

## Introduction

This paper has three aims. *First* of all, it argues that Aristotle's regime theory as it appears in *Politics* (especially in Books IV-VI) can be read in a realist key. This claim is far from being self-evident and raises many reasonable questions about what the term political realism means and how this term can be meaningfully applied to an ancient Greek philosopher. The *second aim* of the paper is to show that modern democratic theories are built on highly problematic political moralist assumptions from the viewpoint of contemporary realist political theory in the sense that these assumptions are both descriptively wrong and normatively misleading. The *third aim* of the paper is to reveal the multiple ways in which contemporary realist theory could profit from a realist reading of Aristotle's regime theory.

As I understand it, regime theory is a time-honored branch of normative political theory that includes not just a typology of the actual (and sometimes the possible) regime forms, but also reflections on the empirical problems of adequately describing existing regimes as well as on the normative implications of a certain understanding of political regimes.

For a very long time classical regime theory dominated the discussions about political regimes until the late Enlightenment after which it gradually collapsed into what we can call modern democratic theories. Aristotle is a founding father of classical regime theory and this paper can be understood as a plea for a partial return to classical regime theory as a remedy to certain inherent weaknesses of modern democratic theories.

From a realist point of view the inherent weaknesses of modern democratic theories emerge from a "moralistic bias". It means two interconnected problems.

First, modern democratic theories *describe* existing regimes in moralized terms. They regard liberal democracy as the only morally recommendable regime type and define all the other regime types by their degree of variation from liberal democracy. Consequently, they offer a

one-dimensional typology of existing regimes ranging from liberal democracy to autocracy (the opposite of democracy). There are, of course, many possible ways to describe and classify existing regimes and, for certain purposes, a one-dimensional descriptive model can be as useful as any other. However, as we will see in Section III, modern democratic theories cannot offer a convincing justification for it. In contrast, the advantage of classical regime theory in comparison with modern democratic theories is that it offers an essentially multidimensional description of political regimes.

Second, "moralistic bias" also means that modern democratic theories offer a *normatively* inadequate account of existing regimes. Modern democratic theories assess every regime exclusively on the basis of an uncompromising commitment to the values and ideals of liberal democracy. Consequently, modern democratic theories tend to overlook a wide variety of political ethical challenges particular to political regimes other than liberal democracy. A partial return to classical regime theory can offer a remedy to these problems because its multi-dimensional understanding of what constitutes a political regime and how political regimes differ from each other leaves larger room for considering ethical problems specifically connected to various regime types.

This is not to say that classical regime theory in itself was politically realist. It was merely more sensitive to theoretical problems that figure prominently in contemporary realist political theory than modern democratic theories. In other words, these affinities between classical regime theory and the political outlook of contemporary realist theory constitute a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for reading Books IV-VI of Aristotle's *Politics* in a realist key. What can constitute a sufficient condition will be the primary subject of the remainder of the paper.

The paper is structured as follows: Section I will seek to clarify the meaning of the term political realism for the specific purpose of the paper. Section II will examine how certain parts of Aristotle's *Politics* can be read in a realist key as constituting a realist regime theory in the sense defined by Section I. Section III will return to the general problems of regime theory discussed in the Introduction and will argue that contemporary realist political theory - if it wants to challenge the moralism of modern democratic theories - can learn from Aristotle's realist regime theory.

## I. The variety of political realism

Anyone seeking to read Aristotle's regime theory in a realist key immediately faces with a difficulty arising from the polysemy of the term *political realism*. Among the many possible meanings, four stand out as being most widespread and particularly significant. First, political realism may refer to a group of political thinkers in the history of political thought (Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, etc.) who are labeled realists mostly in retrospect based on certain shared characteristics and also for their opposition to various idealized and morally loaded political outlooks. Second, it may refer to a school of international political theory which has been named 'realist' obviously on more or less similar grounds. Or, third, it may refer to a heterogeneous movement in contemporary political theory defined by two thematic issues of *European Journal of Political Theory* (2010/4) and *Critical Review of Social and Political Philosophy* (2017/3) having emerged as a critical response to what was perceived by them as the predominant 'political moralism', 'applied morality', 'ethics-first view' or 'idealism' of mainstream political theory. Fourth, there is also a common practice to define realism by offering various - often slightly different - lists of basic characteristics of realism.

The various meanings are not entirely unconnected, but their relationship is complicated. While it is common to cite realist classics in contemporary realist theory and there are some articles arguing that other classical authors should be added to the realist canon (e. g. Schlosser, 2014), this practice is not without difficulties (Douglas, 2016; McQueen, 2017). There are also arguments put forward for involving realist international political theory into contemporary realist theory (Sleat, 2013: 12-14). The lesson is that we have to be careful in how we use the term political realism.

Based on this 'big tent' approach, we are now able to offer a more specified account of the primary aim of this paper as follows: it is to show that *Aristotle's regime theory shares certain defining characteristics with contemporary realist theory* and that by dint of their shared characteristics Aristotle's regime theory can serve as a starting point for a contemporary realist regime theory.

One advantage of this specification is that it can help us avoid certain possible misunderstandings about and objections to the asserted relationship between Aristotle's regime theory and political realism. First, this paper does not seek to prove that 'Aristotle is a realist thinker, period,' or, second, to assert that 'Aristotle's views belong to ancient realist thought.' On the other hand, the paper contends that Aristotle's regime theory can be read in a realist key in spite of many realists' critical attitudes toward Aristotle's thought.

To the best of my knowledge, the *first* has not been claimed by anyone so far, and indeed it would be an overly ambitious claim - given Aristotle's actual ethical and political views. A much more modest, but at least actually existing claim, however, served as a significant, albeit limited, source of inspiration for the primary claim of this paper. Werner Jaeger's observation (1968) that Books IV-VI of Aristotle's *Politics* look more empirical than the other books and Malcom Schofield's remark (199) that Aristotle uses the term polis in many

different (sociological, political etc.) meanings suggests that Aristotle's political theory can be read in more than one way which plays an important part in the argument of this paper. But, on the other hand, neither Jaeger nor Schofield connect Aristotle to political realism or provide any direct support for such a claim.

*Second*, the paper does not put forward any claim to connect Aristotle to other ancient realist thinkers (as Ober [1998] does). A possible advantage of pursuing a historical argument would be that it could offer an explanation for the realist elements in Aristotle's thought by pointing to its shared characteristics with other ancient realists. But, on the other hand, it would make the argument of the paper unnecessarily complicated without lending any weight to the primary claim of the paper.

Third, narrowing down of the focus of the paper offers a possible way of reconciling the very critical attitudes of certain realist thinkers toward Aristotle's thought with a realist reading of his regime theory. For example, Hobbes heatedly criticized Aristotle's 'vain and erroneous' philosophy because he was deeply dissatisfied with Aristotle's understanding of humankind as a genuinely political species and political community as being natural (Hobbes, 1998). A modern realist thinker, Bernard Williams was also critical about Aristotle's views. Williams' main concern was that Aristotle's strong teleological approach to nature and particularly to human nature pointed toward an ethical theory that was unacceptable for Williams as being a distinct form of moralism (the opposite of realism) (Williams, 1993). His another criticism was that Aristotle's 'practical reason required the dispositions of action and feeling to be harmonized [...] this is quite different from our assumption' (Williams, 1996: 36). While other realists - especially certain members of the Harvard realist school (Yack, 1993; Sabl, 2002, 2011) - seem to hold much more favorable views about Aristotle, focusing on the shared characteristics of Aristotle's regime theory and contemporary political theory offers a much

simpler way of defending the primary claim of this paper than any authoritative argument could do.

The defining characteristics of realism can be enumerated in many, slightly different ways. In the following I will focus on four major criteria on which most contemporary realists seem to agree. Also I will seek to determine in each case what should be found in Aristotle in order to meet these criteria. Certainly it is not one or another of these characteristics that really matter in this respect, but rather their juxtaposition.

### Criterion 1

Realism proposes a conflict- and agency-centered understanding of human coexistence and, consequently, it shows a keen interest in the variety of ways of establishing and maintaining political order (or a way of living together without permanent terror and violence) as opposed to political moralism's vision of politics based on rational principles that could be agreed on by every rational human being in a hypothetical situation (Sabl, 2002: 19-21; Williams, 2005: 3; Philp 2007: 55-75; Geuss, 2008: 21-23; Galston, 2010: 396; Sleat 2013: 45-70; McQueen, 2016: 1).

It is not quite clear what exactly follows from the conflictual political outlook of realism: some realists see a rather destructive force in political conflicts (see for example, Judith Shklar' 'liberalism of fear' or Bernard Williams's thought) while others (especially agonist thinkers) appreciate conflicts as the moving force of politics (Mouffe, 2005, see also Stears - Honig, 2011) or at least have a neutral approach to them.

But what most certainly follows from it is that the conflict-centered understanding of politics is seen by realists as fundamentally incompatible with any Rawlsian-style normative and ideal political theory. Instead of finding the principles of justice on which everybody could agree,

the realists' aim is to understand the demands of the circumstances of politics in which a deep and ineliminable disagreement exists (Sleat, 2013).

To show that Aristotle's regime theory can be read in realist terms we need to demonstrate that he offers an account of political regimes in which political conflicts regularly occur and need to be addressed by theory in a way that resembles less to the Rawlsian endeavor to establish the basic principles of justice than to a Williamsian examination of the 'first question of politics' or a Mouffean anti-foundationalist understanding of politics.

### Criterion 2

Realism emphasizes the need for a moral psychology based on the complexity of human motivations and asserts that no viable political order can be established on the basis of a reductionist and overly rationalistic moral psychology as moralists seem to expect (Sabl, 2002: 138-141; Williams, 2005: 40-51; Philp, 2007: 4-5; Galston, 2010: 398-400; Horton, 2010: 442;). Bernard Williams, for instance, extensively argued in his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1996) that 'morality' or 'ethical theory' (in eudemonist, deontological or utilitarian forms) is based on numerous unnecessary and mostly unacceptable simplifications about how ethical thought works and, consequently, it precludes a wide range of considerations from ethics. Since, at least in Williams' view, moralist political theory is 'applied morality', political moralists can be rightly accused of omitting many important aspects of politics from their political outlook. If Williams is right then no political theory based on moralistic principles can offer an adequate account of politics.

Aristotle's regime theory can be called realist in this respect if it can be discussed detached from his overall political philosophy (which is undoubtedly moralist in Williamsian terms) and if it includes an array of human motivations in its account of political regimes.

### Criterion 3

Despite the widespread claim that political realism is anti-moralist (Estlund, 2017), realism actually seeks for a genuinely political ethics. The real difference between political realism and moralism in this respect is not that moralists advocate a political outlook that includes moral considerations while realists are anti-moralists, but that, according to realists, moralism as ‘applied morality’ misinterprets the origins and main characteristics of the ethical problems within politics (Hall - Sleat, 2017).

As an alternative, contemporary realist theorists offer an array of ethical approaches to politics including role ethics (Sabl, 2002), virtue ethics (Philp, 2007), ethics of responsibility (Williams, 2005). What all these various realist political ethical approaches agree on is that a genuinely political ethics should start with a thorough understanding of how politics actually works and not on a set of rationalistic principles of what politics should look like.

Aristotle's regime theory can be read as realist in this respect if it examines the particular political ethical demands of living in a certain political regime.

#### Criterion 4

Realism prefers a style of theorizing that starts with the complexity of real-life politics and looks for limitedly generalizable lessons depending on contextual factors and admitting the primacy of political practice over theorizing as opposed to moralists' systematic efforts to establish a coherent and rationally demonstrable set of fundamental principles (Sabl, 2002, 2012; Williams, 2005; Philp, 2007; Bellamy, 2010; Sagar, 2013; Baderin, 2014; Thomas, 2015). Rahul Sagar, for instance, repeatedly contends in his *Secrecy and leaks* that it is not possible or at least it is extremely difficult to offer a regulatory framework for monitoring the use of state secrecy that is “efficient, credible, and legitimate” (Sagar, 2013: 14) and he also provides a long list of the limits of generalizability of his argument. There are multiple reasons behind this kind of style of theorizing in contemporary realism, but two stand out



among them: contemporary realists mistrust mainstream political theory because they find it either descriptively or normatively misleading, and therefore they seek for alternative ways of theorizing that are more responsive to the challenges of real-world politics.

Aristotle's regime theory can be seen as realist in this respect if it demonstrably betrays an interest in offering local solutions to particular problems of political regimes rather than providing a general theory of political regimes.

These are the criteria that this paper contends Aristotle's regime theory and contemporary realist political theory share in common. But, as I will seek to show in the next section, the presence of these criteria in Books IV-VI of *Politics* do not necessarily exclude that certain part of Aristotle's understanding of political regimes are moralist. From our viewpoint it is sufficient if we can provide convincing reasons to read the realist parts of Aristotle's views separately from the moralist parts.

## II. A realist regime theory in Aristotle's *Politics*

### 1. Realism among the normative ends of political science

If we want to understand the place of realist insights in Aristotle's political theory it is worth starting with his differentiation between four possible normative ends of political science at the beginning of Book IV. First, he argues, we can examine the characteristics of the 'absolutely best' regime (Aristotle, 1992: 236). Second, we can seek for the regime that is the 'best in the circumstances'. Third, we can 'consider also a constitution which is given, both how it could come into being, and how once in being it may last longest '. Fourth, we can study 'the constitution which will suit pretty well all states.'

What is pretty obvious in the first place is that the first of these normative ends - which is called 'pure ideal theorizing' by one interpreter (Shuster, 2011) - is markedly far from what realist political theory is generally interested in. The absolutely best regime is that that would exist under circumstances we would pray for and its Aristotelian discussion in Books VII-VIII is fundamentally moralist in the sense that it is based on principles derived from the Aristotelian eudemonist ethical theory. To some degree the moralism of this normative end of Aristotle is analogous with the Rawlsian theory of justice since both derive their desirable political institutions from a set of pre-political moral values, but, on the other hand, they are built on very different ethical theories.

As regards the other three normative ends, it is far less obvious that they would be incompatible with political realism. The second normative end, for example, means that we need to carefully examine the components of a certain existing regime in order to assess what regime type suits its demands best. Or, as one interpreter puts it, 'This branch of political science does not ask which single way of life is best for a great many citizens; rather, it studies cities in which different citizens have different ways of life; and it seeks the best possible mixture of the available ingredients.' (Kraut, 2002: 429-430) In other words, this normative end is not the source of a genuinely moralist enterprise. It is not derived directly from Aristotle's ethical theory (as Kraut states it quite clearly), but from the empirical variety of the ways of living of people within particular political communities. In this sense we can say that it looks for normative answers to genuinely political problems of how to live together securely and peacefully.

Similarly, the third normative end of the Aristotelian political science also puts the moralistic ground of the eudemonist ethical theory aside and instead it focuses on the demands of creating and maintaining of a particular regime form. The main difference from the second normative end is that the third one does not seek political answers to the demands of a

particular social composition, but takes a particular conception of political rule as a limiting condition of normative theorizing. It might be 'given' (hypothesis), for instance, that a certain political community is already democratic or oligarchic etc. and what needs to be found out is not how to change it, but how to improve it and make more persistent.

What is important here is that focusing on what is 'given' makes the third normative end clearly different from the moralism of the first normative end. As one interpreter Amy L. Shuster highlights, major existing regime types are built on hypotheses of their own like democracy is on freedom while the best regime is not based on any kind of hypothesis, but on human well-being in absolute terms (haplos) (Shuster, 2011: 616). The pursuit of making a given political regime more persistent is an Aristotelian enterprise (discussed extensively in Book VI) that is not simply anti-moralist, but also a recurring theme both of the realist tradition (Machiavelli, Hobbes) and contemporary realist political theory.

Finally, the fourth normative end asks which regime type can be best applied to all political communities. It might seem somewhat difficult to tell the difference between this normative end and the search for the best regime 'under the circumstances', i. e., the second normative end. An interpreter, Richard Kraut explains Aristotle's interest in pursuing the fourth normative end by referring to the analogy raised by Aristotle himself between political science and physical training: looking for the most suitable regime type to all cities is analogous with the question of 'what single form of training for everyone will serve the greatest number.' (Aristotle, 1992: 236) while the second end is analogous with the question of 'what kind of training is advantageous for what kind of body, and what training is best?' (Aristotle, 1992: 236). All this still might seem a bit odd until Kraut points out that the two normative ends lead towards very different kinds of examinations in Aristotle. While the fourth normative end accounts for the examination of the regime based on a broad middle-class in chapter 11 of Book IV (Kraut, 2002: 428-429), the second normative motivates

Aristotle's analysis of the qualitative and quantitative ingredients of political regimes in chapter 12 of Book IV (Kraut, 2002: 429).

That the fourth normative end is nearer to political realism than to a moralist position is quite clear because it does not look for what is best for everyone in the moralist sense that builds on an ethical theory of how people should live, but for what suits most the empirical variety of human ways of life.

In sum, the Aristotelian distinction between four different normative ends of political scientific examination of political regimes introduces a clearly moralistic question into political science, but also brings forward other theoretical issues that show more responsiveness to the sensitivities of political realism.

The question is whether we can treat Aristotle's interest in the second, third and fourth normative ends in Books IV-VI somewhat separately from his examination of the best regime in Books VII-VIII.

It is quite possible that Werner Jaeger was wrong and Aristotle did not see any incompatibility between the subject matters of Books VII-VIII and Books IV-VI. As Richard Kraut argues, for instance, Aristotle explicitly asserts in chapter 1 of Book IV that the four normative ends together constitute Aristotelian political science (Kraut, 2002: 428). But it is also Kraut who admits that the various normative ends highlight the merits of different kinds of political regimes: the first points to the best regime, the second to the mixed regimes, the third to the sustainability of democracies and oligarchies, and, finally, the fourth focuses on the regime based on a wide middle-class.

In sum, if Aristotle seriously thought, based on his eudemonist ethical theory, that the absolutely best regime deserved to be valued above all the existing regime types then it means that he, personally, was a political moralist, but, as I tried to show, this possible state of the

affairs does not necessarily make each and every part of his regime theory also moralist. In fact, much of what Aristotle says about political regimes can be read in a realist key because these part of his work are dedicated to the pursuit of normative ends with arguably realist characteristics.

## 2. A multidimensional understanding of regimes

While the differentiation between four distinct normative ends of political science is important from our viewpoint because it is what makes room for a realist reading of certain parts of Aristotle's regime theory, the main reason why it might be fruitful to attempt such a reading is Aristotle's multidimensional approach to political regimes since modern democratic theories are sadly one-dimensional. By multidimensionality I mean that Aristotle sees a political regime not as a set of ingredients that all embody the very same ideal (as is the case with liberal democracy in modern democratic theories), but as a delicate balance of many different and conflicting factors (Aristotle, 1992: 240-243, see Jill, 2005: 3). Among these factors, justice (1), the institutional arrangement (2), and the social composition (3) stand out as the most important ones.

(1) Most actually existing political regimes represent what seem from Aristotle's personal point of view (or, in other words, from the perspective of the theory of justice presented in Book V of *Nicomachean Ethics*) as an "unstable mixture of justice and injustice" (Kraut, 2002: 136). The main reason for this is that it is only the best regime that is based on what is unqualifiedly just (*haplon dikaion*) (Aristotle, 1992: 415) while all the other regime types merely represent a limited understanding of what is just or an assumption (hypothesis) about what is just. Aristotle takes great pains to explain in Book III why the common approaches to what is just, for example, in how political offices should be distributed in a political regime

mirror limited understandings of justice at best (Aristotle, 1992: 195-198). The problem with the democratic or the oligarchic approaches is that they extend the scope of what seems just in one sense to other areas: that is why the partisans of oligarchy think that larger wealth should be accompanied with larger share in political power or why democrats think that every citizen should have equal power resulting in the rule of the many because under democratic circumstances the sheer number of citizens would prevail (Aristotle, 1992: 195).

Importance of the question of justice in Aristotle's regime theory comes from the fact that each major regime type is primarily characterized by a given understanding of justice that determines how political power is distributed within that regime: democracy is based on numbers, oligarchy is on wealth, tyranny is on the arbitrary power of someone, aristocracy is on the virtue of a smaller group, kingship is of the virtue of one person etc (Aristotle, 1992: 190). This means, on the one hand, that Aristotle's overall theory of justice must inevitably affect his assessment of each regime, but, on the other hand, it does not exclude the possibility that there can be criteria of assessing regimes other than their meeting the requirements of what is unqualifiedly just.

Aristotle makes quite clear that, from his perspective, the limited understandings of what is just by each regime are highly problematic (Aristotle, 1992: 195). But his distinction between four normative ends of political science enables him to discuss a wide range of problems regarding justice besides what might seem the single most important insight from the perspective of Aristotle, namely, that unqualified justice and the best regime are closely connected. Since it is one of his normative ends, for example, to ask about the durability of a given regime, he can spend considerable space in Book V to examine how regimes can be maintained and how it is related to the problems of justice (Aristotle, 1992: 323-332). Similarly, he can reasonably argue in Book V - in line with his definition of 'good citizen' in Book III (Aristotle, 1992: 179-183) - that the preservation of a given regime requires from a

politician to identify with the limited understanding of justice of that regime (Aristotle, 1992: 329).

It is obvious that the reasons for instability of any given political regimes discussed extensively in Book V by Aristotle are closely related to his theory of justice in two interconnected ways. Since every regime is defined in terms of a limited or assumed understanding of distributive justice by Aristotle here lies an apt analogy between the reasons for instability in any given regime and what Aristotle calls *pleonexia* in *Nicomachean Ethics* or the violation of equality by grabbing more than is proportionate. If we overview the major causes of discontent we find cases when the regime itself disadvantages people (in oligarchy the many are excluded from power for instance) while there are other cases when people are harmed by not observing the limited justice embodied by a given regime. In this sense we can say that Aristotle's overall theory of justice is an indispensable part of how he sees political regimes, but, put in the light of his four-partite political science, it becomes a part of a rather realist regime theory in Books IV-VI. On the one hand, the emphasis on the limitedness of justice in every given political regime (except for the best regime) plays an important part in explaining why existing political regimes are very instable, but, on the other hand, Aristotle's political science allows that there are solutions to instability other than seeking the best regime. These other solutions are in line with the second, third and fourth normative ends of Aristotelian political science thus correspond to various legitimate aims of political science even if they turn out to be, at the end of the day (or, in other words, from the perspective of the best regime), ad hoc, partial and theoretically unsatisfying.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that Aristotle introduces a differentiation between correct and erroneous regime types based on whether a regime observes common good and he makes clear that the observation of common good is a precondition of justice (Aristotle, 1992: 189). From this perspective, the limited understandings of what is just in an

erroneous regime type might seem a far cry from justice in the eye of Aristotle. It is not surprising at all that Aristotle says that among erroneous regimes there are no better ones, only less wrong (Aristotle, 1992: 239). Yet again his sophisticated four-partite political science enables Aristotle to make balanced assessments even about the merits of an erroneous regime as is the case with the stability of democracy (Aristotle, 1992: 268) or the capacity of the many to make better judgments than the few (Aristotle, 1992: 202-206). One possible explanation for Aristotle's liberality toward erroneous regimes shown in Books IV-VI is his belief that every regime - even the worse one - can be improved to some degree (Kraut, 2002: 436). Accordingly, he differentiates between extreme and other, less unbearable forms of tyranny and democracy (Aristotle, 1992: 264 about tyranny and 255 about democracy, see Jordović, 2011).

What is important here is that various major regime types of Aristotle's realist regime theory are not subjected to a unitary conception of what is just the same way as are the different regime types in modern democratic theories. Aristotle's theory of justice can be seen unitary (Zingano, 2013), but its application to his regime theory is significantly refined by his four-partite political science. Consequently, he assesses various regime types by many different measures in Books IV- VI. Besides, the highest standard is not identified with any existing regime type by Aristotle, but it is only a possible regime type discussed separately in Books VII-VIII. Therefore Aristotle's regime typology cannot be reduced to a single dimension as is the case with modern democratic theories.

(2) Institutional arrangement (or: taxis) plays a similarly complex role in Aristotle's regime theory.

Its primary function is to realize an assumption about what is just as every existing regime is based a certain assumption about the just distribution of power. For instance, Aristotle



emphasizes in Book I of *Rhetoric*, lot is a form of selecting magistrates in a democratic way while in oligarchy office holding is based on property owning (Aristotle, 2006: 73). The resulting problem, as we saw already, is that the institutions of existing regimes can only realize a limited understanding of what is just. Consequently, political institutions will not be able to deal equally well with all political challenges concerning justice.

Second, not every institution within an existing regime has the same effect: some of them will help to realize a given sense of justice, others will moderate its effects (Aristotle, 1992: 273-276). For example, daily payment for participating in juridical assemblies will make a constitution more democratic while the lack of such payment will not encourage the many to participate en masse in these assemblies (Aristotle, 1992: 274). Third, if all the institutions of a regime are arranged to strengthen the effects of one another, they will inevitably generate conflicts and destabilize the regime.

What this teaches us about the role of institutional arrangement is that it plays an important part in determining the character of a certain regime, but the relationship between political justice and institutional arrangement is complicated by two reasons: first, major regime types exist in many different forms (as we see it soon) and a pure form of a major regime type would have to conform to extremely improbable demands (as is the case with a monarchy of a person with "superlative virtue" or "being a god among men"[Aristotle, 1992: 213]) or would be hardly recognizable as a state (as is the case with extreme tyranny or extreme democracy). In other words, if a regime is designed to survive, its institutional arrangement must be a mixture of institutions with different, sometimes even conflicting purposes that can counter-balance the effects of other institutions (Aristotle, 1992: 329-332).

(3) As regards the third factor, social composition is so important that it can easily trump the effects of the sense of justice and institutional arrangement. According to Aristotle, a

community of a few land-owning horsemen, for instance, will lead to the rise of oligarchic rule (Aristotle, 1992: 378); strong middle-class will result in moderate democracy; a community of craftsmen and merchants will encourage more extreme forms of democracy etc. That is why the second of the four normative ends of Aristotelian political science is to find the regime type that suits a certain state best.

It does not mean, however, that skillfully crafted institutional arrangement cannot counterbalance the effects of social composition at least to some extent. All the more so because one of the main functions of institutions is to guarantee that its supporters have the proper means to maintain a regime. As Aristotle puts it, 'it is essential that that part of the state which desires the permanence of the constitution should be stronger than that which does not.' (Aristotle, 1992: 271).

At first, this might seem to suggest that a fraction of the population can preserve its dominance by monopolizing all the resources of power. Aristotle, however, has something completely different in mind that resembles most what Andrew Sabl recently called 'enlarged interests' in his discussion of Hume's political theory (Sabl, 2012). In Aristotle's context, 'enlarged interest' translates as follows: the better mixed institutional arrangement a regime has, the more permanent stability it achieves by extending the scope of the support for the regime. Aristotle certainly does not assert that solely a numerical majority can do this job. Instead, he argues that the qualitative superiority of the supporters is what actually matters (Aristotle, 1992: 272). Unfortunately for them, however, the dominant parts of the regimes are usually more inclined to behave selfishly and cheat those who are not favored by the regime (Aristotle, 1992: 331).

### 3. Variety of regime types

The Aristotelian regime theory contains a wide variety of existing regimes based on the individual balance between the various factors they are built on and it is not an easy job to categorize and to assess them. It focuses on the real-life complexity of political regimes and offers a typology that avoids to reduce this variety to a set of highly abstract regime types.

Some might object that Aristotle's typology is still very idealized and that it cannot be seen as a particularly accurate account of the actually existing regimes of ancient Greek poleis. Undoubtedly, Aristotle's typology has its roots in a traditional set of concepts and he reworks these concept with the help of his highly abstract and sophisticated philosophy, but still it is striking how empirically rich his discussion of his existing regime types is in Books IV-VI and how strongly his arguments are shaped by what we called the realist normative ends of Aristotle's political science.

Although in Aristotle' regime theory there are some major regime types like the rule of the one, the few and the many; and all of them have correct and erroneous forms (monarchy vs. tyranny; aristocracy vs. oligarchy, politeia vs. democracy), but most of these regimes have many different sub-types; and among these there are many transitional forms that unite various characteristics of different regimes. Whilst in Book III Aristotle analyzes the major regime types in a somewhat conventional manner, Book IV provides a much finer-grained typology with four sub-types of oligarchy (Aristotle, 1992: 252), four sub-types of democracy (Aristotle, 1992: 253-255), three sub-types of tyranny (Aristotle, 1992: 263-264), two distinct realizations of aristocracy (Aristotle, 1992: 257-258) and three ways of creating a *politeia* (Aristotle, 1992: 261-263). However, Aristotle's categorizing efforts are not over yet: he returns to many of these problems in Book VI where he discusses the chances of preserving the democratic and the oligarchic regimes in great detail.

Another kind of difficulty Aristotle seeks to address comes from the fact that every regime type represents a particular sense of justice and that its full realization would destroy that regime rather soon. Consequently, we cannot simply judge a regime by the measure of its justice, but we need to consider further questions like of which stability is the foremost issue. In other words, there is an inbuilt instability in every regime type and it encourages people to establish a variety of institutions as a response to it making actually existing regimes sophisticatedly different from one another .

A third kind of difficulty arises because sense of justice is closely connected to the laws of the land and any regime which is based on the rule of persons rather than on the rule of law is by definition unjust and harmful. As Aristotle puts it, 'Where laws do not rule, there is no constitution. The law ought to rule over all, in general terms, and the officials ought to make rulings in individual cases; then we can decide we have a constitution.' (Aristotle, 1992: 251). The difficulties regarding the rule of law is twofold. First of all, Aristotle suggests that tyranny is a *par excellence* form of the lack of rule of law and therefore it is in its purest form not a regime at all, but the absence of political rule. However, tyranny is still an actually existing regime type in Aristotle's thought which means that in its empirical reality it cannot exist as a pure form of the absence of rule of law (Aristotle, 1992: 263-264). On the other hand, tyranny plays the role of a counter-concept in Aristotle's regime theory as a feature of many different existing regime types that can account for the abovementioned ambiguity in the definition of tyranny. For instance, the absence of the rule of law creates extreme or tyrannical democracy (Aristotle, 1992: 250-251 - see Jordovic, 2011).

Broad empirical variety is not absent from contemporary democratic theories either, but what clearly differentiates Aristotle's regime theory from these is that, in sharp contrast with the almost unequivocal moralistic bias toward liberal democracy in contemporary regime theories, Aristotle's regime theory offers an array of divergent normative judgments about the

comparative merits of various regime types. Obviously, he thinks that under very improbable circumstances monarchy would be the best regime (Aristotle, 1992: 230) while he seems to suggest that oligarchy and democracy are the most widespread regime types (Aristotle, 1992: 268). Although he is clearly not a big fan of democracies, he makes many surprisingly favorable judgments about democracies including the wisdom of the many (Aristotle, 1992: 202-205) or the stability of democracy (Aristotle, 1992: 268). At a certain point he even seems to assert that democracy is the closest to the very essence of a political community because it is based on the equality of its citizens (Aristotle, 1992: 170). In other places, he seems to prefer politea which is a mixed form of oligarchy and democracy with an unmistakable democratic leaning (Aristotle, 1992: 261-263).

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Now, it is time to return to the criteria of describing Aristotle's regime theory in realist terms proposed in Section I.

There I argued that criterion 1 would be fulfilled if it is possible to show that Aristotle has a regime theory that resembles less to a Rawlsian endeavor to discover the basic principles of justice than to a Williamsian search for answers to the first political question of stability, security, living together peacefully. As I sought to show in this Section, Books IV-VI focus on issues that are different from the moralistic pursuit of unqualified justice and the best regime in Books VII-VIII and the fundamental reason why we can look at Books IV-VI as explicating a realist regime theory is the Aristotelian distinction between four separate normative ends of political science at the beginning of Book IV. It is especially the third normative end (maintaining a 'given regime') that is of significance here because it directly addresses what Williams called the first question of politics with respect to any given regime.

Criterion 2, I argued in the previous section, can be satisfied if Aristotle's regime theory can be discussed detached from his overall political philosophy (which is undoubtedly moralist in Williamsian terms) and if it includes an array of human motivations in its account of political regimes. In this respect, what is important is that Books IV-VI discuss problems related to regimes other than the best regime. These problems emerge from a wide range of human motivations not directed to the realization of the aim of the best regime, namely, well-being. Of the four normative ends of political science it is only the first one that is based on the Aristotelian form of political moralism while the others ask more realist questions about political regimes.

To fit criterion 3, the paper contended, Aristotle's regime theory has to examine the particular political ethical demands of living in a certain political regime. As I sought to show, Aristotle really pays much attention to this sort of questions like how a given regime raises particular political problems and imposes particular duties with respect to the preservation of that regime that is the measure of a 'good citizen'.

Finally, criterion 4, I argued, applies to Aristotle's regime theory if it demonstrably betrays an interest in offering local solutions to particular problems of political regimes rather than providing a general theory of political regimes. In this respect, the problems of institutional arrangement and social composition seem particularly instructive because what Aristotle says about these issues is focused on the particular circumstances of a given political regime or the empirical variety of regimes, not on what is needed from the perspective of the best regime.

### III. Towards a neo-Aristotelian realist regime theory

The remaining part of the paper will seek to explain why Aristotle's regime theory is still relevant from the perspective of contemporary realist political theory in more than one way.

This discussion will inevitably bring us back to the problem of modern democratic theories and raise the question of how it is possible to offer a realist alternative to the moralism of modern democratic theories in a modified, neo-Aristotelian regime theoretical form.

But before that it seems worthwhile to emphasize the multiple forms in which a realist reading of Aristotle's regime theory can invigorate contemporary realist political theory. First, one possible, albeit somewhat indirect, advantage of a realist reading of Aristotle's regime theory is that it can underscore the plausibility of the already existing claims to include Aristotle's political thought into the canon of contemporary realist political theory even if these claims do not address regime theoretical issues directly (but for a critique see: Cross, 2017). Second, it also can broaden the perspective of previous realist readings of Aristotle's regime theory that have a more limited scope as is the case with Andrew Sabl's *Ruling passions* (2002). In Sabl's conception Aristotle's description of democracy as a particular regime type plays an important part. In addition, a realist reading of Aristotle's regime theory can encourage to develop a more reflective approach to the problems of political regimes on the part of contemporary realists who already often include insights about the characteristics of particular regimes into their theorizing (for various mentions of political regimes see Sabl, 2002; Williams, 2005; Philp, 2007; Geuss, 2008; Philp, 2012).

Having this said, we have to admit that neither of these potential contributions of a realist reading of Aristotle's regime theory does amount to a straightforward claim that contemporary realist political theory "needs" a regime theory. Still this paper contends that such a need does really exist. Certainly a realist regime theory is needed not in the sense that no contemporary realist political theory could be conducted without an elaborate regime theory, but instead that a regime theory other than what modern democratic theories can offer is needed if contemporary realists wish to address certain theoretical issues that arise from how they understand politics and are closely related to the characteristics of political regimes.

Modern democratic theories depict political regimes in a way that is systematically distorted by a "moralistic bias" both in descriptive and normative terms. In contrast, Aristotle's realist regime theory offers an alternative that avoids the traps of moralism. This paper asserts that if it Aristotle's theory can be demonstrably adapted to the demands of the modern world then realist theorists have no serious reason not to make use of it.

As I already contended in the Introduction, the "moralistic bias" of modern democratic theories means that, in the first place, these theories offer an overly simplistic description of the empirical richness of political regimes based on a moralized understanding of political regimes (for such descriptions see Sartori, 1987; Diamond - Linz - Lipset, 1988; Huntington, 1991; O'Donnell, 1994; Zakaria, 1997; Przeworski, 2000; Ottaway, 2003; Merkel, 2004; Levitsky - Way, 2010). In modern democratic theories only liberal democracy has a content of its own and it is defined by a set of characteristics blending descriptive and normative elements. Even in cases when democracy is defined in a minimal - Schumpeterian or Dahlian - way, the concept of democracy includes more than just descriptive ingredients. In fact, even Schumpeterian democracy is a normative, albeit somewhat elitist, ideal, not merely a descriptive effort to find the definition that fits best a certain set of actually existing political regimes. In contrast, all the other regime types in modern democratic theories are actually empty in the sense that they are defined simply by their specific deficiencies in democratic terms. For instance, autocracy is seen as the opposite of democracy while the in-between forms are characterized as mixtures of democracy and autocracy (in other words, mixtures of democracy and the lack of democracy). Consequently, modern democratic theories create an essentially one-dimensional understanding of political regimes: every existing regime type can be ordered along a single dimension from democracy to the lack of democracy..

But is this really a problem? Some might argue, for example, that it is quite possible that a one-dimensional typology of political regimes with a strong democratic bias can be a



descriptively adequate description of existing regimes. In fact, however, the "moralistic bias" does create numerous problems and distortions concerning the descriptive adequacy of modern democratic theories. For example, it has long fed the illusion that the in-between forms are basically transitory and that they tend to evolve into full-fledged liberal democracies which is not the case at all (Levitsky -Wall, 2010: 3.). Similarly, it has created a chaos in terminology especially with respect to the in-between forms. The reason for the confusion is that modern democratic theories may rely on various moralized conceptions of democracy resulting in many different ways of describing an actually existing regime as a democracy or as an in-between form. Researchers recorded more than 100 distinct non-democratic regime types in the literature since the end of the cold war (Collier - Levitsky, 1997). Standardization might help to eliminate much of these categories in the future, but the underlying problem will remain there, and it is difficult to imagine why the proliferation of categories would ever stop.

The problem of descriptive adequacy gained a new momentum because, since at least the 1980s, a process of hybridization has taken shape in the political world. Hybridization means that there has arisen an array of political regimes that use sophisticated techniques to abuse democratic norms and values (for example, there are multiparty and competitive elections that are often remarkably free, but rarely fair) and therefore it became increasingly difficult to draw the line between these hybrid regimes and actual democracies. The specific problem of hybridization is that it creates new kinds of regimes across the world that are almost indiscernible from liberal democracies.

A partial return to a classical regime theory can eliminate at least some of the underlying causes of this descriptive chaos. If we do not build our typology on strongly moralized conceptions as is the case with liberal democracy in modern democratic theories and if we

replace the one-dimensional model with a multidimensional one the pressure for descriptive distortion is going to ease.

One possible way to reduce the pressure for "moralistic bias" might be to reintroduce the Aristotelian differentiation between the rule of the one, the few and the many not only because it could be still a relevant distinction (to mention just one example, in pre-Xi Jinping China political and economic power was constitutionally monopolized by a politically defined elite in an oligarchic way while in North Korea a supreme leader reigns as a hereditary monarch despite the fact that both countries are communist states in many other respects), but also because this distinction is not moralized to the same extent as the democracy vs. autocracy distinction. In an Aristotle-inspired regime theory, for example, each major existing regime type can carry a limited understanding of what is just which means that, seen from this perspective, liberal democracy would not appear the perfect embodiment of the democratic understanding of justice anymore (because it is not an extreme democracy, but a moderate one). Moreover, the regime types should not be overwhelmingly defined by moralized concepts in a neo-Aristotelian regime theory: social composition and institutional arrangement can be conditions of political stability rather than morally desirable statuses of a political community.

Applying these classical regime theoretical insights to the case of hybrid regimes, for instance, the whole process of hybridization could be put in a different light if we are ready to admit that the name of democracy should not be necessarily reserved for the single most desirable political regime type and if we allow that certain kinds of democracies (based on the formal equality of the citizens and the wide popular support for the leaders) might be less desirable than others. Seen from this perspective it might appear much less crucial to insist that a certain hybrid regime is not democracy (a crucial point for Levitsky and Way, for example), but an authoritarian regime.

Another possible way to handle the distorting descriptive effects of the "moralistic bias" of modern democratic theories is to pay due attention to the essential multidimensionality and wide variety of existing regime types. Aristotle offered a description of political regime types that included a limited set of major regime types, but allowed the existence of a vast amount of sub-types, mixtures and transitory forms based on the many factors Aristotle took into account when framing his regime theory. This richness was the result of not just an abstract theoretical framework, but also of a careful examination of actual political regimes. An Aristotle-inspired realist regime theory can follow his example and offer a theoretical framework in which the proliferation of analytical categories is held under control by a typology consisting of a limited number of major regime types, but leaving enough room for as many subtypes as warranted by the empirical richness of political regimes.

But even if someone does not find these arguments persuasive enough to accept that contemporary realist political theory would be better off with a neo-Aristotelian regime theory, there remains another kind of problem arising from the "moralistic bias" of modern democratic theories - the problem of the misleading normative implications of these theories - that still calls for a realist alternative. In this case the problem is that modern democratic theories explicitly state or at least unmistakably imply that liberal democracy is the only regime type that is justifiable or fully legitimate regardless of what particular moralistic form this justification takes from utilitarianism to deontology or to eudemonia. Accordingly, all the other regime types are not just described, but also assessed by modern democratic theories from the perspective of liberal democracy as specific forms of deviation from democracy.

Yet again, some might object that it is not necessarily a problem to find that only liberal democracy is a fully legitimate regime form if it is what the world looks like in reality. There is no philosophical reason, this objection might continue, to be disappointed by the simplicity of reality. But what is at stake here is not what we think about the acceptability of non-

democratic regimes at the level of our personal ethical commitments, but rather the responsiveness of a regime theory to the richness of the ethical life of various regime types. In other words, the problem is not that someone cannot accept the legitimacy of a non-democratic regime, but that a regime theory should not be built on what Bernard Williams called "applied morality": on a set of pre-political moral principles that is asserted to be agreeable to every rational agent. A regime theory that admits only liberal democracy to be justifiable is based on "applied morality" in this sense and uses a moral standard that ignores many important aspects of ethical life.

In this respect, a realist regime theory can learn a lot from Aristotle's distinction between four different normative ends of political science. Even if someone - like Aristotle himself - is convinced that there is a set of rationally agreeable moral principles on which the best regime should be built on, it is not enough reason to exclude other political and ethical issues from our sight. In Books IV-VI Aristotle spends considerable space to issues we can call genuinely political ethical issues from a realist viewpoint because they are closely connected to and even created by particular political situations (including the characteristics of particular political regimes). For example, the problem of stability cannot be (and should not be tried to be) solved at a general level because its solution always depends on the particular political setting of an existing political regime: it depends on the exact juxtaposition of various factors like what type of regime it is, what kinds of institutions exist there and what social composition it has.

The already repeatedly mentioned book by Andrew Sabl, *Ruling passions*, is an excellent example of how it is possible to use regime theory without a moralistic bias to discuss political ethical issues in a sophisticated way. He offers a democratic role ethics based on an understanding of how democracy as a regime type works and what particular "division of responsibility" it imposes on the holders of various - formal or informal - democratic offices

(Sabl's three examples are the legislator, the moral activist and the community organizer). He compares morally recommendable and reprehensible examples of office-holders on the basis of what kind of "constitutional purpose" an office carries within a democratic regime, what kind of "principles of action" are demanded to successfully achieve that purpose, and, finally, what kind of "dispositions of character" can help someone to perform well in that democratic office. The fundamental idea - supported by quotations from Aristotle - is that a democratic regime can be maintained if its office-holders excel in what Sabl is "democratic constancy" or, in other words, a pattern of behavior and a disposition that enables someone to resist short-term temptations - that are in conflict with the demands of a democratic regime - for the sake of longer-term goals in terms of the functioning of a democratic regime. This is clearly a - neo-Aristotelian and realist - political ethics that is not based on general moralistic considerations about what is just, but what needs politically to be done in order to successfully navigate within the boundaries of a democratic regime. What we can learn from Sabl is that it is possible to meaningfully speak about ethical issues in a way that makes extensive use of an Aristotle-inspired regime theory while evading the "moralistic bias" of modern democratic theories.

At the end of the paper, it seems worthwhile to emphasize once again that the paper was primarily about Aristotle's regime theory and its main aim was to offer a realist reading of Aristotle's regime theory. We needed, however, to clarify in the first place what political realism means in the context of this paper. Since the paper offered an understanding of political realism that asserted that Aristotle's regime theory and contemporary realist political theory share certain defining characteristics in common, it raised the question whether Aristotle's regime theory has any relevance to contemporary realist political theory. In this respect, the paper's aims were, first, to show that modern democratic theories have a "moralistic bias" and therefore are both descriptively and normatively inadequate from a

realist viewpoint and, second, to show how Aristotelian regime theory could serve as a starting point for developing a realist alternative to modern democratic theories.

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