

POLITICAL SCIENCE IN LATE MEDIEVAL EUROPE:  
THE ARISTOTELIAN PARADIGM AND HOW IT SHAPED  
THE STUDY OF POLITICS IN THE WEST

A Dissertation

by

MARY ELIZABETH SULLIVAN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2010

Major Subject: Political Science

Political Science in Late Medieval Europe:

The Aristotelian Paradigm and How It Shaped the Study of Politics in the West

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## ABSTRACT

Political Science in Late Medieval Europe:  
The Aristotelian Paradigm and How It Shaped  
the Study of Politics in the West. (August 2010)

Mary Elizabeth Sullivan, A.B., Georgetown University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Cary J. Nederman

This dissertation looks at Aristotelian political thinkers of the later Middle Ages and argues that they meet all of the criteria of a mature Kuhnian science. Scholars of medieval Europe have spent decades arguing over exactly how one should define medieval Aristotelianism and which thinkers qualify as Aristotelian. I answer this question by turning to the philosophy of science literature. By using the criteria laid out by Thomas Kuhn- a common education, a shared technical language and general agreement on problem choice- I am able to parse out a group of political thinkers who qualify as a scientific community. My dissertation then goes on to illustrate how several different medieval thinkers were able to operate within this Aristotelian paradigm.

This project gives scholars of the Middle Ages a more useful lens through which to view the phenomenon of medieval Aristotelianism. For those interested in political science more broadly, I demonstrate that our field has, in fact, experienced a period of maturity, in which scholars shared a unified paradigm and proceeded with their research

in concert. I also show some of the benefits and limitations of a common research agenda in the study of politics.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Mark and Marlene Sullivan, who have stood by me every step of the way.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to start out by thanking my chair, Cary Nederman, for his help both while writing my dissertation and throughout my graduate career. No one could ask for a better advisor. I would also like to thank the other members of the Texas A&M faculty, especially Lisa Ellis, Erik Godwin, Diego von Vacano, Judi Baer, and Dave Peterson (now at Iowa State) for their help and support. I would like to thank James Blythe of the University of Memphis for valuable feedback on Ptolemy of Lucca and Noah Dauber, currently at Colgate University, who provided assistance on my work with the early commentators.

Thanks also go to my fellow graduate students at Texas A&M, especially Christie Maloyed, Ted Brown, Daniel Betti, Peyton Wofford, Brad Goodine, Megan Dyer, Sara Jordan, Phil Gray, Jesse Chupp, and Hassan Bashir, for reading countless chapter drafts and offering general advice and encouragement throughout this process.

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I would like to thank JoAnn Moran Cruz and Jennifer Paxton of Georgetown University for sparking my interest in Medieval Studies and for advising me on applying to graduate schools. I would certainly not be here today without your advice and inspiration.

Thanks must also go to the many people who have helped me keep my sanity throughout the graduate school process. Thanks to Carrie Kilpatrick, Lou Ellen Herr, Diane Adams, and Elaine Tuttle for helping me successfully navigate the university bureaucracy with amazing patience. All of the graduate students would be lost with you.

To the many friends I have made in the state of Texas over past five years: you have certainly lived up to your reputation for southern hospitality. You have made Texas feel like home, and that is a high compliment coming from a committed Jersey girl. To Ken Wong and all my friends back east, it's good to know I have people I can always count on. You are wonderful.

Last (though very far from least) I'd like to thank my family who have helped make everything possible: my aunt Judi and Uncle Robin, who always let me know that they are thinking of me, and my cousin, Alex, who has been serving his country in Iraq while I have been studying; you are my hero; to my godfather, who always believed in my potential, I know you would be proud; finally to my parents, I can't even begin to express how grateful I am for everything you have given me. Thank you so much for all your support.



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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION:

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN ARISTOTELIAN IN THE MIDDLE AGES?

In the thirteenth century, Western political thinkers reacquainted themselves with the moral and political works of Aristotle, after nearly seven centuries of absence. Although controversial at first, Aristotle quickly became a central part of the medieval curriculum, and citations of both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* are ubiquitous in later medieval writing. This introduction of Aristotle contributed to a flourishing in the study of politics in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance. Although generally in agreement that Aristotle in some way reshaped political thought in late medieval Europe, there remains much contention among scholars as to how. A number of different definitions of medieval Aristotelianism have been offered over the past half-century, none of them fully satisfying.

While scholars have provided many interesting insights into the role of Aristotle in shaping later political theory, I argue that they are inadequate to explain the rapid “Aristotelianization” of political thought in the later Middle Ages. I propose that using Thomas Kuhn’s concept of the scientific community could help shed some light on this phenomenon. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas S. Kuhn outlines several criteria for the mature scientific community, all of which, I will argue, are met by

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This dissertation follows the style of *The Review of Politics*.

the medieval Aristotelians. This dissertation will endeavor to explain why medieval political Aristotelianism qualifies as a science and why I believe this to be a particularly useful framework for its study. Having established these arguments, the dissertation will proceed to outline the growth, maturation, and eventual decline of the Aristotelian political paradigm through the examination of individual political thinkers, from the mid-thirteenth to the early fourteenth centuries.

This dissertation will address two important questions: one for the field of medieval studies, the other for political science. The first is: What is medieval (political) Aristotelianism? Over the past several decades, numerous scholars of medieval intellectual history have sought a workable definition of medieval Aristotelianism. Previous attempts have tended either to overstate the effects of Aristotle on political thinking or to trivialize Aristotelianism as a mere rhetorical strategy. I believe that the Kuhnian approach outlined in this dissertation will avoid both of these pitfalls by focusing on *how* medieval thinkers approached the study of politics after the reintroduction of Aristotle, rather than on what they concluded in their studies. The second question regards the status of political science as a science. If one accepts Thomas Kuhn's definition of the scientific community, then, I argue, one must acknowledge that political science is not a twentieth-century phenomenon. The political Aristotelians of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries meet Kuhn's key criteria for scientific research. Further examination of how the Aristotelian paradigm came to be accepted and why it was later displaced could shed some light on how a scientific study of politics could work.

## THE DEBATE OVER MEDIEVAL ARISTOTELIANISM

Before setting out to argue for why a Kuhnian framework is useful in studying medieval Aristotelianism, this dissertation will look at how other scholars have approached the reception of Aristotle in the Middle Ages. Although there is general agreement that Aristotle had some noticeable impact on medieval political thought, scholars seem to have difficulty defining the phenomenon that resulted. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say each scholar has his or her own idea of what medieval Aristotelianism really is. Several different methods have been proposed for determining whether any given author qualifies as an “Aristotelian.” Some focus on certain theoretical tenets, the presence or absence of which distinguishes those authors whose work should be considered Aristotelian. Other scholars point to a shared language system or to Aristotle’s scheme for the organization of human knowledge. Under some definitions, nearly every late medieval thinker qualifies as an Aristotelian; according to others, the number is far smaller.

One of the most seminal investigations of the reception of Aristotle’s moral and political works and their long-term effect on political theory was proposed by Walter Ullmann. For Ullmann, the primary contribution of Aristotelianism was to provide a natural foundation for the political community. In his view, the early and high Middle Ages were characterized by a universality and unipolarity which subsumed the natural and earthly aspect of human life to the spiritual and other-worldly. Rulers were reborn through the act of anointment into a new regenerated life. The ruler served as a “tutor” to the people, leading them on the path to salvation. The model of authority was entirely

top-down; subjects were no more entitled to choose their ruler than children would be to choose their teacher. In the later Middle Ages, however, Ullmann argues, a number of factors converged to change this. Interest in Roman law, scientific studies of natural man and the dissemination of Aristotle's political writing all contributed to the growth of humanism. In the realm of politics, humanism led to a renewed appreciation of the naturalness of politics. In contrast to earlier medieval thinkers, humanist political theorists placed the source of political power in the community itself. Authority came from the bottom up rather than the top down. The reintroduction of Aristotelian political thought was only one among a number of factors that, according to Ullmann, helped shape this new political outlook.<sup>1</sup>

In a similar vein, Quentin Skinner views the reintroduction of Aristotle's political philosophy as "of overwhelming importance to the development of a modern, naturalistic and secular view of political life."<sup>2</sup> Although Skinner allows for a more gradual development of the "secular" view of politics, he still sees this as being Aristotle's primary contribution to the Middle Ages. Likewise, Gert Sørensen argues that the classical conception of politics was driven nearly to extinction by Christianity. Aristotle's texts served as "challenges to the hegemony of dominant religious culture."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Ullmann, *Medieval Foundations of Renaissance Humanism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Volume One: The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Gert Sørensen, "The Reception of the Political Aristotle in the Late Middle Ages (From Brunetto Latini to Dante Alighieri): Hypotheses and Suggestions," ed. Marianne Pade, *Renaissance Readings of the Corpus Aristotelicum* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum, 2001), pp. 9-25, p. 25.

For John Morrall, the key change that comes about with the introduction of Aristotle's major works in the west was a more positive outlook toward social and political life in general. This was in marked contrast to the previously held neoPlatonic-Augustinian view, in which politics only existed as a remedy for man's sinfulness after the fall.<sup>4</sup> This new perspective on political life allowed for the blossoming of political philosophy in the late Middle Ages:

The notion of politics as a separate branch of knowledge was not unfamiliar before the thirteenth century but it was the direct influence of Aristotle's thought which enabled medieval political theory to come of age. Now for the first time since fall of the Roman Empire, western Christian thinkers came face to face with the possibility that political society was of value in its own right.<sup>5</sup>

Aristotle, in Morrall's opinion, both raised the status of political life and stimulated the study of political philosophy as a field in its own right. This led to a blossoming of political theory in the later Middle Ages and a shift in its tone.

Maurizio Viroli shares Morrall's view that the reintroduction of Aristotle's moral and political works encouraged the study of politics as a distinct discipline. "The science of the city" is described as the highest of the practical sciences, leading late medieval thinkers to grant it a particularly revered place in their studies. The Aristotelian notion of politics that Viroli sees as dominating political thought up through the sixteenth century

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<sup>4</sup> John B. Morrall, *Political Thought in Medieval Times* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 68.

<sup>5</sup> Morrall, *Political Thought in Medieval Times*, p. 69.

is specifically the art of ruling the city according to reason and justice. This Aristotelian meaning of politics is replaced, according to Viroli, with a more pragmatic view in the sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

James Blythe looks at the reintroduction of Aristotle's moral and political works in relation to theories of mixed constitutions in the later Middle Ages. He finds that most medieval Aristotelians endorse some form of the mixed regime, however, these medieval Aristotelians do not simply reproduce Aristotle's constitutional views,

Their approaches toward the question of the best government and their conclusions were inevitably conditioned by their particular experiences and political needs and problems and thus necessarily resulted in a reciprocal relationship with Aristotle in which on the one hand they imposed their concerns and values on him, and on the other he molded and significantly altered their modes of thought.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, medieval Aristotelians responded both to their classical source and to the political conditions around them in forming their constitutional ideas.

In contrast, Paul Kristeller defines medieval Aristotelianism not by a shared doctrine but by reliance on a common Aristotelian corpus. Aristotle's major works, Kristeller argues, were not studied as "great books," but rather served as the basic

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<sup>6</sup> Maurizio Viroli, "The Revolution in the Concept of Politics," *Political Theory* 20, (1992): 473-95., esp. p. 476, and *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), esp. Ch. 1.

<sup>7</sup> James M. Blythe, *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 301, and "The Mixed Constitution and the Distinction between Regal and Political Power in the Work of Thomas Aquinas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1986): 547-65.



textbooks for late medieval universities. Reliance on a certain set of texts defines a thinker as Aristotelian: “The Aristotelianism of the later Middle Ages was characterized not so much by a common system of ideas as by a common source material, a common terminology, a common set of definitions and problems, and a common method of discussing these problems.”<sup>8</sup> One of Kristeller’s main contentions is that Aristotelianism in this sense did not die out in the Middle Ages but survived well into the Renaissance: “It has been my intention to show how Aristotle had become by the early fourteenth century ‘the master of those who know,’ in order to emphasize the additional fact... that this Aristotelian tradition, though exposed to attacks and subject to transformations, continued strongly and vigorously to the end of the sixteenth century and even later.”<sup>9</sup>

In Cary Nederman’s analysis, seeking doctrinal coherence, of the sort Ullmann employs, is not a particularly useful way of examining medieval Aristotelianism. While nearly all late medieval thinkers exhibit at least some familiarity with Aristotle, none could fully embrace his metaphysical precepts. Nederman therefore argues, “In my view, the Aristotelianism of medieval moral and political thought ought not to be defined in relation to a body of texts or a substantive doctrine or a mode of discourse, but instead as a structure which frames the manner in which questions about political and moral issues are raised and answered.”<sup>10</sup> For Nederman, the key structure that defines a thinker or

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<sup>8</sup> Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanist Strains* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955), p.32.

<sup>9</sup> Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*, pp. 33-4.

<sup>10</sup> Cary J. Nederman, “The Meaning of ‘Aristotelianism’ in Medieval Moral and Political Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1996): 563-85, p. 565. See also, Francisco Bertelloni, “Giuridicità della ‘Scientia Politica’ nella Riflessione Politica degli Artisti nella Prima Metà del Secolo XII,” eds. B. Calos Bazán, Eduardo Andújar, and Léonard

work as “Aristotelian” is Aristotle’s classification of knowledge into the practical and theoretical branches. Under this scheme, politics is placed above ethics and economics as the king of the practical sciences.

While some scholars have tried to discover a core Aristotelian idea or set of ideas or otherwise narrow their field of study to the “real Aristotelians,” Antony Black has taken a somewhat different approach. Black treats Aristotelian simply as one of several political languages available to European thinkers in the late Middle Ages. Medieval writers were able to plunder Aristotle’s text for a variety of terminology and historical exempla. Yet Black is careful to note that Aristotelian political language is just that, a *language*; there is no definite theoretical framework to which it is tied:

Aristotle provided an enormous (for the period) wealth of concepts and observations which could be employed in discussing *any* constitution, as we find in post-1260 discussions of city-states, kingdoms, and the Church. Authors ranging from John of Hocsem through Marsilius to Giles of Rome could use Aristotelian to explain the merits, and when they wish the superior merits, of their preferred form of government, or mode of distributing authority. *They* certainly did not feel constrained, because they were Aristotelian- or, better,

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G. Sbrocchi, *Les philosophies morales et politiques au Moyen Âge: actes du IXe Congrès international de philosophie médiévale, Ottawa, 17-22 août 1992* (New York: Legas, 1995), pp. 333-67, “Zur Rekonstruktion des politischen Aristotelismus im Mittelalter,” *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* (1998): 999-1011, and “Les Schèmes de la *Philosophia Practica* Antérieurs à 1265: Leu Vocabulaire Concernant la *Politique* et leur Rôle dans la Rèception de la *Politique* d’Aristote,” in *L’élaboration du Vocabulaire Philosophique au Moyen Âge*, Jacqueline Hamesse and Carlos Steel, eds. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 171-202.

*speaking* Aristotelian- to agree with Aristotle about the superiority of ‘aristocracy’ or of a mixture of oligarchy and democracy... what Aristotle ‘gave’ such people, that is, what they took from him, was not a set of political ‘ideas’ or doctrines, but a language, that is, a set of concepts and ways of expressing things.<sup>11</sup>

Black’s methodology treats Aristotelian language as tool, and, for him, the interesting question is how and to what end each thinker chooses to employ it.

While the above scholars all focus on political Aristotelianism, it is important to remember that the transmission of Aristotle’s works in the Middle Ages had a profound impact on a variety of fields. Charles Lohr has examined the effects of Aristotle on numerous different scientific fields in the Middle Ages. Lohr contends that Aristotle aided medieval thinkers in breaking away from a “clerical” notion of science, in which the authority of divinely ordained masters went unchallenged. The recovery of Aristotle helped create a more modern science based on continual testing and questioning of theories. However, Lohr is careful to note, this change didn’t come about overnight. The initial reaction to Aristotle’s texts was dismay (at their contradiction to Christian beliefs), then reverence, and finally a critical analysis.<sup>12</sup> Richard Rubenstein makes a

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<sup>11</sup> Anthony Black, “Political Languages in Later Medieval Europe,” in *The Church and Sovereignty c.590-1918*. ed. D. Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 318-19. See also Roberto Lambertini, “La diffusione della ‘Politica’ e la Definizione di un Linguaggio Politico Aristotelico,” *Quaderni Storici*, vol. XXXIV (1999), pp. 677-704.

<sup>12</sup> C.H. Lohr, “The Medieval Interpretation of Aristotle,” eds., Norman Kretzman, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg, *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 80-98, see also Francisco Bertelloni, “Presupuestos de la Recepción de la *Politica* de Aristóteles,” eds., Fernando

similar argument that the recovery of Aristotle brought a more rational and enlightened discourse to medieval minds.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, Edward Grant, for example, had explored the usefulness of the term “Aristotelian” in studying late medieval natural philosophy. Given the central role that Aristotelianism played in shaping natural philosophy through much of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and the wide variety of thinkers who can fall under this heading, Grant seeks to determine “whether the terms ‘Aristotelianism’ and ‘Aristotelian’ can be assigned significant meaning.”<sup>14</sup> Toward this end, he offers a variety of possible approaches to Aristotelianism in natural philosophy. The one he finds most promising is a “species” approach, in which Aristotelianism consists of the collection of individual Aristotelian thinkers, even if some depart from Aristotle in key areas:

There is no need for a definition of Aristotelianism, since the term embraces a population with inherent similarities and individual differences. Unlike [the previously discussed possibilities] there is no norm against which to measure whether a departure has occurred. In this sense, *there are no departures or anomalies*. There are only individual Aristotelians who produce individual Aristotelianisms.<sup>15</sup>

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Domínguez, Rudei Imbach, Theodor Pindl and Peter Walter, *Aristotelica et Lulliana* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1995), pp. 35-54.

<sup>13</sup> Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle’s Children: How Christians, Muslims, and Jews Rediscovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Middle Ages* (New York: Harcourt, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Edward Grant, “Ways to Interpret the Terms ‘Aristotelian’ and ‘Aristotelianism’ in Medieval and Renaissance Natural Philosophy,” *History of Science* xxv (1987): 335-57., p. 342.

<sup>15</sup> Grant, “Ways to Interpret the Terms...” p. 248.

Grant even goes so far as to say, “Aristotle himself becomes simply another unprivileged Aristotelian.”<sup>16</sup>

#### WHAT THESE AUTHORS HAVE ACHIEVED AND WHERE THEY HAVE FAILED

Looking at medieval Aristotelianism and its legacy, there appear to be many different ways in which it helped shaped later medieval political theory. Each author discussed above has found a slightly different aspect of this transformation on which to focus. Ullmann notes the introduction of bottom-up theories of political authority; Blythe, the appearance of theories of the mixed regime; Nederman, the categorization of knowledge into practical and theoretical fields. Several scholars argue that Aristotle’s texts helped break up the Church’s stranglehold on knowledge. The problem is that, although these characteristics of medieval Aristotelianism are all generally true, they do not fully capture the shift that took place in the study of politics in the west after the reintroduction of Aristotle’s work. Walter Ullmann and those who followed in his footsteps, for example, have often been criticized for drawing too sharp a line between the early and late Middle Ages.<sup>17</sup> Not all political thinkers writing before Aristotle’s recovery adhered to a strictly top-down notion of divinely mandated political power, nor did this type of theory disappear immediately after the translation of the *Politics*.

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<sup>16</sup> Grant, “Ways to Interpret the Terms...” p. 348.

<sup>17</sup> See for example, Antony Black, *Political Thought in Medieval Europe*; Cary J. Nederman, “The Meaning of ‘Aristotelianism’ in Medieval Moral and Political Thought” and “Aristotelianism and the Origins of ‘Political Science’ in the Twelfth Century” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52 (1991): 179-94.

However, my objection to Ullmann's thesis is different; by choosing a single doctrine that serves as the litmus test for whether or not a thinker qualifies as an Aristotelian, Ullmann neglects one of the most interesting facets of medieval Aristotelianism- the variety of perspectives it encompasses. Medieval Aristotelians frequently disagree with one another and even with Aristotle. To choose a single Aristotelian doctrine is to ignore the diversity of thinkers who claimed adherence to Aristotelian principles in the Middle Ages. While Ullmann is the most prominent example of this tendency, Skinner, Blythe, Nederman, and Lohr all fall prey to it to some degree. The resulting definitions of medieval Aristotelianism are too narrow. Important and interesting thinkers who were influenced by Aristotle's thought are overlooked because they fail to include a particular political or philosophical doctrine in their work.

On the other hand, with an approach like that of Antony Black, the term "Aristotelian" becomes so inclusive as to be almost meaningless. Black's work on political languages in the Middle Ages is very insightful. As he has noted, medieval political thinkers were able to draw on a variety of language systems, blending them and moving between them as suited their argument. Like this dissertation, Black criticizes previous scholars who have tried to choose a single doctrine as necessary for inclusion in a particular category (such as Aristotelian). However, Black's thesis does not capture all that is going on with medieval Aristotelians in the later Middle Ages. While use of Aristotelian language does not entirely determine what arguments a political thinker can make, there is more to the recovery of Aristotelian political philosophy than just the addition of one more language system. As noted by Viroli, more thinkers were looking

at political issues and doing so in a more focused and organized way.<sup>18</sup> Black's argument is interesting but misses parts of the picture.

This dissertation outlines an alternative way of addressing political Aristotelianism in the Middle Ages, one that avoids the pitfalls of an overly narrow classification based on doctrinal orthodoxy, on the one side, and the overly lax linguistic systems, on the other. In the following chapter, I argue that the philosophy of science literature offers a useful corrective to both camps. By borrowing from Thomas Kuhn's terminology, I argue that medieval Aristotelianism can best be viewed as a paradigm for the practice of political science in the Middle Ages. Medieval political thinkers took from Aristotle a methodology for the study of politics which they then applied to the political structures of their own day. This definition of Aristotelianism is more stringent than that of Black because, in order to be considered part of the Aristotelian community, thinkers not only had to utilize Aristotle's political language but also to engage in the Aristotelian project of finding the best constitution. Chapter II provides a more complete outline of what medieval Aristotelian political science entails. My definition of Aristotelianism also avoids the pitfalls of Ullmann and his ilk; there are no restrictions on what conclusions medieval Aristotelians could reach in their investigations. Medieval Aristotelians could, and often did, disagree about the best forms of government.

The remainder of this dissertation examines the medieval Aristotelian paradigm. Chapter II explains how the medieval Aristotelians fit into Kuhn's definition of a

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<sup>18</sup> Maurizio Viroli, "The Revolution in the Concept of Politics," and *From Politics to Reason of State*, esp. Ch. 1.

scientific community. It also makes the case that examination of this early paradigm in the study of politics could be of use to current political scientists who are concerned with the current lack of a unified paradigm in the field. Chapter III explains how Aristotle's *Politics* provides a model for a political science based on comparative constitutional studies. Chapter IV explores the work of Brunetto Latini, an Italian republican theorist writing just before the Latin translation of the *Politics* became available then outlines the recovery of Aristotle's moral and political works and examines some of the early commentaries. Chapter V covers Ptolemy of Lucca's *De regimine principum*, a defense of republican government written in the mature Aristotelian paradigm. Finally, Chapter VI explores Dante Alighieri and his theories of world empire.



## CHAPTER II

### MEDIEVAL ARISTOTELIANISM AS A KUHNIAN SCIENCE

As discussed in the previous chapter, medieval Aristotelianism has proved problematic for scholars of the later Middle Ages. No Christian could fully accept Aristotle's premises; yet, nearly every political thinker cited his major works. Furthermore, Aristotelian political thinkers come from a variety of different political perspectives and advocate completely different forms of government. How then does one classify an Aristotelian in the Middle Ages? This dissertation proposes that the phenomenon of medieval political Aristotelianism be treated as a scientific paradigm, in accordance with the theories of Thomas Kuhn. In this chapter, I first outline Kuhn's notion of science and the arguments for why it may be a useful way to view the history of political science. Having done this, I go on to explain why medieval Aristotelianism qualifies as a scientific paradigm. I argue that this approach to political Aristotelianism avoids the error of calling any thinker who cites Aristotle an "Aristotelian"; a more thorough adherence to an Aristotelian project is necessary. At the same time, this approach does not require that medieval thinkers thoroughly conform to any particular Aristotelian principle or set of principles. As long as a thinker followed the methodology of the Aristotelian paradigm, he or she could produce a variety of different conclusions.

For scholars of the late Middle Ages, the Kuhnian framework provides a new and fruitful way of viewing political Aristotelianism, explaining why Aristotle was accepted so universally and how he shaped political inquiry in the later Middle Ages. For those

interested in political science, and particularly in its status as a science, the later chapters of this dissertation will illustrate how a mature paradigm was able to operate in this field. Like any paradigm, the political Aristotelianism of the later Middle Ages both provided new opportunities for productive research and limited its scope.

#### THOMAS KUHN AND THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE

In his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn offers a description of scientific progress that is at odds with the textbook account of incremental discovery. Kuhn examines the history of science, paying particular attention to how scientific communities regulate themselves. In Kuhn's view, mature sciences alternate between periods of "normal science" and "revolutions," where the very assumptions of a field are challenged. Each revolution provides a new paradigm (a set of assumptions about the world), through which the work of normal science can begin again. In the period before maturity,<sup>19</sup> multiple paradigms can compete for legitimacy among the scientific community. There are no "rules" for how the process of scientific research should proceed. While this may, at first, appear to provide opportunities for creative exploration, Kuhn argues that it is problematic: "In the absence of a paradigm or some candidate for a paradigm, all the facts that could possibly pertain to the development of a given science seem equally relevant.... In the absence of a reason for seeking some particular form of more recondite information, early fact-gathering is usually restricted

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<sup>19</sup> Kuhn implies that a science which has reached maturity may still return to a period of competing paradigms.

to the wealth of data that lie ready to hand.”<sup>20</sup> Research is a random and unfocused process.

Without a shared paradigm, scientists do not know which questions are important. Furthermore, it is difficult for the scientific community to proceed together *as a community*, to relate the work of one scholar to that of another: “Different men confronting the same range of phenomena, but not usually all the same particular phenomena, describe and interpret them in different ways.”<sup>21</sup> Kuhn is careful to point out that genuine (and important) scientific discoveries can be made during these phases of competing or non-paradigmatic science. However, since each scholar must start from scratch in justifying his or her basic assumptions, and no commonly accepted framework directs research toward a particular set of questions, it is an inefficient use of scientists’ energy.

Kuhn depicts science in its early stages is disorganized and often lacking in explanatory theory; however things do not usually stay this way. When an individual or a group comes up with a theory than can explain more and attract a greater number of followers, competing theories die out or their adherents are relegated to other fields. New practitioners of the science are socialized into this new “paradigm,” and scholarship can proceed without each thinker having to justify his or her assumptions. Research becomes more focused:

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 17.

The new paradigm implies a new and more rigid definition of the field. Those unwilling or unable to accommodate their work to it must proceed in isolation or attach themselves to some other group.... It is sometimes just its reception of a paradigm that transforms a group previously interested merely in the study of nature into a profession or, at least, a discipline.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, a field becomes a “Science.” Those who follow the paradigm are part of the scientific process, and those that do not are forced out of the community.

The type of research undertaken once a group of scientists has accepted a common paradigm is what Thomas Kuhn calls “normal science.” Kuhn compares normal science to puzzle-solving. The paradigm dictates what sort of research is to be done and what sort of questions are to be asked:

One of the things a scientific community acquires with a paradigm is a criterion for choosing problems that, while the paradigm is taken for granted, can be assumed to have solutions. To a great extent these are the only problems that the community will admit as scientific or encourage its members to undertake. Other problems, including many that had previously been standard, are rejected as metaphysical, as the concern of another discipline, or sometimes as just too problematic to be worth the time.<sup>23</sup>

The scientific community agrees on what questions are appropriate and what constitutes the aims of their field. This development is key. While the acceptance of a paradigm

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<sup>22</sup> Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 37.

generally signals a period of increased progress in a science, it also usually means a drastic narrowing of the field.

Normal scientists not only gravitate toward the puzzles that their paradigm promises a solution to; they actually avoid questions that might challenge the foundations of the paradigm. In many cases, questions or phenomena that do not fit within the boundaries of the paradigm are simply not “seen” at all. Experiments are undertaken to show how nature agrees with the paradigm, not to test the validity of its assumptions. Under the conditions of normal science, according to Kuhn, “To desert the paradigm is to cease practicing the science it defines.”<sup>24</sup>

Periods of normal science do not, however, last forever. When anomalies are discovered that challenge that assumptions of the paradigm, the first response is to try to explain them away from within the existing paradigm. If this does not succeed, scholars will begin tinkering with the paradigm, making minor adjustments to its premises, as was seen in Ptolemaic astronomy in the sixteenth century. Scientists will struggle to preserve the paradigm until anomaly and confusion become so great that the field enters a period of crisis. As Kuhn elaborates, “All crises begin with the blurring of a paradigm and the consequent loosening of the rules for normal research. In this respect research during crisis very much resembles research during the pre-paradigm period...”<sup>25</sup>

Sometimes a crisis is handled satisfactorily by normal science; sometimes a problem is simply set aside or ignored. On some occasions, however, crisis leads to the proposal of an entirely new paradigm. This is what Kuhn deems a “revolution,”

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<sup>24</sup> Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 84.

a reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalizations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications. During the transition period there will be a large but never complete overlap between the problems that can be solved by the old and by the new paradigm. But there will also be a decisive difference in the modes of solution. When the transition is complete, the profession will have changed its view of the field, its methods, and its goals.<sup>26</sup>

Scholars who do not buy into the new paradigm are excluded from the science, which has itself been redefined. Normal science then begins again with a new set of assumptions and a new focus for its investigations.

Kuhn's approach to the history of science is distinctly different from the incremental growth model put forward by those such as Karl Popper and Carl Hempel.<sup>27</sup> There is no sense of steady progress toward Truth; periods of simple puzzle-solving alternate with revolutions that redefine contours of the science itself. Science proceeds within the boundaries of its paradigm. Observations can only be made through the lens of theory. There are no universal objective criteria for proper scientific method. Each community of scholars sets its own rules for how experiments should be performed and what questions should be investigated, in accordance with the current paradigm. The paradigm provides commonly accepted assumptions within which science can progress

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<sup>26</sup> Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions.*, p. 85.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, (London: Routledge, 2002); Carl Hempel, *Philosophy of Natural Science* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996).

but also limits the types of investigations considered acceptable. The paradigm, in effect, makes the science.

#### KUHNS'S THEORY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

A number of different scholars have considered whether Kuhn's model of science might be applicable to the social sciences. These scholars come at Kuhn's text from a variety of different directions and with multiple aims. Some want to use Kuhn's theory as a model for how to make political science more "scientific." Others think Kuhn's model provides a more positive view of political science vis-à-vis the natural sciences. Since Kuhn himself has explicitly denied that *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* should be read as a prescription for how a field can attain scientific maturity, I will not spend much time on those who read his text proscriptively. Kuhn's study is intended as a description of how scientific communities work in practice, not a set of guidelines. However, there has also been considerable debate about how accurate Kuhn's depiction of science is and whether it is applicable to fields other than the traditional natural sciences.

Gabriel Almond, for example, uses Kuhn in his 1966 call for continuing the trend of creating a more scientific political science. Almond specifically denies Socratic and Aristotelian political thinking the title of "political science" on the basis of its heavy reliance on psychology and sociology. Almond believes that in his lifetime, political science had taken a great step forward with the advent of the systems approach. In Almond's view, this paradigm for the study of politics was clearly more scientific than

its predecessors and signals the nearing maturity of the field.<sup>28</sup> Almond seems to misread Kuhn in two ways. The first is by denying that earlier paradigms, including Aristotelianism, were scientific, because they do not follow the systems approach that was prevalent during his career. Kuhn's theory provides no basis for arguing that one paradigm is more or less "scientific" than another. Second, Almond takes *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* as containing a normative claim, that sciences *should* adopt a unified paradigm if they wish to be "real," i.e., mature sciences. Kuhn explicitly denies such a reading. He was not exploring what scientific communities should do, only what they had done in the past. Kuhn specifically levels these criticisms at those in the social sciences who tried to use his work as a blueprint for how they should catch to other fields.<sup>29</sup>

A more useful appropriation of Kuhn can be found in Sheldon Wolin, who contends that Kuhn's framework is, in fact, very useful for the study of politics. While the history of political thought might not resemble a science in the strict positivist sense, it does if one follows Kuhn's definition. Wolin uses Kuhn to take aim at the (false) notion that there can be no progress in political theory. Part of the blame, according to Wolin, lies with scholars of historical political theory, who are more eager to point out the differences between theories than to trace continuity or progress.<sup>30</sup> Wolin contends that political theorists actually laid the foundations for one another in their work. Under

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Gabriel A. Almond, "Political Theory and Political Science," *The American Political Science Review* 60 (1966): 869-79.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Road Since Structure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Sheldon Wolin, "Paradigms and Political Theories," *Politics and Experience*, ed. Preston King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 139.



Wolin's understanding, the great thinkers of traditional political theory are akin to Kuhn's "revolutionary" scientists:

When applied to the history of political theory, Kuhn's notion of paradigms...invites us to consider Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, and Marx as the counterparts in political theory to Galileo, Harvey, Newton, Laplace, Faraday, and Einstein. Each of the writers in the first group inspired a new way of looking at the political world; in each case their theories proposed a new definition of what was significant for understanding that world; each specified distinctive methods for inquiry; and each of the theories contained an explicit or implicit statement of what should count as an answer to certain basic questions.<sup>31</sup>

These thinkers are noteworthy because they changed the way people (or at least other political theorists) looked at politics. The names of the "normal scientists" who continued work within the frameworks provided by these writers are largely forgotten except by serious scholars of the period in question. Wolin even offers Aristotelian-Thomists of the Middle Ages and Lockean liberals as examples of political thinkers who shared a common paradigm.<sup>32</sup>

In Wolin's view, political scientists do not see the progress in these traditions because, "instead of interpreting past theories as preparing the way for the next phase of political theories, commentators and lecturers tend to underscore the differences between

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<sup>31</sup> Wolin, "Paradigms and Political Theories," p. 140.

<sup>32</sup> Wolin, "Paradigms and Political Theories," p. 141.

the great theorists.”<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, thinkers who practice normal puzzle-solving are dismissed as unoriginal and derivative (and therefore not given much attention). I would add to this explanation the tendency for historians of political thought to defend the work of their particular period as especially valuable. Thus, students of politics fail to see the progress their predecessors have made. In actuality, according to Wolin, there has been a significant accumulation of knowledge in the study of politics.

Paradigms in political theory provide the same sort of basic assumptions and framework for approaching research as in the natural sciences: “A paradigm is not intended to solve all puzzles in advance, but to supply the means for solving them, even if they have not been anticipated.”<sup>34</sup> Wolin then goes on to defend thinkers who apply a paradigm to problems that its originator may never have intended. While some would criticize such thinkers for “distorting” the original paradigm, Wolin argues they are being good scientists, using the paradigm to approach the important political puzzles of their day.

The key insight of *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, according to Wolin’s reading, is the way paradigms are socially enforced and the narrowness of the research they permit. A paradigm does not necessarily win out because it is better than the rest but because it has attracted a critical mass of followers: “Kuhn describes the process of initiation as partly a matter of winning the loyalty of a new generation of scientists to the view of the world embodied in a paradigm, and partly as a matter of enforcing the

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<sup>33</sup> Wolin, “Paradigms and Political Theories,” p. 141.

<sup>34</sup> Wolin, “Paradigms and Political Theories,” p. 142.

authority of the paradigm... upon the initiates.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, the adoption and enforcement of the paradigm is fundamentally a *social* act. The paradigm then sets rather rigid rules for what type of work is to be done. Arguing against those who claim political science to be a young, immature science, Wolin claims that there have been multiple dominant paradigms over the course of its history, starting with Plato and his followers and leading up to the current (at the time of his writing) behaviorist domination.

This application of Kuhn’s theory to political science has not gone unchallenged. Wolin has been criticized for accepting Kuhn’s formulation too uncritically, as well as using Kuhn to defend traditional political theory against modern political science. The first charge is accurate and can be applied to any political scientists who have attempted to adopt Kuhn’s framework. Kuhn himself backed down from some of the more extreme positions taken in *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, such as the complete inability to communicate information between paradigms. However, even a slightly watered down Kuhn can still prove useful to the social sciences. In terms of the relationship between political science and political theory, some of Wolin’s critics have badly misconstrued his work. Jerone Stephens writes:

Wolin claims that behaviorists have misconstrued the nature of traditional theory, and this misunderstanding has in turn misled them about the nature of their own undertaking. By equating behaviorism with Kuhn’s normal science, and traditional theory with extraordinary science, Wolin believes

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<sup>35</sup> Wolin, “Paradigms and Political Theories,” p. 134.

that he can set the behaviorist straight and also correctly point out the vocation of the traditional theorist.<sup>36</sup>

I did not take this to be Wolin's point at all. Wolin uses Kuhn to defend political science vis-à-vis the natural sciences. He contends that the "great thinkers" of political theory are revolutionaries; normal scientists followed in their footsteps, but their work is generally dismissed as derivative. If anyone is to blame for the mistaken belief that there has been no progress in political theory, it is not empirical political scientists but scholars of the history of political thought. Wolin also asserts that the current paradigm for the study of politics is behaviorism, rigidly enforced by university departments. However, Stephens' assertion that Wolin thinks behaviorism is normal science and (contemporary) political theory serves as the creative revolutionary branch of the discipline is entirely false. Wolin simply thought the field was in a state of normal science.

Overall, Wolin's analysis of how Kuhn can be applied to the study of politics is insightful. He does perhaps accept Kuhn's views too uncritically and fail to examine whether the history of science truly matches his description. Additionally, the importance of enforcement in paradigm adoption, while true, may be exaggerated by Wolin. Nevertheless, his contention that great political theorists such as Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, and Locke can be compared to Kuhn's revolutionary scientists places political science (and the history of political thought) in a different light.

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<sup>36</sup> Jerone Stephens, "The Kuhnian Paradigm and Political Inquiry: An Appraisal," *American Journal of Political Science* (1973): 467-488, p. 484.

While Thomas Kuhn offered the first, and perhaps most dogmatic, account of how paradigms function in the sciences, there are alternative versions. In particular, Imre Lakatos proposed a model in which multiple paradigms can coexist within a single field.<sup>37</sup> Unlike Kuhn, Lakatos is more openly prescriptive, advising that new research programs should be nurtured and protected from the strict falsificationists of Popper's ilk. Multiple paradigms working on their separate puzzles, in Lakatos's view, can make for the most productive science. It is Lakatos's view of the scientific community that Terrence Ball adopts in his analysis of progress in the study of politics: "Scientific progress, according to Lakatos, can only be gauged by looking at the successes and failures, not of single theories but of successive series of theories, each sharing common core assumptions."<sup>38</sup> Researchers create a "protective belt" of auxiliary theories which serves to keep the core afloat when it encounters anomalies. As long as the adjustments in a research program are content-increasing, i.e., able "to predict novel facts even as they explain old anomalies," that program can be said to be fruitful.<sup>39</sup> However, research programs can dry up and die out. Both Lakatos and Ball caution against killing off a research program prematurely because it encounters anomalies (Ball suggests that this may have happened to Marxism).<sup>40</sup> Ball's conclusion is a call for tolerance of multiple paradigms or research agendas in political science and a sort of protectionism for

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<sup>37</sup> Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgraves, eds. *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 91-196.

<sup>38</sup> Terrence Ball, "Is There Progress in Political Science?" ed. Terrence Ball, *Idioms of Inquiry: Critique and Renewal in Political Science* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Ball, "Is There Progress...", pp. 24-25.

<sup>40</sup> Ball, "Is There Progress...", pp. 24-25.

budding programs: “We political scientists have not... treated our budding research programs (or traditions) very leniently. On the contrary, we have made them sitting ducks; and, in a discipline which includes many accomplished duck hunters, this has often proved fatal.”<sup>41</sup> This alternative reading concurs with Kuhn on the role of paradigms and its opposition to dogmatic falsificationism, but does not make paradigmatic exclusivity the litmus test for maturity in science.

The general consensus is that Kuhn’s theory of the history of science has at least some applicability to the field of political science. Researchers agree upon a common set of assumptions that are socially enforced and direct future research. Communication between paradigms, while not impossible, is definitely strained, and the subjects of interest are often entirely different. In Kuhn’s view, the presence of multiple competing paradigms is a sign of crisis. Lakatos and Ball actually encourage the flowering of multiple research programs as conducive to scientific productivity. However, the key tension between these schools is not simply whether one or more paradigms are permitted but the aims of their writing; Kuhn is proposing a sociological description of how sciences operate, while Lakatos and Ball are making normative suggestions for how they should operate. Ball’s contention that Marxism was killed off before it had a chance to take root actually supports Kuhn’s thesis that the adherents of a paradigm will try to wipe out or isolate competing viewpoints. For this dissertation, I will be adopting a modified Kuhnian framework. Whether or not the presence of two or more paradigms

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<sup>41</sup> Ball, “Is There Progress...,” pp. 34.

signals a state of crisis and/or immaturity, I will argue that communication between research programs is so troublesome that they may as well be separate subfields.

#### ARISTOTELIANISM AS A POLITICAL PARADIGM

Having established that Kuhn's model of science is useful, if not perfect, how then does it help shed light on medieval Aristotelianism? Medieval scholars have long struggled to explain the sudden adoption of Aristotelian language and (parts of) Aristotelian philosophy by late medieval thinkers. Sheldon Wolin has already proposed that if political scientists adopted a Kuhnian framework, Aristotelianism should be considered one of the paradigms in its history. This is an approach that has been neglected among medievalists. Medieval Aristotelianism fits the key criteria Kuhn lays out for a mature science. Its adherents shared a set of basic assumptions about the world, a language system that facilitated scholarly communication, and agreement on what questions were appropriate subjects for political inquiry. The medieval Aristotelian framework, however, is not straight Aristotelianism, but a uniquely medieval conglomeration, including Christian, Germanic, and Roman elements. However, the reintroduction of Aristotle in the late thirteenth century provided the spark that brought these elements together into a coherent research agenda in politics.

The clearest connection between the various Aristotelian political writers is their frequent citation of Aristotle and use of Aristotelian political language. Antony Black has already documented the explosion in Aristotelian political language in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries and pointed out that using Aristotelian language

did not necessarily limit what any given author could say.<sup>42</sup> However, this language did provide political theorists with their own set of technical jargon. Medieval thinkers were immersed in Aristotle during their training period (most notably at the University of Paris). The vocabulary they thereby acquired could be utilized, and understood, by thinkers from a wide variety of ideological positions. Specifically, medieval Aristotelians adopted Aristotle's six-fold classification of regimes and the definitions for the types of constitutions contained therein. They also adopted the Aristotelian virtue language of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This political jargon served to both facilitate scholarly discourse and identify its users to each other as members of the same community of political scientists.

In addition to political terminology, Aristotle provided his medieval readers with a ready supply of historical *exempla* that would be common knowledge among the community of political scientists. Everyone would recognize the Spartan constitution as a polity or Dionysius as a tyrant. Citations of such passages could provide authoritative illustrations without forcing authors to take the potentially politically dangerous step of commenting directly on current political situations. Like Aristotle's political terminology, these examples both acted as commonly recognized shorthand that political theorists would all understand and identified the writers as a correctly socialized student of politics.

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<sup>42</sup> Antony Black, "Political Languages in Later Medieval Europe." in *The Church and Sovereignty c.590-1918*, D. Wood, ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1991). See also Antony Black, *Political Thought in Europe, 1250-1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).



A paradigm, however, is more than just a language system. These political theorists also shared many basic assumptions about the world. Some came from their reading of Aristotle: political life is natural, virtue can be acquired through education, democracy is a corrupt form of government, etc. Other assumptions grew out of their common Christian religious beliefs: God will punish sinners in the afterlife, men and women have free will, etc. Beliefs such as these did not need to be justified in political works; they could simply be taken for granted. Furthermore, any thinker who openly disagreed with one of these propositions would, at the very least, not be taken seriously by his or her peers.

The ties between medieval Aristotelian thinkers do not stop here. As members of a scientific paradigm, these political thinkers all agreed upon the proper goal for political inquiry: determining the best sort of political regime. The centrality of this particular research question became a hallmark of medieval Aristotelian political inquiry. Maurizio Viroli recognizes this search for the best form of government as a key characteristic of political thought after the dissemination of Aristotle in the West, though his primary interest lies in later European thought:

The rediscovery of the *Politics* helped the students to consider politics not only as the art of ruling the city according to reason and justice but also as the science of the city in general... The focus of political discourse was no longer the ruler but rather the constitution and the collective life of the city. Political

inquiry shifted from the duties and qualities of the political man to the assessment of the comparative merits of political regimes.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the translation of the *Ethics*, and to an even greater extent, the *Politics* fundamentally reshaped how medieval political thinkers approached their work. Political writers seeking to answer Aristotle's main political question- What is the best type of regime?- and employing his framework of classification, in more or less modified ways, can provide scholars with yet another definition of a limited 'medieval Aristotelianism'

As mentioned above, it is the determination to answer the same question and not any particular argumentative position that leads these thinkers into a community of learning. Thomas Kuhn meditated at length about the definition of the scientific community as a circumscribed community of learning. When discussing the relationship between his notion of 'paradigms' and the structure of the scientific community, he stated, "Having isolated an individual specialists' group, I would next ask what its members shared that enabled them to solve puzzles and that accounted for their *relative unanimity in problem-choice* and in the evaluation of problem-solutions."<sup>44</sup> The political thinkers who embraced political Aristotelianism shared ideas about "problem-choice", as well as a set of political concepts that permits communication between theories.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the Aristotelian paradigm served all the major functions outlined by Kuhn. Medieval Aristotelians shared basic assumptions about the political world. They had a

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<sup>43</sup> Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 33.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, "Reflections on My Critics," pp. 231-277, in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*. Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds., p. 271 emphasis added.

technical language system allowing easy communication among scholars. Above all, medieval Aristotelians agreed on the primary aim of political inquiry: determining which type of constitution is best. This Aristotelian framework, adopted by the end of the thirteenth century, was reinforced through the training at medieval universities, which had adopted Aristotle's *Politics* as their primary political text. While earlier political thinkers, such as Thomas Aquinas, had to fight for the acceptability of teaching Aristotle, later medieval theorists could take basic Aristotelian principles for granted. New generations of political scientists were socialized within the medieval Aristotelian paradigm.

Scientific paradigms become dominant when a critical mass of followers unites behind them. Once accepted, the paradigm is then enforced from within the field. There is evidence that this was the case with medieval Aristotelianism. As was already mentioned, Aristotle's political and social works had become standard university texts. Aristotle's authority was almost unquestionable. As later chapters will show in detail, political thinkers who disagreed with each other and with Aristotle all still cite the Philosopher in their work. Disagreements with Aristotle were handled in a variety of ways. One could, either through guile or actual ignorance, misrepresent Aristotle so as to make him agree with the argument. Other writers very deliberately cited the positions Aristotle was arguing against as his own. Some, such as Ptolemy of Lucca, simply promise to explain away the contradiction later and then never do. Some scholars, such as James Blythe, attribute these misuses of Aristotle as the result of simple ignorance or confusion due to Moerbeke's overly literal translation; however, this interpretation does

not give medieval thinkers enough credit. While medievals may have occasionally misunderstood Aristotle's text, there are also many clear cases of manipulation.

In some instances, medieval thinkers were just taking advantage of Aristotle's authority to add legitimacy to their own argument. I would also contend, however, that at least superficial adherence to Aristotelian principles was necessary to be accepted as a genuine political scientist. Although some of Aristotle's theses, the eternity of the universe, for example, were disregarded by medieval thinkers, others, such as the six-fold classification of the good and corrupt forms of government, were almost required political dogma. Those who disagreed with them had to dissemble about their own ideas or manipulate Aristotle's text to minimize any appearance of disagreement. So while the formal institutions of scientific enforcement were only partially established by the fourteenth century, adherence to the medieval Aristotelian paradigm was still being socially enforced. Thinkers had to conform (at least on the surface) or risk exclusion from the community.

## CONCLUSION

Thomas Kuhn's sociologically based approach to the history of science provides a fruitful lens through which to view medieval Aristotelianism. Science, as Kuhn describes it, is not a gradual accumulation of knowledge, but rather sporadic bursts of revolutionary thinking separated by periods of normal science or puzzle-solving. When this model of science is applied the study of politics, political science no longer appears quite so "young" in comparison with the natural sciences. Medieval Aristotelianism can

thus be viewed as one of the paradigms in the history of the study of politics. Its adherents shared technical language, basic assumptions about the political world, and a fundamental agreement on problem-choice. Political thinkers could not openly challenge the authority of Aristotle for fear of exclusion from the intellectual community.

Historians of political thought, such as Maurizio Viroli, have already noted that the translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* in the late thirteenth century preceded an explosion of scholarly interest in politics. Focus shifted from the virtues of the ruler to “the science of the city.”<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, a greater number of treatises became dedicated solely to the subject of politics, and particularly to constitutional arrangements. As Kuhn argued, it is often the adoption of a paradigm that solidifies a group of scholars into a scientific field. The reception of Aristotle seems to have done just that in the Middle Ages.

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<sup>46</sup> Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State*, p. 33.

## CHAPTER III

## ARISTOTLE AND THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF THE POLIS

As mentioned in the previous chapter, medieval Aristotelianism was as much medieval as it was Aristotelian. Several of Aristotle's premises about the nature of the cosmos could not be accepted if one wanted to remain an orthodox Christian. Some compromise was necessary. In addition to their Aristotelian education, medieval Aristotelians typically shared a Judeo-Christian religious background and Roman historical heritage. Yet, despite these multiple influences, Aristotle remains at the heart of this political paradigm. This is because Aristotle's political and social works provided the core assumptions around which political science solidified as a discipline. The *Politics* presents politics as a natural and critical aspect of human life- one certainly worthy of study. In fact, Aristotle presents politics as the highest of all the practical sciences. Having defined politics as "the science of the city," Aristotle then offers a model for how it can be studied. The medieval Aristotelians took Aristotle's claims on the centrality of politics to the good life to heart. They then tried to follow his lead in determining which type of constitution would best allow for human flourishing.

In this chapter, I outline how Aristotle, and the *Politics* in particular, can provide a model for the scientific study of the polis. In Book IV of the *Politics*, Aristotle states that: "It belongs to the same science to study: what the best constitution is, that is to say, what it must be like if it is to be ideal, and if there were no external obstacles. Also, which constitution is appropriate for which city-states. For achieving the best

constitutions is perhaps impossible for many.... [and] which constitution is best given certain assumptions.”<sup>47</sup> Toward this end, much of the *Politics* is devoted to the analysis and evaluation of the different constitutional regimes. Aristotle collects data on existing constitutions, develops a scheme for their classification, selects his criteria for a “best” regime, and then chooses which regimes he thinks are best, both ideally and practically. In this chapter, I argue that this treatise thereby provides a blueprint for political science methodology that will be adopted by political thinkers in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

#### PREVIOUS WORK ON ARISTOTELIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE

The claim that Aristotle offers his readers a “scientific” study of the social and political organization of ancient Greece is not an original one. Several scholars have noted that the empirical approach adopted by Aristotle provides the seeds of an early social science. Andrew Lintott points out that Aristotle’s approach to the study of politics contains multiple important empirical and normative elements: “He is not only seeking the best possible constitution, but also the best constitution possible in light of a city’s circumstances.... It is also true that he buttresses his general statements about human behavior by examples taken from history. However it is ultimately in the light of general ethical and political principles that the range of constitutions is judged.”<sup>48</sup> Lintott agrees that the ultimate purpose of the *Politics* is the discovery of the best constitution,

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<sup>47</sup> 1288b21-25, 28. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998): 101.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Lintott, “Aristotle and Democracy,” *The Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992): 114-128, p. 114.

although this task may not be as simple as it would at first appear. Aristotle is interested in both the theoretically best constitution and how the particular conditions of a given city will affect what is possible. He is interested in empirical explanations of how cities work as well as normative questions about how cities can best direct their lives of their citizens and serves the ends of justice. Aristotle's *Politics*, as Lintott presents it, provides a very thorough constitutional science that address both how politics works and how it should work.

In his comparison of Aristotelian and Hobbesian political thought, Curtis Johnson recognizes the importance of Aristotle's classification and evaluation of constitutions to his overall political thought, saying, "Aristotle's idea of sovereignty is completely entangled with his constitutional taxonomy."<sup>49</sup> Johnson argues that one cannot understand Aristotle's notion of sovereignty outside of this constitutional analysis, nor can one fully understand the constitutions without examining Aristotle's sovereignty. Clifford Bates contends that the discussion of regimes at the beginning of Book III of the *Politics* is the "real beginning" of the work. Bates argues that, since Aristotle's notion of the flaws in human nature prevents him from truly sanctioning the rule of the best man, the *Politics* actually endorses "democracy restrained by the rule of law" as the best system of government.<sup>50</sup> Even if one disagrees with Bates' conclusions on Aristotle's feelings about democracy, one can still agree that constitutional questions form the heart of his political inquiry. Likewise, Stanford Cashdollar freely admits that

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<sup>49</sup> Curtis Johnson, "The Hobbesian Conception of Sovereignty and Aristotle's *Politics*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46 (1985): 329.

<sup>50</sup> Clifford Angell Bates, Jr., *Aristotle's 'Best Regime': Kingship, Democracy, and the Rule of Law* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), esp. p. 215.



“the eight extant books of the *Politics* are ‘about the constitution’ [or] ‘about the best constitution.’<sup>51</sup> Although these scholars are primarily interested in other aspects of Aristotle’s thought, they begin by establishing that constitutions play the central role in the *Politics*.

Looking not just at Aristotle’s thoughts on politics, but on his philosophy more broadly, Jonathan Lear argues that one of Aristotle’s key assumptions about human nature is an inherent drive to discover and understand things. This drive, in Lear’s reading of Aristotle, is satisfied first and foremost through the exercise of our senses: “That we take pleasure in the sheer exercise of our sensory facilities is a sign that we do have a desire for knowledge.”<sup>52</sup> Citing the *Metaphysics*, Lear argues both that human beings are driven to gain knowledge about their world through the use of sensory observation and that this knowledge is desired, not only for instrumental purposes, but for its own sake as well. Lear goes on to show how this understanding of how and why knowledge is obtained underlies Aristotle’s approaches to both the natural and social sciences.

Once again looking at Aristotle’s thought more broadly, Richard Rubenstein’s popular account of Aristotle’s approach to scientific inquiry and its impact on later thinkers praises Aristotle as a foundational figure in the history of science. Rubenstein defends Aristotle’ from modern critics, saying:

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<sup>51</sup> Stanford Cashdollar, “Aristotle’s Politics of Morals” *History of Philosophy* 11 (1973) 145-60.

<sup>52</sup> Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 1.

Aristotle's cosmology was wrong, not 'unscientific.' Like the rest of his system it was based on principles, highly controversial at first, that later became accepted pillars of scientific method: for example, the ideas that the world our senses show us is real, not just a shadow of reality; that humans using their reason are capable of discovering general truths about the world; that understanding phenomena means comprehending relationships of cause and effect; and that natural processes are developmental, revealing to skillful inquirers orderly patterns of growth and change.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, Aristotle can be considered a father of scientific inquiry in general and a proponent of methods that will eventually lead to the growth of modern science.

While Lear and Rubenstein look at Aristotle's philosophy of how we understand things (through empirical observations), Davis Toye examines what political material was actually available to Aristotle. Toye disputes the traditional argument that Aristotle or his students would have traveled to large number of cities to collect their data, believing instead that Aristotle would have relied heavily on literary sources, as well as account from students and other travelers of their native cities.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, Toye does not dispute the idea that Aristotle's political science was based upon observations, even if they were more often than not second hand. Similarly, Bernard Yack, agrees that

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<sup>53</sup> Richard E. Rubenstein, *Aristotle's Children: How Christians, Muslims, and Jews Rediscovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Middle Ages* (New York: Harcourt, 2003), p. 10.

<sup>54</sup> David L. Toye, "Aristotle's Other *Politeiai*: Was the Athenian *Politeia* Atypical?," *The Classical Journal* 94 (1999): 235-253, p. 237.

Aristotle is interested in finding the best form of government, but thinks modern scholars have often misinterpreted his understanding of politics, trying to force Aristotle into a communitarian mold. Yack argues that the “good life” in the polis still allows for a great deal of conflict and disagreement among the citizens.<sup>55</sup>

Even Leo Strauss contends that Aristotle should be considered the founder of the scientific study of politics, although his reasoning is slightly different:

Not Socrates or Plato but Aristotle is truly the founder of political science: as one discipline, and by no means the most fundamental or the highest discipline, among a number of disciplines... Whereas Platonic teaching presents itself necessarily in dialogues, Aristotelian teaching presents itself necessarily in treatises. As regards political things, Aristotle acts directly as the teacher of indefinitely many legislators or statesmen whom he addresses collectively and simultaneously.<sup>56</sup>

While the deductive reasoning of Plato lends itself to the give-and-take of a dialogue format, Aristotle makes observations, evaluates information and reaches conclusions.

Several of the above scholars emphasize the role that observing the realities of the political world plays in Aristotelian political science. Though there may be some debates about where he obtained his data, scholars generally accept an empirical foundation as one of the hallmarks of Aristotle. The *Politics* asks what types of constitutions there are and what they look like in practice. These questions, along with

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<sup>55</sup> Bernard Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal: Community, Justice, and Conflict in Aristotelian Political Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>56</sup> Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1964), p. 21.

Aristotle's attempts to answer them through systematic observations of political phenomena, have led many to grant him the title of first political scientist. However, it can be tempting, especially when one is comparing Aristotle's work to that of Plato, to overemphasize the place of empirics in Aristotelian political thought. Although observation is key to understanding politics, the ultimate goal of Aristotelian political science is still to answer the normative question of which type of regime is best. Stephen Salkever highlights the complexity of Aristotle's goal of both understanding how politics works and determining how it could work better:

If social science were simply a matter of understanding the nomoi of a particular polis, it would not be difficult, 'because it is not hard to have understanding concerning those things which nomoi say.' But since the purpose of political inquiry is not merely interpretive understanding, but evaluation and criticism of nomoi in the light of the possibilities of a good or just political ordering or system of nomoi, it is not so easy.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, the Aristotelian political scientist is not relieved of normative and ethical judgments. Rather, he or she must make these evaluations while keeping in mind what has been learned through the gathering of political observations. As Richard Bodeus argues, Aristotle shows a deep concern for how regimes work in the real world and how they can be improved and protected from corrupting forces. In this

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<sup>57</sup> Stephen G. Salkever, "Aristotle's Social Science," *Political Theory* 9, (1981) 497-508, p. 494. See also Stephen G. Salkever, *Finding the Mean: Theory and Practice in Aristotelian Political Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

way empirical and normative concerns are blended.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, James Schall highlights Aristotle's concern with "what is best" in politics, a question he feels modern political theorists neglect all too often.<sup>59</sup>

Likewise, Mary Nichols is very aware of the complexity of the aims of Aristotle's political science. She argues that Aristotle is fundamentally concerned with how existing regimes can be improved so as to make them closer to an ideal. In order to achieve this goal, Aristotle must understand both what an ideal regime would look like and how the existing, imperfect regimes of the real world operate.<sup>60</sup> Nichols objects to scholars like Ernest Barker, who contends that when Aristotle turns his attention to the analysis of existing regimes and how the statesmen can give their citizens what they desire he "lose[s] all ethical connection."<sup>61</sup> Quite to the contrary, Nichols argues that Aristotle's investigations into the imperfect regimes are driven by his desire to understand how realistic improvements can be made in even the most corrupt constitutions:<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Richard Bodeus, "Law and Regime in Aristotle," Carnes Lord and David O'Connor, eds., *Essays on the Foundation of Aristotelian Political Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 234-48.

<sup>59</sup> James V. Schall, "The Best Form of Government: A Perspective on the Continuity of Political Theory," *The Review of Politics* 40 (1978): 97-123.

<sup>60</sup> Mary P. Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen: A Study of Aristotle's Politics* (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), pp. 86-90.

<sup>61</sup> Ernest Barker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (New York: Dover, 1959), p. 240.

<sup>62</sup> Contrast this with someone like Judith Swanson, who emphasizes Aristotle's fundamental conservatism and reluctance to alter existing constitutions. Judith A Swanson, *The Public and the Private in Aristotle's Political Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), pp. 95-102.

Aristotle is not advocating, as it might appear, that the statesmen study and serve the variety of existing regimes, in contrast to those idealists who seek the single regime that is best. Far from serving the variety of regimes, regardless of their ends, he studies that variety precisely because each regime can be transformed by degrees into a version of that single arrangement.<sup>63</sup>

Nichols firmly advocates the idea that empirical studies of politics are not antithetical to Aristotle's overall normative aims; in fact, they are often necessary.

Multiple scholars have acknowledged Aristotle to be a founding figure in scientific methodology, advocating a process of observation and inference of causal relationships. In the realm of politics, this means that Aristotle wants to observe the different poleis and see how their organization affects the lives of those within them. Yet for Aristotle, political science does not end here. From these empirical observations, Aristotle seeks to draw normative conclusions both about which regime would be best ideally and which is best in practical terms. Although scholars focus on different aspects of Aristotle's method and conclusions, there is still fairly widespread agreement on this basic outline of his political methodology.

#### ARISTOTLE'S *POLITICS* AND THE BEST REGIME

Aristotle begins his most famous political work by positing that every community comes together for the sake of some good. Of these, the city-state is the

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<sup>63</sup> Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen*, p. 88.

highest because it encompasses authority over all the other goods in human life.<sup>64</sup>

Politics, for Aristotle, is not the necessary evil of the neo-Platonic/Augustinian tradition.

Rather, it is a necessary and natural part of the good human life: “For as a human being is the best of all animals when perfected, so when separated from LAW and JUSTICE he is the worst of all.”<sup>65</sup> This elevated role for political activity is one of the hallmarks of Aristotle and his followers in the ancient, medieval and modern world.

Politics is not only posited to be important, but to constitute its own form of knowledge. As Aristotle states in Book I, Chapter I, the city is not just a very large household, and politics is more than an extended form of household rule: “Those, then, who think the positions of Statesman, King, Household Manager, and Master of slaves are the same are not correct. For they hold that each of these differs not in kind, but only in whether the subjects ruled are few or many... But these claims are not true.”<sup>66</sup>

Aristotle then contends that this will be obvious to the reader once we complete a thorough investigation of cities and their composite parts.

Returning to the theme that “[the city] comes to be for the sake of living, but it remains in existence for the sake of living well,” the *Politics* begins a discussion of the many different necessary components of the city. These include the various trades, commerce, the acquisition of wealth and the management of slaves. Most importantly, Aristotle discusses the household and rule within it. Households are the building blocks

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<sup>64</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, C.D.C. Reeve, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), p. 1, 1252a1-6.

<sup>65</sup> *Politics* 1253a32-34, p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> *Politics* 1252a7-10, p. 16.

of which cities are made. Thus, although household management is distinct from politics, it is still a critical aspect of the successful political community.

In Book II of the *Politics*, Aristotle begins his systematic study of constitutions in an effort to find the ideal regime. The first step in this process, however, is tearing apart Plato's ideal city from the *Republic*. Aristotle launches his primary attack on Plato's assertion that women and children should be held in common, contending that the system would be both detrimental to the common good (people would not care for collective goods and children as conscientiously as they would their own) and impractical (people would still suspect which children were theirs). Aristotle also points out that the same group of guardians is constantly in power in the *Republic*, a situation he sees as potentially dangerous, especially if the guardians become unhappy with their lot.<sup>67</sup> Having thus dismissed the notion that Plato has already found the best regime, Aristotle begins his own investigation in earnest.

With assistance from his students, Aristotle had assembled a collection of over one hundred fifty constitutions from surrounding city-states (including some that were proposed but never implemented).<sup>68</sup> The second half of Book II is devoted to examining and evaluating a number of these. Aristotle generally describes each of the different systems of rule and then points out potential flaws and contradictions in them.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Politics*, 1261b16-1266a30, pp. 28-41.

<sup>68</sup> William A. Dunning, "The Politics of Aristotle," *Political Science Quarterly* 15 (1900): 273-307, p. 273. As noted earlier in this chapter, the extent to which Aristotle gathered this information first-hand has been disputed by David Toye.

<sup>69</sup> *Politics*, 1279a22-1280a6, pp. 77-79.



Particular attention is paid to who holds political power in the city. A wide variety of constitutional arrangements are included, each one analyzed with a critical eye.

Aristotle goes about his investigations in a fairly organized manner. First, he explains, one must find a way of classifying the different regime types: “The next thing to investigate is whether we should suppose that there is just one kind of constitution or several, and, if there are several, what they are, how many they are, and how they differ.”<sup>70</sup> Aristotle argues that regimes can vary both by who holds political power and by whether they exercise said power for the common good or for their private benefit. Thus, Aristotle frames his famous six-fold scheme for classifying both good and bad constitutions:

Since ‘constitution’ and ‘governing class’ signify the same thing, and the governing class is the authoritative element in any city-state, and the authoritative element must either be one person, or few, or many, then whenever the one, the few, or the many rule for the common benefit, these constitutions must be correct. But if they aim at the private benefit, whether of the one, the few or the multitude, they are deviations.<sup>71</sup>

The result is that each city can be classified as a monarchy, a tyranny, an aristocracy, an oligarchy, a polity, or a democracy.

The remainder of Book III is spent weighing the benefits (and failures) of these different systems of government. Aristotle wants to find the one that is the most just and conducive to human flourishing. Although his basic scheme allows for only six types of

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<sup>70</sup> *Politics*, 1278b6-8, p. 75.

<sup>71</sup> *Politics*, 1279a 25-31, p. 77.

constitutions, Aristotle acknowledges that there can be variations on these types, as when he compares the different forms of kingship in chapter fourteen, where Aristotle lists no less than five variations on this simplest constitutional form.<sup>72</sup> Aristotle concludes that the best government is one where a person or persons of outstanding virtue rule for the benefit of the whole; yet it is more important to have good laws than a good ruler.<sup>73</sup>

Book IV opens with an extended statement on the aims of political science and what areas of study it should cover:

It is clear that it belongs to the same science to study: [1] What the best constitution is, that is to say, what it must be like if it is to be most ideal, and if they were no external obstacles. Also [2] which constitution is appropriate for which city-states. For achieving the best constitution is perhaps impossible for many; and so neither the unqualifiedly best nor the one that is best in the circumstances should be neglected by the good legislator and true statesman. [3] Which constitution is best given certain assumptions. For a statesman must be able to study how any given constitution might initially come into existence, and how, once in existence, it might be preserved for the longest time... Besides all these things, a statesmen should know [4] which constitution is most appropriate for all city-states.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Politics*, 1284b35-1285b33, pp. 91-93.

<sup>73</sup> *Politics*, 1286a7-20, p. 94.

<sup>74</sup> *Politics*, 1288b 20-30, pp. 101-02.

Thus, Aristotle is concerned with both what regime is best in theory and what is practically possible in a given situation. Normative conclusions, for Aristotle, must be supported with evidence from political life. In this way, he breaks from Plato. Furthermore, while Aristotle includes a fairly broad range of topics in his science of politics, they are all rooted in questions of constitutional design. Although issues such as the personal virtue of rulers and the economic well-being of the city were certainly of concern to Aristotle, they are not, strictly speaking, political science.

Aristotle resumes his investigation by asking what really distinguishes these constitutional forms from one another:

The reason why there are several constitutions is that every city-state has several parts... all city-states are composed of households... within this multitude there have to be some who are rich, some who are poor, and some who are in the middle; and that of the rich and the poor, the one possessing weapons and the other without weapons. We also see that the people comprise a farming part, a trading part, and a vulgar craftsman part...Some times all of these parts participate in the constitution, sometimes fewer of them, sometimes more.<sup>75</sup>

The fundamental divisions within the city, for Aristotle, are class-based, and the distinctions between the constitutions lie in which of these elements (or what combination thereof) holds power.

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<sup>75</sup> *Politics*, 1289b27-34, 1290a3-4, pp. 104-05.

So which of these constitutions is best? Ideally, an individual of supreme virtue, i.e., a true king, would rule over the city to everyone's benefit; however, Aristotle acknowledges that this is unlikely to work in practice.<sup>76</sup> In examining the constitutions of real life cities, Aristotle concludes that most are either oligarchies, democracies, or (most frequently) some combination of the two.<sup>77</sup> It is this mixture of democracy and oligarchy, called polity, that Aristotle endorses as the best practical regime. This regime typically combines elements of democratic law (no property requirements for holding office) with elements of oligarchic law (officials are elected rather than chosen by lot). Polity thus satisfies Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean, since virtue does not lie in the extremes.<sup>78</sup>

Aristotle begins Book IV, Chapter 11 by reiterating the purpose of his political science, particularly as it relates to the practical side of politics:

What is the best constitution and what is the best for most city-states and most human beings, judging neither by virtue that is beyond the reach of ordinary people, nor by a kind of education that requires natural gifts and resources that depend on luck, nor by the ideal constitution, but by a life that most people can share and a constitution in which most city-states can participate?<sup>79</sup>

He then continues the task of answering this question as best he can. The best practical constitution relies not only on balancing the interests of the rich and the poor, but

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<sup>76</sup> *Politics*, 1289a40-b2, p. 103.

<sup>77</sup> *Politics*, 1293b, pp. 114-15.

<sup>78</sup> *Politics*, 1293b21-1294b40, pp. 114-17.

<sup>79</sup> *Politics*, 1295a25-30, p. 118.

requires a strong middle class as well: “Of all citizens, those in the middle survive best in city-states. For neither do they desire other people’s property as the poor do, nor do other people desire theirs... It is clear, therefore, that the political community that depends on those in the middle is best too, and that city-states can be well governed where those in the middle are numerous and stronger.”<sup>80</sup> It is through mixing and moderation that one can achieve a good polis, even in an imperfect world. Aware that the political world and those who inhabit it cannot always meet ideal expectations, Aristotle is still concerned with giving them the best that is possible for them.

Although no fan of democracy, Aristotle acknowledges that including some democratic elements in a mixed regime can improve its stability and effectiveness. The best laws will do a city no good if no one obeys them, and including more of the population in the political process is one way to increase the likelihood that citizens will obey the law.<sup>81</sup> Again, one can see that Aristotle is deeply interested in different constitutions and how they work (or fail to work) in practice. This theme continues through Aristotle’s discussion of specific cities and their constitutions in Book VI. His scientific investigations into the effects of constitutional structures, however, do not signal a break from his earlier normative project. Aristotle is still concerned with what is best, but he also wants to understand how existing political bodies can be made better.<sup>82</sup>

As the above analysis shows, Aristotle’s *Politics* can provide the outline for a political science of comparative constitutional studies. Aristotle classifies cities

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<sup>80</sup> *Politics*, 1295b28-31, 34-7, p. 120.

<sup>81</sup> *Politics*, 1294a3-8, p. 115.

<sup>82</sup> See Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen*, pp. 85-90.

according to who rules and tries to determine which of these systems is best. Yet, this is not as straightforward a task as it might seem. Aristotle is deeply concerned with the practical side of politics. He wants to find not just the ideal best regime, but the regime that will function best in the real world. For this reason, he observes the workings of various constitutional systems and their effects on the citizens who live under them. Aristotle's political science methodology combines normative and empirical elements in an effort to find the best constitution.

#### HOW DOES ARISTOTLE ANSWER HIS OWN QUESTION?

As I am arguing that Aristotle's primary concern in the *Politics* is the discovery of the best sort of regime, it is natural that one would wonder what conclusion he comes to. In my own reading, I see Aristotle endorsing monarchy in an ideal world, but accepting a mixed regime (with a heavy dose of aristocracy) as a more practical solution.<sup>83</sup> [cite] Interpreters of Aristotle in the many centuries since he wrote the *Politics* have often disagreed about this issue, claiming Aristotle's endorsement of political systems ranging from monarchy to empire to republicanism to communitarianism to deliberative democracy. Aristotle's text is in many ways ambiguous enough to allow a variety of different readings.

In particular, recent scholars, such as Andrew Lindsey and Paul Nieuwenburg, have debated what Aristotle might have to say to modern proponents of democracy. Some try to defend him from accusations of elitism, arguing that Aristotle offers

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<sup>83</sup> *Politics*, 1289a26-1289b5, p. 103.

“qualified” support for democracy in the polis.<sup>84</sup> Others are certainly more reluctant to read any support for democracy in Aristotle’s work.<sup>85</sup> One of the more common (and perhaps one of the more fruitful) approaches is to claim that regardless of Aristotle’s actual feeling about democracy, his views on human nature and the proper role of politics in human life provide some valuable lessons for contemporary deliberative democrats.<sup>86</sup> Despite more than two thousand years of analysis, Aristotle’s commentary on the different forms of constitutions still provides ample fodder for scholars of political theory. These debates are, however, largely outside the scope of this project, except to reaffirm that Aristotle’s analysis of what regime type is best is still a central matter of concern in Aristotelian political theory. The medieval thinkers whose work I am analyzing, like their modern counterparts, saw multiple possible answers to the question of Aristotle’s preferred constitution. Thus, whether one believes Aristotle to be a monarchist, republican, or deliberative democrat, his influence on political methodology in the later Middle Ages need not be denied.

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<sup>84</sup> Thomas Lindsey, “Aristotle’s Qualified Defense of Democracy through ‘Political Mixing,’” *The Journal of Politics* 54 (1992): 101-19. Paul Nieuwenburg, “Learning to Deliberate: Aristotle on Truthfulness and Public Deliberation,” *Political Theory* 32 (2004): 449-67.

<sup>85</sup> W.R. Newell, “The Problem of Monarchy in Aristotle’s *Politics*,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 40 (1987), pp. 159-78. Andrew Lintott, “Aristotle and Democracy,” *The Classical Quarterly* 42 (1992): 114-28.

<sup>86</sup> Miriam Galston, “Taking Aristotle Seriously: Republican-Oriented Legal Theory and the Moral Foundation of Deliberative Democracy,” *California Law Review* 82 (1994): 329-99; Susan Bickford, “Beyond Friendship: Aristotle on Conflict, Deliberation, and Attention,” *The Journal of Politics* 58 (1996): 398-421; Martha Nussbaum, “Aristotle, Politics, and Human Capabilities: A Response to Antony, Arneson, Charlesworth, and Mulgan,” *Ethics* 111 (2000): 102-40.

OTHER TOPICS ADDRESSED IN THE *POLITICS*

My reading of Aristotle places the question of regime type (both ideal and practical) at the heart of the *Politics*; however, not everyone accepts that this is Aristotle's central political concern. Alternative accounts have proposed defining the nature of the city or the nature of the citizen as the key to Aristotelian political science.<sup>87</sup> Others argue that Aristotle is either continuing Plato's project of finding the meaning of justice or offering a critique of the Platonic project, although the latter would certainly at least be related to my account of the aims of the *Politics*.<sup>88</sup>

With any thinker as complex and multi-faceted as Aristotle it is a nearly impossible to determine with any certainty which topic they thought to be the *most* important. Yet few would deny that Aristotle thought the question of determining the best regime to be a critical one, as Aristotle said so himself in Book I of the *Politics*.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics* reaffirms this supposition:

Then let us study the collected political systems, to see from them what sorts of things preserve and destroy cities, and political systems of different types; and what causes some cities to conduct politics well, and some badly. For

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<sup>87</sup>Examples of this approach include, but are not limited to Robert Devlin, "The Good Man and the Good Citizen in Aristotle's *Politics*," *Phronesis* 18 (1973): 71-79. Curtis Johnson, "Who is Aristotle's Citizen?," *Phronesis* 29 (1984): 73-90. Wayne H. Ambler, "Aristotle's Understanding of the Naturalness of the City," *The Review of Politics* 47 (1985): 163-85. David Keyt, "Aristotle and Anarchism," *Reason Papers* 18 (1993): 133-52.

<sup>88</sup>Delba Winthrop, "Aristotle and Theories of Justice," *The American Political Science Review* 72 (1978): 1201-1216; Darrell Dobbs, "Aristotle's Anticommunism," *American Journal of Political Science* 29 (1985): 29-46; William Mathie, "Political and Distributive Justice in the Political Science of Aristotle," *The Review of Politics* 49 (1987): 59-84.

<sup>89</sup>*Politics*, 1288b21-25, p. 28.



when we have studied these questions, we will perhaps grasp better what sort of political system is best; how each political should be organized so as to be best; and what laws and habits it should follow.<sup>90</sup>

Even if one does not accept the centrality of constitutional evaluation in Aristotle's political investigations, medieval political thinkers still interpreted his work as such, as the following chapters will demonstrate.

Another issue over which scholars of Aristotle frequently come to blows is whether he is more concerned with which constitution is best unqualifiedly or with which is best, given the particular circumstances of a city. Is Aristotle a realist or an idealist? One point of contention is whether Aristotle's conception of the "natural" city still allows room for conflict. Although few scholars will actually claim that Aristotle is a utopian, they seem fond of accusing other scholars of reading him as such. To what extent does Aristotle's politics account for the disagreement? Alasdair MacIntyre and Thomas W. Smith both see Aristotle's ideal polis as one in which conflict over the common good is minimal at least.<sup>91</sup> This approach has been criticized by those scholars who see Aristotle as making ample allowance for conflict within the political community.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 1181b18-24, p. 171.

<sup>91</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 146-64. Thomas W. Smith, "Aristotle on the Conditions for and Limits of the Common Good," *The American Political Science Review* 93 (1999): 625-36.

<sup>92</sup> Bernard Yack, "Community and Conflict in Aristotle's Political Philosophy," *The Review of Politics* 47 (1985): 92-112. Ronald J. Terchek and David K. Moore, "Recovering the Political Aristotle: A Critical Response to Smith," *The American Political Science Review* 94 (2000): 905-911. See also Thomas W. Smith, "Ethics and

These debates about the extent to which Aristotle's political theory takes conflict and disagreement into account stem from a larger dispute about Aristotle's methodology. While some see Aristotle as continuing a fairly Platonic project of finding the best *ideal* regime, others argue that his interest in finding the best *practical* regime signals a break from his former teacher.<sup>93</sup> In my mind, this conflict is rather overblown. Aristotle is interested in both the best ideal regime and the best possible regime, and these two goals are in no way conflicting. As Robert Barlett points out while defending Aristotle's from modern critics:

The 'imagined' republic or 'best regime' of Books VII and VIII of Aristotle's *Politics*...shows Aristotle to be in no sense naïve or that he knows full well the ways of the world; that although Aristotle does indeed look to moral virtue as the standard by which to judge... a political community, he is not only aware of the difficulties of that standard but attempts in a number of ways to cope with them.<sup>94</sup>

Aristotle is ultimately concerned with both ideal politics and the workings of politics in the real world. There is no conflict. Likewise, he is able to combine a deep interest in normative questions with thorough empirical investigation.

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Politics: A Response to Terchek and Moore," *The American Political Science Review* 94 (2000): 913-918.

<sup>93</sup> Richard Mulgan, *Aristotle's Political Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).  
William W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle's Practical Side: On His Psychology, Ethics, Politics and Rhetoric* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

<sup>94</sup> Robert C. Bartlett, "The 'Realism' of Classical Political Science," *American Journal of Political Science* 38 (1994): 381-402.

Thus Aristotle is a realist, and yet is still interested in the ideal regime. He tries to understand how politics works and how constitutions affect the lives of those that live under them in order to determine which is best ideally. And he seeks to understand the ideal constitution and how it would work in order to determine how real world political systems could be improved. These tasks are complimentary, not contradictory.<sup>95</sup>

Medieval thinkers looking to Aristotle as a model could emphasize either aspect of his political science. Although many focused on the “ideal” constitution, like Aristotle, they still did so bearing in mind the realities of political life.

## CONCLUSION

From this chapter, one should be able to see how the *Politics* can provide a model for the conduct of political science. Aristotle approaches the study of the city driven by the normative goals of identifying which regime is best and determining how existing cities could be made better. Yet these conclusions are always based on his real world political observations. Normative and empirical approaches to politics are not in conflict for Aristotle. While addressing both normative and empirical concerns, Aristotle’s political science focuses on questions of regime type. The central question addressed in the *Politics* is, “What regime is best?,” and this question is approached from both idealist and realist perspectives. The resulting “comparative constitutional studies” forms one prototype for political science research. Thinkers in the Middle Ages

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<sup>95</sup> C.J. Rowe, “Aims and Methods in Aristotle’s *Politics*,” *The Classical Quarterly* 27 (1977): 159-72.

who were exposed to Aristotle's political and social thought embraced this model of political science and made it their own.

Although questions of regime type, in my reading, form the heart of the *Politics*, they are not the only issues addressed in this text. Scholars have offered multiple alternative objectives for Aristotle's writing, including discovering the meaning of justice or the nature of citizenship. Yet even if one disagrees with my assessment of Aristotle's primary purpose, the following chapters will hopefully show that medieval Aristotelians read him as such. The reintroduction into the West of Aristotle's major moral and political works brought the subject of politics to the forefront of many scholars' minds. Political science came to be viewed as a distinct and important discipline. When medieval thinkers themselves took up the study of the city and its workings, they turned to the *Politics* as their model.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ARISTOTELIAN TRANSITION

As the previous chapter shows, Aristotle's *Politics* can provide a model for a political science centered on comparative constitutional studies. However, the political Aristotelianism of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries did not result solely and immediately from the reintroduction of this one text. Aristotle's model of political science took time to gain adherents. Furthermore, the emergence of Aristotelian political philosophy in the west was a gradual process. Roman, Christian, Jewish, and Arab sources had provided indirect access to the ideas of this ancient thinker long before Moerbeke's Latin translation was completed. And most of Aristotle's other important works became available first. Much of the contents of the *Politics* would not, therefore, have been a complete surprise to its medieval readers.<sup>96</sup> How, then, can one try to determine how strong an effect the *Politics* actually had on medieval political thought?

This chapter will explore the mid thirteenth-century political thinker Brunetto Latini and his contribution to the development of western political thought. Latini occupies a particularly interesting place in this history, writing on the brink of the reintroduction of Aristotle's *Politics* in the thirteenth century. Latini was born circa 1220 and was best known in his lifetime as a teacher and scholar of rhetoric in his native Florence. His most famous political work, *Les Livres du Tresor*, was completed around 1260. At that time, Latini was quite familiar with the text of the *Nicomachean Ethics*

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<sup>96</sup> See Cary J. Nederman, "Aristotelianism and the Origins of Political Science in the Twelfth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52, (1991): 179-94.

(translated in 1247) but had no access to that of the *Politics* (the complete translation of which was made available sometime between 1260 and 1265). Thus, Latini's writing provides the scholar of the Middle Ages with a unique opportunity. This chapter will examine *Les Livres du Tresor* to determine to what extent Latini was able to follow an Aristotelian political paradigm without any direct access to the *Politics* itself. This should shed some light on the process by which Aristotle's model of political science was adopted and the specific role of the *Politics* therein.

After exploring Latini's work, this chapter will briefly discuss the process through which the Latin text of the *Politics* became available in the West and how it was initially received. It will look at the work of some of the early commentators and their attempts to make sense out of William of Moerbeke's unwieldy translation. I then make the case that these commentaries, while important to the development of the Aristotelian paradigm, do not constitute Aristotelian political science themselves. These early thinkers are busy defining and defending Aristotle's political ideas, not using his framework to make their own political statements.

#### BRUNETTO LATINI: PREHUMANIST AND DEFENDER OF LIBERTY

Scholarship on the political thought of the later Middle Ages far too often neglects to offer any serious consideration of the Florentine republican, Brunetto Latini. Those who do mention his work often present him simply as a mere precursor of the more thorough Italian humanists of the Renaissance or limit their interest to Latini's possible influence on his protégé, Dante Alighieri (or to Dante's placement of Latini

among the sodomites in the *Divine Comedy*).<sup>97</sup> While these two veins of scholarship are not without merit, Latini's political thought deserves more substantial consideration on its own.

One reoccurring theme in the scholarship on Latini is the role he played in both reviving interest in classical texts and in connecting these ancient ideas to contemporary politics. It should therefore not be surprising that Quentin Skinner touches on both aspects in his discussion of Latini's work. He first notes Latini's extensive use of classical, particularly Roman, sources in his discussions of politics and rhetoric. According to Skinner, these classical sources helped to "enrich" the tradition of political writing inherited the early and high Middle Ages.<sup>98</sup> Brunetto Latini's other contribution comes in the form of a remarkable defense of republican liberty. This includes both a resounding preference for popular rule over that of kings or princes and an urging of the citizenry to respect the traditional republican values and put the common welfare ahead of their private interest.<sup>99</sup> For Latini, Skinner argues, this emphasis on virtue leads him to value a potential leader's personal qualities rather than wealth or social status, reinforcing his republican ideology.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> In this latter vein, see Blake Leland, "'Siete Voi Qui, Ser Brunetto?'" Dante's *Inferno* 15 as a Modernist Topic Place," *ELH* 59 (1992): 965-86; Joseph Pequigney, "Sodomy in Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*," *Representations* 36 (1991): 22-42; Elio Costa, "From *locus amoris* to Infernal Pentecost: the Sin of Brunetto Latini," *Quaderni d'italianistica* X (1989); Richard Kay *Dante's Swift and Strong*, (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1978), pp. 3-24.

<sup>98</sup> Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Volume One: The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 39.

<sup>99</sup> Skinner, *Foundations*, pp. 41-44. Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics, Volume II: Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 27-28, 47-48.

<sup>100</sup> Skinner, *Foundations*, pp. 45-46.

Like Skinner, other scholars have acknowledged the important role Latini played in returning classical texts to a place of importance in late medieval learning. According to Charles Davis, “The appearance of Brunetto Latini was accompanied by a distinct advance in general culture and by a new enthusiasm for the ancient authors.”<sup>101</sup> As Skinner pointed out, this shift toward classical authors was not without substantive effect. Latini was a teacher of rhetoric who held to the Roman ideal that the rhetorician was one who led his fellow citizens toward a more just and virtuous political life.<sup>102</sup> Maurizio Viroli also views Brunetto Latini as playing a critical role in the return to classical ideas about politics in the later Middle Ages (despite his writing before the reintroduction of Aristotle’s *Politics*). Viroli contrasts this ancient/medieval view, in which politics is about ruling according to justice and right reason, with the more realist views of the early modern period.<sup>103</sup>

Similarly, Jerreld Seigel argues that Latini’s study of classical sources, and of classical rhetoric in particular, shapes his political views. Seigel finds Latini to be an important predecessor of later humanist thinkers, but also cautions against overplaying the similarities between medieval and Renaissance rhetoricians:

Latini makes rhetoric the foundation of politics. Moreover, he specifically embraces the ideal of the combination of rhetoric and philosophy, making use of Cicero’s *De inventione*. It would seem therefore that many of the

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<sup>101</sup> Charles T. Davis, “Education in Dante’s Florence,” *Speculum* 40, (1965): 419.

<sup>102</sup> Davis, “Education in Dante’s Florence,” p. 420.

<sup>103</sup> Maurizio Viroli, “The Revolution in the Concept of Politics,” *Political Theory* 20 (1992): 475-76. See also Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).



humanists' deepest interests had surprisingly clear precedents. Nevertheless, the culture of a man like Latini was very different from that of Petrarch.<sup>104</sup>

For Seigel, although Latini borrowed ideas from classical thinkers like Cicero and Aristotle, he still lacked the historical appreciation of their work that would appear in the Renaissance. Likewise, James Blythe points out the ways in which Latini resembles later medieval thinkers, while still maintaining a vigilant awareness of how he is not like modern (or even later medieval) political theorists.<sup>105</sup>

Brunetto's political theory is not focused solely on the importance of justice in government but offers a form of republicanism with a strong democratic element, as his preferred constitutional form. John Hine Mundy notes that Latini is one of several late medieval thinkers who are concerned with including "the people" in the politics. According to Mundy, Latini offers "a stronger democratic voice" than Ptolemy of Lucca and continually asserts the superiority of republican rule over other forms.<sup>106</sup> Marvin Becker similarly places Latini among those medieval thinkers who asserted that an individual's character and actions were truer marks of nobility than one's birth. He thus takes the merchant values of his native Florence into the political arena, where he argues against aristocratic dominance.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Jerrold E. Seigel, "'Civic Humanism' or Ciceronian Rhetoric? The Culture of Petrarch and Bruni," *Past & Present* 34 (1966): 39.

<sup>105</sup> James M. Blythe, "'Civic Humanism' and Medieval Political Thought," in *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 30-74, esp. p. 56.

<sup>106</sup> John Hine Mundy, "In Praise of Italy: The Italian Republics," *Speculum* 64 (1989): 825.

<sup>107</sup> Marvin B. Becker, "Dante and his Literary Contemporaries as Political Men," *Speculum* 41 (1966): 666. An early examination of Latini's immersion in classical

Although admitting that Latini's *Book of the Treasure* does not provide a true "political theory," John Najemy still think that Latini offers important political lessons for the citizens of Florence. According to Najemy, Brunetto Latini viewed politics as an "art" and its practitioners as "artisans." Latini then combines his understanding of Aristotelian virtue ethics with his experiences in the Florentine Commune to come to his own conclusions on how the political artisan should operate.<sup>108</sup> Najemy provides one of the more thorough investigations of Latini's political thought in the English language tradition, though he is careful not to exaggerate Latini's originality or prowess as a philosopher. Although Najemy certainly give Latini more attention than most scholars, his conclusion still focuses on how Latini and his writing may have shaped later Florentines.

Although full-scale studies of Brunetto Latini as a political thinker seem to be rare (especially in the English language), he is still frequently cited by scholars as a early advocate of participatory politics. For example, Jean Campbell's study of the political ideals of Ambrogio Lorenzetti's frescos cite Brunetto Latini as the primary literary inspiration.<sup>109</sup> These studies are generally not interested in Latini himself, but in the ways he prefigures the republican and humanist ideas of the Italian Renaissance. In a somewhat similar vein, Charles Davis offers Latini as an example of how Hans Baron's theories about the shift from medieval to Renaissance thinking were, at the very least,

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sources, though with a less political bent can be found in Francis J. Carmody, "Latin Sources of Brunetto Latini's World History," *Speculum* 11 (1936): 359-70.

<sup>108</sup> John M. Najemy, "Brunetto Latini's 'Politica,'" *Dante Studies* 112 (1994): 33-51. See especially pp. 39-42.

<sup>109</sup> C. Jean Campbell, "The City's New Clothes: Ambrogio Lorenzetti and the Poetics of Peace," *The Art Bulletin* 83, (2001): 240-58.

off by at least a century. According to Davis, Latini clearly recognized the centrality of political life that Baron identifies as a hallmark of later thinkers, “For Brunetto, education in general, and rhetorical education in particular, was a preparation for politics.”<sup>110</sup>

Cary Nederman has criticized the tendency in Latini scholarship to focus solely on the classical sources that influenced Latini’s republican thought. Nederman points out that, in addition to classical texts on the virtues of republican government, Latini also found inspiration in the commercial environment of northern Italy. Latini not only contradicts Aristotle to say that commercial interactions can form the basis of just and friendly relations between citizens, he actually makes economic activity the hallmark of the good city.<sup>111</sup> According to Nederman, Brunetto Latini focuses on the material needs of citizens and asks what type of government can best meet those needs; his answer is a republic similar to those found in the cities of northern Italy.

### *LI LIVRES DOU TRESOR*

Having looked at previous scholarship on Brunetto Latini and his impact on later thinkers, this chapter will now turn to the text of *Li Livres dou Tresor* itself. How well does it fit the model of Aristotelian political science that I have previously laid out? Does Latini employ Aristotelian political language in his arguments? Does he attempt to

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<sup>110</sup> Charles T. Davis, *Dante’s Italy and Other Essays*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), p. 173.

<sup>111</sup> Cary J. Nederman, “Commercial Society and Republican Government in the Late Middle Ages: The Economic Dimensions of Brunetto Latini’s Republicanism,” *Political Theory* 31 (2003): 349-50.

classify cities based on their constitutional arrangements? Above all, does Latini engage in the medieval Aristotelian project of trying to determine which of these constitutional systems is best?

The primary source for Brunetto Latini's political thought is his encyclopedic *Li Livres dou Tresor*, or *The Book of the Treasure*. This compendium was intended to offer a one-stop source for human knowledge. Book I covers the natural history of the world, clearly a very broad topic and one that Brunetto took to include both the natural sciences and the history of human civilization from Biblical creation to his present day. Book II covers the subject of morality and is taken mostly from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Book III is where political issues really come into play; here, Latini delves into the subjects of politics and rhetoric. It is Book III that has helped Latini earn his reputation both as a scholar of Ciceronian rhetoric and as a defender of one of the most inclusive notions of citizenship and communal government found in the Middle Ages.

Writing just on the cusp of the reintroduction of Aristotle's *Politics*, Latini provides a very interesting case study. His *Li Livres dou Tresor* can help show us just how much of the Aristotelian paradigm was available before the *Politics* and what elements were still missing. In some ways, Latini shares a great deal with the Christian Aristotelians of the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Much of the moral and political vocabulary used is the same. For example, in Book II, Brunetto discusses the virtues; the list he provides includes the standard virtues of medieval Aristotelianism: Courage, Temperance, Magnificence, Magnanimity, etc. Furthermore, when giving a general definition of virtue, Latini turns to the doctrine of the mean, explaining: "Every

artisan strives to maintain the middle ground in his art and to abandon the extremes, that is, too little or too much, and moral virtue is in those things in which too little and too much are despised and the middle is worthy of our esteem; therefore, virtue is a state of character through will... and it resides in the middle according to us.”<sup>112</sup> Thus, the language that Latini uses when discussing the moral virtues is fundamentally Aristotelian in nature. This is not surprising, given that Book II of *Li Livres dou Tresor* is at times little more than a summary of and commentary on Aristotle’s *Ethics*.

The use of Aristotelian terminology is not, however, limited to the discussion of moral virtues. Latini’s breakdown of constitutional regimes also seems to be at least partly derived from his understanding of Aristotle. In Chapter 44 of Book II he describes the types of lordship: “There are three types of lordship: one of kings, the second of men, and the third of communes, which is best of all. Each type has its opposite, for the king’s lordship has its opposite in the lordship of the tyrant...”<sup>113</sup> While the description that Brunetto gives of how each type of good regime can decay does not entirely match that of Aristotle (the rule of “good men” becomes a commune rather than an oligarchy), his notion of the different types of good and bad regimes seems remarkably similar in

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<sup>112</sup> Brunetto Latini, *Li Livres dou Tresor*, Spurgeon Baldwin and Paul Barrette, eds. (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003), II.15.3, pp. 153-54. English translations in this paper will follow that of *The Book of the Treasure (Li Livres dou Tresor)*, trans. Paul Barrette and Spurgeon Baldwin (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993). Hereafter cited as *Tresor*. “Et tous arthier s’esforcent de tenir le mi en leur ars & deguerpir les estremités, ce est poi & trop, & le vertu moral est en talc hoses en cui lou poi & lou trop sont desprissables & lou mi est prisables; donques est virtue uns habis par volonté & demure en lo mi qui est segont nos.”

<sup>113</sup> *Tresor*, II.44.1. p. 179. “Seignourie sont de trios manieres: l’une est des rois, la seconde est des hons, la tierce est des communes, laquele est la très meilleur entre ces autres. & cascune maineiere a son contraire, car la seignourie dou [roi...] tirant...”

form to that found in other medieval Aristotelians. Constitutions are classified according to who rules and whether they do so virtuously. Despite not having direct access to the *Politics*, Brunetto Latini seems to have employed much of the technical language of political Aristotelianism, one important criterion for membership in the political Aristotelian “scientific community.”

Additionally, Brunetto Latini shares with Aristotle (and with several medieval Aristotelians) the idea that human knowledge could be divided into the theoretical and practical disciplines.<sup>114</sup> This division in knowledge is paralleled by a division in virtues. As Latini writes, “The very first knowledge is theoretical, and this is the very science which teaches us first the subject, that is, to know and be acquainted with the nature of all things celestial and terrestrial.”<sup>115</sup> Latini then goes on to discuss theology, physics, and mathematics and their place in human learning.<sup>116</sup> In regard to practical knowledge, Brunetto states: “The second branch of philosophy is the practical one, and it teaches us what to do and what not to do.”<sup>117</sup> Among the practical subjects, politics is “without a doubt... the highest wisdom and most noble profession there is among men.”<sup>118</sup> This

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<sup>114</sup>Cary J. Nederman, “The Meaning of ‘Aristotelianism’ in Medieval Moral and Political Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 57 (1996): 563-85.

<sup>115</sup>*Tresor*, I.3.1, p. 3. “Toute la premiere, ce est teorique, & est cele prope sciense que nos enseigne la premiere question, de savoir & de conoistre les natures de toutes choses celestiaus & terreines.”

<sup>116</sup>*Tresor*, I.3.2-8, pp. 3-4.

<sup>117</sup>*Tresor*, I.4.1, p. 4. “Practique est la segonde sciense de philosophie, qui nos enseigne que l’en doit fere & que non.”

<sup>118</sup>*Tresor*, I.4.5, p. 4. “sana faille...la plus haute esciences dou plus noble meistier qui soit entre les homes.”

division of learning is consistent with medieval Aristotelian views, though not a conclusive test of whether a thinker was, in fact, “Aristotelian” as I am using the term.<sup>119</sup>

Like Ptolemy of Lucca, who will be discussed at length in Chapter V, Brunetto Latini uses this Aristotelian language to make arguments that support the republican traditions of his native Italy. These republican arguments were often not particularly Aristotelian in their thrust. In particular, Latini saw the mechanical arts as a vital and valuable part of the civic community, a claim that Aristotle would not necessarily support. Likewise, commercial interactions are praised as avenues for the exercise of virtues, such as justice; as Brunetto writes: “Citizens who live together in a city serve one another, for if a man needs something another person has, he receives it and gives him his reward and his payment according to the quality of the thing until there is a just middle ground between them.”<sup>120</sup> Cary Nederman has discussed how Latini’s “commercial republicanism” contrasts with Aristotle and displays a “valorization of mechanical occupations” evident in medieval literature from the twelfth century onwards.<sup>121</sup> Thus, one can see that Brunetto Latini was just as comfortable citing Aristotle while arguing a contrary position as Ptolemy of Lucca would be half a century

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<sup>119</sup> See Bertelloni, Francisco, “Les Schèmes de la *Philosophia Practica* Antérieurs à 1265: Leur Vocabulaire Concernant la *Politique* et leur Rôle dans la Réception de la *Politique* d’Aristote,” in *L’élaboration du Vocabulaire Philosophique au Moyen Âge*. Jacqueline Hamesse and Carlos Steele, eds. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 171-202

<sup>120</sup> *Tresor*, II.29.1, p.168. “Li citains, ciaux qui habitant ensemble en une ville, s’entreservent li uns a l’autre; car [si] uns homs a mestier des choses d’un autre, si entrement, & li rent son guererdon & son paiement segont la qualité de la chose, jusque tant qu’I soient en droite moieneté entr’aus.”

<sup>121</sup> Nederman, “Commercial Society and Republican Government in the Latin Middle Ages,” p. 649.

later.<sup>122</sup> Latini's disagreement with Aristotle on political matters, such as who should be counted as a full citizen and how political decisions can best be made, does not exclude him from the category of "medieval Aristotelian" under my definition.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *Les Livres dou Tresor* is a compendium and contains information on a variety of subjects. Many of his discussions of politics in Book III concentrate on the particulars of how one should administer the city. Topics such as how the new executive should be informed that he has won the election and how he should travel to the city and take his oath of office are discussed at length.<sup>123</sup> Although these subjects may not typically be considered the stuff of serious political philosophy, throughout Brunetto's discussion, he continually draws attention to the fact that the lord's power is granted by the people and is only legitimate when exercised in accordance with the local laws of the city.<sup>124</sup>

While I have shown that Brunetto Latini was able to deploy a great deal of Aristotelian political language despite not having direct access to the text of the *Politics*, the question still looms: Did Brunetto Latini pursue an Aristotelian research agenda? According to the definition of medieval Aristotelianism offered earlier in this dissertation, one must determine whether the main goal of Brunetto's work was to establish what is the best sort of regime. Constitutional questions formed the heart of

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<sup>122</sup> Like Ptolemy of Lucca, much of Latini's republican influence seems to come from ancient Roman sources, Cicero foremost among them. In Book III, Latini's discussion of Cicero's rhetoric not only praises the ancient Roman's use of language, but acknowledges his political wisdom in fearing the Catilinian conspiracy and the rise of Julius Caesar. See *Tresor*, III. 34.

<sup>123</sup> *Tresor*, III. 77-83.

<sup>124</sup> See Najemy, "Brunetto Latini's 'Politica.'"



later Aristotelian political science and are, not surprisingly, also present in Latini's work. In Book II, Chapter 44, Brunetto Latini writes: "There are three types of lordship: one of kings, the second of men, and the third of communes, *which is the best of all.*"<sup>125</sup> Although this sentence is not equal to the lengthy defense of republicanism found in a thinker such as Ptolemy of Lucca, the question of constitutional form is still present. Likewise, in Book III Brunetto Latini again briefly takes up the subjects of different types of regimes:

These [governments of cities] are of two types, one of which exists in France and in other countries, who are subject to the lordship of kings and of other perpetual princes who sell the office of magistrate and give it to those who seek it... The other kind is in Italy, for the citizens and the city-dwellers and the communities of cities elect as magistrates and lords those they consider to be better and more profitable to the common good of the city and all its subjects...<sup>126</sup>

Here, one can see Latini's general supposition that those cities whose people elect their leaders will be better ruled. Yet, once again, the discussion of constitutional types and their merits is rather brief.

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<sup>125</sup> *Tresor*, II.44.1, p.179. Emphasis is mine. 'Seignourie sont de trios manieres: l'une est des rois, la seconde est des hons, la tierce est des communes, laquele est la très meilleur entre ces autres.'

<sup>126</sup> *Tresor*, III. 73.5-6, pp. 363-64. "& cil sont en dui mainieres, un qui sont en France & as autres païs, qui sont sommis a la seignorie des roi & des autres princes perpetual qui vendent les provestés & les baillent a ciaux qui plus les chacent.... [L'autre est en Ytaile, que li citain et li borgois] & les chomunités de villes exlissent lor poesté & lor seignor tel come il cuident qu'il soit meillor & plus profitable au comun pro de la ville & de tos ses subjés."

In contrast to an earlier thinker, such as John of Salisbury,<sup>127</sup> Brunetto Latini does not take one regime form for granted, but rather considers which is best. Still, I think it would be disingenuous to claim that determining the best type of constitution was the overriding aim of *Li Livres dou Tresor*. As the following chapters will show, mature Aristotelian political scientists focus more clearly on this single topic. For example, *De regimine principum* (at least from the point that Ptolemy takes over authorship) provides an organized line of reasoning for why republicanism is the best form of government and why Republican Rome, in particular, is the best example thereof. *Li Livres dou Tresor*, on the other hand, is a more rambling text, addressing many questions, political and otherwise.<sup>128</sup> Although Latini does discuss constitutional forms and chooses one he thinks is best, constitutional forms are not so clearly the heart of his argument, as they are in Ptolemy's text. The Aristotelian constitutional question is, therefore, present but not central in his treatise.

#### DOES BRUNETTO LATINI QUALIFY AS A MEDIEVAL ARISTOTELIAN?

Based on the above analysis, I would conclude that Brunetto Latini represents an transitional stage in the Aristotelianization of political thinking in the thirteenth century. In some ways, *Li Livres dou Tresor* resembles later works of the Aristotelian political tradition. Much of the moral and political language, for example, is derived from that

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<sup>127</sup> See John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: On the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, Cary J. Nederman, trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>128</sup> See, for example, I.16, "Memory and reason"; I.179, "Weasels"; II.104 "True friendship"; III.88 "How the lord must honor foreign messengers and ministers."

found in Aristotle and his commentators. Likewise, Latini utilizes the division of learning into the theoretical and practical disciplines, a feature of medieval Aristotelian thinking that is not even found in the early fourteenth-century theory of Ptolemy of Lucca. Overall, Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Tresor* contains a remarkable number of Aristotelian elements, especially considering it was written before the dissemination of Aristotle's *Politics* in the west.

Regarding the research question of *Li Livres dou Tresor*, my results are mixed. Brunetto Latini does address the issue of which type of constitutional regime is best and gives his readers a clear answer (communal government). This represents a significant step. Latini feels a need to discuss the different constitutions and offer his opinion on the best one. Brunetto Latini's constitutional theory seems thin, at best. There is comparatively little discussion of *why* communal government is the best form or of the strengths and weaknesses of the various constitutional forms. Furthermore, saying that finding the best constitution is the primary aim of *Li Livres dou Tresor* would be a stretch. Latini considers many problems in this work, and his discussion of constitutions is only one small part. Unlike later medieval Aristotelians, arguing for his preferred constitutional form is not the central task of Latini's work.

This chapter has shown how, with some help from the philosophy of science literature, one can gain better leverage on the question of who in the Middle Ages was really an Aristotelian. *Li Livres dou Tresor* falls into an intermediate category, addressing the primary Aristotelian political question, but not making that its overarching aim, all while employing Aristotelian political language. Through this

analysis I hope to have not only demonstrated how an Aristotelian political “research agenda” is a useful way of looking at medieval Aristotelianism, but also to have shed some greater light on the specific role of the *Politics* in transforming western political thought in the Middle Ages. Though much of the language of Aristotelian political argument seems to have been available prior to the dissemination of William of Moerbeke’s translation of the *Politics*, it does seem that the *Politics* played a key role in making the constitutional issue the primary (if not the only) legitimate question of later medieval Aristotelian political theory and giving medieval thinkers a clear model for how to conduct political science.

#### THE TRANSLATION OF THE *POLITICS* AND ITS IMMEDIATE RECEPTION

Around the time that Latini completed his *Li Livres dou Tresor*, the complete Latin translation of Aristotle’s *Politics* was made available to western Europe. This happened no later than 1265. Medieval thinkers, already familiar with much of Aristotle’s thought, were eager to read the Philosopher’s views on political matters. However, the availability of a Latin *Politics* did not result in the immediate adoption of an Aristotelian paradigm for the study of politics. William of Moerbeke’s translation of the *Politics* was problematic in several respects. It was overly literal, contained many Grecisms and was generally difficult to understand. As Jean Dunbabin has put it, in Moerbeke’s translation, “Accuracy is more than counterbalanced by unintelligibility.”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Jean Dunbabin, “The Reception and Interpretation of Aristotle’s *Politics*,” Norman Kretzman, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg, eds. *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 723.

The initial hurdle of simply making sense of the text left many of the first generation of political thinkers exposed to Aristotle with more questions than answers. Furthermore, there was trepidation about the appropriateness of relying on a pagan authority.<sup>130</sup>

It should therefore not be surprising that many of the earliest written responses to the *Politics* in the medieval tradition are more concerned with determining what Aristotle was trying to say himself, rather than engaging in a theoretical critique of his text or the application of his scientific methodology to contemporary political problems. This first generation of commentaries includes those of Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas's partial commentary, and Peter of Auvergne's continuation. For much of their text, the *Politics* is simply paraphrased in more comprehensible Latin. Additionally contemporary examples were added in place of ancient ones and some attempt is made to transfer Aristotle's theories from the Greek *polis* to the medieval kingdom. The struggle to accommodate Aristotle's often foreign concepts to the medieval worldview was evident in many places, such as when Thomas Aquinas defines "polity" as "when the ruler rules according to scientific rules (i.e., according to laws established by political science)."<sup>131</sup> It appears Aquinas is trying to both explain an unfamiliar political term and make Aristotle's political theory more amenable to a medieval audience; a single ruler (a king) could still count among Aristotle's best practical regimes in this

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<sup>130</sup> Fernand van Steenbergen, *Aristotle in the West: The Origins of Latin Aristotelianism*, trans. Leonard Johnson (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), pp. 62-66.

<sup>131</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, trans. Richard J. Regan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), p. 9. See James M. Blythe, "The Mixed Constitution and the Distinction between Regal and Political Power in the Work of Thomas Aquinas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47 (1986): 547-65 and *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

schema, as long as he is restrained by the law. Later in the same text, however, Aquinas states, “And we call the regime in which the multitude rules and strives for the common benefit a polity, which is the common name for all regimes.”<sup>132</sup> Thomas Aquinas may have himself been struggling to determine exactly how to deal with Aristotle and his terminology.

As one can see, these works are more than just summaries of Aristotle’s (poorly translated) text. Thinkers drew attention to the questions they felt were most pressing. In both Albert and Thomas Aquinas, significant space is dedicated to the subject of law and the place of law within political science. They discuss such subjects as “Can there be a bad law?” and “What areas can be regulated by law? Should child-rearing be off-limits?”<sup>133</sup> The authors concern with legal issues shines through, even when they are providing a chapter-by-chapter to Aristotle’s text (which, in comparison, devotes less space to legal questions). As long as western political thinkers have been trying to understand Aristotle, they have also been trying to use him to address their own questions.

As a basic understanding of Aristotle’s political premises became more readily available, these earliest commentaries were followed by works, such as Peter of Auvergne’s *Questions*, that moved beyond explication of Aristotle and began to use discussions of the *Politics* as a platform for advancing one’s own political views. For

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<sup>132</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Politics*, p. 209.

<sup>133</sup> Albert the Great, “Questions on Book X of the *Ethics*,” Arthur Stephen McGrade, John Kilcullen, and Matthew Kempshall, eds. *The Cambridge Translations of Medieval Philosophical Texts Volume Two: Ethics and Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

example, Peter's *Questions* offers a consistent defense of monarchy as the best form of government, rejecting the inclusion of mixed intuitions, such as elections, as being good in theory but not viable in practice.<sup>134</sup> Here Aristotle's text brings up the subject of the best constitution, but Peter is then willing to move away from simply explaining Aristotle's answer and provides his own ideas instead. Thinkers needed to gain a basic grasp of Aristotle's political thought before they could apply his ideas or methodology themselves. Thus, there is a gradual process whereby thinkers tried to understand Aristotle and then begin to use his texts for their own purposes.

#### DO THE EARLY COMMENTATORS COUNT AS ARISTOTELIANS?

These earliest discussions of Aristotle's political and moral thought are certainly deeply concerned with Aristotle and indebted to his writings; yet, in most cases, they do not meet my criteria for medieval Aristotelian political science. The main reason is fairly simple: they're not conducting science, they're simply trying to understand what Aristotle is saying. However, I do not intend this as a criticism of the commentators. A commentary has a fundamentally different aim from a work of political science. These authors were trying to explain the Aristotelian project and what Aristotle's conclusions were, as well as why such a project was an acceptable part of Christian learning. In these matters, the early commentators were to a large extent successful.

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<sup>134</sup> Peter of Auvergne, "Commentary and Questions on Book III of Aristotle's *Politics*," McGrade, Kilcullen, and Kempshall, eds. *The Cambridge Translations of Medieval Philosophical Texts Volume Two*, pp. 254-56.

In order to be a part of a mature scientific community, one has to be socialized within its framework so that the assumptions of the paradigm are taken for granted. One can then continue in one's work, knowing that the scholarly audience will already accept your basic premises as true. They were socialized in the same paradigm. The earliest writers on Aristotelian political thought in the west could take none of these things for granted. Aristotle was still somewhat unfamiliar terrain, and many of his premises were quite controversial. Early commentators, such as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, could not even assume their audience understood the available Latin texts (in most cases it was probably safer to assume they didn't). They then had to make a case for why politics should be viewed through this Aristotelian framework rather than, for example, an Augustinian or neo-Platonic perspective. A scientist in a mature discipline has none of these concerns; he or she can simply begin working on a proscribed puzzle without defending each individual assumption on which their conclusion is based.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter examined some of the thinkers writing just before and just after the dissemination of the Latin translation of Aristotle's *Politics*. In many ways, they are similar to later medieval Aristotelians. They use Aristotelian political language and *exempla*. They argue for the naturalness of the political community and they recognize the different forms of constitutions as significant to the study of politics. Yet none of these thinkers is entirely immersed in the Aristotelian paradigm or engaged in Aristotelian political science. They are undertaking a project of a fundamentally



different nature. Brunetto Latini was compiling an encyclopedia of human knowledge. While it is clear that Aristotle helped shaped the content of the political and ethical sections of this work, these were only a small portion of his project. And although Latini does offer his opinion that a republic is the best type of constitution, he does not of the systematic defense of this position that is seen in later Aristotelian thinkers, such as Ptolemy of Lucca. Likewise, the commentators are not Aristotelian political scientists. They discuss regime types in the context of explaining Aristotle's classification system, but do not provide their readers with substantial discussions of their views on the matter. By the time Peter of Auvergne wrote his *Questions on the Politics*, however, this is starting to change. As thinkers became more comfortable with Aristotle and his political framework, they were increasingly able to utilize his model of political science but come to their own conclusions.

The thinkers writing before the maturation of the Aristotelian paradigm do not "fail" at Aristotelian political science; they are simply engaged in other projects. Brunetto Latini is more concerned with providing an overview of the most current knowledge in all subjects than offering an in depth defense of his political views. Early commentators are trying to make Aristotle's text understandable and acceptable to a medieval Christian audience. In my view, both are fairly successful at achieving their aims. In particular, the work of commentators in the later thirteenth century laid the groundwork for the Aristotelian political science of the fourteenth century. Only after a thinker like Thomas Aquinas had fought for the acceptability of the study of Aristotle and worked to make the Philosopher's words intelligible to medieval minds could a

political thinker like Ptolemy of Lucca come along and use the methodology of the *Politics* to engage in his own scientific study of the political community.

## CHAPTER V

### PTOLEMY OF LUCCA:

#### ROMAN REPUBLICANISM IN AN ARISTOTELIAN FRAMEWORK

By the start of the fourteenth century, the Aristotelian paradigm had come to dominate the study of politics in the West. Aristotelian language was integrated into political discourse. Both the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* were standard texts in medieval universities. Medieval political thinkers were applying Aristotelian methodology and asking what sort of regime is best. This chapter explores one of these Aristotelian political scientists, Ptolemy of Lucca. Ptolemy worked within the mature Aristotelian paradigm, but his political influences were not limited to Aristotle. Ptolemy's treatise, *De regimine principum*, defends a republican government with strong Roman and Christian influences. By examining Ptolemy's work, this chapter will illustrate how medieval political thinkers could use Aristotle's methodology while still drawing most of their inspiration from distinctly non-Aristotelian sources.

#### PTOLEMY OF LUCCA

With the publication of James Blythe's two volume study of Ptolemy, much more information has become available on the life and thought of this remarkable medieval thinker. Unfortunately, several areas are still somewhat cloudy. Ptolemy of Lucca (or Tolomeo Fiadoni) was born sometime around 1236 in the northern Italian city of Lucca, most likely into a family of fairly well off merchants. Lucca, lying on a major

roadway between France and Rome, was quite cosmopolitan by medieval standards, serving as a center of trade and manufacturing, particularly for the silk industry. Its communal government placed an exceptionally large portion of political power in the hands of the *popolo*, a trend that would only increase during Ptolemy's lifetime.<sup>135</sup>

Little is known about Ptolemy's early life and education in Lucca. The earliest recorded event in Ptolemy's biography is his traveling from Rome to Naples with Thomas Aquinas, though it is likely these two figures knew each other well before this date. Despite assumptions by many scholars (myself included), it is now considered uncertain as to whether Ptolemy ever studied formally with Aquinas at the University of Paris. Ptolemy travelled throughout Italy and France with Aquinas and later on his own. In 1300 or 1301, Ptolemy was elected prior of Santa Maria Novella, the famous Dominican house in Florence; by 1307 he appears to have moved to San Remano. A few years later, he relocated, with the papal curia, to Avignon. Around 1318, he was appointed bishop of Torcello, where he remained until his death, despite rumors of senility (it is likely Ptolemy was in his eighties when he took the position).<sup>136</sup>

Ptolemy's most well known political work, and the one on which this chapter will focus, is the continuation of a treatise known as *De regimine principum*. Originally, the entire text was attributed to Thomas Aquinas; however, in the twentieth century, scholars established that this text had at least two authors and Ptolemy of Lucca was

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<sup>135</sup> James M. Blythe, *The Life and Works of Tolomeo Fiadoni (Ptolemy of Lucca)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 33-56

<sup>136</sup> Blythe, *The Life and Works of Tolomeo Fiadoni*, pp. 50-135.

responsible for the section from Book II.4.7 onward.<sup>137</sup> As the two sections of the text differ completely in both style and content, it seems amazing that the entire work was attributed to a single author for so long. Some debate exists as to whether Aquinas actually wrote the entire first section, but that is not of major consequence for this chapter.<sup>138</sup> Ptolemy's portion of *De regimine principum* outlines a defense of republican government, and particularly of republican Rome, that calls on both Christian and Aristotelian sources for support. Despite his avid support for republicanism in the secular realm, Ptolemy remained a passionate supporter of papal monarchy and of papal involvement in political affairs.<sup>139</sup> This did not strike Ptolemy as a contradiction.

#### MODERN SCHOLARSHIP ON PTOLEMY

Ptolemy of Lucca has drawn attention from modern scholars for his praise of republican government and apparent espousal of humanist values in the Middle Ages. Scholars such as Charles Till Davis have remarked on Ptolemy's admiration for classical sources (both Greek and Latin). Davis argues that, drawing on these classical inspirations, Ptolemy placed a remarkable (for the Middle Ages) amount of value on politics and its role in the good life.<sup>140</sup> Recent work by John La Salle and James Blythe

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<sup>137</sup> Blythe, *The Life and Works of Tolomeo Fiadoni*, pp. 157-59.

<sup>138</sup> See the exchange between Kenneth Pennington and Cary Nederman in *Medieval Academy News* 149 (2004): 2.

<sup>139</sup> Blythe, *The Life and Works of Tolomeo Fiadoni*, pp. 11-28.

<sup>140</sup> Charles T. Davis, "Ptolemy of Lucca and the Roman Republic," *Proceeding of the American Philosophical Society* 118 (1974): 30-50; James M. Blythe, "'Civic Humanism' and Medieval Political Thought," ed., James Hankins, *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 30-74.

suggests that even Hans Baron recognized humanist elements in the writings of this early fourteenth century thinker.<sup>141</sup> From the latter part of the twentieth century onward, scholars have shown an increasing interest in and appreciation for Ptolemy and other medieval republicans as political thinkers in their own right, not simply as precursors to the fully formed humanism and republicanism of the Renaissance. As John Hine Mundy has pointed out, republican thought can be seen in Italy as early as the thirteenth century, and by the fourteenth century, Ptolemy of Lucca is offering practical arguments for the accountability of public officials and public involvement in governing.<sup>142</sup> These are not modern concepts.

Several of the scholars mentioned above have remarked that Ptolemy's work was deeply influenced by his reading of Aristotle. They note that unlike neo-Platonic Christian thinkers, such as Augustine of Hippo, Ptolemy does not see political life as connected to sin, but rather as part of our nature.<sup>143</sup> Not only is politics not a sign of human depravity, it can actually be an avenue for the exercise of virtue for Ptolemy explicitly connects to the higher end of spiritual fulfillment. As James Blythe as has pointed out, "Civic virtue is not different from religious virtue, still less opposed to it, but of the same nature, and though inferior to it, a necessary prerequisite."<sup>144</sup> These

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<sup>141</sup> John La Salle and James M. Blythe, "Was Ptolemy of Lucca a Civic Humanist? Reflections on a Newly-Discovered Manuscript of Hans Baron," *History of Political Thought* XXVI (2005): 336-65.

<sup>142</sup> See John Hine Mundy, "In Praise of Italy: The Italian Republics," *Speculum* 64 (1989): 815-34.

<sup>143</sup> Charles T. Davis, "Roman Patriotism and Republican Propaganda: Ptolemy of Lucca and Pope Nicholas III," *Speculum* 50 (1975): 411-33; James M. Blythe, "Aristotle's *Politics* and Ptolemy of Lucca," *Vivarium* 40 (2002): 36.

<sup>144</sup> Blythe, "Aristotle's *Politics* and Ptolemy of Lucca," p. 116.

authors are correct in noting the value that Ptolemy places on political life. Like Aristotle, he sees government as having the potential to play a positive role in people's lives and even to inculcate virtue (a topic that will be discussed at greater length later in this chapter). However, at times Blythe goes too far in asserting Aristotle's influence. Blythe attributes Ptolemy's preference for "political" government to Aristotle's espousal of polity or a mixed regime as the best practical constitution in the politics. According to Blythe, this leads Ptolemy (and a number of other later medieval thinkers) to adopt this as their preferred constitution as well.<sup>145</sup> As Cary Nederman and I have argued, however, in the sections of *De regimine principum* where Ptolemy advocates political rule, he draws on Roman Republican sources far more than on Aristotle. Furthermore, his defense of republicanism relies on the necessity of including all elements of the citizen body and the importance of civic virtue in building character, not the need for balancing the competing interests of the rich and poor, as Aristotle's defense of polity does.<sup>146</sup>

Blythe recently composed the first book-length discussion of Ptolemy's thought in English. Here, he does his best to do justice the complexities and apparent contradictions in Ptolemy's text. The first volume of this work is dedicated to Ptolemy's life and historical context, including the composition of his major works. The second volume covers Ptolemy's thought with a heavy (though not exclusive) emphasis on his political ideas. Blythe maintains that Ptolemy is a republican theorist, albeit one who is

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<sup>145</sup> James M. Blythe, *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution in the Middle Ages*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Also Blythe, "Aristotle's *Politics* and Ptolemy of Lucca."

<sup>146</sup> Cary J. Nederman and May Elizabeth Sullivan, "Reading Aristotle through Rome: Republicanism and History in Ptolemy of Lucca's *De regimine principum*," *European Journal of Political Theory* 7 (2008): 223-40.

also greatly concerned with when different forms of regimes are necessary. Blythe also tries to place Ptolemy's political work in the context of his wider (largely religious) worldview; Ptolemy sees no contradiction in supporting popular participation in secular politics while maintaining the authoritative superiority and political prerogatives of the pope. Not does he shy away from arguing for both the natural foundations of the political community and its ability, through the development of political virtue, to aid in the spiritual advancement of mankind. Blythe finishes his work by defending Ptolemy from the oft-leveled charge of being a bit player in the development of western thought. Blythe contends that Ptolemy's republican theory influenced the work of important thinkers like Savonarola and had a profound impact on the republican tradition as we know it.<sup>147</sup>

Recently, Bee Yun has challenged the notion that Ptolemy of Lucca should be read as a republican at all. Yun contends that Ptolemy's association of monarchy with tyranny should not be taken as a condemnation of monarchy *per se*, but rather an attack on the French king who was at the time in dispute with the papacy.<sup>148</sup> Yun goes as far as to say, "Ptolemy's sympathy for republican rule hardly went beyond an emotional dimension, bearing almost no theoretical or practical fruits worthy of the title of republicanism."<sup>149</sup> Yun also argues that previous scholars have conflated Ptolemy's views on secular and spiritual rule; Ptolemy was an adamant defender of papal

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<sup>147</sup> Blythe, *The Life and Works of Tolomeo Fiadoni (Ptolemy of Lucca)*, and *The Worldview and Thought of Tolomeo Fiadoni (Ptolemy of Lucca)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 208-37.

<sup>148</sup> Bee Yun, "Ptolemy of Lucca- A Pioneer of Civic Republicanism? A Reassessment," *History of Political Thought* XXIX (2008): 417-39, esp. pp. 43-34.

<sup>149</sup> Yun, "Ptolemy of Lucca- A Pioneer of Civic Republicanism?," p. 435.



monarchy. Yun's claims would, perhaps, have some justification if the republican reading of *De regimine principum* were based entirely on Ptolemy's critical comments about monarchy. Unfortunately, Yun pays scant attention to Ptolemy's discussions of citizenship and the necessity of including members of all different strata in the city's public decision-making. In terms of recognizing the distinction between Ptolemy's political and religious thought, Charles Davis's "Roman Patriotism and Republican Propaganda" more accurately describes Ptolemy's ability to endorse a popular republican government in the secular realm while still fiercely defending the unilateral rights of the pope on religious matters.<sup>150</sup> Ptolemy's acknowledgement of the pope's autocratic power within the Catholic Church need not imply an endorsement of secular monarchy.

Despite a long history of relative neglect from scholars, Ptolemy of Lucca is gaining increasing recognition as an important figure in the development of republican thought and the civic humanist impulse that led to the Renaissance (although his position as a republican is not entirely undisputed). Ptolemy was a thinker who drew on many different intellectual traditions, and scholars are still debating which were the most influential in different areas of his thought. Despite their differences, more scholars do seem to be agreeing that Ptolemy is, if nothing else, worthy of their attention.

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<sup>150</sup> Davis, "Roman Patriotism and Republican Propaganda," pp. 411-33.

## PTOLEMY'S ARGUMENTS FOR HIS BEST REGIME

In the text of *De regimine principum*, Ptolemy explores different types of regimes and argues for the superiority of political or republican rule. Throughout this work, Ptolemy frequently cites Aristotle's texts, even though he often strays quite far from Aristotelian political principles. Ptolemy's application of Aristotelian language (as well as the other political languages prominent in the later Middle Ages) is particularly skillful. References to Aristotle and his work are fairly frequent in *De regimine principum*; at times, the *Politics* is simply used as a helpful sourcebook to illustrate the characteristics of the different political regimes of ancient Greece; in other cases, Aristotle's words are carefully manipulated to support Ptolemy's position on the superiority of ancient Rome and the republican institutions found therein. One instance of Ptolemy's clever utilization of Aristotelian texts is evident in Book II, where he draws on Aristotle's classification of the different types of constitutions; instead of using the standard divisions in Books 3.6-4.10, Ptolemy favors employing only two categories: "Although in Book 5 of the *Politics* Aristotle supposes that there are many forms of rule, which I have already described and will discuss again, elsewhere in the same work he supposes that there are only two, political and despotic, each of which has its own distinctive ministers."<sup>151</sup> What is Ptolemy referring to here is the distinction between

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<sup>151</sup> *De regimine principum* 2.8.1. "Duplex enim principatus ad Aristotele ponitur in sua Politica, quorum quilibet suos habet ministros, licet plures ponat in V Polit., ut supra est distinctum et infra etiam declarabitur, politicus videlicet et despoticus." Latin text is taken from St. Thomas Aquinas, *Opuscula Monia necnon Opera Minora, Vol. I, Opuscula Philosophica*, ed. R.P. Joannes Perrier (Paris: Lethielleux, 1949). English translations are taken from Ptolemy of Lucca, *On the Government of Rulers (De*

the different types of rule within the household illustrated in Book 1 of the *Politics*. However, Aristotle made it clear that the city could not be treated as an extended household; Ptolemy thus deliberately defies a central tenet of Aristotelian political philosophy.<sup>152</sup> As one can see, Ptolemy of Lucca has read Aristotle's text very strategically.

Nor is Ptolemy simply an inattentive reader of Aristotle. Later in Book II, Ptolemy makes it clear to his reader that he is conscious of the fact that his position directly conflicts with that of the *Politics* when he defends his decision to collapse monarchy and tyranny into a single category: "But then one may object that Aristotle contrasts regal and despotic rule in Book I of the *Politics*. I will explain this in the next book...but for now it will suffice to prove what I have said using divine Scripture."<sup>153</sup> He never does go back to explain why this proposition does not contradict Aristotle. From this passage, one can see that Ptolemy was aware of the discrepancies between his thought and that of Aristotle and deliberately chose to obscure these differences.<sup>154</sup>

There are many instances of Ptolemy simply using Aristotle's text as a convenient historical sourcebook. For example, in Book 2 Chapter 3 of *De regimine*

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*Regimine Principum*), trans. James M. Blythe (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

<sup>152</sup> See Nederman and Sullivan, "Reading Aristotle through Rome."

<sup>153</sup> "Sed tunc est quaestio, quia Philosophus in I Polit. dividit regale contra despoticum. Hoc autem in sequenti libro declarabitur... sed nunc sufficiat per divinam Scripturam probare quod dicitur." *De regimine principum* 2.9.2.

<sup>154</sup> Contrast with Blythe, "Aristotle's *Politics* and Ptolemy of Lucca" p. 135. See also Mary Elizabeth Sullivan, "The Bond of Aristotelian Language Among Medieval Political Thinkers," eds. Constant Mews and John N. Crossley, *Communities of Learning: Networks and the Shaping of Intellectual Identity in Europe, 1100-1500*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).

*principum*, he concurs with Aristotle's assessment of Lycurgus's decision to ban currency in his realm; it was pure foolishness.<sup>155</sup> Here, there is clearly no need to manipulate the words of Aristotle. Similarly, the text of the *Politics* could provide Ptolemy with information about other great thinkers of ancient Greece. For example, in Book 4, he questions Plato's/Socrates's claim that some women should be permitted to take up arms and fight in wars; however, since he was not able to refer directly to the text of the *Republic*, Ptolemy instead cites Aristotle's discussion of Plato's position in the *Politics*.<sup>156</sup>

As the above passages show, Ptolemy works hard to maintain a surface adherence to Aristotle's philosophy, even when his own views diverge from those of the ancient philosopher. Despite his reverence for Aristotle's authority, Ptolemy's own political views come across loud and clear. Throughout *De regimine principum* Ptolemy advocates republican or "political" rule as the superior type of government. This type of government he specifically identified with his native Italy: "Political rule exists when a region, province, city, or town is governed by one or many according to its own statutes, as happens in regions of Italy and especially in Rome, which for the most part has been governed by Senators and consuls ever since the city was founded."<sup>157</sup> Although not ideal for every state at all times, Ptolemy comes to the conclusion that political rule is

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<sup>155</sup> *De regimine principum* 2.13.3.

<sup>156</sup> *De regimine principum* 4.5.1-3. See James Blythe, "Family, Government, and the Medieval Aristotelians," *History of Political Thought* X (1989): 1-16.

<sup>157</sup> Ptolemy of Lucca, *De regimine principum*, 2.8.1, "Politicus quidem quando region sive provincial sive civitas sive castrum per unum vel plures regitur secundum ipsorum statute, ut in regionibus contingit Italiae et praecipue Romae, ut per senatores et consules pro majori parte ad Urbe condita."

superior to regal rule, especially when the populace in question is virtuous and freedom-loving:

Political government is placed ahead of royal government for two reasons. First, if we refer lordship to the integral state of human nature, called the State of Innocence, in which there was political, not regal, lordship, there was not lordship that involved servitude, but rather preeminence and subjection existed according to the merits of each... Therefore, political government was better for wise and virtuous persons, such as the ancient Romans, since it imitated this state of nature... The second reason political government is placed ahead of royal government has to do with how the land is situated with respect to the stars. This disposes the region in various ways, as I said above, so we see that certain provinces are suited to servitude and other to liberty.<sup>158</sup>

Republican government is praised here as the type of government closest to what would have been found in the Garden of Eden. Although drawing heavily on both Roman and Christian elements to craft this pro-republican argument, Ptolemy maintains an adherence to the Aristotelian proposition that politics is natural and not the result of sin.

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<sup>158</sup> Ptolemy of Lucca, *De regimine principum*, 2.9.4,6, “ex duplici parte regimen politicum regali praeponitur. Primo quidem, si referamus dominium ad statum integrum humanae naturae, qui status innocentiae appellatur, in quo non fuisset regale regimen sed politicum, eo quod tunc non fuisset dominium quod servitutem haberet, sed praeeminentiam et subjectionem in disponendo et gubernando multitudinem secundum merita cujuscumque . . . Unde apud sapientes et homines virtuosos, ut fuerunt antiqui Romani, secundum imitationem talis naturae regimen politicum melius fuit . . . Amplius autem et situs terrae secundum stellarum aspectum regionem disponit, ut dictum est supra; unde videmus quasdam provincias aptas ad servitutem, quasdam autem ad liberatatem.”

Book III of *De regimine principum* defends the rule of the Roman Republic. Here, Ptolemy first contends that the Romans could not have ruled so successfully without the assistance of the Divine Will. He then outlines why God rewarded the Romans for their civic virtue by making them the rulers of the known world. Finally, Ptolemy explains that the Roman Republic actually helped paved the way for the coming of Christ; Republican government requires virtue and self-sacrifice on the part of its citizens. The Romans, through their praising of civic virtue and love of justice, offered a precursor to the reign of Christ.<sup>159</sup> Setting up the Romans as both virtuous political rulers and harbingers of Christ paves the way for Ptolemy's discussion in Book IV of what the ideal regime would look like.

In Book IV, Ptolemy describes an ideal Christian republic, one that politically resembles the Roman Republic to a very great extent. Although Ptolemy is concerned with human flourishing, he does not ignore the importance of material needs in the formation of the political community. Compared to other natural creatures, human beings are weak and vulnerable; without the mutual aid provided by living in society, we could not survive as a species.<sup>160</sup> The value of the city, as Ptolemy describes it, comes from its ability to meet the material needs of citizens through the practice of the arts and crafts: "To the extent that a city is greater than a town or village, there will be more arts and artisans present there to assure the sufficiency of human life, and it is from these that

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<sup>159</sup> Ptolemy of Lucca, *De regimine principum*, 3.15.5.

<sup>160</sup> Ptolemy of Lucca, *De regimine principum*, 4.2.8.

the city is constituted.”<sup>161</sup> Ptolemy repeatedly emphasizes the unity of the political community. While there are many different parts and ranks among the citizens, all are brought together and share in communal and political life.<sup>162</sup>

In contrast to Aristotle, Ptolemy’s Christian republicanism contains a remarkably inclusive notion of citizenship. Having established the importance of artisans in creating a city in human beings can thrive, Ptolemy argues that they should therefore be counted as full members of the community, a notably un-Aristotelian position. This inclusivity means that Ptolemy’s ideal republic has a strong populist element:

It seems to be consonant with reason that they [rulers] were elevated to the government of the people with the consent of all counsel, as today is common in Italian cities. The name ‘city’ implies this, which, according to Augustine, is ‘a multitude of human beings bound together by some chain of society,’ so that a city is, as it were, a unity of citizens. Therefore, since the name ‘city’ includes all citizens, it indeed seems reasonable that it ought to search for its government from the separate kinds of citizens, since the merits of individuals are necessary for the state of civil government.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Ptolemy of Lucca, *De regimine principum*, 4.2.8. “Et tanto magis de civitate quam de castro, vel quacumque villa, quanto in ea plures sunt artes et artifices ad sufficientiam humanae vitae ex quibus civitas constituitur.”

<sup>162</sup> Ptolemy of Lucca, *De regimine principum*, 4.4.9.

<sup>163</sup> Ptolemy of Lucca, *De regimine principum*, 4.18.3. “et hoc videbatur consonum rationi, ut consensus totius consilii assumpti ad regimen populi fieret, ut hodie communiter faciunt civitates Italiae. Sic enim civitates nomen importat, quae est secundum Augustinum, I *De Civitate Dei*, hominum multitudine, aliquot societatis vinculo colligato: unde civitas, quasi civium unitas. Cum ergo nomen civitatis omnes cives includat, rationabile quidem videtur ad regimen ejus de singulis generibus civium debere require, prout exigent merita singulorum, ad civilis regimini statum.”

Ptolemy argues that as all members of the city (including artisans) are necessary for its functioning, they should all be included as citizens. This passage also implies that citizens from all classes should at least have the opportunity for political participation.

Throughout *De regimine principum*, Ptolemy blends various political traditions, most prominently, Aristotelian, Roman, and Christian. He is comfortable moving between these different language systems in constructing his argument for Christian republicanism. While his methodology is Aristotelian, the substance of his arguments, e.g., that artisans should have citizenship rights, and that political virtue can prepare one for salvation in the afterlife, is frequently quite un-Aristotelian. However, this does not lead to a confused political theory; Ptolemy is a very skillful political thinker who is adept at borrowing from different political traditions in order to craft a unique argument for republican government that would appeal to his medieval audience.

#### PTOLEMY AS AN ARISTOTELIAN POLITICAL SCIENTIST

As this chapter shows, Ptolemy of Lucca drew from a diverse array of sources in crafting his political arguments. His relationship with Aristotle's text is complex. On some topics, Aristotle does seem to have inspired Ptolemy's political thinking. For example, *De regimine principum* advocates a positive role for government in the lives of its citizens and even contends that politics can help bring about a more virtuous life. He sees politics as a natural aspect of the human life and not the product of sinfulness, as the Augustinian tradition contends. In other important ways, Ptolemy departs from the Aristotelian tradition. Rather than using the six-fold classification of regimes from the



politics, Ptolemy deliberately breaks with Aristotle in arguing that there are really only two different types of regimes, regal and political. Later in his text, Ptolemy argues for the inclusion of all members of the city (even laborers) in the ranks of citizens. This is not done as a necessary evil to preserve stability in the city (as Aristotle might suggest) but because for Ptolemy, every member of the community is necessary for its flourishing and has the potential to contribute to its economic and political well-being. Ptolemy's attitude toward working-class members of the city is remarkably different from that of the more elitist Aristotle.

Although Ptolemy borrows from Aristotle in some places, this does not limit his arguments. Ptolemy is a flexible thinker who can move between the political traditions of the late Middle Ages and even misrepresent his sources where needed. When Aristotle doesn't support his collapsing of kingship and tyranny into a single type of constitution, he turns to Biblical discussions of kingship instead.<sup>164</sup> His arguments for republican government are supported with numerous Roman historical sources, and Augustine is even misquoted to appear approving of Rome.<sup>165</sup> This strategic use of source material allows Ptolemy of Lucca to create a lengthy list of supporting authorities without being substantially limited in what he can argue.

Ptolemy's numerous disagreements with Aristotle do not prevent him from being a prime example of an Aristotelian political scientist. Ptolemy of Lucca is fully immersed in the Aristotelian paradigm. Ptolemy was thus fully familiar with Christian

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<sup>164</sup> *De regimine principum*, 2.9.2-3.

<sup>165</sup> *De regimine principum*, 3.15.

Aristotelianism and its assumptions. He uses much of Aristotle's moral and political language and frequently cites the Philosopher throughout his text, drawing not just on the *Politics*, but on the *Ethics* and *Metaphysics* as well. Even where Ptolemy disagrees with Aristotle, he does his best to hide this fact by selectively (and often disingenuously) citing Aristotle's text. Most importantly, Ptolemy follows an Aristotelian political methodology. *De regimine principum* is dedicated to discovering and defending the best type of constitution. Ptolemy considers the different types of regimes and comes up with his own schema for their classification. Even though his conclusions here directly conflict with those of Aristotle, he still tries to tie his project to that of the *Politics* by citing Aristotle's discussion of rule within the household.<sup>166</sup> The remainder of *De regimine principum* is spent explaining why political rule is superior to regal, why the Roman Republic the best example of the former, and what the modern-day ideal government would look like. Like Aristotle, Ptolemy begins with the collection of empirical data from both historical sources and contemporary city-states on different regime types and their effects on citizens' lives. He then uses this data to answer the normative question of what constitution is best. Ptolemy's methodology is Aristotelian at heart.

The effect of Aristotelian political methodology can be seen even more clearly when one compares the work of Ptolemy of Lucca with that of Brunetto Latini (discussed in Chapter IV). In terms of the political content of their work, these authors are remarkably similar. This should perhaps not be surprising as both are products of the

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<sup>166</sup> *De regimine principum*, 2.8.1.

communes of northern Italy, where they would have been amply familiar with republican government. Both men advocate popular republics where laborers and artisans would have the opportunity to participate in politics. Both are for an inclusive notion of citizenship based on the important role artisans play in the economic life of cities. Yet, *Les Livres dou Tresor* and *De regimine principum* are very different works. Brunetto touches on the subject of the best regime as part of a wide-ranging discussion of moral philosophy and human history. Ptolemy, on the other hand, presents his reader with a more thorough treatise on politics, one specifically focused on regimes; promoting republican government is the focus of his text. Additionally, although Brunetto offers up his opinion on what type of constitution is best, he spends very little time explaining why before moving on to other subjects. *De regimine principum* provides a much more elaborate defense of republican government that considers the benefits of a wider citizen body and even under what situations other forms of government might be preferable. Like Aristotle, Ptolemy freely acknowledged that the ideal regime might not be possible in all circumstances. Ptolemy of Lucca explores the same political structures as earlier republicans, but within the framework of Aristotelian political science.

#### CONCLUSION: PTOLEMY OF LUCCA AND NORMAL SCIENCE

In the conclusion of his two volume study of Ptolemy of Lucca's life and thought, James Blythe addresses criticisms made of Ptolemy upon the release of the English translation of *De regimine principum* over a decade ago. At the time, John Watt

dismissed Ptolemy as a minor figure whose work was too unimaginative to warrant attention from scholars outside of specialists in the Middle Ages. Ptolemy of Lucca is no Thomas Aquinas. Blythe, however, comes to Ptolemy's defense:

But Watt's attitude... suggests a misguided prejudice often-found in discussions of the medieval contributions to intellectual history: that it suffices to touch on one or two 'greats,' usually Thomas Aquinas for anything and Marsilius of Padua for political thought, before moving on to the Renaissance... and modern period, leaving the study of lesser figures to specialists of the period. 'It is unlikely,' Watt adds, 'that "it could benefit all historians of political thought" or that they should feel obliged to read it.' I argue that in several ways Tolomeo *is* more significant for the history of political thought than Thomas Aquinas and other major figures... There are [certain of Ptolemy's beliefs], such as the emergence of civic humanism, hatred of monarchy, and love of freedom and republicanism, that are essential [to the history of political thought]. This assertion is not solely a contextual one. Tolomeo does provide a more transparent window into the thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Italian republican milieu than Thomas or Marsilius, but- although this is difficult to demonstrate conclusively- he also, in my opinion, played more of a direct part than they in the evolution of modern republicanism.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Blythe, *The Worldview and Thought of Tolomeo Fiadoni*, pp. 228-29.

My thesis supports Blythe's contention, although in different terms. Ptolemy of Lucca was a normal scientist. He did not create the Aristotelian political paradigm, but he worked within the paradigm to answer its puzzles. As Thomas Kuhn noted in *Structures of Scientific Revolutions*, while "revolutionary" scientists who introduce new paradigms to their fields are typically later heralded as the "great thinkers" of their age, the names of normal scientists are often lost to history. Nevertheless, they make critical contributions to the development of a science.<sup>168</sup> Ptolemy took the assumptions and methodology of Aristotelianism and applied them to the pressing political questions of his time and place: Why is political rule a better type of government? What would an ideal Christian republic look like? And under what conditions is this ideal government appropriate?

Ptolemy of Lucca provides an excellent example of the mature Aristotelian political scientist. He utilizes Aristotelian methodology, while drawing on numerous political traditions for his inspiration. He addresses in practical and realistic terms the question of what regime is best. Aristotle gives Ptolemy a framework for his political investigation, but Ptolemy comes up with his own answers. Ptolemy serves as a representative of normal science in the Aristotelian paradigm. He didn't invent the paradigm; he solved puzzles within it. Yet, his work was critical in developing notions of republicanism that continue to shape western political theory to this day.

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<sup>168</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 23-42.

## CHAPTER VI

## DANTE'S ARISTOTELIAN IMPERIALISM

In the previous chapter of this dissertation, I demonstrated how Ptolemy of Lucca utilized the Aristotelian political framework to defend republican government and the virtues of political participation. Yet the use of Aristotelian political methodology does not guarantee this outcome. Thinkers working within the medieval Aristotelian paradigm offered a wide variety of solutions to the Aristotelian problem of discovering the best constitution. The chapter will look at another thinker working within the mature Aristotelian paradigm, Dante Alighieri, and how he approached the study of politics. Like Ptolemy of Lucca, he focuses his political work on defending his preferred constitution, and he shares many assumptions with Aristotle and his medieval followers. Yet in his final conclusion about what time of government is best, Dante is very far from Ptolemy or Aristotle, advocating a universal unchecked monarchy.

This chapter examines Dante's political treatise, *De monarchia*, which argues for the establishment of an all-powerful world monarchy, the secular counterweight to the papacy. Drawing on Aristotelian metaphysics, Christian theology, and his own Ghibelline political beliefs, Dante argues that the only way to ensure peace and justice in the world is to give all authority and material possessions to single individual. Throughout this work, Dante makes abundant use of Aristotelian quotations and syllogistic logic. Many of his assumptions about the universe and about human nature are derived from his reading of Aristotle's texts. Most importantly, he follows Aristotle's political methodology in his investigation of the best government. Thus, I argue, that

even while advocating a political position at odds with Aristotle's *Politics*, Dante Alighieri should be considered a medieval Aristotelian.

#### DANTE'S LIFE AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Dante Alighieri was born in Florence in 1260 into an aristocratic, though not terribly wealthy, family. Although best known in the modern era for his poetic writings, in his lifetime Dante was highly involved in Florentine politics as a member of the Guelph party. However, after the split between the Black and White factions of the party, Dante was exiled from his native city in 1301 and would never return. Jilted by the Guelphs, Dante abandoned his old allegiances and became an ardent advocate for the Holy Roman Emperor's claims in Italy. During his time in exile, Dante consoled himself with writing, composing works of both poetry and prose. Along with the well known *Divine Comedy* (whose political implications have been well documented by scholars), Dante also wrote a philosophical treatise, the *Convivio*, modeled after Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, and a political tract titled *De monarchia*. All of these works reflect Dante's reformed political position and advocate the establishment of a universal secular imperial power.

Dante's education has been the subject of much speculation. By the late thirteenth century, the seeds of pre-humanism were apparent in Florence, and many classical texts would have been available for study. In the *Inferno*, Dante refers to Brunetto Latini as his master or teacher, and this is likely the case. Latini (treated in Chapter IV) was well versed on classical authors, including Cicero, Boethius, Sallust,

and parts of the Aristotelian corpus. Latini was an admirer of the ancients and an avid proponent of republican virtue. At some point during his education, it is also probable that Dante studied with Remigio de Girolami, Florence's premier philosopher, who had studied at Paris during Aquinas's years there. Remigio is the most likely source for much of Dante's Aristotelianism. In Remigio's own work, he makes frequent citations of Aristotle's major works, including the *Ethics*, the *Politics*, *Physics*, and *De Anima*.<sup>169</sup>

Although Dante includes frequent citations from Aristotle in his own writings, there is still considerable uncertainty about which of his works Dante had read *in toto*. Highly specific references to the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Metaphysics* in both *De monarchia* and *Convivio* lead scholars to believe that Dante had direct access to these texts at the time he was writing. The *Politics*, on the other hand, though cited regularly in both works, never includes a reference to a specific book number. This has led scholars to suggest that either Dante had read the *Politics* earlier but did not have the text at hand at the time he was composing his own political works, or Dante's knowledge of the *Politics* was derived from the considerable secondary sources available to him at the time. This would include Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*, and numerous works by Thomas Aquinas.<sup>170</sup> Whether Dante was able to read the complete translation of the *Politics* or not, it is clear that he was familiar with most of its main premises. Between reading other works of Aristotle, contemporary authors who relied heavily on Aristotle,

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<sup>169</sup> Lorenzo Minio-Paluello, "Dante's Reading of Aristotle," ed. Cecil Grayson, *The World of Dante: Essays on Dante and his Times* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 61-79, esp. pp. 69-72; Charles T. Davis, "Education in Dante's Florence," *Speculum* 40 (1965): 415-35.

<sup>170</sup> Allan H. Gilbert, "Had Dante Read the *Politics* of Aristotle?," *PMLA* 43 (1928): 602-13.



and studying with Remigio de Girolami, Dante's education contained a healthy dose of Aristotelianism.

#### SCHOLARSHIP ON DANTE

In contrast to thinkers like Brunetto Latini and Ptolemy of Lucca, Dante's contributions to the history of political thought have, if anything, been over-studied. Numerous articles and monographs have explored both his more explicitly philosophical tracts (*De monarchia* and *Convivio*) as well as the political implications of the *Divine Comedy*. This chapter will focus primarily on the former two treatises and their accompanying scholarship, not because the *Divine Comedy* lacks political content or is unworthy of study as a piece of political thought, but because it is in *Convivio* and *De monarchia* that the influence of the Aristotelian paradigm can be seen most clearly. Even excluding the scholarship focused on the *Divine Comedy*, however, there is still plenty of material to explore and many conflicting opinions about Dante and his political ideas.

One of the continuing debates in Dante scholarship is about the extent to which Dante resembles earlier medieval thinkers and to what extent he is more like the later Italian humanists. How modern is Dante? Alessandro Passerin d'Entrèves concludes that Dante is, in fact, quite medieval in his political outlook. Passerin d'Entrèves points out that, for Dante, the ultimate purpose of temporal government is to maintain peace and prevent outbreaks of violence and greed; this constitutes a negative, almost Augustinian view of the purpose of politics. Passerin d'Entrèves considers this worldview to be

wholly medieval.<sup>171</sup> On the other side, Marvin Becker argues that, in keeping with other political thinkers of his day, such as Ptolemy of Lucca, Dante had a very positive view of earthly government and its role in the salvation of mankind, almost to the point of heterodoxy: “Dante himself pushes the schoolman’s theories until they serve to justify the positive value of earthly government. Indeed, he comes perilously close to proposing the quintessential beatitude of this life as independent from celestial beatitude. Again he and his contemporaries legitimize, almost sanctify, the political impulse of the citizenry.”<sup>172</sup> There is a remarkable amount of truth in both these arguments, and one is often left agreeing with Becker’s opening statement, that Dante occupies a “middle ground” in western political thought.<sup>173</sup>

The ability of government to play a positive role in people’s lives is not the only area in which scholars clash over the extent to which Dante is really “medieval.” Derek Davis asserts that Dante’s insistence that political and spiritual power be organized in distinct and separate institutions make him a remarkably modern thinker, more in line with the Renaissance than the Middle Ages. According to Davis, the notion of separation of church and state, ultimately culminating in the United States Constitution, can be traced back to Dante’s work.<sup>174</sup> However, as Barbara Barclay Carter has noted, Dante’s distinct authorities are still expected to work in harmony:

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<sup>171</sup> Alessandro Passerin d’Entrèves, *Dante as a Political Thinker* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).

<sup>172</sup> Marvin B. Becker, “Dante and His Literary Contemporaries as Political Men,” *Speculum* 41 (1966): 665-80, p. 675.

<sup>173</sup> Becker, “Dante and His Literary Contemporaries as Political Men,” p. 665.

<sup>174</sup> Derek Davis, “Seeds of the Secular State: Dante’s Political Philosophy as Seen in the *De Monarchia*,” *Journal of Church and State* 33 (1991): 328-46.

But while the spiritual and temporal planes remain distinct, they are interdependent. It is the task of the secular authority to guide men to earthly happiness in accordance with the moral and intellectual virtues, through the exercise of reason, while it is for the spiritual authority to guide them to eternal happiness, through teachings transcending reason and the theological virtues.<sup>175</sup>

It does seem that Davis is perhaps exaggerating the novelty of Dante's distinction between secular and religious authority; the "two suns" of Dante's political theory have overlapping duties and are still a far cry from modern notions of a wall of separation between church and state. Furthermore, his thought was not significantly more extreme in this area than several other medieval thinkers, including John of Paris and Marsiglio of Padua.

One of the more interesting uses of Dante by political theorists has been the application of his thought to modern notions of cosmopolitanism and international order. *De monarchia*, in particular, is read as a blueprint for a system of international law; in these cases, it is generally Dante's emphasis on the importance of world peace and a world-wide standard for justice that are emphasized, rather than the specific proposals of his government. As Kenneth Sills has argued: "To Dante's mind it was impossible that two quarreling nations should submit their differences to another nation for decision, and that nations should agree to abide by the decrees of an international court. But he saw very clearly that if justice was to flourish among nations as among individuals, there

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<sup>175</sup> Barbara Barclay Carter, "Dante's Political Ideas," *The Review of Politics* 5 (1943): 339-55, p. 347.

must be some final means of settling disputes.”<sup>176</sup> Although advocating an overarching world order, Dante is still read as respecting the political and cultural traditions of individual nations. In this way, Dante is taken as a precursor of modern international law theory and an advocate for supranational institutions (although, in many cases scholars simply drop his name in order to show that theories of international organization have a longer pedigree than most would expect).<sup>177</sup>

Despite its age, Etienne Gilson’s study, *Dante the Philosopher*, still provides one of the most thoughtful examinations of Dante’s political and social philosophy. Gilson takes the time to explore each of Dante’s major works and note the potential for contradiction between them. He is also one of the only Dante scholars to find anything odd with Dante’s plan for achieving world peace and eliminating greed (giving all power and material goods to one person).<sup>178</sup> Gilson also offers a very nuanced view on the impact of Aristotle on Dante’s political theory. Gilson argues that Aristotle, and his *Nicomachean Ethics* in particular, definitely helped shaped Dante’s response to the political problems he faced. Yet Dante could not simply derive his answer from Aristotle’s text; Aristotle had not faced the same political problems that existed in Dante’s age. Dante would have to provide his own solution. At the same time, Gilson does think that his reading of Aristotle encouraged Dante to endorse as ideal “a temporal

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<sup>176</sup> Kenneth C.M. Sills, “The Idea of Universal Peace in Virgil and Dante,” *The Classical Journal* 9 (1914): 139-53, p. 150.

<sup>177</sup> Frederick Pollock, “Cosmopolitan Custom and International Law,” *Harvard Law Review* 29 (1916); Thomas W. Pogge, “Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty,” *Ethics* 103 (1992): 48-75; Derek Heater, “Cosmopolis, the Way to Peace?” *Peace Studies* 9,(1997): 315-20.

<sup>178</sup> Etienne Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, trans. David Moore (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1952), pp. 175-78.

order independent of the Church and seeking its own final goal under the guidance of reason alone.”<sup>179</sup> Thus, Dante was inspired by Aristotelian political philosophy, but his work is still uniquely his own.

Numerous other scholars have also questioned exactly how Aristotle helped shape Dante’s political and social thought. Allan Gilbert conducted a thorough investigation of which of Aristotle’s works Dante must have had direct access to (*Nicomachean Ethics*, *Metaphysics*, and *De Anima* among them) and which sources Dante could have used to mine the *Politics* quotations he used (if he did not have direct access to that text while he was writing). Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principum* is at the top of the list.<sup>180</sup> Searching *De monarchia* for evidence of Aristotelian influence, Larry Peterman notes the overridingly practical nature of Dante’s political thought. He argues:

The need that moved Dante to propose a universal world monarchy moved him away from the Aristotelian political tradition and led him to forgo the virtues at the forefront of that tradition... Given the condition of Dante’s time, as he understood it, and the influence of Christianity, the moral virtues of pagan antiquity are no longer possible. Even with divine inspiration, Dante’s monarch cannot reinstitute them in a world that demands above all

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<sup>179</sup> Gilson, *Dante the Philosopher*, pp. 217-18.

<sup>180</sup> Allan H. Gilbert, “Had Dante Read the *Politics* of Aristotle?”

the unity and stability represented by world government. The best that man can hope for is that political order be reestablished.<sup>181</sup>

However, given Aristotle's deep concern with the practical side of political affairs, Dante's decision might not be so un-Aristotelian after all.<sup>182</sup>

In his study of the impact of Aristotle on Dante's writing, Lorenzo Minio-Paluello came to the conclusion that many of Dante's political ideas were influenced more by the non-political works of Aristotle than the *Politics* itself. Specifically, Dante developed his worldview through a reading of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Physics*, and *De Caelo*, which Minio-Paluello describes thus: "The universe is an integrated, order whole consisting of a large number of beings. One supreme being, God, regulates the functions and activities of other constituent beings."<sup>183</sup> These beings are not only ordered, they have a purpose: "Every thing of nature tends to its good, its own actualization."<sup>184</sup> For human beings, this actualization includes a political life. According to Minio-Paluello, Dante's theory of monarchy is derived from this notion of ordered and teleological hierarchy; as there is one prime mover, there should be one temporal ruler to direct humanity in achieving its actualization. Thus, Dante is able to create an "Aristotelian" political theory that has very little in common with that found in Aristotle's *Politics*.

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<sup>181</sup> Larry Peterman, "Dante's *Monarchia* and Aristotle's Political Thought," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 10 (1973): 3-40, p. 39.

<sup>182</sup> See also Larry Peterman, "Dante and the Setting for Machiavellianism," *The American Political Science Review* 76 (1982): 630-44, and "Machiavelli's Dante and the Sources for Machiavellianism," *Polity* 20 (1987): 247-72.

<sup>183</sup> Minio-Paluello, "Dante's Reading of Aristotle," p. 65

<sup>184</sup> Minio-Paluello, "Dante's Reading of Aristotle," p. 65

As the above analysis shows, despite vast investigation, many questions about Dante's political thought are still up for debate. In many instances, this may be the result of the inherent tensions in Dante's own thinking. Although a precursor to Renaissance and early modern thought in some ways, Dante is still largely rooted in a medieval Christian worldview. He was simultaneously an advocate of supranational world government and a pro-nationalist; his ability to balance these two impulses makes him especially appealing to modern advocates of cosmopolitanism. But most important for this dissertation is the conflict over how Aristotle helped shape Dante's political views and to what extent his world monarchy is a departure from an Aristotelian political philosophy. Again, prominent scholars come down on both sides of the question. Overall, Dante is seen as a thinker who, after the trauma of his own political expulsion, tried to craft a theory of politics that would bring about a lasting peace.

#### *CONVIVIO AND DE MONARCHIA*

Having examined what previous scholars have to say on Dante's political ideas, this chapter now turns to Dante's texts themselves. How does Dante craft his theory of politics, and to what extent is this theory shaped by Aristotelian ideas? Aristotle's influence can be felt throughout Dante's *Convivio*, a philosophical treatise believed to be modeled partially after Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. From the opening lines, Dante attempts to link his intellectual project with that of the ancient philosopher: "As the Philosopher says at the beginning of the *First Philosophy*, all men by nature desire to know... Since knowledge is the ultimate perfection of our soul, in

which resides our ultimate happiness, we are all therefore by nature subject to a desire for it.”<sup>185</sup> Regarding the knowledge that human beings seek, and in contrast to Ptolemy of Lucca, Dante enunciates what Nederman considers to be one of the prime tenets of medieval Aristotelianism, namely, the delineation between active and contemplative life and the corresponding virtues of each.<sup>186</sup> Dante acknowledges the value of both forms of life, although he follows the Greek tradition in denoting the contemplative life as “best”: “We may have two kinds of happiness in this life, according to two different paths, good and best, which lead us there. One is the active life, and the other the contemplative life.”<sup>187</sup>

Dante’s notion of virtue in the *Convivio* is also derived, in part at least, from Aristotle. After listing eleven moral virtues, for which Dante credits the *Nicomachean Ethics* as his source, he then goes on to describe the nature of these virtues to his reader: “Each of these virtues has two related enemies, that is, vices, one through excess and the other through deficit. These virtues constitute the mean between them, and they spring

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<sup>185</sup> “Sì come dice lo Filosofo nel prinipo della Prima Filosofia, tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapre... onde, acciò che la scienza è ultima perfetione della nostra anima, nella quale sta la nostra ultima felicitade, tutti naturalmente al suo desiderio semo subietti.” Dante, *Il Convivio* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 1997), p. 3. The English translations of the *Convivio* in this paper will generally follow those found in *Dante’s Il Convivio (The Banquet)*, Richard H. Lansing, trans. (New York: Garland, 1990).

<sup>186</sup> See Nederman, “The Meaning of ‘Aristotelianism’...” pp. 573-75.

<sup>187</sup> “Noi potemo avere in questa vita due felicitadi, secundo due diversi cammini, buono e ottimo, che a ciò ne menano: l’uno è la vita attiva, e l’altro la contemplative.” *Convivio* IV.17.9, p. 326.



from a single source, namely from our habit of good choice.”<sup>188</sup> Dante provides his reader with a very concise description of Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Mean. In these ways, one can see that, in addition to utilizing Aristotelian concepts, several aspects of Dante’s moral thought were informed by important Aristotelian philosophical premises.

In *De monarchia*, Dante likewise turns to Aristotle for support. Although the governmental system espoused in this text is not one which Aristotle would have supported, or even recognized,<sup>189</sup> Dante does draw on some common medieval Aristotelian premises in formulating his theory, such as the ordering of the universe and the political and teleological nature of mankind. These metaphysical tenets of Aristotle shape Dante’s political theory more than Aristotelian ethical or political texts do. Early in Book I of *De monarchia*, Dante states, “Now it has been sufficiently explained that the activity proper to mankind considered as a whole is constantly to actualize the full intellectual potential of humanity, primarily through thought and secondarily through action.”<sup>190</sup> He then goes about arguing that the political system most likely to bring about this highest human potential is a world monarchy. Dante’s initial line of reasoning stems from the Aristotelian notion of ordered hierarchy, as Minio-Paluello explains it.

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<sup>188</sup> “E ciascuna di queste vertudi ha due inimici collaterali, cioè vizii, uno in troppo e un altro in poco; e queste tutto sono li mezzi intra quelli, e nascono tutto in uno principio, cioè dall’abito della nostra buona elezione.” *Convivio* IV.17.8, pp. 325-26.

<sup>189</sup> I am not referring so much to the type of regime, absolutist monarchy, so much as the idea of a single government encompassing all of the known world.

<sup>190</sup> “Satis igitur declaratum est quod proprium opus humani generic totaliter accepti est actuare simper totam potentiam intellectus possibilis, per prius ad speculandum et secundario propeter hoc ad operandum per suam extensionem.” *De monarchia* I.iv.1 (pp. 10-11). The English translations of passages from *De monarchia* will generally follow Prue Shaw’s translation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 1996). Page numbers correspond to the 1995 dual-text edition.

According to *De monarchia*, the need for a single ruler follows from the *telos* of mankind and the goodness of unity:

A part stands in relation to the whole as to its end and perfection: therefore the order in a part stands to the order of the whole as to its end and perfection. From this it can be deduced that the goodness of the order in a part does not exceed the goodness of the order in the whole...the order of the parts in relation to that single entity is better, for it constitutes the end or purpose of their interrelationship... So if this second kind of order is discernable in the constituent parts which make up the human race, then with all the more reason must it be observable... in the human race considered as a whole or totality.... And thus all the parts we have enumerated which are lower than kingdoms, and those kingdoms themselves, must be ordered to one ruler or one rule, that is to a monarch or monarchy.<sup>191</sup>

Here, Dante is employing techniques common in medieval Aristotelian argumentation, as well as engaging with some Aristotelian philosophical principles. The form and language of this passage would have been familiar to those accustomed to scholastic argument, despite its political extremism.

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<sup>191</sup> “Et sicut se habe pars ad totam, sic ordo partialis ad totalem. Pars ad totam se habet sicut ad finem et optimum: ergo et ordo in parte ad odinem in toto, sicut ad finem et optimum. Ex quo habetur quod bonitas ordinis partialis non excedit bonitatem totalis ordinis, sed magnis e converse...ordo partium ad unum est melior tanquam finis alterius... Unde si forma huius ordinis reperitur in partibus humane multitudinis, multo magis debet reperiri in ispa multitudine sive totalitate...Et sic mnes partes prenotate infra regna et ipsa regna ordinari debent ad unum principem sive principatum, hoc est ad Monarcham sive Monarchium.” *De monarchia* I.vi.1-4, pp 16-17.

Dante continues to employ Aristotelian language in the *De monarchia*, even as the gap between his views and those of Aristotle widens. This becomes quite evident in the passages where Dante contends that the ruler, under his system of government, will exhibit the greatest degree of justice. From the passages of the *Convivio* cited previously in this chapter and others, one can see that Dante was acquainted with the Aristotelian idea of the moral virtues. However, the discussion of princely justice in Book I of *De monarchia* illustrates an entirely different view of political justice. Dante's monarch is free from the temptations of injustice because there is nothing he does not already justly possess:

The thing most contrary to justice is greed, as Aristotle states in the fifth book of the *Ethics*. When greed is entirely eliminated, nothing remains which is opposed to justice... But where there is nothing which can be coveted, it is impossible for greed to exist, for emotions cannot exist where their objects have been destroyed. But there is nothing the monarch could covet, for his jurisdiction is bounded only by the ocean.<sup>192</sup>

Though using the language of Aristotelian political virtue, Dante is not, in this instance, advocating a position that could be classified as Aristotelian; the justice sought by this proposed institutional arrangement is not a moral virtue. The moral education of the ruler, a crucial consideration to Aristotle and his medieval followers, is abandoned in

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<sup>192</sup> “Quod iustie maxime contrariatur cupiditas, ut innuit Aristotiles in quinto *ad Nicomacem*. Remota cupiditate omnino, nichil iustitie restat adversum.... Ubi ergo non est quod possit optari, impossibile est ibi cupiditatem esse: destructis enim obiectis, passiones esse non possunt. Sed Monarcha non habet quod possit optare: sua nanque iurisdictio terminatur Oceano solum.” *De monarchia* I.ix.11-13, pp.24-27.

favor of institutional arrangements that limit temptation and therefore the need for true political virtue.

#### ARISTOTLE'S ROLE IN THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF DANTE

To what extent was Dante's political thought shaped by his reading of Aristotle? Reading the *Convivio*, one gets the clear impression that Dante had a strong sense of Aristotelian virtue ethics. He not only included a large number of detailed citations from the *Ethics*, but seems to base his system of moral philosophy on these Aristotelian principles. Dante notes the distinction between the active and contemplative life; he describes each virtue as being located between two extremes, each of which is a vice. Little in the *Convivio* directly conflict with Aristotelian moral premises. This is part of the reason why the departures from Aristotelian moral theory in *De monarchia* are so remarkable. Dante constructs a system of government in which peace and justice are maintained by giving all temporal authority to one individual. Yet, Dante makes no mention of the *personal* virtues the monarch must have or how the Doctrine of the Mean could come into play in his character. Nor is there any mention of the education of the monarch, an important theme in Aristotle and many of his medieval followers, including Giles of Rome, one of the suggested intermediate sources for Dante's political Aristotelianism. The Aristotelian moral theory that dominates *Convivio* is almost entirely absent from *De monarchia*.

Instead of exhorting the monarch to virtue and self-restraint, Dante tries to ensure justice in his monarchy by making it logically impossible for the monarch to succumb to

greed. Everything and all authority belongs to him by right, so he is incapable of lusting after anything that isn't his; no such thing exists. However, again breaking with Aristotle's *Politics*, Dante's institutional measure do not include any restraints on the monarch's powers or "mixing" of regime type to keep one person or element of society from becoming unjust. In fact, Dante is quite explicit in saying that the monarch has no limits on his political power. In this way, Dante strays from one of Aristotle's key political premises, that a true monarchy is unlikely to work in the real world.

Yet just because the main political arguments of Dante's *De monarchia* run counter to those of the *Politics* does not mean that Aristotle did not have a hand in shaping Dante's political views. Dante endorses the Aristotelian view that human beings are political by nature and require the guidance of a political community in order to fulfill their *telos*. Although Dante's insistence that the primary aim of temporal government should be the maintenance of peace is reminiscent of Augustine of Hippo, he still posits a far more positive view of the role of government. In both *De monarchia* and the *Divine Comedy* Dante argues that the twin powers of the empire and the papacy are needed to lead mankind toward fulfillment and, ultimately, salvation. Although sharing the Christian notion that mankind's ultimate *telos* is not located on this earth, Dante still sees politics as playing a critical role in the achievement of this telos, a thesis very much in keeping with Aristotle's political philosophy.

Furthermore, as Lorenzo Minio-Paluello has argued, Dante was strongly influenced by Aristotle's metaphysical views. Influenced in large part from his reading of Aristotle and his medieval commentators, Dante conceived of the universe as an

ordered whole, under divine direction. Just as the individuals has a purpose in this worldview, so does the universe as a whole. Throughout *De monarchia*, Dante uses syllogistic logic to argue that just as the universe is unified under the direction of a single God, so, too, the inhabitants of earth should be unified under the direction of a single political leader. Dante thus derives a political theory from Aristotelian metaphysical tenets that sharply disagrees with much of Aristotle's own political theory. This could be (at least partially) the result, as Gilbert has suggested, of Dante not being as familiar with the text of the *Politics* as he was with many other works of Aristotle.<sup>193</sup> It could also be that Aristotle's metaphysical works were more supportive of the imperial political ideology that Dante already advocated.

The above analysis all deals with the substance of Dante's political theory. Yet despite endorsing an unorthodox (from an Aristotelian perspective) system of government, Dante still follows Aristotelian political methodology in his work. He uses Aristotelian political and moral language throughout both the *Convivio* and *De monarchia*. Additionally he uses the syllogistic logic of Aristotelian (and scholastic) philosophy in making his analogous claims about the need for a single temporal ruler. This language would have signaled to contemporary readers that he had been educated in the Aristotelian tradition and was part of the political science community. Finally, Dante's *De monarchia* undertakes the Aristotelian project of determining the best type of regime. Dante spends nearly all of this relatively short political tract outlining why the

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<sup>193</sup>Gilbert, "Had Dante Read the *Politics* of Aristotle?,"

world will be best off under the leadership of a secular monarchy and how (institutionally) this monarchy will be able to help mankind secure its rightful end.

Dante's *De monarchia* provides an excellent illustration of how a thinker could work within the Aristotelian paradigm yet come up with a solution utterly at odds with Aristotle's constitutional theory. Dante argues for an absolutist unmixed worldwide monarchy. He also argues for ensuring justice, not through the moral education of the monarch, but by giving him absolute control of everything. This, however, does not disqualify him from being an Aristotelian, according to my definition. He still accepts the Aristotelian paradigm for the study of politics. Dante's text addresses the same principle political questions Aristotle's *Politics*. Compared to other Aristotelian political scientist, including Ptolemy of Lucca, who was examined in the previous chapter, Dante relies less heavily on empirical observations and more on logical and analogical arguments to support his conclusion.

Like Aristotle, Dante is well aware that politics is a practical science and must take the particularities of time and place into account, as well as human beings' natural flaws. Despite his ambitious claims for the monarch's authority, Dante does seem aware that finding a perfectly virtuous individual to fill this role will be problematic, so he does not try. However, where Aristotle addresses this problem by mixing constitutional forms, forcing the monarch to share political power with other members of the community, Dante takes a very different approach. Dante makes it impossible for the ruler to overstep his bounds by making his power boundless. Although this proposed

solution can appear a bit ridiculous, it is yet another case of Dante seeing the same potential political problem as Aristotle but offering his own unique answer.

Aristotle's effect on Dante's political theory was great, even if Aristotle wouldn't have endorsed many of Dante's political suggestions. Dante can hardly be praised for his moderation. Yet, Dante's *Convivio* shows extensive evidence that he espoused an Aristotelian moral theory. Additionally, Dante's theory of human nature was fundamentally Aristotelian; he saw human being as having a *telos* that involved living a fulfilled political life while on earth, and the government had a positive role to play in helping mankind achieve that fulfillment. Dante also accepted an Aristotelian metaphysical view (albeit with an infusion of Christianity) that saw the universe as an ordered and purposeful whole. It was partially from this metaphysical perspective that Dante defended his idea of world monarchy. Finally, and most critically for my thesis, Dante adopted a medieval Aristotelian political methodology. For him, the purpose of political system was to determine the best regime type and then offer your supporting evidence; this he did in *De monarchia*. Thus, although departing from Aristotle's political premises in important ways, Dante is still a medieval Aristotelian.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The Aristotelian paradigm dominated the study of politics for much of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. It set the standards for who was part of the political science community and how they should conduct their studies. This Aristotelian paradigm was transmitted through the medieval education system, the heart of which was the University of Paris. Medieval Aristotelians read a mixture of the major works of Aristotle and medieval works that grew out of them. They drew from both Aristotelian philosophy and the tenets of medieval Christianity to create a unique worldview. The moral and political language of Aristotle permeated their work, making it understandable to other members of the scientific community and signaling their own membership within that community. Most critically, the medieval Aristotelians agreed on the appropriate subject for political investigation. They followed the methodology of the *Politics*, examining the different forms of regimes and determining which was best. Thus, contrary to the beliefs of some modern political scientists, the medieval Aristotelians were a mature science. Political science is not a new science by any means, but a very old one that has been through multiple paradigm shifts.

#### WAS THE ARISTOTELIAN PARADIGM A SUCCESS?

Having argued that the medieval political Aristotelians meet all of Kuhn's major criteria for a mature scientific community, I must now ask what the effects of this paradigm were on the study of politics. As I mentioned in earlier chapters, the adoption

of the Aristotelian paradigm was accompanied by a dramatic increase in political studies in the late Middle Ages. More thinkers were interested in both constitutional questions and politics in general. In this sense, the Aristotelian paradigm was a success. As Kuhn's theory predicts, the adoption of a single paradigm by the field led to a blossoming of political research. People from a variety of different backgrounds weighed in on the central political debate. Additionally, the Aristotelian paradigm brought focus to the study of politics. Earlier political thought was often found mixed in with other topics in advice books for princes, compendia, or works of theology or history. After the introduction of Aristotle, a far greater number of purely political tracts began to appear; these works directly addressed political questions and especially the question of regime type. These works also tended to be better organized and provide justification for their political views. In several ways this later medieval political thought was more "scientific."

Yet there is still a problem with applying Kuhn's theory to medieval Aristotelianism. Kuhn states that, within a paradigm, over time scholars will be able to build upon one another's work, fitting together the pieces of a puzzle. There is little evidence of this among the medieval Aristotelians. Thinkers were far more likely to offer a competing answer to Aristotle's key political question than to build on the work of their predecessors. As a result, you never see the accumulation of knowledge one would hope for in a mature science.

There are several possible explanations for this. This first is that consensus may not be possible in a field that requires the answering of normative questions. Aristotelian

political sciences required the researcher to collect information on the different types of constitutions and draw causal inferences about how those political institutions affected the lives of people living within the city. Yet it also required the thinker to then use this information to determine which of these systems provided people with the best life and the best opportunity for flourishing. This latter question may just be essentially contestable. If political thinkers were unable to reach an agreement on what type of constitution was best, it may have prevented them from moving forward.

Another possibility is that the range of political research under the Aristotelian paradigm was just too narrow. There was essentially one central question that Aristotelian political science had to address: What is the best type of regime? Once that had been answered, people didn't really know what puzzle to move on to next. So, instead of building on previous work, they offered their own alternative answer instead. Because there was no logical next step, the result was conflicting information instead of cumulative information. The overly narrow Aristotelian paradigm, may have, in the long run stifled political research by limiting its scope. The paradigm became too much of a straightjacket.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

My dissertation looks at the establishment of the Aristotelian paradigm in political science in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. In future research I'd like to examine how this paradigm came to lose its dominant position. Through the early part of the fourteenth century, Aristotle's model for political science was standard

practice in the field, yet by the early Renaissance it was no longer in use. What caused this? How and why did the Aristotelian paradigm lose its place? I wish to discover what, if any, paradigm took its place as the dominant model for political inquiry. Was the Aristotelian paradigm replaced by another paradigm that could better address the political issues of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance? Or, did it simply collapse under its own rigidity, leaving a splintered community of scholars in its place?

My future research will also evaluate whether the adoption of a universal paradigm benefited the study of politics in the long run. Although the parameters set for research by the Aristotelian paradigm may have been stifling, was this outweighed by its ability to draw interest to the study of politics and bring disparate thinkers together in a scientific community? Once established, did the political science community continue to prosper as an intellectual institution, even after the dominance of the Aristotelian paradigm had faded? These latter questions hold special importance for those within the discipline of political science today who advocate (or oppose) the adoption of a single paradigm by all its practitioners. What are the costs and benefits of such an action?

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