristotle’s *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE I*, 4.1215b1-4; *EE I*, 5.1216b19-25) and *Metaphysics* (*Metaph. I*, 1.993b19-23; *VI*, 1.1025b19-28).

¹⁵A different view is held by Irwin, who maintains that Aristotle is not speaking exclusively to lovers of beauty, but also to those who, *qua* rational, are able to understand his claims on virtue. See T.H. Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles*, Oxford 1988, p. 601.

to beauty). As Aristotle states at *NE X*, 10.1180a4-5, the many «heed necessity rather than argument, punishments rather than what is noble (τῷ καλῷ)».

The many avoid performance of ugly actions and succeed in taking part in moral goodness only out of fear of punishment. As Aristotle makes it clear at *NE X*, 10.1179b12-15, the many «pursue their own personal pleasures and the means to them, and avoid the opposed pains; and they do not have even an idea of what is noble and truly pleasant, since they have never tasted it».

Thus, such people lack the emotional and attitudinal tools needed to profitably listen to and show appreciation towards speeches on virtue.

The φιλόκαλος, by contrast, is able not only to emotionally and intellectually grasp the beauty of speeches on virtue, but also to feel pleasure at listening to them, finding in that same pleasure a motive to pursue (or continue to pursue) a virtuous agential path. It is mainly persons of this kind that the virtuous lawgiver addresses by stirring up their love for beauty, in line with a principle which we might characterize as “principle of differential treatment”. This principle is illustrated by a passage at *NE X*, 10.1180a5-12:

This, some people think, is why legislators ought to urge people to virtue and encourage them to act for the sake of what is noble – on the assumption that those who have been trained well in their habits will respond – but ought also to impose punishments and penalties on those who disobey or whose nature is more deficient, and completely banish the incorrigible. For, they think, the good person, since he lives with a view to what is noble, will listen to reason, while the bad person, since he desires pleasure, is chastened by pain, like a beast of burden; this is also why they say the pains inflicted should be those most opposed to the pleasures they like.

As it is plausible to suppose, the love of beauty which allows good lawgivers to successfully address a fixed category of citizens – namely those well brought-up – is the same emotion as the one which Aristotle’s listeners are required to possess in order to successfully listen to Aristotle’s speech on human goodness and its relationships to virtuous political action. In the pages that follow I will try to show that some arguments contained in Aristotle’s speeches on issues of politics are addressed not only to rational listeners as such, but also to potential rulers/lawgivers well-trained in love of moral beauty. In particular, taking issue with the phenomenon of ostracism, I will contend that Aristotle’s critical discussion can be framed within an ethical vision which advances claims of objective goodness and legitimacy not simply in conditions of absolute goodness, but also in imperfect political conditions, such as those that call into question the possibility of ostracism itself.

2. Beauty as a Metaphysical Concept

As an emotion responsive to recognition of its object¹⁶, the Aristotelian φιλοκαλία is a form of love stirred up by a peculiar type of beauty, namely one which transcends sheer physical appearance and captures the inner structure of things, living beings and/or situations. In the *Metaphysics*, for instance, beauty is presented as a property belonging to mathematical objects (and, as we read in *Metaph.* XIII, 3.1078a36-b5, as a proper “cause” (αἰτία). Here Aristotle deals with mathematical sciences (αἱ μαθηματικαὶ ἐπιστῆμαι; 1078a3, or αἱ μαθηματικά; 1078a33) by emphasizing their power to open up for human beings a path of visualization of sensible objects which are seen in their unchanging, structural properties¹⁷. At *Metaph.* XIII 3.1077a36-b2 he acknowledges that mathematical sciences, more successfully than others, reveal properties of their objects which Aristotle characterizes as “the supreme forms of beauty”: «[T]he main species of beauty (τοῦ δὲ καλοῦ μέγιστα εἶδη) are orderly arrangement (τάξις), proportion (συμμετρία) and definiteness (τὸ ὀρισμένον); and these are especially manifested by the mathematical sciences»¹⁸.

An in-depth survey of the three properties and their employment in Aristotle's works goes beyond the scopes of the present paper. Suffice it to say that, in Aristotle's thought, “συμμετρία” may denote either some kind of proportion between natural elements, such as those out of which a condition of health results¹⁹, or the property of arithmetic commensurability between separate entities or parts of a single entity²⁰. The idea of a proportionality between parts – especially the one of an accomplished whole – is also evoked by the property of τάξις. In ancient Greek lexicon, the substantive ‘τάξις’ indicates a military set-up with an internal arrangement²¹. In a similar vein, Aristotle excludes that order is a feature alien to random arrangements of parts. By contrast, he seems to regard order as the typical property of living beings designed by nature to achieve a full-fledged form, or the endowment of artifacts (and their parts) crafted by

¹⁶ Cf. Goldie 2000: 28-37, who speaks of a ‘recognition-response tie’ in Aristotle's moral psychology, arguing that emotions such as anger, pity and shame represent a response to the recognition of some evaluative property (see P. Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*, Oxford 2000, pp. 20-28).

¹⁷ See *Metaph.* XIII, 3.1077b17-1078a5; Cf. *Phys.* II, 2.193b31-35.

¹⁸ Translation by H. Tredennick, Cambridge, MA and London 1989 (first published 1933), from which all the passages of the *Metaphysics* mentioned in this paper will be taken.

¹⁹ See for instance *NE* X, 2.1173a25-28, where Aristotle critically examines some theories on the relationships between goodness and pleasure. He hints at the idea that health admits of various degrees although it is a determinate condition, and so does pleasure. In fact, the same proportion συμμετρία is not found in all beings, nor a single proportion always persists in the same being.

²⁰ In *Metaph.* V, 2.1004b1-12 συμμετρία is characterized as one of the distinct peculiarities of numbers and their relations, such as oddness and evenness, equality, excess and defect.

²¹ For the idea of ‘τάξις’ as ‘organized military body’ see for instance Aeschylus, *Persians*, 298 and Xenophanes, *Anabasis* I, 2.16, VI, 5.11. As for the idea of τάξις as ‘order in the battlefield’ see Tucydides, *Stories* V, 68 and Xenophon, *Anabasis* II, 1.7.

expert people²². Similarly, the property of definiteness evokes the idea of a well accomplished entity, one with an outer limit, which lacks no parts and also one which, in virtue of its distinctive physiognomy, is distinguishable from others. A definite thing, in other words, might be seen as one which has achieved the final stage of its development and presents a good, well-ordered functional form.

It is interesting that, in *Metaph.* XIII, 4.1078b1-5 the supreme forms of beauty are treated as causes, just as beauty itself:

«[A]nd inasmuch as it is evident that these (I mean, e.g., orderly arrangement and definiteness) are causes of many things, obviously they must also to some extent treat of the cause in this sense, i.e. the cause in the sense of the Beautiful (ὡς τὸ καλὸν αἴτιον τρόπον τινά)²³».

We might wonder in what respect beauty and its distinctive properties work as causes. In the first place, it is plausible to suppose that beauty is a formal cause both by virtue of its capacity to make the inner structure of things (or their possible relationships to other things) intelligible and for its power to shape²⁴ that structure (and/or possible relationships) of things, thus imparting proportion and order between their parts²⁵. Beauty can also be detected in those living substances whose natural development (which proceeds by way of internal motion; *Phys.* II, 1.192b16-34; *Metaph.* V, 4.1602a16-20) strives towards the achievement of a perfect, functional form, one fitting to the potentialities of the subject itself. In this respect, the attainment of a perfect, beautiful form becomes understandable in the light of a teleological framework, which is to say, one in which the beauty of the form will end up being identified with the one of the end to attain²⁶. A similar idea emerges in Aristotle's *Parts of Animals*, where he says that «[N]ot chance, but finality are present in the nature's works works of nature, and in the highest degree: and the end for which those works are put together and produced occupies the region of the beautiful (τὴν τοῦ καλοῦ χώραν) (*PA* I, 5.645a23-26; my translation)».

As I hope to show in the remainder of this essay, the idea of beauty as a final causative power is pervasively at work also in Aristotle's practical philosophy. By appeal to ideals of harmony, moderation and, most importantly, beauty and its

²² On the relationships between the properties of beauty and teleological order see G. Richardson Lear, *Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine*, cit., especially pp. 118-119.

²³ On the idea of "cause" as an explanatory (rather than constitutive) principle of reality see M.R. Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology*, Oxford 2005, pp. 42-49. See also R. Sorabji, *Necessity, Cause and Blame*, Ithaca 1980, p. 40, where he characterizes causes as "modes of explanation".

²⁴ On the idea of "cause" as a factor actively operating in reality see D.J. Furley, *What Kind of Cause is Aristotle's Final Cause?*, in *Rationality in Greek Thought*, ed. by M. Frede and G. Striker, Oxford 1996, pp. 59-79: 60.

²⁵ On the idea that Aristotelian causes combine an explanatory and formal-final powers see J. Moravcsik, *What makes Reality Intelligible? Reflections on Aristotle's Theory of Aitia*, in *Aristotle's Physics: A Collection of Essays*, ed. by L. Judson, Oxford 1995, pp. 31-47: 31.

²⁶ On the coincidence between form and end see *Metaph.* V, 4.1015a10-11; cfr. *Metaph.* V, 24.1023a35-36; *Phys.* II, 7.198a25-27; *Phys.* II, 7.198b4; *Phys.* II, 9.200a14-15; *Phys.* II.9.200a34; *GC* II.9.335b6-7; *DA* II, 4.415b10-12; *GA* I, 1.715a4-6.

supreme forms, Aristotle seems to use aesthetical notions as *rationes cognoscendi* of political entities or phenomena that actively shape the structure of the city and set the basis for the solution of problematic circumstances that make the road to perfection impracticable. I shall take issue with Aristotle's treatment of ostracism, and show that Aristotle offers a problematic characterization of this political device, measuring up justifications and criticism by appeal to reasons of beauty. By so doing, as I will contend, he means both to elicit the emotions of his good readers and also to stress the importance for virtuous lawgiving activity of appealing to love of beauty in order to persuade a specific type of citizens of the ethical appropriateness or inappropriateness of certain political measures.

3. The Institute of Ostracism. Aristotle's Critical Reading

Ostracism is a political device introduced for the first time and institutionalized in the VI century b.C. by Cleisthenes²⁷, a lawgiver and political leader committed to setting the ancient Solonian constitution of Athens on a democratic footing. According to this procedure, any citizen who, in virtue of eminent political powers, talents and/or material resources, was perceived as a potential threat for the stability of the *polis*, could be banished by popular vote from the city-state of Athens for ten years²⁸. As such, ostracism consisted in a legalized form of exile, one according to which a citizen could be expelled without being the addressee of a special accusation, without trial and also without the possibility of defending himself²⁹. The Athenians were asked each year in the assembly whether it seemed best to them to hold an ostracism. In case of a positive response, an ostracism would be held two months later, under the supervision of the nine archons and the *Boulē* (a deliberative council made up of 500 citizens appointed by lot every year). Then, each citizen could write down the name of the person each wanted to banish (the name "ostracism" itself is derived from the greek 'ὄστρακον', the pottery shard which the Athenians used as voting token to express the name of the man they wished to banish). In case more than one name appeared in the *ostraka*, the person receiving the majority of votes was banished³⁰. No permanent loss of status and social stigma used

²⁷ Cf. Aristotle, *Ath. Pol.*, 22, 1-4; Aelian, *Hist. Var.* XIII, 24; Philochoros in F. Jacoby, *Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker*, Berlin 1923, Fr. 30, p. 108; Ephoros in Diodoros XI, 55.

²⁸ Records of exceptions to the rule are found in Plutarch's *Life of Aristeides* (VII, 5-6) and *Life of Cimon* (17, 2-6). Aristeides, Athenian archon and general who distinguished himself in the Persian War, was ostracized from Athens due to his opposition to a law proposed by his rival Themistocles, and was recalled ahead of time (in 480 a.C.) thanks to an amnesty indicted to recruit generals in the defence of Athens against the Persian enemy (he was elected as military general for the year 480-479). Similarly, Cimon was ostracized in 461 b.C. and called back during an emergency.

²⁹ See G. Grote, *A History of Greece*, vol. IV, originally published in 1847, Cambridge 2009, chapter XXXI, p. 200.

³⁰ Plutarch reported that ostracism was considered valid if the total number of votes was at least 6000 (Plutarch, *Life of Aristeides*, 7). A different testimony is offered by Philocorus (*Atthis*, Book

to befall those who suffered ostracism at the end of their exile, nor were they deprived of the right to enjoy income from their property at the time of coming back to their native cities³¹.

Before the introduction of the law of ostracism, exile of prominent people was a practice employed at the discretion of members of aristocratic élites, who were concerned with the preservation of their personal power. Only after the enactment of the law by Cleisthenes, institutionalized exile became a way by which the δῆμος was allowed to neutralize the citizens perceived as powerful rivals, to the effect of avoiding open conflict among individuals and/or political factions³². If seen in this light, ostracism could represent a way for the citizens to widen the political participation and the autonomy of deliberation typically endorsed in democratic systems³³. What is more, by being called to intervene in the management of political conflicts which threatened the stability of their system, the citizens could eventually perceive themselves both individually and as a group as protagonists and arbiters of the political life³⁴.

Aristotle addresses the issue of ostracism both in the *Athenaion Politeia* and in the *Politics*. In the *Athenaion Politeia* (presumably drafted by Aristotle and his pupils³⁵) he reconstructs the origins and purposes of this political practice by way of a descriptive treatment of the crucial events, institutions and constitutional changes that occurred in the Athenian regime up to 403 a.C. In the *Politics*, instead, he investigates the institute of ostracism within the framework of an analysis of those criteria which, being possessed by certain members of a given *polis*, legitimize their access to political power.

Noticeably, while in the *Athenaion Politeia* Aristotle characterizes Cleisthenes' law of ostracism as a reaction to the threat of tyranny³⁶ and as a distinctively democratic device (Cleisthenes is said to have introduced this

III, reported in FGrH 328 F 30), who says that 6000 is the minimum number of votes against a certain man required to make ostracism of that man valid.

³¹ See G. Grote, *A History of Greece*, cit., p. 200.

³² Several contemporary scholars have spoken about a supposedly "preemptive" nature of ostracism. See for instance P.J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia*. Oxford 1981, p. 270; M.H. Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles, and Ideology*, Norman (Oklahoma) 1991, p. 35.

³³ See Grote's praise of ostracism as a means of protection of the early democracy and a means through which each citizen could cultivate and strengthen a sentiment of reverence towards the constitution in force (See G. Grote, *A History of Greece*, vol. IV, originally published in 1847, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009, chapter XXXI, especially 200-212).

³⁴ On this point see S. Forsdyke, *Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy. The Politics of Expulsion in Ancient Greece*, Princeton 2005.

³⁵ As P. J. Rhodes points out in the introduction to his translation of the *Athenian Constitution* (London 1984), the work was probably written by an anonymous pupil and not by Aristotle himself.

³⁶ Cf. G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *Cleisthenes II: Ostracism, Archons and Strategoi*, in *Athenian Democratic Origins and Other Essays*, ed. by D. Harvey and R. Parker, Oxford 2004, pp. 180-228: 209. As he says, the law of ostracism would have been a very natural reaction on the part of Cleisthenes and the members of his circle to the threat of tyranny or even of domination by a foreign power.

practice “aiming at the multitude”; *Ath. Pol.* XXII, 1.3³⁷), in the *Politics* he speaks about ostracism in terms of a policy that can be adopted in a wide variety of constitutions (either constitutions aiming at the exclusive interest of rulers, which Aristotle himself characterizes as ‘deviant’ (παρεκβάσεις), or those aiming at the common interest, which he qualifies as ‘right’ (ὀρθαί)³⁸).

Aristotle addresses the theme of ostracism in Book III of the *Politics*, placing his discussion of this subject within the framework of an examination of the criteria which ought to be reasonably accepted as principles of distribution of political offices (*Pol.* III, 13.1283a24ff.). Given that some established qualifications for rulership (among the proposed criteria he lists wealth, noble birth, freedom and virtue) might be possessed by someone to an extremely high degree, the question emerges as to whether a person eminent in a certain property ought legitimately claim political power and, if so, whether the attribution of high political offices raises problems of overall proportion and stability within a given city³⁹. It is precisely within this context of examination that ostracism is introduced as a theoretical possibility. More to the point, ostracism might be thought of as a policy which, although admitting elements of justice, might also cause undesirable political consequences, such as the banishment of people able to contribute to the well-functioning of the *polis* by way of an outstanding political virtue.

To the possibility that a person prominent in some respects ought to achieve power at the expense of others, Aristotle initially replies that, generally speaking,

Correctness (τὸ ὀρθόν) must be taken to mean “in an equal spirit” (ἴσως): what is [enacted] in an equal spirit is correct with a view both to the advantage of the city as a

³⁷ The idea of ‘aiming at the multitude’ admits of at least two readings. One possibility is that Cleisthenes meant to ‘please’ the many (see for instance the translation of the passage by de Ste. Croix, cit. at p. 183; cf. Kenyon’s translation at *Aristotle. The Athenian Constitution*, ed. by F.G. Kenyon, London 1915: «securing the goodwill of the masses»). This would imply that the law of ostracism was immediately and consciously appreciated by the many. An alternative possibility is that Cleisthenes simply aimed at promoting the interest of the many by preserving their power from the threat of tyranny, still without a conscious reaction of appreciation by the many. I believe the second reading is more plausible if we consider that, as Aristotle himself declares at *Athenaion Politeia* XXII, 2, the law of ostracism was enacted eleven years before its first application by the many against Hipparchus, a kinsman of the tyrant Peisistratos (an alternative reconstruction is instead offered by the historian Androtion, in his turn preserved by Harpocration (fr. 6 Jacoby), who seems to have stated that the law was applied at the same time in which it was enacted, i.e. in 488-487 a.C.). This might imply that the many (due to an excessive mildness [πραότης], as Aristotle explains at *Ath. Pol.* XX, 4) did not immediately recognize the threat posed by the tyrant and his friends, and that they might have felt the need for an ostracism only at a subsequent stage, precisely when they began to feel suspicion towards friends and relatives of the tyrants. For a similar interpretation see de Ste. Croix, cit., p. 183.

³⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Pol.* III, 6.1279a16-21.

³⁹ As Accattino notices in his commentary to Book III of the *Politics*, it is not an acceptable and right to concede exclusive power to a person who, although possessing a certain quality in the highest degree, shares possession of the same quality with other citizens. See *Aristotele, La Politica, Libro III*, ed. by P. Accattino and M. Curnis, Roma 2013, p. 210.

whole and to the common [advantage] of the citizens. A citizen in the common sense is one who shares in ruling and being ruled; but he differs in accordance with each regime (*Pol.* III, 1283b40-1284a2)⁴⁰.

The idea of the political community as a dimension of human agency that involves the active participation of a plurality of citizens – presumably according to principles of proportional equality⁴¹ – might certainly be used as a reason to rightly banish a man prominent in either wealth or charismatic power. We might even suppose that a virtuous lawgiver, working in view of the interest of citizens and their involvement in political activity, can rightly banish an exceedingly virtuous man to prevent concentration of power. Surprisingly, Aristotle prefers to advance an alternative – and perhaps less convincing – justification:

«... legislation must necessarily have to do with those who are equal both in stock and capacity, and [that] for the other sort of person there is no law – they themselves are law. It would be ridiculous, then, if one attempted to legislate for them» (*Pol.* III, 13.1284a11-15).

As it seems to me, the above mentioned argument fails to properly distinguish the problem of the distribution of lawgiving powers from the one of the addressees of legislation. In fact, a man endowed with outstanding human and political virtue can also be a perfect lawgiver and operate in view of the wellbeing of the whole *polis*, even in those cases in which a full display of virtue is impracticable.

Aristotle himself seems to be well aware that, in order to justify a procedure like ostracism of exceedingly virtuous persons, one ought address the issue not from the point of view of what legislation can do for such persons, but primarily from the point of view of what these persons can do for legislation. The possibility that he is thinking of the hypothetical benefits that outstandingly virtuous persons can make in any political arena (both in well-ordered communities and in communities characterized by inner strife or lack of the human and material resources needed for self-sufficiency) becomes clear once he makes reference to a tale by Hesop (*Fables* 241; *Pol.* III, 13.1284a15-17), in its turn employed by the philosopher Anthistenes. Aristotle suggests that the hares are not totally right in demanding in the assembly that that all should have equality (as I believe, Aristotle may refer here primarily to equality in political powers, not to – or not only to – equality of treatment), and that the lions, instead, might be right when they reply that «where are your claws and teeth?» (thus implying that only possession of special talents would legitimize legislative power in the assembly). It is interesting to notice that, at this stage of his discussion, Aristotle does not appear willing to defend the idea that people outstandingly powerful on account of some form of strength, like wealth or popularity, ought to be accorded the

⁴⁰ Trans. by C. Lord (*Aristotle. The Politics*, Chicago and London 1984), from which all the passages of the *Politics* mentioned in this essay will be taken.

⁴¹ See the already quoted commentary by Accattino at p. 210.

highest political offices, nor does he resort to the idea of a participatory equality to justify the practice of ostracism. So far, he seems to treat ostracism purely by way of a descriptive approach, avoiding justificatory ratios for that policy and confining himself to advancing explanations, as he does for instance at *Pol.* III, 13.1284a17-22 with regard for democratically governed cities:

[H]ence democratically run cities enact ostracism for this sort of reason. For these are surely held to pursue equality about all others, and so they used to ostracize and banish for fixed periods from the city those who were held to be preeminent in power on account of wealth or abundance of friends or some other kind of political strength.

To enforce the explanation above, Aristotle mentions the mythical tale of the Argonauts, who left Heracles behind due to his exceeding weight in relation to the other sailors.

Evaluative aspects are introduced only in the following lines of Aristotle's argument, where he presents the story of Periander (also reported by Herodotus V 92⁴²), who, being asked for advice by the Tyrant Thrasybulus through a herald, did not offer any verbal response, but confined himself to levelling the corn-field by plucking off the ears that stood out above the rest; this Thrasybulus understood as an invitation to destroy outstanding citizens (*Pol.* III, 13.1284a26-34).

While narrating this story, Aristotle explains that some blame Periander's advice to the tyrant. With regard to such persons, he expresses the view that those who criticize him are not totally right in their censure. This, as I believe, might be viewed as a decisive step towards a qualified defence of ostracism, which artfully interweaves reasons of utility and reasons of beauty. In the first place, as it might be implied from a reading of *Pol.* III, 13.1284a33-37 – where Aristotle mentions exclusively those constitutions aiming at the personal advantage of the rulers – ostracism is an advantageous policy, which people in power use for their personal interest, even in those political communities in which the practice of exile is not framed by law, such as in oligarchies and communities governed by tyrants:

This is something that is advantageous not only to tyrants, nor are tyrants the only ones who do it, but the matter stands similarly with respect both to oligarchies and to democracies; for ostracism has the same power in a certain way as pulling down and exiling the preeminent.

In a similar vein, Aristotle goes on to say, ostracism can be also understood as an advantageous mechanism of neutralization of the growing power of certain cities at the expenses of well-established cities. Telling examples are the action undertaken by the city of Athens against cities like Samos, Lesbos and Chios,

⁴²As Laurenti points out (Aristotele, *La Politica*, Roma-Bari 2007, 10th ed., see, p. 100, footnote 48), Herodotus reports that Thrasybulus is the one who gives the advice, not the one who receives it.

which had adhered to a naval league founded by Athens during the Persian Wars and had increased their power (*Pol.* III, 13.1284a37-b3), or the case of the king of the Persians, who used to cut down the numbers of the Medes, Babylonians, and others who had waxed proud on account of once being head of an empire.

We might assume that, in his hypothetical defence of ostracism, Aristotle means to present the search for utility as an intuitively palatable motive to neutralize outstanding persons. However, as the first stage of the Aristotelian defence reveals, when utility is characterized purely in terms of personal advantage, it fails to stand the test of moral acceptability and to play a role in a supposedly ethical justifiability of ostracism. It is only in the last part of Aristotle's argument that the defence of ostracism begins to take a convincing shape. Here Aristotle sharpens his reflections on the utility of that procedure by making it clear that, in general, ostracism is a pre-emptive measure the activation of which is premised on thoughts on the potentially destabilizing consequences (either for those in power or for the city in its wholeness) of a person proportionally superior to those already in force. Reasons of utility can be accepted as a justification of certain forms of ostracism only when utility concerns the whole community, and not simply a limited part of it. As Aristotle explains at *Pol.* III, 13.1284b3-6: «The issue is one that concerns all regimes generally, including correct ones. For the deviant ones do this looking to the private [advantage of the rulers], yet even in the case of those that look to the common good the matter stands in the same way».

By showing that the domain of applicability of ostracism can be extended also to right constitutions, Aristotle does not mean to present ostracism as a policy which deviant constitutions apply in the same way as and with the same ends in view the right ones. By contrast, he means to mark a gradual shift from a justification of ostracism grounded in reasons of personal utility to a different type of utility-based justification: namely, one rooted in reasons of common utility. It becomes clear, then, that the supposed justice of ostracism cannot be explained by reference to subjective reasons, i.e. reasons linked to the sphere of one's arbitrary conception of one's own wellbeing.

It is not a case that, in the subsequent lines of his argument, Aristotle pursues a possible defence of ostracism by introducing a series of analogies between the city and compounds the parts of which contribute toward and cooperate in view of a shared end. What might seem surprising, though, is the fact that the ethical soundness and justifiability of common utility is illustrated by appeal to reasons that might be characterized as "aesthetical".

The first analogy is drawn from the field of figurative arts. At *Pol.* III, 13.1284b7-10 Aristotle says that «a painter would not allow himself to paint an animal with a foot that exceeded proportion, not even if it were outstandingly beautiful».

The idea of a lack of proportion between parts is expressed in terms of "symmetry" (τῆς συμμετρίας), which, as we have seen in the *Metaphysics*, is one of the supreme forms of beauty. To be implemented, symmetry must be pursued

with an eye to the whole, this being teleologically prior to each of its parts. Being a relational property, symmetry brings artists to operate with a synoptic glance, not partial and directed since the beginning to the whole. What is at stake is the creation of a well-defined entity, the *polis*, the distinctive beauty of which calls into question the idea of the realization of an internally ordered and teleologically conceived thing⁴³. In this respect, it is reasonable to assume that, even in the political life, the search for beauty by virtuous lawgivers⁴⁴ acts as a causative power, both in a final and in a formal sense. As far as the form is concerned, that symmetry is not to be understood in a purely superficial aesthetic sense emerges from the following example (advanced by Aristotle at *Pol.* III, 13.1284b10-11): «nor would a shipbuilder permit himself to build a stern or any of the other parts of the ship that exceeded proportion».

It is clear that the structural organization of the parts of a certain object (such as a ship), crafted to satisfy a given end (such as safe navigation) must possess an inner arrangement (*taxis*) in which each part, through its specific function, cooperates with the others towards the good general functioning of the object. Beauty and its properties of proportion and order, in this case, obeys to teleological necessities and to an aesthetic ideal which we might qualify as “functional”. The aesthetic dimension re-emerges in an explicit way in the last example: «nor indeed would a chorus master allow someone with a voice louder and more beautiful than the entire chorus to be a member of it» (*Pol.* III, 13.1284b11-12).

The example above, like the previous ones, conveys the idea that there is a single expert responsible for the success of the functioning of the whole. Unlike the others, however, it puts forward the idea of a human group directed by a leader, and not an inanimate compound whose well-functioning depends on the technical skills of a human subject. The third analogy, then, might mark a shift of focus in Aristotle’s discussion of the aesthetical and functional utility of certain compounds. While a work of figurative art and a ship are ontologically unable to interact with those who have crafted them, a community made by cooperative citizens is not. More to the point, political craftsmanship aiming at the implementation of beauty and harmony in the city involves not only the skillful activity a virtuous leader, but also the capacity of people involved in the implementation of his (legislative and political) work to *react to* and *interact with* the measures introduced by the leader⁴⁵. Citizens well-inclined to listen,

⁴³ Cf. Richardson Lear, *Aristotle on Moral Virtue and the Fine*, p. 119.

⁴⁴ According to my reading of the passage (I follow in this respect Accattino’s commentary at p. 215), the analogy is referred exclusively to rulers whose ultimate goal is the common interest. A different view is expressed by Simpson (P. Simpson, *A Philosophical Commentary on the Politics of Aristotle*, Chapel Hill 1998, p. 216). Simpson believes that the analogy applies also to the cases of deviant constitution in which pursuit of self-advantage might incidentally coincide with a measure advantageous for the whole city. Aristotle, however, does not make this possibility explicit in his argument.

⁴⁵ Cf. A. Rosler, *Civic Virtue: Citizenship, Ostracism, and War*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle’s Politics*, ed. by M. Deslauriers and P. Destrée, Cambridge 2013, pp. 144-175: 156.

understand and show consent towards the reasons advanced by ruling power are part of the beautiful work created by virtuous lawgiving activity.

As the subsequent lines of the argument suggest, this analogy is helpful to explain on aesthetic basis the utility of ostracism pursued by a single expert in political matters, the monarch, who acts with an interest for the whole city. Aristotle paves the way for the reasonability of practice of ostracism by denial of an impossibility: «Thus in connection with the [generally] agreed forms of preeminence the argument concerning ostracism involves a certain political justice» (*Pol.* III, 1284b13.16-17).

We might wonder why Aristotle expresses a special interest in the possibility of adoption of ostracism in monarchies. In the first place, his focus on monarchy must be premised on the idea that in some monarchical constitutions (presumably those in which the power of the king is not pervasively extended to any sphere of the political and civic life)⁴⁶, strong is the risk of persons endowed with exceeding talents and, because of this, capable of gaining outstanding power in certain spheres of the political life.

That Aristotle's focus on ostracism in monarchies is not simply due to historical or antiquarian interests becomes clear once he qualifies the initiative of expert persons as "harmonizing" with the whole city (*Pol.* III, 13.1284b14). The verb *συμφωνεῖν*, being taken from the musical field, refers to an agreement between more parts, and not only at the initiative of a single person (even though the initiative of the single virtuous individual can be beneficial for the whole city). It is likely that, by way of the image of *συμφωνεῖν*, Aristotle means to lay emphasis on the harmonious beauty that arises not only when a political measure is implemented in view of the well-being of the whole community, but also when the parts involved in the creation of beauty gain awareness of the process in which they take an active participation.

Aristotle does not clarify whether the citizens express consent to the procedure of ostracism on the basis of sensitivity to reasons of beauty. Indeed, they might simply be induced to acknowledge ostracism on utility-based reasons, such as the risk of negative consequences for the stability of the city and the well-being of citizens themselves, especially when they are denied spaces for political participation.

It is not to be excluded that some of the citizens ruled by a king are lovers of beauty and, in virtue of this, understand the supposed utility of ostracism through reflection on the possible effects of lack of aesthetic properties in the city (such as order and proportion). Lack of beauty might both *produce* and *explain* a

Rosler suggests that the analogies help us to understand that ostracism can be a means of pursuing civic equality.

⁴⁶ Examples of monarchical constitution in which the king does not exert an all-pervasiva power are found in *Pol.* III, 14.1285a3-6, where Aristotle characterizes the Spartan regime as a kingship which does not have authority over all matters. See also 1285b22-23, where he mentions a kingship in which the king is only general and juror, and has authority over matters concerning the gods.

disproportionate distribution of power in the light of certain established criteria, or the enactment of laws that in several ways prevent the citizens from leading a good life in terms of enjoyment of material resources and/or participation in political offices.

It is clear, however that Aristotle appeals to reasons of beauty to elicit the capacity for understanding of practical matters of those listeners who are φιλόκαλοι. The message which Aristotle means to convey is enucleated at *Pol.* III, 13.1284b16-17: «in connection with the [generally] agreed forms of preeminence the argument concerning ostracism involves a certain (τι) political justice». The adjective ‘τι’ reveals that ostracism is not justifiably applicable in any kind of constitution, and that it might represent an appropriate response only to certain problems identifiable in specific political arenas. Ostracism is meant to serve as a “corrective measure” (διόρθωμα; 1284b20) of problems which the constitution should have taken pains to ward off before their arousal. In this light, ostracism does not appear any longer as a sheer pre-emptive measure, which is to say, one that avoids open conflict, but as an *ex-post* correction of problems which might have been avoided from the beginning. In this respect, ostracism can be characterized as a medicine (ἰατρεία: *Pol.* III, 13.1284b19) and, as such, it heals the symptoms of an illness already in action, although it has not yet totally went off full blown.

Noticeably, Aristotle excludes that ostracism is a medicine for those historic constitutions in which this policy has been adopted with a sect-spirit (στασιαστικῶς ἐχρῶντο; *Pol.* III, 13.1284b22). On the one hand, he concedes that ostracism is advantageous for the rulers privately and is just (*Pol.* III, 13.1284b24-25). On the other hand, it is evident that the equation between justice and advantage laid down here is not the one which defines the just in its true, proper sense – namely those activities and rules promoting the common utility. Thus, ostracism pursued with selfish aims is understandable, but not justifiable, given that it excludes both reasons of common utility and aesthetic reasons.

What Aristotle has not yet clarified so far is the idea that both forms of ostracism – i.e. ostracism pursued with a sect-spirit and ostracism pursued in view of the common utility – are enacted in relation to the risk of a superiority concerning exclusively material goods and a charismatic power only when this superiority is disentangled from possession of authentic virtue. That moral and intellectual virtue are ruled out from this picture becomes evident only in the final stage of Aristotle’s critical examination of ostracism. As he unequivocally states at *Pol.* III, 13.1284b25-33, what cannot *by any means* be regarded as right is the applicability of ostracism as a means to neutralize an exceeding level of political virtue:

In the case of the best regime, however, there is considerable question as to what ought to be done if there happens to be someone who is outstanding not on the basis of preeminence in the other goods such as strength, wealth, or abundance of friends, but on the basis of virtue. For surely no one would assert that such a person should be

expelled and banished. But neither would they assert that there should be rule over such a person: this is almost as if they should claim to merit ruling over Zeus by splitting the offices. What remains – and it seems the natural course – is for everyone to obey such a person gladly, so that persons of this sort will be permanent kings in their cities.

In the passage above, Aristotle sketches out the groundlines of an ideal city in which consent between the ruled and an exceedingly virtuous king⁴⁷ is not rooted in sensitivity to beauty, but rather in a shared capacity – the capacity which human beings possess *qua* fully rational – to understand the relevance of virtue in political life. *No one* (line 29), and not simply someone, would deny that a man outstanding in virtue ought to be banished. As it seems, consent to obey such a man is a natural, spontaneous fact, and not a tendency supported by good upbringing.

Conclusive Remarks

Having stated that the supremacy of virtue must be hailed as a good which no alternative justifying reason can defy, we might wonder whether the reasons of beauty advanced by Aristotle to offer a qualified support to ostracism reveal their weakness. In my opinion, they do not, precisely because Aristotle's interest is to supply the educational and philosophical bases not only for political experts operating in the ideal constitution, but also and especially for those involved in the ruling of imperfect political communities and in the task of finding fitting solutions to the conflicts (either open or potential) threatening the stability and well-functioning of the *polis*, as well as the foundational principles of distribution of political offices. Would-be rulers sensitive to the ideal of beauty will be more receptive than others to political advices that aim at preventing open conflict between persons and factions – or, viewing the issue from a different perspective, advices that aim at “healing” and rectifying a state of potential conflict already at work.

In this essay I have assumed that the causative power of beauty is understood by Aristotle not only as a factor actively shaping the political reality, but also in terms of an explanatory power. By stressing the relational dimension of the parts of a certain whole and their possibility of cooperation in view of an established (and virtuous) end, Aristotle seems to lay emphasis on the capacity of citizens and rulers to fruitfully interact and understand the practical relevance of measures designed to promote harmony and stability. The idea of a balance established against the backdrop of potentially disruptive situations emerges even more clearly in imperfect political conditions – even in those conditions in which the constitution in force aims at the common interest.

⁴⁷ I agree with Accattino (cit., p. 213) that Aristotle is referring here to the theoretical figure of a ‘kingly man’, and not, as many scholars (starting from Hegel; for a detailed bibliography see E. Schütrumpf, *Aristoteles. Politik. Buch II und III*, Berlin 1991, pp. 527-530) to the historical figure of Alexander the Great.

Various members of the *polis* involved at different levels of participation can be the protagonists of a beauty *in fieri*, one which is not exclusively premised on the existence of a single, outstandingly virtuous leader in power. In this respect, Aristotle appears to invite those readers sensitive to the emotion of beauty to get a grasp into the complexity (and even the imperfection) of political reality, especially in cases in which an ordered, functioning *polis* can arise from a well-orchestrated “symphony” between citizens and potential leaders with no distinguished moral excellence).

An appeal to the properties of proportion, order and definiteness of the *polis* and the relationship between its constitutive parts may be seen as an educational attempt which Aristotle himself deems as particularly significant for the goals of his practical philosophy. Strengthening the capacity for a specific emotion, beauty, and directing those listeners brought up in good habits to the acquisition of stable virtue represent a vehicle for the attainment of sound expertise in matters of institutions and legislation. Once well-educated, good lawgivers will contribute in their turn to the diffusion of the ideal of beauty and its structural relation to human goodness throughout their political activity and individual behaviour, without forgetting to show concern also for those people who, rather than being sensitive to the power of beauty, are subservient to the passion of fear of punishment, and perhaps more ready to welcome justifying reasons that hint at their personal advantage.

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