

ARISTOTLE'S POLITICUS: A LOST DIALOGUE

The "catalogues" of early Aristotelian writings found in Diogenes Laertius¹⁾ and Hesychius²⁾ list a *Politicus* or *Statesman*. Judging from Cicero's remark contained in his *Epistola ad Quintum Fratrem*³⁾, one would have to admit that this work was written in dialogue form, and that Aristotle apparently casts himself in the role of one of the interlocutors⁴⁾. The particular title of the *Politicus* is likewise explained by Cicero⁵⁾, who records that in this dialogue Aristotle points out who should be the "ruler" (*princeps*) in the body politic. Hence, it must be assumed that the term "statesman", as it is used by Aristotle in the *Politicus*, refers to a person qualified to govern the body politic. It may also be surmised that in his *Politicus* Aristotle discusses the "ideal statesman", and presumably does so in the same manner, but not necessarily on the same philosophic basis, as Plato expounds the "ideal statesman" or ruler in his *Statesman*. This being so, it may also be conjectured that there probably exists a certain affinity of thought, method and argument between the Platonic *Statesman* and the Aristotelian *Politicus*. Such an affinity, it could be argued,

1) Diogenes Laertius V. 22 (no. 4). Diogenes Laertius lists here a *Πολιτικός* in two books.

2) *Vita Hesychii* (also called *Vita Menagii* or *Vita Menagiana*) 10 (no. 4). Hesychius lists a *Πολιτικόν* in one book. — The "catalogue" ascribed to Ptolemy-el-Garib does not mention a *Politicus*.

3) Cicero, *Epistola ad Quintum Fratrem* III. 5. 1; V. Rose, *Aristotelis Fragmenta* (1886), frag. 78, subsequently quoted as Rose, frag. 78; W.D. Ross, *Aristotelis Fragmenta Selecta* (1955), frag. 1, subsequently cited as Ross, frag. 1.

4) See here also J. Bernays, *Die Dialoge des Aristoteles in ihrem Verhältnis zu seinen übrigen Werken* (1863), p. 53; E. Heitz, *Die verlorenen Schriften des Aristoteles* (1865), p. 189; P. Moraux, *Les Listes Anciennes des Ouwrages d'Aristote* (1951), p. 31. — In his *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development* (Oxford Paperbacks, 1961), p. 29, W. Jaeger points out that in such didactic dialogues as the *Politicus* or the *On Philosophy*, Aristotle himself is the leader of the discussion. Cicero, *Epistola ad Atticum* XIII. 19. 4, maintains that in his dialogues Aristotle is in the habit of leading the discussion. Obviously, this remark of Cicero does not apply to all of the early dialogues, and certainly not to the *Gryllus* and the *Eudemus* (or, *On the Soul*).

5) Cicero, *De Finibus* V. 4. 11; W.D. Ross, *op. cit.* at p. 63.

seems to follow from the observation, likewise made by Cicero⁶), that Aristotle had composed a work in which he debates the body politic (*res publica*) as well as the "foremost man" (*vir praestans*) within the body politic. Obviously, this "foremost man" in the body politic is he who stands at its head, that is, "the statesman".

W. Jaeger insists that the passage taken from Cicero's *Epistola ad Quintum Fratrem*, especially the expression "*vir praestans*", seems to refer to the *Politicus*, while the use of the term "*res publica*" indicates that it may also refer to the *On Justice*⁷). R. Weil, who discusses the Aristotelian *Politicus*, fully accepts Jaeger's thesis that in his report Cicero had in mind both the *Politicus* and the *On Justice*⁸). R. Stark, who likewise subjects the *Politicus* to a searching analysis, maintains, on the other hand, that Cicero quotes the two terms *vir praestans* and *res publica* not from two different works, such as the *Politicus* and the *On Justice*, but from the second and first book of the *Politicus* respectively⁹). In so doing Stark advances the theory that the first book of the *Politicus* deals with an entirely different subject than the second book.

According to Syrianus¹⁰), in the second book of the *Politicus* Aristotle states that "the good is the most precise measure among all things", that is, among all measures or standards. This statement, which seems to be a direct quotation from Aristotle, has, as W. Jaeger recognizes¹¹), far-reaching implications as regards the "doctrinal background" of the Aristotelian *Politicus*. As a matter of fact, it is the only fragment of real importance that has been ascribed to the *Politicus* with any degree of certainty. Assuming that it is really by Aristotle and that it is correctly translated as well as interpreted, it simply restates some of the basic tenets not only of Plato's *Philebus*, which assigns the first and uppermost position in the hierarchy of goods or values to measure, the second to the measurable, and the third to reason

6) Cicero, *Epistola ad Quintum Fratrem* III. 5. 1. See note 3, *supra*.

7) W. Jaeger, *op. cit.* at p. 29, note 2. — An *On Justice* in four books is listed by Diogenes Laertius V. 22 (no. 1), Hesychius (no. 1), and Ptolemy-el-Garib (no. 4). — The whole passage from Cicero reads as follows: "...Aristotelem denique quae de republica et praestanti viro scribat ipsum loqui".

8) R. Weil, *Aristote et l'Histoire: Essai sur la "Politique"* (1960), p. 146.

9) R. Stark, *Aristotelesstudien* (1954), p. 12.

10) Syrianus, *Commentaria in Metaphysica*, in: *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, vol. VI, part 1 (ed. W. Kroll, 1902), p. 168, lines 33–35; Rose, frag. 79; Ross, frag. 2.

11) W. Jaeger, *op. cit.* at p. 87.

which apprehends measure (*phronesis*)¹²); but also of the Platonic *Republic*, where the pure Form or Idea of the Good is called the ground of the being as well as of the true knowledge of the whole real world¹³); and of the Platonic *Laws*, which proclaims that "to us God [*scil.* the absolute Good] ought to be the measure of all things"¹⁴). Hence, Jaeger concludes, it could be maintained that according to the Aristotelian *Politicus*, the good is the supreme value exactly because it constitutes the highest, the most universal and the most absolute unity and, accordingly, the ultimate measure¹⁵). Seen from this point of view, it would also follow that in the *Politicus* Aristotle fully adheres to Plato's mature doctrine of the Ideas, or to be more exact, to the "Separate Ideas" or "Idea Numbers", and that he believes, as Plato did, that political philosophy and, indeed, all of ethics, could simply be reduced to an "exact philosophic science" or "metaphysics of ethics"¹⁶).

W. Jaeger also maintains that the passage preserved by Syrianus fully confirms his general thesis that in his early writings Aristotle was a loyal follower of Plato and, hence, actually a Platonist. This particular view, which on the whole found wide acceptance among Aristotelian scholars¹⁷), was attacked by R. Stark. Stark proposes an entirely different translation as well as interpretation of this particular passage¹⁸). Suggesting that it is perfectly legitimate to translate it as "for everything the good is the most exact measure"¹⁹), he insists that Aristotle is not concerned here with the fact that its "greatest exactness" makes a good the "highest good" among all other goods and, hence, the "most perfect measure" among measures. What Aristotle wishes to express here, Stark contends, is merely the fact that a (moral) good is a value criterion or standard by which all things (or actions) can be judged or evaluated properly²⁰).

12) Plato, *Philebus* 66 A.

13) Plato, *Republic*, books VI and VII, *passim*.

14) Plato, *Laws* 716 C.

15) W. Jaeger, *loc. cit.*

16) See here, for instance, Plato, *Philebus* 56 BC, and *ibid.* at 57 C-57 D; 58 C, *et passim*.

17) See, among others, E. Bignone, *L'Aristotele Perduto e la Formazione Filosofica di Epicuro* (1936), vol. II, p. 5, and *ibid.* at p. 102.

18) R. Stark, *op. cit.* at pp. 27 ff.

19) Jaeger's translation and interpretation makes the good the "most exact measure among all things", that is, among all measures or Ideas, while Stark's translation makes the good "the most exact measure for all things (in the world of experience)."

20) R. Stark, *loc. cit.*

If Stark's translation or interpretation should prove to be the correct one, its ultimate significance would be of far-reaching consequences: in a work such as the *Politicus*, which is primarily dedicated to "political philosophy", this interpretation would be tantamount to an ultimate identification of "politics" and "ethics". For now the "science of politics" would be based on the concept of a highest (moral) good. More than that: it would not necessarily imply a reference to, or reliance upon, Plato's particular Idea of the Good as it is expounded in the Platonic *Republic* or, perhaps, to Plato's "Separate Ideas" or "Idea Numbers" advocated in the later Platonic dialogues. For the good of which Aristotle speaks in the *Politicus*, Stark maintains, is certainly not the Platonic "One", but rather the moral end of human action or, to be more exact, of each human action²¹). But if this be so, then there exists no real doctrinal conflict between the ethical views of the *Politicus* and the theories advanced in the later or dogmatic works on ethics, such as *Nicomachean Ethics* 1176 a 17ff., for instance, where Aristotle states that "if ... virtue and the good man as such are the measure of everything, those also will be delights which appear so to him, and those things pleasant which he enjoys"²²). Hence, in both the *Politicus* – if we can accept Stark's interpretation – and the later doctrinal works on ethics, virtue and the (moral) good (or the good man) are the measure or criterion for each individual thing as well as for each individual action²³).

The problem raised by Syrianus' fragment²⁴) might possibly be resolved as follows: the passage in the *Politicus*, namely, that

21) R. Stark, *op. cit.* at p. 31.

22) See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1113 a 29ff, and *ibid.* at 1128 a 31.

23) This being so, R. Stark also denies one of Jaeger's basic theses, namely, that in his later works Aristotle "abandons" his original "Platonic" position which among other early works, becomes manifest in the *Politicus*. But Stark goes still further: he also propounds that Plato himself, at least in the *Philebus* and *Statesman*, actually reduces both ethics and politics to a "science of measurement" – a science, that is, which turns into dialectics. But such a situation most certainly does not require several "measures" or "standards" or "values" among which the "Supreme One" or the "Ultimate Good" constitutes the most exact and, hence, the most appropriate measure. It rather presupposes the ability to judge or evaluate the worth of different things or different actions in the light of that single and supreme, and at the same time, absolute criterion or measure which is the good. See R. Stark, *op. cit.* at pp. 28–30.

24) See note 10, *supra*.

“the good is the most precise measure among all things” or, as Stark would have it, “for everything the good is the most exact measure”, seems to be closely related to a remark found in Plato’s *Laws*, where in opposition to Protagoras’ *homo mensura* maxim Plato announces that God is the measure of all things²⁵): “Now God ought to be to us the measure of all things, and not man, as men commonly assert [*scil.*, Protagoras] ... And he who would be dear to God must, as far as this is possible, be like Him and such as He is”²⁶). But this is most certainly not the Idea of the Good as Plato expounds it in his *Republic*. Hence, it might be alleged that the Aristotelian remark preserved by Syrianus is to be placed somewhere “between” the Idea of the Good advocated in the Platonic *Republic* and the Idea of God suggested in the Platonic *Laws*. It could even be claimed that this remark is perhaps an attempt on the part of Aristotle to reconcile these two notions. Perhaps the ambiguous wording of this remark which, as Jaeger and Stark point out, admits of two entirely different interpretations, is wholly intentional: the good is the measure of all things; and the most exact measure (God) is the ultimate measure among all measures. But this latter suggestion, needless to say, is pure conjecture.

It should also be borne in mind that the *Politicus* probably was composed about the same time as the Aristotelian *On Philosophy*²⁷). If it is assumed, then, that the *Politicus* was written

25) Plato, *Laws* 716 C. See also note 14, *supra*.

26) See here also Plato, *Cratylus* 386 A ff.; *Theaetetus* 152 A.

27) W. Theiler, in his “Bau und Zeit der Aristotelischen Politik”, *Museum Helveticum*, vol. IX (1952), p. 66, note 6, tentatively dates the *On Philosophy* in the year 354, that is, prior to the *Protrepticus*. See also W. Theiler, *Zur Geschichte der Teleologischen Naturbetrachtung bis auf Aristoteles* (1924), pp. 86–88. F. Nuyens, in his *Évolution de la Psychologie d’Aristote* (1948), pp. 100–106, insists that it should be dated among the earliest works of Aristotle. See also *ibid.* at pp. 95 ff. P. Wilpert, in his “Die Aristotelische Schrift ‘Über die Philosophie’”, *Autour d’Aristote* (1955), pp. 155–162, maintains that the *On Philosophy* was composed during Aristotle’s membership in the Platonic Academy, as does I. Düring in his “Aristotle and Plato in the Mid-Fourth Century”, *Eranos*, vol. 54 (1956), pp. 109–120. A. Mansion, in his “La Genèse de l’Oeuvre d’Aristote d’après les Travaux Récents”, *Revue Néoscholastique de Philosophie*, vol. 29 (1927), p. 319, and M. Gentile, in his “La Dottrina Platonica delle Idee Numeri e Aristotele”, *Annali della Reale Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1930), p. 121, note 30, insist that the *On Philosophy* is prior to book I of the *Metaphysics*. H. von Arnim, in his “Die Entstehung der Gotteslehre des Aristoteles”, *Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse*, vol. 212, no. 5 (1931), on the other hand, holds that the

shortly before 348/47, and that the *On Philosophy* was composed shortly after 348/47, then it also must not be overlooked that the *Politicus* was conceived a considerable time after the completion of the Platonic *Republic* (which most certainly must be dated prior to 370–365), and approximately at the same time as the Platonic *Laws* (which were composed probably after 350). One might also gain the impression that the God (or the good) referred to in the *Politicus* is somewhat akin to the God found in Aristotle's *On Philosophy* which, after all, seems to have been written at about the same time as the *Politicus*.

According to Cicero²⁸), who in this relies on an Epicurean source unfavorable to Aristotle²⁹), in the third book of the *On Philosophy* the Stagirite declares now that God is mind, now that He is the universe, now that He is ether, and now that He is some other Being to Whom the universe was subordinated and Who guides its movements. And Sextus Empiricus³⁰), probably by using Posidonius as a direct source³¹), reports that in the *On Philosophy* Aristotle declares God the author of all order³²). The

On Philosophy was written very shortly after Plato's death in 348/7, as does M. Untersteiner in his "Aristotele, Phys. I. 8–9: Frammenti del *Περὶ Φιλοσοφίας*", *Rivista di Filologia e d'Istruzione Classica*, vol. 87 (1959), pp. 1–23, as well as in his "Il *Περὶ Φιλοσοφίας* di Aristotele", *ibid.*, vol. 88 (1961), pp. 337–362, and vol. 89 (1961), pp. 121–159; C. de Vogel, in her *Greek Philosophy*, vol. II (1953), pp. 29–32; D. J. Allan, in his *The Philosophy of Aristotle* (1952), pp. 21–30; and W. Jaeger, in his *Aristotle* (1923), pp. 124 ff (Oxford Paperbacks of 1961), insist that the *On Philosophy* was composed after the death of Plato. W. Jaeger, *loc. cit.*, also maintains that it is slightly posterior to book I of the Aristotelian *Metaphysics*. This view has also been accepted by M. Untersteiner in his newest book, *Aristotele: Della Filosofia* (1963), pp. XVII–XIX.

28) Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* I. 13. 33; Rose, frag. 26; Walzer, frag. 26; Ross, frag. 26. See here also M. Untersteiner, *op. cit.* at pp. 255–265.

29) This is probably the same source which is used by Philodemus. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* I. 33. 93 (frag. 235 Usener), reports that "Epicurus Aristotelem vexavit contumeliosissime..."

30) Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* IX. 26–27; Rose, frag. 11; Walzer, frag. 12 b; Ross, frag. 12 b. See here also M. Untersteiner, *op. cit.* at pp. 171–175.

31) Sextus Empiricus probably relies here on Posidonius' *De Divinatione*.

32) It is interesting to note here that in *Metaphysics* 1075 a 11 ff, Aristotle likewise uses the analogy of a "properly functioning and orderly army" in order to illustrate the notion of an universal order under a "universal commander". The excellence of an efficient army, we are told here, "is found both in the order and in its commander, and more in the latter. For he does not depend on the order, but the order depends on him". This, in turn, calls to mind Plato, *Timaeus* 28 A–29 A, where the Demiurge is presented as the originator of the cosmic order.

same notion is recorded by Cicero in his *De Natura Deorum*³³). In a story reminiscent of Plato's famous image of the cave³⁴), Cicero points out that if men should suddenly ascend from the bowels of the earth and perceive "the whole sky laid out and adorned with stars ... and the risings and settings of them all and their courses ratified and immutable for all eternity, they would immediately think that these are the mighty works of gods". This particular passage, which J. Bernays considers a direct quotation from Aristotle's *On Philosophy*³⁵), likewise stresses the notion of a supreme author and director of the cosmic order. And finally, according to the testimony of Simplicius³⁶), Aristotle declares God in his *On Philosophy* "the most perfect being" and, hence, "the most immutable"³⁷), who on account of this perfection not only governs everything, but also constitutes the ultimate measure of everything.

These few summary remarks about the concept of God (or the good) found in the third book of Aristotle's *On Philosophy* might lend some significant support to our contention that whenever in his *Politicus* Aristotle speaks of an ultimate and most perfect measure which constitutes the criterion of everything, he probably had in mind the concept of God which he develops in his *On Philosophy*. By realizing this we might also resolve in favor of R. Stark the differences that exist between W. Jaeger's and R. Stark's interpretations of the important fragment transmitted by Syrianus. But this, too, is highly conjectural. In any event, it is fairly safe to assume that as to its philosophic content the *Politicus* is still strongly under the influence of Platonic teachings. This might be gathered from the fact that "politics" in the main are here reduced to a sort of "metaphysics of ethics". At the same time, provided R. Stark's interpretation should prove to be the correct one, Aristotle, although still under the spell of Plato, makes a first beginning to "emancipate" himself from his teacher, especially from Plato's "Separate Ideas", by claiming

33) Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* II. 37. 95-96; Rose, frag. 12; Walzer, frag. 13; Ross, frag. 13. See here also the comments of M. Untersteiner, *op. cit.* at pp. 175-181.

34) Plato, *Republic* 514 Aff, and *ibid.* at 532 Aff.

35) J. Bernays, *op. cit. supra* note 4, at p. 106.

36) Simplicius, *Commentaria in Aristotelis Quattuor Libros De Caelo*, in: *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, vol. VII (ed. J. L. Heiberg, 1894), p. 288, line 28 - p. 289, line 15.

37) See here also Plato, *Republic* 380 Dff., where Plato maintains that "the things which are the best are also least liable to change..."

that the good in general is an acceptable measure for everything that transpires in the experimental world.

The remaining fragments which have been attributed to the *Politicus*³⁸) really are of small interest to us in that they contribute little if anything to our understanding of this early dialogue. As a matter of fact, some scholars have raised serious doubts as to whether they are in any way related to the *Politicus*³⁹).

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EMENDATIONS IN THE TEXT OF MAXIMUS OF TYRE

This paper consists of eleven textual notes on Maximus of Tyre, the eclectic Platonic philosopher and rhetorician of the second century of our era. For the reader's convenience, in citing the text I shall refer by page and line to Hobein's¹) critical edition of Maximus. The textual notes of Davis, Markland, and Reiske are taken from the second edition of Davis²) in Leipzig. A list of publications containing the emendations of scholars mentioned in this paper will be found in the *praeformatio* to Hobein's edition, pp. XVII-XX.

38) Seneca, *De Ira* I. 3. 3, and *ibid.* at I. 7. 1; I. 9. 2; I. 17. 1; III. 3. 1; Cicero, *Tuscul. Disput.* IV, 19. 43; Philodemus, *De Ira*, pp. 65, line 31 - p. 66, line 2 (ed. Wilke); Rose, frag. 80; Ross, frag. 3. See also Philodemus, *De Rhetorica: Volumina Rhetorica*, vol. II (ed. S. Sudhaus, 1896), p. 175.

39) None of the fragments cited in note 38, *supra*, specifically refers to the *Politicus*. Fragment 81 (Rose), which V. Rose attributes to the *Politicus*, is now attributed to the Aristotelian *On Poets* by W. D. Ross: Ross, frag. 5 (*On Poets*).

1) H. Hobein, *Maximus Tyrius, Philosophumena, Lipsiae, in aed. Teubneri*, 1910.

2) *Maximi Tyrii Dissertationes, ex recensione Ioannis Davisii ... editio altera ... emendata notisque locupletioribus aucta. Cui accesserunt Ier. Marklandi annotationes. Excudi curavit et annotatiunculas de suo addidit Io. Iacobus Reiske, pars prima, secunda, Lipsiae, Th. Georgius, 1774-1775.*