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DIALECTIC AND ITS ROLE IN ARISTOTLE'S POLITICAL MORPHOLOGY. THE CASE OF DISTINGUISHING OLIGARCHY AND DEMOCRACY*

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ABSTRACT. Dialectic and Its Role in Aristotle's Political Morphology. The Case of Distinguishing Oligarchy and Democracy. Is the number of rulers an essential criterion in distinguishing democracy from oligarchy? This is an important issue tackled by Aristotle in two places from his *Politics* (III, 8 and IV, 4), an issue that seems to generate disagreement among scholars. Some believe that number is an essential criterion, i.e. a differentia, others that it is an accident. An attempt to solve this disagreement shall be considered from the perspective of Aristotle's views on dialectics. I will try to show that even if there is no sufficient proof to mandate the interpretation that the number of rulers is a differentia, this position can be defended to some point. In addition, that it is more likely that he considered number to be a particular type of accident.

Keywords**:** *Aristotle, democracy, oligarchy, dialectic, number, wealth, differentia, accident*

1. Introduction

Aristotle's best-known classification of political regimes seems clear enough and without any significant shortcomings. With its two criteria for classification, aim of the ruler or rulers and the number of rulers, it provides us with six kinds of political regimes: monarchy, aristocracy, constitutional government, democracy, oligarchy and, the worst, tyranny. However, paying more heed to what Aristotle has to say in detail about the way these regimes are to be considered distinct might puzzle some readers. One of these is related to the manner in which Aristotle operates a distinction between the two of the most common regimes of his day, democracy and oligarchy, and the role of the criterion of number of rulers in this particular case.

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To say that Aristotle's classification (or taxonomy) of political regimes has certain problems is not something new. For example, in a now classic scholarly work on the topic of political regimes, *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution in the Middle Ages*, James M. Blythe stresses some existing problems in Aristotle's discussion of political regime types (Blythe 1992, p. 11, 18, etc.): in the works where he classifies political regimes (*Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics*, *Rhetoric*), he does so in several different ways – six-fold, four-fold or two-fold classifications. In addition, he "does not present a totally coherent analysis". All this because the contradictory classifications he employs or because he makes use of terms with several meanings (as is the case of "best" having an absolute sense, a relative sense etc.). Of course, these are not the only problems and authors expressed their puzzlement regarding the cogency of Aristotle's treatment of the subject-matter since the 19th century (e.g. Newman 1887, 214).This actually is something that Aristotle also had to contend with: it is not uncommon that Aristotle starts from 'something that seems to be the case' and eventually it turns out to be incoherent or inconsistent because of some faulty element and then, by employing the tools of dialectic, he reaches that 'what should be the case'.

If dialectic as a preferred method is ubiquitous in the works of Aristotle, then this should also be the case in the case of practical sciences such as politics. This is, of course, uncontroversial. For instance, when someone encounters a democracy and an oligarchy for the first time she or he tends to consider the number of the persons in power is one of the specific and defining features of the regime. This is what is 'more knowable to man' or 'what seems to be the case'. However, Aristotle eventually observes that seeing things this way leads to difficulties (puzzles, problems, or *aporias*). After dealing with these problems dialectically, we observe that the number is no longer one of the essential features of these two regimes, but it is rather accidental; in the same time, wealth (or the lack of it) receives the status of essential feature (*Politics* III, 8). And this is what 'is the case'. Nevertheless, the number of rulers seems to keep an important place in Aristotle's view on the matter in (*Politics* IV, 4) and this generates disagreement among scholars. Some (as P. Simpson, C. Rowe or A. Bereschi) maintained that the number of rulers is an accidental characteristic of a political regime, others (as W. L. Newman or R. Mulgan) considered that it is actually not the case that the number of rulers is an accident but, given the fact that Aristotle reintroduces it as an important characteristic of oligarchy or democracy (as he does in *Politics* IV, 4), it is actually a differentia.

Therefore, what exactly is this 'number of rulers'? Is it an accident or a differentia? Normally, it cannot be both, since Aristotle obviously considers differentia (which is linked to definition) different from accident. In this paper, I will argue that

the number of rulers is actually a certain kind of accident that can be easily mistaken for an essential feature such as a differentia. Another reason, as I shall try to point out, is that one can build a strong case to consider 'number' a differentia.

To accomplish this, the paper shall have the following outline: 1. I will start by presenting the source of the problem and disagreement; 2. Then, I will formulate the problem and present the proposed solutions to it; 3. Following this, I will mention the two contexts, theoretical and methodological, that have to be considered in order to reach a resolution to the problem; 4. Then, I will discuss to what extent we can defend the position that maintains that number is a differentia; 5. Finally, I try will show that number is more likely a particular type of accident rather than a differentia.

2. The source of the problem

The problem in understanding I propose to address in this paper is related to the manner in which Aristotle is distinguishing between democracy and oligarchy, especially the status of 'number' as a criterion in doing so. This problem comes about because Aristotle seems to give contradictory accounts in the two places (*Politics* III, 8 and IV, 4). In short, the two accounts seem to contradict each other with regard to the relevance of the number of those who rule as a criterion to make a difference between democracy and oligarchy. In III, eight we are told that the number of rulers is accidental and it happens by chance that a few rule in an oligarchy and many rule in a democracy. We should rather distinguish between the two and define each based on 'wealth'. Later on, in IV, 4, Aristotle seems to suggest that the feature of number is, however, essential concerning the way we can define the two, democracy and oligarchy. If in this second case, the 'number of rulers' is to be considered an essential criterion in the definition, then it seems obvious that there is an inconsistency in Aristotle's account, since a feature of this sort, as Aristotle himself wrote in the *Topics*, not just that it cannot be both accidental and essential at the same time, but that it can neither transform from an accidental feature into an essential one or the other way around. However, we will see about this later. Before that, I should present the texts that are at the origin of the mentioned inconsistency.

Politics III, 8 begins by stating that there are problems or difficulties (ἀπορίας; 1279b11) regarding the classification of forms of government. Two of these are about the way oligarchy and democracy are defined and distinguished from one another, which seems to bring about unwanted implications.

His discussion of the distinction (*Politics* III, 8, 1279b20-34) can be presented thus:

1. There are only six forms of government, three correct, three corrupt (from III, 7).

2. Oligarchy is different from democracy (from III, 7).

First, we have four views resulting from 'what was said before' (III, 7):

3. If the rich rule, then we have oligarchy.

4. If the poor rule, then we have democracy.

5. If the majority rules, then we have democracy.

6. If a minority rules, then we have an oligarchy.

Having all these in mind, Aristotle produces two possible cases to challenge these views:

7. Case 1: A state in which the rich majority rules.

8. Case 2: A state in which the poor minority rules.

If both three and five were the case, then seven would imply that we have states that are democracies and oligarchies at the same time. If both four and six were the case, then eight would imply the same, that a state is an oligarchy and a democracy at the same time. Nevertheless, this is not something acceptable, since it is obvious that democracy and oligarchy are two different things (challenges assumption 2 from above – meaning that in the accepted accounts there is something that generates inconsistencies). Another way in which Aristotle indicates the problem is by taking both criteria as relevant, but then the list is not complete, there being more forms than the six mentioned (the six being: monarchy, aristocracy, constitutional government, democracy, oligarchy, tyranny. Therefore, at least one criterion is problematic and it should be eliminated. Aristotle opts to keep the criterion of wealth, meaning that the criterion of number is the one that generates the difficulties.

Why is number problematic and it is not fit to be part of the definition? The reason is that number is an accident (συμβεβηκός ἐστιν – 1279b36) and, being an accident, it cannot be part of a definition. From Aristotle's account of the predicables in the *Topics*, it results that accident is not a definition and it is not part of the definition. This can be seen in the way he presents accident in *Topics* I, 5 (102b4-26), first in a negative way, as something that is neither genus, nor definition nor property, and then in a positive manner, as something that may belong or not to a thing. Number is accidental in this case because, as Aristotle points out, it is only by accident that in the context of his day rich people are fewer than poor ones. Thus, the criterion of number should be eliminated from the account.

However, in what follows next, we will observe that in another place he seems to think otherwise because he seems to consider number still a criterion. The other account about the place of number in the definition appears in *Politics* IV, 4.

This chapter is to some point the same as III, eight, but then we observe that wealth is no longer enough to distinguish between democracy and oligarchy. Here he introduces freedom and number as necessary. The chapter starts by clearly stating that we should not consent to two views held by some people and this is in the same vein with III, 8:

1. Where the many rule, we have democracy.
2. Where the few rule, we have oligarchy.

Aristotle gives two obvious examples:

3. If we have a majority of rich people who rule while the rest, the poor, do not share in office, we do not have a democracy.
4. If the poor are few and strong and they do not share the offices with the many rich, we do not have an oligarchy.

So, Aristotle concludes:

5. Oligarchy is where the rich are in power.
6. Democracy is where the free are in power.

As in III, 8, the fact that the rich are few and the poor are many is accidental and if we choose to take number as a standard for a regime, then we can have offices distributed based on other accidental features such as height, beauty etc. So far, the account is the same as in III, 8.

Nevertheless, the problem arises when Aristotle says that it is not enough to distinguish democracy on grounds of wealth and freedom and he concludes:

- Democracy = where the free and the poor *many* (οἱ ἐλεύθεροι καὶ ἄποροι πλείους) rule (1290b17-19).
- Oligarchy = where the rich and the well-born *few* (οἱ πλούσιοι καὶ εὐγενέστεροι ὀλίγοι) rule (1290b19-20).

3. The problem

Two main positions seem to have emerged in relation to the status of number as criterion: 1. One that maintains that number is not an accident, but a differentia (represented here by Newman 1902, 158-59; Mulgan 1991, 316-317); 2. The other, which considers that number is indeed an accident (Simpson 1998, 296-299; Rowe 2005, 379; Bereschi 2009, 12-14). The arguments for these options are as follows.

In his four-volume edition of Aristotle's *Politics*, published at the end of the 19th century, W. L. Newman is more inclined to consider the number of rulers as being a differentia. For him, the purpose of Aristotle is to avoid the error of reducing

all the constitutions to two forms, democracy, and oligarchy. Thus we should avoid to define democracy and oligarchy by a single criterion, i.e. only by number or only by wealth or freedom. For W. L. Newman at least two things should be taken together in order to have one specific regime: freedom and superior numbers, with poverty optional, for democracy, respectively wealth and inferior numbers, with high birth as optional, for oligarchy. This way, we avoid saying that polity is a kind of democracy or aristocracy is a kind of oligarchy.

About a century later, in a companion work on Aristotle's political theory (Keyt & Miller 1991), Richard Mulgan maintains a similar position. He distinguishes two possible types of equality: 'geometric equality' or equality based on wealth, and 'arithmetic equality' or equality based on freedom. The type of equality the ruling class is characterized by implies the necessity of numbers, more or less, in relation to it. Thus, if one criterion is 'arithmetic equality' then this implies that government can emerge only if the free are a majority. This way, in R. Mulgan's opinion, Aristotle admits that the size or number of rulers is "essential, not accidental"[1]and he adds that the counter-examples are anomalous cases of mixtures. Also, the meanings of the words themselves, *oligoi* and *demos*, indicate numbers, i.e. few and many.

Of a different opinion in this matter is Peter L. Phillips Simpson in his book *A Philosophical Commentary on the Politics of Aristotle* (1998). According to him, Aristotle attacks the commonly held views on what democracy and oligarchy are (rule by many and rule by few) and shows that these views bring about falsities and absurdities. In the context of this criticism of the common view, it is pointed out in the commentary that the reader needs to be careful regarding the status of freedom in the equation. Wealth is sufficient when we define an oligarchy, but if we consider freedom as essential in the case of a democracy then we should surely see that this is insufficient (because the oligarchs are free too). It is obvious that Aristotle does not consider number as essential but rather 'incidental' (I read this as accidental) given the fact that Aristotle himself insists on it both in *Politics* III, 8 and in the first part of IV, 4. In conclusion, Aristotle prefers to distinguish oligarchy and democracy by the criterion of wealth (or poverty) and not by the criteria of freedom and number[2].

[1] I read here "essential" to be equivalent to "being a differentia" since it is fairly obvious that size or number is neither the definition of the specific mentioned regimes nor their genus.

[2] A curious thing should be mentioned at this point: P. Simpson writes (1998, 296, n.2) that he follows W. L. Newman in his commentary. However, as it seems, not to the end. Also, P. Simpson does not seem to be eager to consider what Aristotle has to say about the two regimes in IV, 4 as something to be considered a general definition, but he considers Aristotle's account to be adapted to the examples he gives in the chapter (i.e. Apollonia, Thera, Colophon) (Simpson 1998, 298).

The same opinion, that number is accidental, is held by Christopher Rowe in one of his contributions to *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (2005). For C. Rowe, Plato and Aristotle considered the two most commonly existing forms of constitution, democracy, and oligarchy, as opposed, and people actually had the tendency to reduce the other government forms, as aristocracy for instance, to one of these two. Aristotle does not follow the etymological suggestion of the names that here we have a rule by the many or a rule by the few, but actually indicates that number is not essential here; and "the real essence of oligarchy (...) is that the rich have the power and the real essence of democracy is that the poor have it." (Rowe 2005, 379).

Taking number as accident is also the option backed in a paper written by Andrei Bereschi, "La theorie des formes politiques dans l'antiquité grecque (Platon, Aristote et Polybe)" (2009). The main idea here is that the root of the problem can be found in the denominational instability (*l'instabilité de la dénomination*) of the two structural genera existent besides the genus of monarchy (which contains regality and tyranny as species). This instability is caused by the two aporias of criterion (*aporiai pros ton diorismon*) present in *Politics* III, 8 (1279b20, 31) which exist because of the problems caused by the criterion of number. If we keep this criterion, then we would have examples of states that would not fit in the accepted taxonomy. Thereby, this criterion should be dropped. And this is why, in A. Bereschi's view, Aristotle considers the criterion of number as accidental[3].

This disagreement is, however, solvable if we consider the problem carefully from the perspective of the relevant contexts to be had in mind, especially the methodological context.

4. Two contexts

Hence, before endeavoring in discussing Aristotle's account of the difference between democracy and oligarchy, I should present the two relevant contexts: 1. The theoretical context – Aristotle's political morphology; 2. The methodological context – Aristotle's dialectical approach to the study of politics.

[3] In order to avoid confusion, A. Bereschi suggests that we should change the names of democracy and oligarchy into 'penioarchy', respectively into 'plutoarchy'. One additional specification here: in contrast with W. L. Newman, A. Bereschi considers that the result of this clarification of criterion is not the avoidance of reducing the other government forms to democracy and oligarchy, but the emergence of two structural genera which contains as species both the right form and the degenerated form (e.g. plutoarchy as a genus contains aristocracy and oligarchy) (Bereschi 2009, 13).

Theoretical context: The theoretical context that has to be considered when tackling an issue related to one or more types of political regimes is what I will call Aristotle's *political morphology*[4], i.e. Aristotle's theory of the forms of government. Aristotle is not singular in ancient times to propose a political morphology since we can identify similar classifications in Herodotus, Plato or Polybius etc.[5] However, his six-fold classification of forms of government was arguably more influential[6].

At the beginning of the third book of the *Politics*, we find that the purpose is to "inquire into the essence and attributes of various kind of government" (*Politics* III, 1, 1274b32-33). But in order to do this, one must first know what a city-state is, and then, to know what a city-state is, one must know what a citizen is. At the end of the first chapter of *Politics* III we get the following relevant definitions: "He who has the power to take part in the deliberative or judicial administration of any state is said by us to be a citizen of the state; and, speaking generally, a state is a body of citizens sufficing for the purposes of life." (*Politics* III, 1, 1275b19-22).

Thus, a state is composed of citizens and these organize themselves in different ways and these ways determine the type of the state they are citizens of, e.g. a democracy, an aristocracy etc. Aristotle states explicitly that 'citizen' means one thing in a democracy and another thing in an oligarchy (*Politics* III, 1, 1275a4-5; and this is so by necessity -ἀναγκαῖον- 1275b4-5). Aristotle also gives a working definition of a citizen (best suited for democracy – 1275b5-6): a citizen is he who "shares in the administration of justice and in offices" (*Politics* III, 1, 1275a23 sqq. 2, 1276a3-5), but in the end he modifies it so that it can apply to the citizens of other kinds of states as well: "He who has the power to take part in the deliberative or judicial administration of any state is said by us to be citizen of that state" (*Politics* III, 1, 1275b17-20). And qualifications for office can differ accordingly to the form of government:

> "Since there are many forms of government there must be many varieties of citizens, and especially of citizens who are subjects; so that under some government the mechanic and the labourer will be citizens, but not in others, as, for example, in so-called aristocracies, if there are any, in which honours are given according to excellence or merit; for no man can practice excellence who is living the life of a

[4] I derive the present usage from (Bereschi 2009).

[5] For example in Herodotus, *Histories* III, 80-83 we read a discussion employing for and against arguments about monarchy, oligarchy and democracy. In *Republic* VIII, Plato discusses aristocracy, timocracy, oligarchy, democracy and tyranny; in the *Statesman* -291d-292a – he distinguishes two kinds of monarchy, the tyrannical and the kingly, two kinds of rule by the few, aristocracy and oligarchy.

[6] Of course, taking into account factors such as textual transmission and reception. Also, it was already mentioned at the beginning what J. M. Blythe observed, i.e. that Aristotle seems to have in mind many different ways to classify constitutions: two-fold, four-fold, and six-fold.

> mechanic or a labourer. In oligarchies the qualification for office is high, and therefore no labourer can ever be a citizen; but a mechanic may, for an actual majority of them are rich. (...)" (*Politics* III, 5, 1278a15-25)

A state being an arrangement of citizens, it follows that a specific regime is a specific arrangement of citizens and basically this is discussed in *Politics* III, 3: each citizen should fulfill a contract being part of the arrangement and he does so by having certain characteristics. If he is the citizen of a democracy, he will consider fulfilling his office obligations in a manner specific to that democracy and this should be based on his convictions. If his convictions change, then from a citizen of a democracy he will become, say, a citizen of aristocracy and he will refuse to fulfill his contract in the context of democracy; this can then lead to regime change (depending on the quantity of such citizens who refuse to fulfill contracts).But it is not my purpose in this article to dwell on matters relating to citizenship, to state or to the relation between the two.

The citizens, as elements of the state, can have different properties or, better said, attributes. Some of these citizens are in power and the attributes of this ruling class determine the type of regime. There are many possible attributes that a citizen in power can have and these count as criteria to classify government kinds:

> "Now every city is composed of quality (ποιοῦ) and quantity (ποσοῦ). By quality I mean freedom (ἐλευθερίαν), wealth (πλοῦτον), education (παιδείαν), good birth (εὐγένειαν), and by quantity, superiority of numbers (πλήθους ὑπεροχήν)." (*Politics* IV, 12, 1296b17-18)[7]

In *Politics* III, 6, Aristotle states his purpose: considering how many forms of government there are and their respective differences (διαφοραὶ; 1278b8). All these differences will be used in the subsequent discussions on the nature of the different regimes. However, the best-known classification is the one that appears in *Politics* III, 7, 1279a6-1279b10 (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 10, 1160a32-b22):

True form	**Perverted form**
Monarchy - one ruler - best man - regards common interest	Tyranny - one ruler - self-interest of the monarch
Aristocracy - few rulers	Oligarchy - few rulers

[7] It should be kept in mind that these criteria are already considered as candidates at least since Plato: "one, few and many, wealth and poverty, force and consent, (...) written laws or without laws" (*Statesman* 292a).

True form	Perverted form
- best men - regard to common interest	- self-interest of the wealthy
Constitution - many rulers - best men (military excellence) - regard to common interest	Democracy - many rulers - self-interest of the needy

This seems to be a classification that was given a significant deal of attention by Aristotle and it is also the one that is most challenged, as we can observe in the present case when distinguishing oligarchy and democracy. Next, I will say a few words about the methodological context.

Methodological context: The aim of Aristotle is quite clear in this respect: his interest is to start from what can be considered as common knowledge about regimes and to make the classification better; he tries to do this either by eliminating anything that hinders clear understanding or by adding anything that promotes it. In its core, Aristotle's method is dialectical and he strongly recommends the use of it (e.g. *Topics* I, 2, 101a25-101b4). Starting with G.E.L. Owen's paper, *Tithenai ta Phainomena*, a significant number of scholarly works have been published on this issue. In short, Aristotle's method is *aporetic* in the way that he tries to work through difficulties or puzzles which he first identifies in what he has initially at his disposal regarding a subject-matter. Then he tries to solve those difficulties by employing things said by others (*endoxa*) or observations (*phainomena*) in order to clarify the issue at hand. The *Politics*, being a work dedicated to a science, better said a practical science, is also written with the help of at least some underlying dialectical methodology and it was already observed that this is the case (Reeve 1998, p. xviii-xxv; etc.).

When dealing with the classification of government forms, we need to keep in mind its *endoxical* character, i.e. Aristotle does not necessarily break entirely new ground in the study of political regimes, but rather discusses views already held by someone else[8]. J. M. Blythe observes (1992, p. 18-19) that Aristotle uses most often variants of the six-fold classification of regime types already found in Plato or, earlier, in Herodotus. But his work as a political scientist does not stop at the point where he provides a classification borrowed to some extent from his predecessors; on the contrary, it just begins, because now he will observe the insufficiency of that classificatory scheme; following this, he will try to identify the cause and he will attempt to solve the issue.

[8] As mentioned above, we can already find variants of this classification in Plato.

As *phainomena* we can consider the information gathered about existing constitutions, for which Aristotle's school was renowned in antiquity (e.g. see Diogenes Laertius V, 1, 27). This information, it seems, was actually used in his critical discussions. For instance, in the case that is of interest to us in this paper, while in *Politics*. III, 8, Aristotle offers mentally conceived counter-examples (what if the rich people are in majority etc.), in *Politics.* IV, 4, he already shows not just that the counter-examples are more developed ("Suppose the whole population of a city to be 1300, and that of these 1000 are rich…") but that he also has information about real constitutions (Appolonia, Colophon, Thera)[9].

The problems are called by Aristotle *aporias* and their occurrence signals something that needs special care on the part of the scientist. The *aporetic* method, mentioned above, is at work when Aristotle deals with matters pertaining to government forms and related issues. This can be observed at a quick browsing through the Aristotelian corpus: one can note that the term *ἀπορία* (or cognates) occurs about 30 times in the *Politics*, which seems to indicate that the dialectical method of working through puzzles (or *aporias*) is employed here[10]. Also, related technical terminology appears: variants of διαπορεῖν (to go through all the *aporias*) or εὐπορεῖν (to solve the *aporias*, to find a way). The problem that the present paper addresses arises, as observed, from *aporias* of criterion. It is to be expected, then, that the explanation of what Aristotle does when he tries to do away with the problems should appeal to dialectic and to relevant passages from his writings on dialectic, especially the *Topics*.

Since the discussion is about what is specific to a regime, about how we can define a government form or what is an essential or accidental attribute of it, it is obvious that a knowledge of what the predicables (definition, property, genus – incl. differentia, - and accident) are is needed. Also, detailed knowledge of the varieties of some of these predicables and their relation to specific categories is important, and this in order to understand the manner in which the different criteria proposed by Aristotle fit in.

5. Number: differentia or accident?

Hence, to start with the first of the mentioned options, the question is the following: can we consider number, following W. L. Newman and R. Mulgan, a differentia? To do this, at least two kinds of conditions should be met, textual and co-textual. The co-textual conditions are the following two: 1. A thing should be able to be defined

[9] We could be inclined to consider this something that hints a later date of composition for IV, 4 than for III, 8. But I would not venture here into developmental and chronological issues.

[10] For comparison: the term or its cognates occur about 60 times in the *Metaphysics*, about 30 times in the *Physics*, about 15 times in the *De anima* and the *De generatione animalium*, about half this in the *De caelo* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

by more than one differentia (being obvious that number cannot be the only differentia that a political regime has); 2. It should be possible for a quantity (since number is a quantity) to be a differentia (given that usually the differentiae seem to belong to the category of quality). If we find evidence for this in the Aristotelian corpus, then we can say that these two co-textual conditions are met. However, in addition to these, this interpretation needs one more condition fulfilled: direct textual evidence that Aristotle considers number a differentia in *Politics* IV, 4.

We are usually inclined to think that the process of defining needs to involve one genus and one differentia, the same as in the case of "Man" defined as a "rational animal". In the same venue, one might be inclined to define democracy as the rule of majority for their own benefit or oligarchy as the rule of a minority for their own benefit. But, as Aristotle himself thought, this account is incomplete.

In the fourth book of the *Politics*, where Aristotle discusses the topic of his classification of forms of government (what here is called *political morphology*), he is presenting his choice of classification in analogy with his biological works:

"I have said that there are many forms of government, and have explained to what causes the variety is due. Why there are more than those already mentioned and what they are, and whence they arise, I will now proceed to consider, starting from the principle already admitted, which is that every state consists, not of one, but of many parts. If we were going to speak of the different species of animals, we should first of all determine the organs which are indispensable to every animal, as for example some organs of sense and the instruments of receiving and digesting food, such as the mouth and the stomach, besides organs of locomotion. Assuming now that there are only so many kinds of organs, but that there may be differences in them – I mean different kinds of mouths, and stomachs, and perceptive and locomotive organs – the possible combinations of these differences will furnish many varieties of animals. (For animals cannot be the same which have different kinds of mouths or of ears.) And when all the combinations are exhausted, there will be as many sorts of animals as there are combinations of the necessary organs. The same, then, is true of the forms of government which have been described; states, as I have repeatedly said, are composed, not of one, but of many elements." (*Politics* IV, 4, 1290b21-1291b13)

It is common knowledge that when trying to classify animals Aristotle has in mind more than one differentia. The work of P. Pellegrin is very helpful in this respect. P. Pellegrin underlines the fact that Aristotle was not satisfied with the 'dichotomous' (or 'binary') division model of the Platonicians (e.g. Pellegrin 1986, 21 sqq.) since it could not supply him with a proper explanation for diversity. Aristotle's way of 'dividing' things is more likely 'multidimensional' (Pellegrin 1986, 31, 154, 172). The above-quoted fragment should be taken under consideration along these lines.

And, even more, we have evidence towards this in the *Topics*. In several places, Aristotle talks about *differentiae* and not one *differentia*. For instance, in the first book (I, 8, 103b15-16) we are told that a definition results from genus and *differentiae* (ἐκ γένους καὶ διαφορῶν). Or, in the context of talking about the relevance of discovering differentiae:

> "The discovery of differences helps us both in deductions about sameness and difference, and also in recognizing what a particular thing is. That it helps us in deductions about sameness and difference is clear; for when we have discovered a difference of any kind whatever between the objects before us, we shall already have proved that they are not the same; while it helps us in recognizing what a thing is, because we usually distinguish the account that is proper to the substance of each particular thing by means of differentiae (διαφοραῖς) that are appropriate to it." (*Topics* I, 18, 108a38-b6[11])

Of course, Aristotle also uses the singular, but this alternate use of singular and plural indicates what is fairly obvious, that a thing has *at least* one differentia. So, at this point, we can say that the first co-textual condition is met.

In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle says that only qualities can be differentiae (1024b3-6). But he does not seem to hold this view ubiquitously in his work. We have just seen that a thing can take more than one differentia, but the following question is this: can quantity count as a differentia? It seems so, since Aristotle writes the following in the sixth book of the *Topics*:

> "... see in some cases if he [i.e. the opponent] has failed to distinguish the quantity (τὸ πόσου) or quality or place or other differentiae of an object; e.g. the quality and quantity of the honour he striving for which makes a man ambitious – for all men strive for honour, so that it is not enough to define the ambitious man as him who strives for honour, but the aforesaid differentiae must be added. Likewise, also, in defining the covetous man the quantity of money he aims at, or in the case of the incontinent man the quality of the pleasures, should be stated. For it is not the man who gives way to any sort of pleasure whatever is called incontinent, but only he who gives way to a certain kind of pleasure. Or again, people sometimes define night as a shadow on the earth, or an earthquake as a movement of earth, or a cloud as a condensation of the air, or a wind as a movement of the air; whereas they ought to specify as well quantity, quality, place, and cause. Likewise, also, in other cases of the kind; for by omitting any differentiae whatever he fails to state the essence. On should always attack deficiency. For a movement of the earth does not constitute an earthquake, nor a movement of the air a wind, irrespective of its manner and the amount involved." (*Topics* VI, 8, 146b20-35)

[11] *Topics* VI, 4, 141b26; VI, 6, 143a31 etc.

At this point, we can say that the two co-textual conditions are met: a thing can take more than one differentia and quantity can be a differentia. Now, let us pass to the textual condition.

One interpretation that would do justice to both fragments would be that Aristotle thinks that an accident may become an essential feature as a differentia. But, can this happen according to Aristotle? Replying to this question would explain if number, as a quantity and an accident, can become at some point a property or a differentia. But this does not seem to be the case, since Aristotle states clearly that: "there is nothing to prevent accident from becoming both a relative and a temporary property; but a property absolutely it will never be." (*Topics* I, 5, 102b24-26).

Considering all this, there is no textual evidence that in his discussions from *Politics* III, 8 or IV, 4 Aristotle uses a terminology that indicates him considering number a differentia. The most one can do with the discussion from the second part of IV, 4 is to argue for a view that Aristotle stopped considering number an accident, but to say that he automatically considered it a differentia is a *non sequitur* with no textual basis. So, we could consider this line of inquiry. Instead of arguing that 'number' is a differentia, we can argue that it is not an accident. First, we should keep in mind that while an argument that number is a differentia clearly makes it not an accident, the argument that it is not an accident does not automatically make it a differentia. It can make it a property, a genus, a definition, or an accident of another kind. For obvious reasons, it is clear that it cannot be a definition or a genus. So, the only candidates that remain here are accident 'of another kind' and property. First, it should be clarified what is meant by 'accident of another kind': in the *Topics* and in the *Metaphysics* Aristotle seems to have in mind more than one kind of accident. For example in the *Topics* we have particular and universal accidents (e.g. in *Topics* VII, 5; cf. *Categories* 2) and in the *Metaphysics* we have temporary and permanent accidents. I will continue with the latter.

So, we can ask ourselves, whether for a state the attribute of 'having a number x of rulers' is to be considered a temporary attribute or a permanent one? Without giving way to utopian speculation, we can say that for Aristotle the latter seems to be the case. But why, then, accident? An explanation can be obtained if we refer to the fifth book of the *Metaphysics*. There, in the last chapter, Aristotle considers that there are two types of accidents:

> (1) "We call an accident that which usually attaches to something and can be truly asserted, but neither of necessity nor usually, e.g. if one is digging a hole for a plant found treasure. This – the finding of treasure – happens by accident to the man who digs the hole; for neither does the one come of necessity from the other or after the other, nor, if a man plants, does he usually find treasure." (*Metaphysics* V, 30, 1025a14-17)

> (2) " 'Accident' has also another meaning, i.e. what attaches to each thing in virtue of itself but is not in its substance, as having its angles equal to two right angles attaches to the triangle. And accidents of this sort may be eternal, but no accident of the other sort is. This is explained elsewhere." (*Metaphysics* V, 30, 1025a30-b2)

The difference between the two kinds of accident has been already observed. For example, J. Barnes shows that in Aristotle (in the *Analytics* and in the *Metaphysics* especially) we find two senses for 'accident', a 'narrow' sense and a 'broad' sense. The accident in the narrow sense is contingent, while the one in the broad sense is not. The one in the narrow sense cannot be subject to science, while the one taken in the broad sense can (Barnes 2003, 221-222). This might count as an explanation as to why Aristotle does not do away entirely with the number of rulers from his *Politics*. Another scholar who observed this was P. Pellegrin, in his *Aristotle's Classification of animals* (1986, 42-45; and this might be another clear indication of the fact that Aristotle's view on classifications in politics draws inspiration from his views on biological subjects).

So, to conclude, for a city, the number of rulers seems more likely to be an 'accident in the broad sense' rather than a 'differentia'[12].

6. Concluding remarks

In this paper, I attempted to address the question of whether the number of rulers is an essential criterion for distinguishing between two of the most common regime types in Aristotle's day: oligarchy and democracy. This question and the underlying problem was prompted by Aristotle's reserved attitude towards number as a criterion given its accidental nature. In this respect two views emerged in scholarly

[12] A supplementary point: some scholars were inclined to consider the accident in the broad sense, or the 'per se accident' as it was called sometimes, the same thing as the 'proprium' (or 'property'), one of the four predicables. For instance, even though Alexander of Aphrodisias does not state that he considers the 'per se accident' a 'proprium', the scholars who translated and commented his *Commentary on Aristotle's* Metaphysics did (Dooley 1994, 126-127, 183, n. 593). It is also considered to be the same thing as property by Sir David Ross (Ross 1924, vol. 1, p. 349). However, I am reserved at this point to accept this, given the fact that in the *Topics* VII we can find a clear distinction between accidents of two kinds, particular and universal, on one side, and properties, on another. Of course, this still is a more plausible account of the nature of number than saying that number is a differentia. However, given the spatial constraints, a discussion in this respect should be developed in a future study.

literature: the view that number, considering the fact that Aristotle reintroduces it in the description of democracy and oligarchy found at *Politics* IV, 4, is actually a differentia (held by scholars such as W. L. Newman and R. Mulgan), and the view that number is, as Aristotle clearly states in *Politics* III, 8, an accident (P. Simpson, C. Rowe and A. Bereschi). It was underlined that the problem should be considered under a double context, theoretical and methodological, i.e. the context of Aristotle's political morphology and the context of Aristotle's views on dialectic. In the light of these, I have shown that the interpretation of number as differentia is plausible to a point, but it lacks the most important feature: textual confirmation. On the other hand, in the case of number seen as accident the situation is obvious. Following this, I tried to show where the root of the misunderstanding lies. This was the case because number does not seem to be any kind of accident and to understand this we had to turn to the *Metaphysics* and the *Topics*. We can say at this point that number is evidently not a differentia, but rather a permanent accident (or what has been called above 'accident in the broad sense') or, depending on the interpretative options, a property.

The issue of differentiation between political regimes is a quite interesting one and the influential taxonomy present in *Politics* III, 7, where regimes are distinguished by two criteria, number and just rule, should be reconsidered by focalized discussions on each of the possible criteria proposed by Aristotle (and Plato before him) from the perspective of his dialectical methodology.

Edition of Aristotle's works used

The Complete Works of Aristotle: The revised Oxford Translation, edited by Jonathan Barnes, 2 volumes, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. All the quoted fragments are from the translations found in this edition.

Edition of Plato's works used

Plato, *Complete Works*, edited, with Introduction and Notes, by John M. Cooper, Associate Editor D. S. Hutchinson, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997. All the quoted fragments are from the translations found in this edition.

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