# ARISTOTLE AND DEMOCRACY
# BETWEEN FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

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## 1. THE FORMS OF GOVERNMENT ACCORDING TO ARISTOTLE[2] .

Democracy is an uncommon form of government in the history of political regimes. For thousands of years, it was an exception in the midst of autocratic regimes: monarchies, aristocracies, empires, oligarchies, tyrannies. It was practised in a few brief historical periods and only in small political units such as the Greek *polis*, particularly Athens, and in the early days of the Roman Republic, reappearing after centuries in some medieval and Renaissance *communes*, at times when they were not dominated by lordships or aristocracies.

From the time of the transition from the Greek *polis* to the Hellenistic and Roman *cosmopolis*, democracy remained a pale memory for centuries, and it only reappeared in modern and contemporary times, but it has had to compete with authoritarian and totalitarian forms of government to this day.

In the second half of the last century, after the end of the totalitarian regimes of right and left (fascism, Francoism, Salazarism, Nazism and Stalinism) and the polarisation of the Cold War, there was a momentary revival and expansion of the democratic form in various parts of the world where it had never existed, for example in the new states that emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, or in the transition from military dictatorships in Latin America, while at the same time there was a crisis in the places where it was born, such as Europe and the United States of America.

Democracy is a regime that is not only rare, but also fragile and precarious, subject to authoritarian deviations of various kinds, and is also difficult to define in terms of its essential characteristics. The literature is full of definitions: direct, representative, elitist, deliberative, formal, substantial, social, liberal, plebiscitary, etc.

The very word "democracy" has long been synonymous with a corrupt, deviant regime, from the time of Plato to Kant, who necessarily considered it a despotism. The main reason for this negative attitude lies in the fear that the elites of all times have had of a government of the many, the masses, the poor, the plebs; a fear that is partly justified when democracy becomes the tyranny of the majority over the minority.

*Prima facie*, we can identify a general division between democratic and non-democratic doctrines, depending on the answer to the question**:** who should govern?

Democratic doctrines are those that argue that everyone or the majority of citizens should govern, because everyone has political discernment; anti-democratic doctrines are those that deny the people this political competence and claim that only an elite (economic, social, political, cultural) should govern because they know how to govern. Usually anti-democratic doctrines are also anti-egalitarian doctrines.

Democracy can only be understood in relation to other forms of government and political systems. According to Aristotle, who took up a Platonic distinction by modifying

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[2] Two texts are brought together in this essay: an unpublished one that presents a succinct overview of the different forms of government based on Aristotle's classic breakdown, and another on Aristotle and Democracy published in: TOSI, G. - GUIMARÃES, R. *Democracia e Elitismo dos antigos e dos modernos.* (Ensaios). Curitiba: CRV, 2020, p. 79-102. English edition: *Democracy and Elitism of ancients and moderns.* (Essays). Curitiba: CRV, 2024.

it, there are fundamentally six forms of government, three correct and three deviant[3] : government by one: monarchy/tyranny; government by a few: aristocracy/oligarchy; government by many: democracy/demagogy[4] . While the first two types of government are elitist, the last type presupposes some kind of political competence on the part of all citizens.

In *Politics* Aristotle makes the famous distinction between the six forms of government that will become canonical for centuries:

> Since constitution (*politeia*) means the same as government (*politeuma*) and government is the supreme power in a city, it is necessary that the supreme command (*kúrion*) be in the hands of a single person (*ena*), or a few people (*oligoi*), or the many (*polloi*). In the case where this one person, or the few people, or the majority, govern with the common good in mind (*sumpheron*), these constitutions must necessarily be the right ones; on the other hand, the cases in which the government is exercised with a view to the self-interest of the one person, the few people or the majority are deviations, because either it must be said that the citizens do not participate in the government of the city, or it is necessary that they do participate. We usually call a monarchy whose aim is the common good a kingdom (*basileía*); the government of more than one person, but always a few, we call an *aristocracy* (*aristokratía*), because the best men govern or because they govern with a view to what is best for the city and its inhabitants; and when the many (*plethos*) govern the city with a view to the common good, the government is given the generic name of all its forms, that is, constitutional government (*politeía*) (*Pol.*III, 1279a 25-40).
> [...]
> The deviations of the aforementioned constitutions are **tyranny**, corresponding to monarchy, **oligarchy** to aristocracy, and **democracy** to *polity*. In fact, tyranny is monarchy governed in the interests of the monarch, oligarchy is government in the interests of the rich, and democracy is government in the interests of the poor, and none of these forms governs for the good of the whole community. (*Pol.* III, 5, 1279b 5-10)[5] .

We can therefore take Aristotle's classic distinction as a starting point and then make it more complex.

**SUMMARY OF FORMS OF GOVERNMENT**

| Correct form | Historical variations | Deviant shapes | Historical variations |
|---|---|---|---|
| **MONARCHY** (government of one) | Absolutist monarchies<br>Feudal monarchies<br>Constitutional Monarchies | **TIRANY** | Despotism<br>Dictatorship<br>Totalitarianism |
| **ARISTOCRACY** (government by the few, the best) | Blood aristocracy (hereditary nobility)<br>Moral and intellectual aristocracy (philosopher kings) | **OLIGARCHY** (government of the few, the rich) | Aristocracy of the strongest<br>Aristocracy of the richest (plutocracy) |

[3] BOBBIO, N. *A teoria das formas de governo*. Brasília: UnB, 1992.

[4] Aristotle uses the word democracy (*democratia*) to describe the deviant form and *politia* the correct form; but, as we will see during the text, he also uses democracy in the positive sense and demagogy as the deviant form.

5 For the text of *Politics* we use: ARISTOTELES. *Politics*, translation, introduction and notes by Mário da Gama Kury. Brasília: UNB, 1997; and ARISTOTELE, *Politica*, a cura de Carlo Augusto Viano, Milano: Biblioteca Univesale Rizzoli-BUR (testo greco a fronte), 2008. The Portuguese translation is made using the two texts with minor modifications by the author.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Modern aristocracy (technocracy and bureaucracy) | | |
| **(POLITICO) DEMOCRACY** (government of the many) | Direct democracy (of old)<br>Representative democracy<br>Participatory democracy<br>Elitist democracy | **(DEMOCRACY) DEMAGOGY**<br>Plebiscitary democracy | Populism<br><br>Totalitarianism |

For Aristotle, the **first deviation** indicates the phenomenon of corruption, a classic theme in political philosophy of all times. A corrupt ruler is one who governs for his own benefit and not for the common good: this definition is obviously relevant today and affects all political systems[6] . Political representation, according to a whole tradition, should be the representation of "general interests", and not particular interests, which are "partial, or local, or corporate, or fractional interests, as opposed to general, national, collective, common interests"[7] .

In this conception, which has its origins in the concepts of popular sovereignty and general will elaborated by Rousseau, the representative's mandate is not "imperative", in other words, it is not linked to a specific group; the mandate holder does not have a mandate bond. But in practice, the imperative mandate, a manifestation of private interests, dominates the political scene and is one of the factors that favours political corruption on a large scale, pushing political news to the police pages.

The **other deviation** is equally important: it is the government of men that prevails over the government of laws. The question is whether the government of men or the government of law is better. In the *Republic*, Plato doesn't value laws (based on the observation that the law is universal and the case particular), because his central thesis is that we need to educate men, warriors, guardians and labourers in ethical and political virtues, so that good men don't need laws, but follow their moral conscience. In the *Laws*, his last (unfinished) dialogue, he reconsidered the importance of laws. Aristotle clearly opts in favour of the rule of law, which for him represents right reason (*orthos logos)*, rationality, which makes it possible to overcome and temper the passions that dominate men[8] .

There is a difference between **forms of government and political regimes,** although it is not always clear. Form of government refers to the "formal" aspect that a state takes on, for example, monarchy. Political regime is the material content of this form. For example, a constitutional monarchy, although formally a monarchy, is in fact a democracy or republic (as Kant would say). Another example is a democracy that is only "formal", whose political regime is authoritarian or totalitarian (democracy as dictatorship of the majority).

[6]AVRITZER, Leonardo e FILGUEIRAS, Fernando. *Corrupção e Sistema Político no Brasil.* Rio de Janeiro: Civilização brasileira, 2011. FILGUEIRAS, Fernando. *Corrupção na política* – Perspectivas teoréticas e metodológicas. Juiz de Fora, 2006. MARTINS, José Antônio. *Corruption***.** Publisher: Globo, 2008.

[7]See: BOBBIO. Representation and interest. In: IDEM. *Teoria Geral da política. A filosofia política e a lição dos clássicos*. Organizado por M. Bovero, Rio de Janeiro, Campus, 2000 p. 460.

[8] The theme is present in Hobbes, who contrasts the passions of men that lead to war and the "eternal and immutable laws of nature" (he defines 18 laws that can be summarised in the golden law of "do unto others as you would have others do unto you") and which point the way to reason and peace. The theme is taken up by Bobbio in favour of the government of laws: BOBBIO, N. Governo dos homens ou governo das Leis? In: IDEM. *O futuro da democracia* Trad. de Marco Aurélio Nogueira. São Paulo: Editora Paz e Terra, 2009, p. 165-186.

## 2. THE LEGITIMATE FORMS OF GOVERNMENT.

### Monarchy

A monarchy is a government in which only one person commands, the monarch (*μονάρχης -monarkhía*, from *μόνος*, "one/singular," and *ἀρχων*, "leader/chief"): the King, the Prince, the Emperor. There are at least three fundamental types of monarchy:

- **The feudal monarchies of the Middle Ages** in fact shared power with a series of other higher powers (the Pope and the Emperor) and lower powers, with which they necessarily had to coexist, and therefore did not achieve absolute power (which existed only in theory), but had to "bargain" for the loyalty of their subjects and the support of their superiors.

- **Absolute or absolutist** monarchies, where the monarch centralises and maintains all power in the hands of himself and his court: this ideal model includes both the Empires and the ancient monarchies, as well as the modern absolutist monarchies of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, before the bourgeois revolutions.

- Modern and contemporary **constitutional or parliamentary monarchies**, which despite being monarchies in terms of the form of government, are in fact democracies in terms of the political regime, since power is shared with parliament and regulated by the constitution and other political and legal mechanisms**.**

### Aristocracy

Aristocracy, from the Greek αριστοκρατία, from άριστοι (*aristoi*), the best, and κράτος (*kratos*), power, is the "government of the best"; but the question is who the best are. We can subdivide this into at least three typologies:

- An **aristocracy of the strongest**: "justice is the advantage of the strongest"[9] , this is the definition of the sophists Thrasymachus (represented at the beginning of Plato's *Republic*), and Callicles (in the *Gorgias*), who affirm that, according to nature (*physis)*, the criterion of justice is the strength that each person possesses and exercises, and that law (*dikaion*) and law (*nomoς)* are an expedient of the weakest and most mediocre to defend their interests against the strongest, who are also the "superior men", anticipating Nietzsche's theses in the 19th century. But a government of this kind would be more like an authoritarian/despotic or tyrannical government than a legitimate one, because it is based not on the force of law, but on the right of force[10] .

- An **aristocracy or nobility of tradition, of blood**, originating from families with a long tradition of presence and dominion over a territory, such as the ancient Greek nobility in Homeric times, or the Roman nobility (*senatus*) or the feudal nobility in the Middle Ages. This type of government is what Weber called "traditional" power.

-A **theocratic aristocracy** founded on hierarchical order (in the literal sense of sacred power *hierós*), as for example was the pontifical state in medieval times until the separation of state and church. Today, some Islamic countries, such as Iran, retain theocratic traits.

- A **moral and intellectual aristocracy**, the best are those who are most fit and well-prepared to assume power, like the guardians and "philosopher kings" of Plato's *Republic*, selected and trained to assume the government of the ideal city[11] .

- A "**technocratic**" **aristocracy**, where the "best" are identified with technicians

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[9] PLATONE. *Repubblica*, 338e/ 339a. Traduzione e commenti di Mario Viroli. Testo originale a fronte. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1995, (Vol. I and Vol. II).

[10] We develop this theme in *Democracy and Elitism, op. cit*, p. 38-42.

[11] The aristocracy proposed by Plato would be a form of *epistemocracy*, a neologism used by BRENNAN, Jason. *Against Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2017. (eBook)

and career bureaucrats, trained and qualified to solve the complex problems of contemporary societies. If in Plato's *Republic* the central role fell to philosophy, and in the Middle Ages to theology, here it is science that dominates, through technology. This type of government is what Weber called "bureaucratic" power.

Even without ruling directly, "**intellectuals**" have always had a relationship with power, just think of the medieval theologians and jurists who didn't rule, but exercised a very strong power over the actions of the rulers, while spiritually legitimising them; the Enlightenment philosophers who, for Kant, shouldn't govern, but should be listened to freely by the Prince or "enlightened despot", thus creating the sphere that would later be called public opinion; or Gramsci's organic intellectuals, linked to a social class, who exercise the role of ruling class or vanguard (of the proletariat)[12] .

**Democracy**

Democracy comes from the Greek δημοκρατία (*dēmokratía* or "government of the people"), which was created from δῆμος (*demos* or "people") and κράτος (*kratos* or "power"). In the political tradition, we can identify three fundamental forms of democracy: direct, representative and competitive between elites. They are all "governments of the people", but popular participation is defined very differently in each of them.

Direct democracy - both in its ancient Athenian model and in its modern version, as an expression of Rousseau's "general will" - presupposes that all citizens have a say in political affairs, through forms of direct participation in the management and oversight of public affairs[13] .

**- Direct democracy of the ancients**: the government of the *demos*, meaning the majority of the population, the many (*pollakoi*), the mass (*plethos)*, and therefore, since the rich are usually few and the poor are many, democracy is a government of the poor, as Aristotle said. This democracy is characterised by its direct form of government: the people decide in an assembly (*ekklesia)*, most positions are appointed by lot, only the most important positions are elected, there is a very intense rotation of positions, there is a ban on the renewal of mandates and instruments for revoking mandates, etc. An example is the *Athenaion Politeia*[14] in democratic periods, transcribed and commented on by Aristotle.

**- Modern direct** democracy: While in ancient democracy it was "the many" who governed, in modern democracy "everyone" is called upon to govern and be governed. The space of citizenship, which in ancient Greece was limited to free and equal citizens, men, born in the city, from a traditional family, is "ideally" extended and expanded to include the space of active and passive citizenship. Ideally, because in practice political regimes have long been elitist and censorial.

**- Direct** democracy and **participatory** democracy are often used synonymously, but here we define them differently, considering the former a typical form of ancient, medieval and Renaissance small city-states, and the latter a more modern form of popular participation that can also exist in large and complex states, which can provide instruments of participatory democracy coexisting with representative democracy[15] .

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[12] See: BOBBIO, N. *Os intelectuais e o poder. Dúvidas e opções dos homens de cultura na sociedade contemporânea*. São Paulo: UNESP, 1997. Ver: *Gramsci e o elitismo de esquerda* In: TOSI, G. - GUIMARÃES, R. *Democracia e elitismo. Op. cit.*, p. 250-270.

[13] See: *Rousseau: a farsa da representação política*. In. TOSI, G. - GUIMARÃES, R. Democracia &Elitismo, op. cit., p.271-286.

[14] Aristotle. *Constituição dos atenienses.* Lisbon: Gulbenkian Foundation, 2015.

[15] See: *Democracia Participativa*. In: TOSI, G. - GUIMARÃES, R. Democracia & Elitismo, op. cit. p. 224-232.

**- Plebiscitary democracy** is a conception of direct democracy that poses as an alternative to representative democracy and finds its foundations in Rousseau's critique of representation[16] . When direct democracy assumes a monist conception of power, it can fall into authoritarian forms; because the principle of democracy, understood *stricto sensu* as "general will", tends to be absolute and does not find limits, counterpoints, balances in the other founding principle of the rule of law, which is the guarantee of individual rights and the rights of minorities[17] .

**- representative democracy**: this is the modern form of democracy that presupposes unrestricted popular sovereignty, exercised not directly but through representatives due to the complexity, size and pluralism that characterise modern states. It is the most widespread form of democracy in contemporary times, with parliament as the central source of power, since it is the people's representatives elected in parliament who draw up the laws (especially in the English tradition).

**- Competitive democracy among elites.**

The doctrines of representative democracy constitute a transition to another doctrine that cannot be called democratic *stricto sensu*, because it denies the founding principle of democracy, i.e. the political competence of citizens. The most radical questioning of citizens' political competence is very old, dating back at least to Plato, but it was systematised by the so-called "elite theorists". According to this doctrine, in all political regimes, including democratic ones, it is never the "people" who govern, but always economic, political, social, religious and technological elites.

The "theory of elites" was developed between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century by two Italian sociologists, Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, and a German political scientist, naturalised Italian, Robert Michels. The hard core of the doctrine, which has various nuances depending on the author, is expressed by Michels' "iron law of oligarchy", which states "that organisation is at the origin of the domination of the elected over the voters, of the mandataries over the mandantes, of the delegates over the delegantes". In this sense, democracy is also a form of oligarchy: "Whoever says democracy says organisation, whoever says organisation says oligarchy, so whoever says democracy says oligarchy". In no system or historical period have the people ruled, but always a restricted group of elites (Pareto) or a political class (Mosca)[18] .

The theory of elites has several possible readings, including a democratic one. Elements of a **democratic theory of** elites can be found in the elitist authors themselves, especially Gaetano Mosca and the first Michels[19] . But it was the Austrian economist Schumpeter who, in the 1940s, attempted to synthesise democratic and elitist theory. Democracy, for Schumpeter, would be the best form of government,– not as a government "of the people", because the people don't have the competence for that, especially in complex modern societies with advanced capitalism– but because it provides a wider recruitment of elites, including among the popular classes traditionally

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[16] ROUSSEAU, J.J. *Do contrato social.* São Paulo: Abril Cultural, 1983 (The Thinkers).

[17] In this regard, Bobbio writes: "If by direct democracy is meant literally the participation of all citizens in all decisions pertaining to them, the proposal is foolish. [...] The Rousseaunian individual called upon to participate from morning to night in exercising his duties as a citizen would not be the total man, but the total citizen (as he was called with evident polemical intentions by Dahrendorf). And, after all, the total citizen is nothing more than the other, equally threatening face of the total state. It is no coincidence that Rousseaunian democracy has often been interpreted as totalitarian democracy in polemic with liberal democracy " BOBBIO, Norberto. *O future da democracia.* A defesa das regras do jogo. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2009, p. 54-55.

[18] See: HOLLANDA, Cristina Buarque de. *Teoria das elites.* Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2011.

[19] We develop the theme of elitist democracy in TOSI, G. - GUIMARÃES, R. *Democracia e Elitismo dos An antigos e dos modernos*, op. cit.

excluded from power, through the method of competition between elites for popular consensus[20] .

## 3. DEVIANT FORMS OF GOVERNMENT.

In addition to these three main forms of government and their variables, we have the so-called forms that Aristotle defines as "deviant". For Aristotle, deviation occurs when the ruler does not govern in the interests of all, but in his own interests and without respect for the laws in force: in this case, it is men who govern, subject to their passions, and not the laws, the expression of rationality.

The deviation from monarchy is **tyranny**, when the king governs in his own interests rather than the common interest and does not respect the laws that he himself emanates (*rex legibus solutus*). Tyranny is different from **despotism**, because despotic power is that which Aristotle defines in the *Politics* between the master/owner (*despotés*) and the slave (doulos). Therefore, for Aristotle, it is a type of non-political but "domestic" government that is limited to the home (*oikos*), where the man dominates over the slaves, women and children. It is only recognised as legitimate in the case of barbarians, because Aristotle had stated that since all barbarians are slaves by nature, they are entitled to despotic rule.

Also different from tyranny and despotism, although they are confused in current usage, is **dictatorship**: a Roman institution that indicates the choice of a leader to take supreme command in times of emergency, during a period of "state of exception", and which has inspired both the left (Marxism's dictatorship of the proletariat) and the right (the role of the *duce* and *fuhrer* in fascism and Nazism and decisionist theories of politics)[21] . In modern political language, not only has the old meaning of the word disappeared, but the institution itself has changed, no longer confining itself to a transitory and limited period of seizing power in exceptional situations, but identifying itself with autocratic forms of power such as tyranny and despotism[22] .

The phenomenon of **totalitarianism**, a "deviant" form of government unknown to the ancients, deserves a separate discussion. *Totalitarian* regimes simultaneously radicalise the element of plebiscitary democracy and the element of the elite, through the figure of the maximum leader who enjoys an immense popular consensus and uses it for total control over the state and society. The term was coined between the two world wars by various authors who analysed the Nazi and fascist phenomena, but it became famous in political philosophy thanks to Hannah Arendt, who in 1951 defined it as a typically contemporary phenomenon, and the perverse fruit of the masses' entry into political life

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[20] SCHUMPETER, Joseph. *Capitalismo, Socialismo e Democracia*. Trad. Luiz Antônio Oliveira de Araújo. São Paulo: UNESP, 2017.

[21] Ver MACEDO JÚNIOR, Ronaldo Porot. *Constitução, soberania e ditadura em Carl Schmitt.* Lua Nova (42) - 1997, "**The Führer Defends the Law**. In his text on "The Guardian of the Constitution", Schmitt develops the thesis that the *Führer* must be the true guardian of the Constitution. Courts made up of magistrates do not fulfil the necessary conditions for maintaining the unity of the political and legal system implicit in the Constitution, since they lack legitimacy and political responsibility.
In a 1934 text entitled 'The *Führer* defends the Law', Schmitt radicalizes this idea by listing the various responsibilities that the *Führer* must have in maintaining order and institutions, to the detriment of the traditional and liberal division of powers as proposed by Montesquieu." See also AGAMBEN, Giorgio. *Estado de Exceção.* São Paulo: Boitempo, 2004.

[22] See the entry "Dictatorship" in the *Dicionario de Política* de BOBBIO, N. - MATTEUCCI, N. - PASQUINO, G. Brasília: Editora UnB, 1986.

from the 19th century onwards[23] . According to the author, there are fundamentally two variables with distinct characteristics: right-wing totalitarianism such as fascism and Nazism, and left-wing totalitarianism such as Stalinism.

**Oligarchy**.

Always following the Aristotelian division, the deviation from Aristocracy would be oligarchy, from the Greek ολιγαρχία , which happens when the few (*oligoi*) assume power; and since Aristotle had said that, normally or almost always, the poor are many and the rich are few, oligarchy is the power of the rich, who act in self-interest (against the poor) and in disregard of the laws. In modern times, this regime is also called *plutocracy*, the government of the rich (*plutoi*) and indicates a government in which those who hold economic power control, dominate, hegemonise or greatly influence political power. The term is not widely used, although it indicates a widespread phenomenon in our capitalist society. This is where the whole discussion between democracy and representation of interests, democracy and the market, democracy and capitalism comes in[24] . The term is more commonly used today in sociological and political literature to indicate a class that defends traditional, "backward" interests that don't keep up with the development of productive forces, such as rural oligarchies, family-based oligarchies, etc.

Demagoguery

The deviant form of democracy (although Aristotle uses this word in a derogatory sense) is demagoguery, i.e. the regime where the power of the "people" in assembly is dominated by demagogues who manipulate the majority, not respecting the laws and acting in their own self-interest against the other classes. In a way, demagoguery is consubstantial with democracy, it is not possible to make a clear distinction between democracy and demagoguery, because elements of demagoguery are present and embedded in democracy itself. For this reason, one of the criteria for assessing the "quality" of a democracy is to see to what extent demagoguery influences the democratic system.

In contemporary political theory, **populism** is synonymous with demagoguery and is generally used in a derogatory way to indicate political systems that have not fully developed democracy, where the leader relates directly to the masses without the mediations and distinctions of liberal democracy. But not all authors consider it a negative phenomenon. Populism is a phenomenon that is no longer limited to Latin America (its traditional cradle) but is spreading in all political systems, even the most traditional ones, playing a positive or negative role depending on the social and political contexts and historical circumstances[25] .

## 4. MIXED FORMS OF GOVERNMENT.

In addition to these "pure" forms, the classics, especially the Romans from the

[23] ARENDT, Hannah. *Origens do Totalitarismo*. Anti-Semitismo, Imperialismo, Totalitarismo. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2009.

[24] See the entry "Oligarchy" in BOBBIO's *Dicionario de Política*, *op. cit.*

[25] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have dedicated works to populism that defend a left-wing populism: LACLAU, Ernesto. *A razão Populista*. São Paulo: Three Stars, 2013. MOUFFE, Chantal. *Por um populismo de esquerda*. Autonomia Literária, 2020. For a right-wing reading of populism see: BENOIST, Alain de. *Populismo*. La fine della destra e della sinistra. Bologna: Arianna editrice, 2017. See also: TORMEY, Simon. *Populismo*: uma breve introdução, translated by Mário Molina. São Paulo: Cultrix, 2019 (Kindle).

historian Polybius onwards, describe mixed forms of government, which bring together elements of the three main forms: monarchy, aristocracy and democracy.

**Republic and republicanism**

A more in-depth discussion is merited on the term **Republic**, and **republicanism** or the "republic**an**" tradition that derives from it. There are quite clear differences between Athenian Democracy and the Roman Republic. The main one is that despite the famous SPQR (*Senatus populusque Romanus*), the Roman Republic was never a democratic form of government, but an aristocracy dominated by the traditional families (*patricians*) and landowners who made up the *senatus*. The people, the *plebs*, were excluded from government for centuries and were only able to participate through the tribune of the plebs, who had no power to pass laws or govern, but did have a powerful veto power[26] .

The Latin term *res publica* was used to translate Plato's *Politeia*, which today is universally known as the *Republic*. It is used, for example, by Cicero in the book of the same name to indicate the belonging of a people to the common good or interest, which is expressed by a set of laws. In this sense, the term can be considered synonymous with a positive and just regime against unjust regimes, thus replacing the term democracy which, for centuries, retained the negative connotations that the ancients had attributed to it.

The term has also had different connotations, from the most common, which lasts to this day, which differentiates Republic from Monarchy, through the Middle Ages (*respublica Christiana*), by the moderns starting with Machiavelli (*Repubblica* contraposta ai *Principati*), and Bodin (*De la republique)* arriving at Rousseau's democratic republic founded on popular sovereignty[27] and the State founded on the Republican Constitution and the division of powers of Kant and the tradition of political liberalism.

Contemporary republicanism arises from a (re)interpretation of Machiavelli promoted by some scholars, such as Pocock and Skinner[28] , based on Machiavelli's reading of the Roman republic, which favours the Machiavelli of the *Discourses on the first decade of Titus Livius* (rather than the *Prince*): and presents the relatively new image of a Republican Machiavelli[29] .

**Polybius: The Roman Republic.**

A positive example of the value of the mixed constitution is, according to Polybius, the Roman Republic, where the monarchical element is represented by the consul, the aristocratic element by the Senate (made up of the families of the patrician nobility) and the popular element by the popular elections of the tribunes of the plebs[30] .

Some interpreters[31] also consider the Aristotelian theory of *politia* to be the best government, because it is a "middle class" government that guarantees social and therefore also institutional stability, as a mixed form. But it's not really a mixed

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[26] He defends the thesis that Rome was never a democracy ROULAND, Norbert. *Rome, democracia impossível?* Os agentes do poder na cidade de Roma. Brasília: UNB, 1997. See also: Moses Finley: Roma uma aristocracia militar. In TOSI, G. - GUIMARÃES, R. *Democracia & Elitismo*, op.cit. p. 127-133.

[27] See the entry "República" in Bobbio's *Dicionario de Politica* (written by Matteucci).

[28] POCOCK, J. G.A. *The Machiavellian Moment*: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition. Princeton Classic, 2016. SKINNER, Quentin. *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought.* São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996. IDEM. *Machiavelli.* L&PM Pocket Collection, 2010.

[29]See the entry on "Republicanism" in Bobbio's *Dictionary of Politics* (written by Maurizio Viroli). BIGNOTTO, Newton. *Origens do republicanism moderno*. Humanitas, 2001.

[30] See: BOBBIO, N. *Políbio.* In: *A teoria das formas de governo*, Brasília: UnB, 1992.

[31] BERTI. E. *Il pensiero politico di Aristotele.* Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1997.

government, as Bobbio notes, but a democracy that avoids the excesses of oligarchy and demagoguery[32] .

After this brief *tour* of the different forms of government, we will now delve into the subject of democracy in Aristotle, offering a more positive reading of the philosopher's political thought on the subject, different from the anti-democratic criticisms of his master Plato.

## 5. ARISTOTLE AND DEMOCRACY

### 5.1. Democracy as the Government of the Poor.

As we saw earlier, one criterion for distinguishing between forms of government or types of constitution is whether those who govern do so in their own interests or in the interests of the common good: thus democracy is considered a deviant form of government because the many, usually the poor, govern in their own interests and not in the interests of all, in other words, they govern against the interests of the rich.

Aristotle also draws attention to another criterion of socio-economic type. In order to define a type of government, we must not only pay attention to the *formal* constitution (*politeia),* but also, and above all, to the segment, class or social stratum that actually governs (*politeuma*). This is why he says that, in fact, the distinction between oligarchy and democracy is not so much the number of citizens who govern, but the type of citizens who govern: in the first case, the rich (*plutoi*), always minorities, and in the second case, the poor (*aporoi*), always the majority:

> What differentiates democracy from oligarchy is poverty (*penía*) and wealth (*ploutós*), so where the rich dominate, whether many or few, there will necessarily be an oligarchy and where the poor dominate there will be a democracy; although, as we said, the rich are few and the poor are many, since few are those who get rich, while all take part of the freedoms. That's why they compete with each other for political dominance (*Pol.* III, 1280a 1-5).

We can see in this statement a distinction between forms of government and political regimes. In cities where there are great social and economic inequalities between the poor and the rich, we shouldn't just look at the formal constitution, but at who actually governs and dominates, the *politeuma*: in oligarchies the rich, in democracies the poor.

Aristotle thus oscillates between the classical division into six forms of government, which is in line with the formal constitutional, and the division in line with the political regime, that is, the *politeuma*. In the latter case, there wouldn't be six forms of government, but only two: the government of the rich, the oligarchy; and the government of the poor, the democracy, because: "It is not possible for the same men to be poor and rich at the same time: therefore the rich and the poor seem to constitute, in the broadest sense, the component parts of the city, [...] to the point of thinking that there are only two forms of government: democracy and oligarchy". (*Pol.* IV, 1291b 5-6).

Another criterion refers to who has the political competence to govern. Aristotle takes a more favourable stance towards democracy than Plato and his aristocratic conception of the *polity*.

The philosopher asks himself the following question: "Who should rule in the city? The many (*plethos*), the rich (*plousioi*), the good men (*epieikeoi*), or a man better

[32] BOBBIO, Norberto. *A Teoria das Formas de Governo*. *Op. cit.* p. 71.

than all the others (*béltiston*), or a tyrant (*tyrannos*)?" He responds by saying that all these alternatives seem to have unpleasant consequences, and that he has arguments for and against them. But in the end he opts for the majority principle:

> The principle that the majority is necessarily better suited to exercising government than a few excellent men can be justified, and although it may raise some difficulties, it is probably true. Indeed, the many, despite not being individually good men, can be better when brought together, not individually, but collectively than the few individually good ones. Indeed, being many, each one brings his share of virtue (*areté*) and wisdom (*phronesis*) (*Pol*. III, 1281b 1-10).

He goes on to say: "When all are gathered together, they have enough discernment, and by joining the better class, they become more useful to the city [...]. But with the proviso that "each member of the crowd, taken separately, is not in a position to judge (*krinein)*" (*Pol.*, 1281b 35-38)[33] .

In this context, Aristotle directly addresses the issue of the political competence of citizens, with an implicit reference to the Socratic-Platonic objections, stating that the thesis that the majority is more fit to exercise government than the few, faces the objection that those competent in a certain art (such as medicine, geometry or nautical art) should be judged only by their peers, and not by those who do not know the art; and this should also apply to magistrates:

> In the election of magistrates [in the broad sense of everyone who takes on a political office] the same thing should be done, because only those who are competent can choose correctly: for example, the choice of a geometer should be made by a geometer, and that of a helmsman by an expert in navigation. And if those who are not competent (*idiotes*) can also contribute to the realisation of some works or the exercise of some art, they certainly don't have the same competence as specialists (*eidotes*). Therefore, according to this argument, the multitude (*plethos*) should not be given the power to decide on the choice and supervision of magistrates (*Pol.* III, 1282a 7-15).

Apparently, the philosopher goes back on his assertion that the many are best suited to govern and opts in favour of the few who are competent. However, Aristotle refutes this opinion, introducing a principle in favour of the political competence of the majority. He claims that the masses are better, not worse, than the "technicians", because it is those who use an object, not those who make it, who know how to judge it: "The father of the family who uses the house will know how to judge it better than the architect who made it, the pilot will judge the helm better than the one who made it, and the consumer will judge the food better than the cook" (*Pol.* 1282a 20-23).

Aristotle, thus using a thesis from Plato himself,[34] affirms a fundamental principle of democracy that Pericles had already emphasised: everyone is capable of judging the results of political action, even if not everyone has the same ability to manage public affairs[35] .

And he concludes - albeit with many doubts - by saying that even the choice of the highest positions, the highest officials and the decision on the most relevant issues

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[33] This theme that "the majority is better able to exercise government (democracy) than a few excellent men" (aristocracy), will be the subject of modern reflection, through the experience of mass democracies that can degenerate into demagoguery.

[34] Plato in the *Cratylus* (388ff) and the *Republic* (X, 601d) had affirmed the superiority of the judgement of those who use an object over those who produce it.

[35] Berti comments on this: "This argument was rightly seen as a defence of Protagoras' theses, notoriously philo-democratic, against the objections addressed to him by Socrates in the Platonic dialogue of the same name." BERTI, Enrico. *Aristotle*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1997, p. 66.

can be left to the decision of the many, when the masses are not "excessively degraded":

> Therefore it is right that the majority/the many (*plêthos)* should be sovereign (*kúrion)* in matters of the highest importance, because the popular assembly (*dêmos*), the Council (*Boulé*) and the Court (*dikastérion*) are made up of numerous people (*polloi*) and the possessions of all these people are collectively greater than those of each official or of a few officials occupying the highest functions (*Pol.* III, 1282a 40;1282b 2).

But the philosopher doesn't limit himself to a general statement about the right of the *many* to rule and to judge the rulers; he details which *social classes* would have the right to participate in government. In defining the different parts of the *polis*, Aristotle makes a list of eight parts[36] , which will become a historical reference for centuries to measure the degree of civilisation of a political community.

> Cities are in fact made up not of one but of many parts. One of these parts is the mass of people linked to food production, called farmers (*georgoî*); the second is the so-called artisan or craftsman class (*bánausoi*) [...]; the third is the commercial class (*agoraîoi*); [...]; the fourth is the class of paid manual labourers (*thetikói*); the fifth is that of the defenders of the city in the event of war, the soldiers (*propolêmesoi*) who are no less indispensable than the others if the people are not to become slaves to whoever attacks the city. There must also inevitably be someone to administer justice and judge what is just [VI part, the judges] (*Pol.* IV, 1291a 1-5). [...] A seventh part of the city is that which serves the community by contributing the fortunes of its members to the various public offices, the so-called rich (*euporoi*). The eighth class is that of the public servants and administrators of the city, since the city cannot exist without rulers; it is therefore necessary that there be some men capable of governing and serving the city, either continuously or alternately." (*Pol.* IV, 1291a 35-40)

Aristotle presents these fundamental functions for a city that doesn't just want to fulfil the material needs of life, but allows its members, or at least its free citizens, to live a full and complete life. He also raises an important question for defining the limits of citizenship: whether all classes of citizens can aspire to participate in political life (obviously with the exception of slaves, women and foreigners) or whether only certain classes have this right.

Your answer goes in the first direction:

> Many believe that different abilities can be possessed by the same people, and that, for example, the same men can be soldiers who defend the city in war, farmers who cultivate the land, and craftsmen, and those who deliberate in the assembly, and even judges; because, in fact, all men claim to possess virtue (*areté*) [politics] and believe themselves capable of performing most of the functions of government in the city (*Pol.* IV, 1291 b 1-5).

Although he did not openly endorse this view as his own, Aristotle defines democracy as a government in which almost all citizens, including the humblest, are recognised as having the political competence to govern, and in which the division of social labour does not correspond to a rigid division of political labour, since everyone, or almost everyone, depending on the more or less broad type of democracy, can assume their roles in economic life and political participation at the same time.

### 5.2. The five forms of democracy and the critique of demagoguery.

Based on this main criterion, plus respect for the rule of law, Aristotle will define

[36]This division is an expansion and criticism of Plato's four classes in *Republic* 369b-371e.

the *five different types of democracy:* four types of democracy that resemble and almost confuse each other, based on greater or lesser equality and freedom among citizens and governed with respect for the law, and a fifth form, which Aristotle openly condemns: demagoguery.

> The first kind of democracy is based primarily on equality; under the law that regulates this kind of democracy, equality means that the poor have no more rights than the rich, and neither class is exclusively sovereign, but both are equal. If, as some claim, freedom (*eleuthería*) and equality (*isóthes*) are essential to democracy, they can only exist in their fullness if all citizens enjoy the most perfect political equality. Since the people constitute the majority, and a resolution passed by the majority is sovereign, such a government must necessarily be a power of the people (*demokratia*). (*Pol.* IV, *1291b* 30-35)

A second form of democracy allows for a more restricted citizenship, because it requires that political positions be distributed among those who have some kind of wealth (census democracy), even if their income is very low.

> Another kind [III] of democracy is one in which all citizens who are not subject to disqualification [who have fathers and mothers who are citizens of the *polis*] participate in the functions of government, and the law is sovereign. There is yet another kind [IV] of democracy, in which everyone participates in the functions of government, as long as they are simply citizens**, and** the law is sovereign (*Pol.* IV, 1291b 35-40).

These four types of democracy are very similar and are based on the principle of equality between citizens and respect for the law, differing only in terms of a more or less broad concept of active citizenship[37] . But there is a fifth type of democracy that is confused with demagoguery and which Aristotle disapproves of, because it is not the law that governs, but the people who are manipulated by demagogues:

> Another kind [V] of democracy is the same as the others in everything, except that it is the masses (*pléthos*) and not the law (*nómos*) that governs, which happens when the decrees (*psephismata*) voted by the popular assembly are sovereign, and not the law (*nomos*). Such a situation is caused by the demagogues (*demagogoi*); in democratically governed cities and under the rule of law there are no demagogues, and the best classes of citizens occupy the most prominent positions Where, however, the laws are not sovereign, then the demagogues appear, because the people become a kind of multiple monarch, a unity made up of many, since the many are sovereign not as individuals, but collectively. [...] A democracy of this kind is analogous to the tyrannical form of monarchy, for its spirit is the same; both exercise despotic rule (*despotikós*) over the better classes, and the decrees (*psephismata*) voted by the assembly are comparable to the arbitrary edicts of a tyranny; and demagogues and adulators are equalled to the point of being confused (*Pol.* IV,1292a 5-20).

*Politia* is a correct form because it is exercised under the terms of the law (constitutional democracy) and democracy is a deviant form because it lacks an essential element, which is the government of the laws (plebiscitary democracy)[38] . In this case, democracy becomes a tyranny of the majority (as Alexis de Tocqueville would say many

[37] We note that, in this case, Aristotle uses the term *democracy* in a positive sense, not a derogatory one.

[38] See FERRAJOLI, Luigi. *La democrazia costituzionale.* Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016, p. 7: "[The rigid constitutions of the aftermath of the Second World War] changed the very nature of democracy, which no longer resides solely in the popular will that manifests itself, directly or indirectly, in the omnipotence of majorities, but also requires - this is the substance of today's constitutional democracies - respect for and the implementation of constitutionally established principles". Respecting the due differences, the concept of constitutional democracy is close to the Aristotelian concept of *politia*.

centuries later), in which each individual behaves like a monarch, thinking only of their own interests, and not as a member of a collective. The collective is not the expression of something organic, which precedes and ontologically founds the parts, but as a sum of individuals (which Hegel would call "atomistic society"), easily manipulated by the demagogue, who governs by decree rather than following established legal norms.

Rafael Salatini comments on demagoguery:

> The main characteristics of the demagoguery described by Aristotle, largely taken from events in Athens (but also in other smaller cities [*polis*]), can be summarised in the following elements: (a) demagoguery is described as the flattery of the people in exchange for their unrestricted support, in the name of which certain illegitimate political actions are practised as if they were legitimate (see *Politics*, VI, 1320a); (b) the strong popular appeal means that demagoguery arises more naturally (although not necessarily) in democracies than in other forms of government (see *Politics*, V, 1305a); (c) the demagogue arises properly in democracies when the government of laws is exchanged for the government of men (see *Politics*, IV, 1292a); (d) the main form of public destabilisation undertaken by demagogues is the promotion of factionalism, either by spreading slander against large landowners and notables, or by inciting the people against them (see *Politics*, V, 1304b; V, 1310a); and (e) after winning popular support and destabilising public order, the demagogues dissolve democratic institutions and begin to exercise an essentially tyrannical government (see *Politics*, II, 1274a; V, 1305a; V, 1310b). [39]

Aristotle concludes that this form of government cannot be called constitutional because it is not governed by laws, but by the will of men:

> It seems a reasonable criticism to say that such a democracy [the demagogic one] is not a form of constitution (*politeia*), because there is no constitution where the laws do not govern; the laws must govern everything, while the magistrates must only take care of particular cases, and they must judge what kind of constitutional government this is (*Pol.* IV, 1292a 30-35).

By criticising demagoguery, Aristotle thus introduces another fundamental criterion for judging constitutions: the government of laws, not of men, another classic theme that he will leave as a legacy for later political philosophy[40] .

> ... is it more convenient to be governed by the best of men or by the best laws? Those who opine that it is more convenient to be governed by a king think that laws only enunciate general principles, but do not give guidelines for dealing with particular cases; therefore, in any kind of art it would be foolish to establish written norms [...At the same time, rulers must be imbued with the general principle that exists in the law, for that which is not subject to the influence of the passions is better than that in which they congenitally exist, and laws are not subject to such influence, but every human soul necessarily is (*Pol.* III, 1286a,10-20)[41] .

As well as taking a stand in favour of the rule of law, Aristotle asks who should

[39] SALATINI, Rafael. Demagogia antiga e moderna, In: Norberto Bobbio. *Contro i nuovi despotismi.* Scritti sul Berlusconismo. São Paulo: Editora UNESP; Norberto Bobbio Institute, 2016 (Afterword to the Brazilian edition).

[40] The philosopher takes a different stance here from his master Plato, who, as we saw in the *Politics* (but also in the *Republic*), had "dismissed" the government of laws in favour of the government of "good" men (a stance he revises in the last dialogue dedicated to the Laws).

[41] Aristotle is here taking up the same position as Plato in the *Laws* (715 d), in defense of the government of laws, which is better because it is impersonal and prevents government from being subject to human passions, which is different from the position in *The Republic*.

be the judge who applies the laws: whether "one person, the best, or all the citizens". Once again, the answer favours the participation of all, given that:

> No doubt any individual citizen is inferior compared to the best of men, but a city is made up of many individuals, and just as a banquet to which everyone contributes is finer than a simple dinner made by a single person, most of the time a group judges better than a single person (*Pol.* III, 1286a 31-35).

What's more,

> The majority is also more difficult to corrupt. The great multitude judges better than a single person [...] and is more incorruptible: as water in great quantity [is harder to dirty], so the mass is more incorruptible than the few. The judgement of a single person, seized by anger and other emotions, will necessarily be negatively influenced, while it is more difficult for everyone to be angry and wrong (*Pol.* III, 1286a 30-40)[42] .

Another criterion that Aristotle introduces to define democracies refers to the founding principles of democracy, *freedom and effective equality* among its members:

> A fundamental principle of the democratic form of government is freedom, which, according to the prevailing opinion, can only be enjoyed in this form of government, as it is said to be the goal of every democracy. **One principle of freedom is to govern and be governed (*archesthai kai archein*) alternately**. In fact, the democratic conception of justice is the observance of equality according to number (*katá arithmón*) and not according to merit (*katá axían*). The consequence is that the masses (*pléthos)* will be sovereign (*kúrion*) and that what is just and what is the end of the city will be what seems so to the majority. In fact, it is said that each citizen should have as much as any other; that is why in a democracy the poor will be more powerful than the rich (*kurióterous einai toús apórous tôn eupóros*), because the former are more numerous than the latter and what counts is the opinion of the many (*Pol. VI*, 1317a 40-1317b 5).

From this freedom and equality, which here means active participation in the administration of the *polis*, comes the need for democratic institutions that have three characteristics: a) the broad and unrestricted participation of all citizens in the administration of public affairs, preferably using the lottery and practising a continuous rotation of positions; b) the payment of public offices, at least the highest ones, to allow everyone, including the poorest, to participate in politics; c) the prohibition of lifetime positions.

Aristotle gives us some examples of democracy's impressive system of political participation in the work (possibly) authored by him, *Athenaion Politeia*[43] .

> Choice of high officials by all and among all; government of each by all and of all by each alternately; choice by lot for all public functions, or for all those that do not require experience; abolition of the requirement of tenure (property) for the exercise of public functions, or its reduction to a very low level; a ban on the same person holding public office for a second time or more than a few times, with a few exceptions, such as the military; the holding of public office for short periods in all cases or as many as possible;

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[42] There is a certain optimism in Aristotle that the majority is more difficult to corrupt; this may be true for the polis due to its small size, but not for modern mass democracies, whose dynamics have been studied by FREUD, W. *Psicologia das Massas e Análise do eu*. L&PM Editora, 2013. See also: REICH, W. *Psicologia de Massa do fascismo*. São Paulo: Martins Fontes 2019.

[43] ARISTÓTELES. *Constituição de Athenas*. Translation and notes by Edson Bini. São Paulo: EDIPRO, 2012. On the authenticity of the attribution to Aristotle of the *Athenaion Politeia* and its relationship with *Politics*, see the essays contained in: CRESCI, L.R.-PICCIRILLI, L. (eds). *L'Athenaion Politeia* de aristotele. Genova: il Melangolo, 1993.

> the holding of judicial office by all citizens, i.e. by persons chosen from among all, and in all matters, or in most of them, or in the serious and most important ones [...]....] Finally, that the People's Assembly be supreme (*ekklesía kurían einai*) over all causes and that no single authority be supreme over any cause, or only over a very few; or else that a Council (*Boulé*) be sovereign over the most important matters" (*Pol. VI*, 1317b 17-30).

He concludes: "While the oligarchy is characterised by nobility, wealth and education, the popular qualifications are the opposite of these, that is, humble origins, poverty and vulgar activities" (*Pol. VI*, 1318a).

### 5.3. Middle-class democracy

Another important element that the philosopher introduces into the discussion on democracy is the theme of instability and change in political regimes**:** monarchy tends to turn into tyranny, and aristocracy into oligarchy, which leads to the revolt of the masses and provokes democracy:

> From oligarchies they first turn into tyrannies, and from tyrannies into democracy, since, with an ever greater number of people in government because of the unbridled love of money, the oligarchs strengthen the masses, who in the end rise up against them, giving rise to democracy" (*Pol III*, 1286b 15-22).

Thus, due to the desire for wealth, the *polis* is divided into two antagonistic classes: the rich and the poor, oligarchy and democracy, unstable regimes that end up fuelling the cycle of transformations. This is the same danger that Plato expressed, but Aristotle's solution is different from his master's (as is almost always the case): not a "revolutionary" solution, but a reformist one. To get out of this dilemma, Aristotle proposes a middle form of government, where the middle *politeuma*, the middle class, predominates[44] . In asking what the best constitution is, Aristotle is not referring to an ideal constitution (like Plato), but to a constitution that can reach the majority of cities and a way of life capable of being shared by the majority of men - Machiavelli would say - as they are, and not as they should be.

Realistically, Aristotle states that, in fact:

> There are three classes of citizens in every city: the very rich (*euporoi*), the very poor (*aporoi*) and, thirdly, those who are in the middle (*mésoi*) of these extremes. Since it is generally accepted that what is moderate and in the middle is better, it is undoubtedly better to enjoy all the goods provided by fortune moderately (*Pol.* IV, 1295b 1-5).

Oligarchic governments, where strong, rich, noble people dominate, tend towards despotism, because these people are reluctant to be governed by others; while in governments where excessively poor, weak or humble people prevail, these people tend towards despotism.

> they *do* not know how to govern, they only know how to submit slavishly to a government, thus giving rise to a city made up of slaves and masters (*gínetai doúlôn kai despotôn pólis*), and not of free men, and of one envious class and another contemptuous; all things that lead away from friendship and political community (*phília kai koinonía politiké*)" (*Pol.* IV, 1295b 20-22).

This situation creates enmity between citizens and threatens the unity of the political community; on the contrary, the ideal is for the city to be made up of "people

[44] On Aristotle's "moderatism" see: GASTALDI. S. Aristotele: lo scienziato della politica, In: *Storia de pensiero politico antico*. Bari-Rome: Laterza, 1998, 216-221.

who are equal and identified with each other, and this happens mainly in the middle class". Middle-class government is best for the following reasons:

a) "because the citizens who make it up do not covet the goods of others, as the poor do, and are not, like the rich, the object of the poor's covetousness" (*Pol.* IV, 1295b 30);
b) because it guarantees greater political stability, "in fact, tyranny arises both from the most unbridled democracy and from oligarchy, but much less frequently from moderate forms of constitution" (*Pol.* IV, 1295b 32-34);
c) the moderate form of constitution is more immune to factions and revolts, i.e. it is more difficult for rival factions of rich and poor to form and cause political instability (*Pol.* IV, 1295b 35-40);
d) the best legislators like Solon, Lycurgus and Carondas came from the middle classes (*Pol.* IV, 1296a 20).

Aristotle proposes a moderate constitution as the best constitution, in which the effective government of the city is exercised mainly by citizens who own a certain amount of property, who are neither too poor nor too rich, who are, for example, *hoplites*, who own heavy infantry weapons.

And he says: "Whoever is truly concerned about the people (*demotikón)* must take care that the masses are not excessively poor, for this is the cause of the fragility of democracy. He must therefore propose measures capable of bringing lasting prosperity to the masses" (*Pol.* VI, 1320a, 35-37).

### 5.4. Aristotle's legacy for political philosophy

In relation to his master Plato, Aristotle shares some fundamental presuppositions common to all Greek thought, and takes from him almost all the main concepts, which he does not create, but organises and systematises; and discusses the problems and aporias left by Plato's dialogical and labyrinthine style. But when it comes to the answers and conclusions, he usually disagrees with the master, as the ancient commentators realised and summed up in the famous Latin maxim: *amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas.*

In the debate with Plato about science or political philosophy, Aristotle has at least two main disagreements.

**Firstly**, there is an epistemological disagreement, i.e. regarding the status of political science. Aristotle affirms that there is an *episteme praktiké*, distinct from the *episteme theoretiké,* which Plato also recognised; but he disagrees on the characteristics and method of this science. It is not a science reserved for the few, acquired through the knowledge of absolute ideas and using an apodictic method, but a science that lies between maths and rhetoric and uses the dialectical method[45] .

Aristotle states in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

> It is necessary, as in other cases, after having set out the points of view on the subject (*ta phainomena*) and having first developed the aporias, that is, the arguments against and in favour, to prove all the opinions that have authority (*éndoxa*) on such matters, or at least most of them or the most important ones. If, in fact, the difficulties were resolved and the opinions that have authority (*éndoxa*) were left to stand, there would be a sufficient demonstration *(Éthica Nicom.* VII, 1, 1145B 3-7).

Berti comments:

[45] FONTES, Narbal de M.; PARINI, Pedro (org.). *Retorica e Política*: análises legal e filosófica. João Pessoa: Editora da UFPB, 2015.

> This is dialectical argumentation, which Aristotle theorises in the *Topics*[46] as a type of syllogism, i.e. argumentation that takes as its premises the *endoxa*, the opinions of everyone, or of the majority, or of the experts [...]. Political science, i.e. practical philosophy, uses dialectical arguments, in the sense that it discusses the various opinions in the light of the *endoxa*. [...] The *éndoxa* are not put up for discussion, but represent common sense and custom (*ethos*), expressed in laws, religion and constitute criteria in the light of which the opinions of philosophers are judged. [47]

Unlike Plato, Aristotle does not seek paradoxical knowledge, literally "against the *doxa*", but *endoxal*, which starts from common sense and does not radically depart from it, discussing the arguments of philosophers and the different forms of constitution in the light of these opinions. Aristotle's thinking is more realistic and reformist, closer to the *doxa* than the Platonic pretence of scientific, apodictic, original knowledge, contrary to common sense, as expressed, for example, in *The Republic*[48] .

The **second difference** between the two thinkers lies in Aristotle's distinction between the philosopher who possesses practical science and the politician who possesses practical wisdom (*phronesis*). Socrates is the example of a philosopher (as is Plato and Aristotle himself), but Pericles is the example of a man who possesses practical wisdom:

> Wisdom is a true disposition/habit (*exis*), united to practical reasoning *(meta- logou praktiken*), which concerns what is good or bad for man. For this reason, we consider Pericles and his like to be wise (*phronimoi*) because they know how to see what is good for them and what is good for man; and we also consider such to be the men who govern houses (*oikonomikoi)* and cities (*politikoi) (Eth. Nic*. VI, 1140b 5-10).

So Aristotle, when discussing the best form of government, doesn't go looking for a "paradigm in the sky"[49] , but has more than 180 constitutions collected from Greek cities, to see which would be the best, not in absolute terms, but given the real conditions of realisation; just as he doesn't look for the ideal good, but the human good (*anthropino agathon)*. His conclusions are more moderate and common sense than his master's utopian proposals.

**As for democracy**, Aristotle's assessment is more positive than Plato's, who criticises it in any of its forms, whether imposed with the use of force or through consensus, without distinguishing between democracy and demagoguery, since all democracy is necessarily demagogic for Plato.

Aristotle's thoughts on democracy fluctuate: sometimes he affirms the political competence of all citizens, including those of humbler status; sometimes he sees the majority of citizens as individually composed of people lacking in political virtue, arguing that good men, i.e. the *aristoi*, should govern. It is not always easy to tell when Aristotle is using descriptive or prescriptive language. This makes it difficult to define the best form of government[50] .

The hypothesis that seems most plausible to us is that, for Aristotle as for Plato, the ideal government would be the government of the "best" men, the aristocracy, or of

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[46] ARISTOTLE. *Top. 1,1,* 100a 29b-23.

[47] BERTI, Enrico. *Le ragioni di Aristotele*. São Paulo: Loyola, 1998, p. 23.

[48] On the *Endoxa* see: BERTI, Enrico. *I diritti umani come moderni endoxa*. Perspectiva Filosófica - Vol. I-no 25 - January-June/2006, p. 235-252.

[49] VEGETTI, Mario. *Um paradigma no céu. Platão politico de Aristóteles ao XX século*. São Paulo: Anablume, 2010.

[50] On the different interpretations of the theme of the best constitution in Aristotle, see: See: BERTI, Enrico. *Il pensiero politico di Aristotele*. Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1997, p. 21. GASTALDI, Silvia. *Storia del pensiero politico antico*. Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1998, p.216-221.

the best among them, the monarchy. The best would not necessarily be the nobles of ancient Athenian families, but virtuous men who have received a good education, who possess the intellectual and moral virtues necessary to govern, as their master Plato defended. But this optimal government doesn't actually exist (Plato himself had said that it is a paradigm in heaven), but it would be such in an "ideal" sense (as a regulatory ideal, we could say, using a Kantian expression), because it requires men endowed with virtues that would be above average.

There is a passage that seems decisive to me, in Book VII of the *Politics*, dedicated to education:

> If there were as much difference between the one and the other as we imagine there is between gods and heroes on the one hand and men on the other, first of all in relation to the body and then to the soul and then to the soul, in such *a* way that the superiority of the rulers was incontestable and patent to the ruled, it would obviously be better, without any doubt, if one group of people always ruled (*archein*) and the other was always ruled (*archesthai*); but since this is not easily achieved [....] it is obviously necessary that everyone, to the same extent (*homòios*), participate in the government and be governed alternately (*katá meros*) (*Pol.* 1332b, 16-27).

Therefore, democracy would not be the best constitution at all (*aplós*); however, from the point of view of different circumstances, certain conditions, its practical applicability and its diffusion, democracy can be a good alternative for a well-ordered *polis*; just as monarchy and aristocracy can be in other circumstances.

In Aristotle, the fundamental distinction is not so much between *democratia*, in a pejorative sense, as opposed to *politia*, but between *democratia*, in a positive sense, as opposed to *demagoguery*. The fundamental criteria for this distinction are: the common good, which is typical of all correct forms of government, the principle of the majority, which must be reconciled with respect for the law, the existence of broad freedom and equality among citizens, a citizenship in which the vast majority of citizens participate, including those in the most humble professions. Finally, Aristotle attributes political competence, albeit with hesitation, to the multitude (*plethos, demos, polloi*) as capable of governing and being governed, of choosing (by lot or by election) the highest political offices and of overseeing and evaluating them.

When these criteria are not respected, and the majority rules in its own interests rather than in the common interest, not by respecting the law, but by decrees of the assembly, which thus becomes not an organic whole, but an atomistic sum of individuals, democracy becomes easy prey for demagogues, taking on the characteristics of a tyranny of the majority over the rest of the *polis*.

Aristotle was not a democrat, his ethnic origin (Macedonian monarchy)[51] and social background and the influence of his teacher led him towards monarchy and aristocracy, an aristocracy that was more moral and intellectual than one of tradition or wealth. However, he tries to analyse the different regimes with a "scientific spirit", checking the "conditions of possibility" (to use a modern term) of the various forms of government in different contexts and situations, including democracy, and the reasons for the success of the Athenian regime which, despite being in decline, managed to rule the *polis* for decades and elevate Athens to its economic, military, political and cultural

[51] Kelsen defends the thesis that monarchy was the best form of government for Aristotle: KELSEN, H. *La filosofia di Aristotele e la politica greco-macedone*, trad. it. In "Studi Urbinati", 43, 1969, pp. 99-114. This thesis is contested by the greatest commentator on the *Politics*: NEWMAN, W.L. *The Politics of Aristotle*, 4 vol: BARKER, E. *The political Thought of Plato and Aristotle*¸ (1906), New York 1959. Quoted by GASTALDI. *Aristotele, lo scienziato della politica*..op. cit., p. 219.

apogee.

In doing so, he seeks to overcome the "natural" distrust of aristocrats (of all times) towards the multitude, defending the political competence of citizens, and thus placing himself closer to the democratic theses of Protagoras than to the aristocratic theses of his master Plato[52] .

At the same time, he raises some questions that, despite the different conceptual context that separates us from the Greek philosopher, are still topical for a reflection on modern democracy.

i. The boundaries between democracy and demagoguery are still very fragile today, and the possibility of democracy turning into a tyranny of the majority is always present (and populist regimes are an example of this);
ii. the great differences and social inequalities between classes are still a factor in political instability and social injustice today;
iii. the relationship between the majority principle and respect for individual freedoms is still an unresolved issue in the democratic rule of law;
iv. the predominance of the rule of men over the rule of law is still one of society's dilemmas today and one of the permanent factors of political corruption.

However, despite all the doubts, we can conclude that democracy remains the best form of government or constitution if we compare it not with the ideal model, but with real conditions; not with Plato's "good in itself", but with the human good (*to anthropino agathon*) of men as they are, and not as they should be.

In the end, the assertion that Zeus gave the *politiké tekné* to all men (and today we know that this principle cannot be restricted only to the free citizens of the Greek *polis*, but to all men and women without distinction) is the point of discrimination between democratic and anti-democratic theories of politics. The "theory of the elites"[53] states precisely the opposite, i.e. that it is never the people who govern, but always an elite of blood, wealth or wise men who possess the technical knowledge to govern. By supporting Protagoras' thesis, Aristotle places himself in the democratic camp, but he also warns that this condition is not enough for the *polis* to allow a coexistence in which *philia* and *koinonia* predominate, and not conflict (*stasis*) between its members.

There also need to be certain conditions, two of which are essential: a fair distribution of goods that avoids great social inequalities and allows for the existence of a strong middle class (and the theme of distributive justice occupies a large part of Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*) and an education (*paideia)* of citizens to respect the law, the expression of right reason (*orthos logos*). Without this, the transition from democracy to demagoguery, and from demagoguery, as the tyranny of the majority, to totalitarianism is a short one, as contemporary history amply proves.

The Greek ideal of democracy was that all citizens, in addition to their private duties, should devote themselves to political life, to the *vita activa*, the only life worthy of a man (not a woman) who was free (not a slave), born into a traditional family (not a foreigner or a *half-breed*) and an adult. There were exceptions, the biggest of which was Pericles' re-election to the post of strategos for 15 consecutive years, renewing his mandate every year: this indicates that there was also a certain political elite that stood out and ended up taking over political power. But the Athenians knew this and tried to avoid this dangerous phenomenon, which could lead to tyranny. That's why they created

[52] PLATO. *Protagoras.* Lisbon: Relógio D'Água Ed., 1999.
[53] Theory analysed in TOSI, G. - GUIMARÃES, R. *Democracia & Elitismo.* Op. cit. p.167-196.

mechanisms such as ostracism[54] .

In this brief essay on the various forms of government and the place of democracy among them, we don't intend to be exhaustive, the aim is purely didactic, we want to offer a **roadmap** to locate yourself in the labyrinth of definitions, from the ancients to the moderns. We pay particular attention to Aristotle's political thinking in relation to democracy, in a pro-democratic reading that may not be accepted by all scholars on the subject, but which we try to justify using the texts and commentators.

Philosophy has the advantage over science of progressing without cancelling, annihilating or forgetting the older philosophical paradigms and without epochal ruptures that "abandon them to their fate", which is that of having a merely historical value, in other words, a past value, as happens with the sciences that advance through revolutions according to Kuhn[55] . That's why we can always learn a lot from reading and commenting on the classics of ancient philosophy, which never cease to amaze us with their unrivalled greatness: we are dwarfs on the shoulders of giants!

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[54] CANFORA, Luciano. *The world of Athens*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2015, defends the theory that Athenian democracy was more of a "myth" than a reality, and that Athens was a "democratic principality". Of a different opinion is FINLEY, Moses. *Ancient and modern democracy*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1988, who recognises Athens as a true popular and direct democracy. On the subject see: ZOLO, Danilo. *Il Principato Democratico*. Per una teoria realista della democrazia. Milano: Feltrinelli, 1992.

[55] KUHN, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* translated *by* Beatriz Vianna Boeira and Nelson Boeira. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2013.

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