Aristotle on anger and moral outrage as causes of civil war (*stasis*)

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Abstract: This article focuses on Aristotle's analysis of disagreements on political justice and on how emotional reactions such as 'indignation' (*nemesan*) and 'anger' (*orge*) could trigger 'factional conflict' or 'civil war' (*stasis*). It argues that Aristotle's studies on the function of moral outrage and anger in Book 2 of the *Rhetoric* allow for a better understanding of his theory of *stasis* in Book 5 of the *Politics*. Groups of citizens who are excluded from political power or who believe that they do not get their fair share become morally outraged and angry and thus motived to engage in *stasis*. This article claims that according to Aristotle the perception of political injustice is the general cause of factional conflict and that he is the founder of a political psychology of motivation.

Keywords: political justice – disagreements – factional conflict – indignation – political psychology

1. Introduction

Aristotle's *Politics* is primarily divided in the books in which he presents his ideal-theory and in the 'empirical books', in which he writes as a political realist. The main topics of his ideal-theory are the 'constitution' or 'political system' (*politeia*) of the best *polis* and the best education, which he analyzes in Books 7 and 8. The primary topics of Aristotle's 'empirical books' are democracy and oligarchy (Book 6), a political system he calls 'polity' (*politeia*), which is primarily a mix of these two constitutions (Book 4), and the theory of 'factional conflict' or 'civil war' (*stasis*)[1] he presents in Book 5. In the literature, Aristotle's theory of *stasis* has been examined and discussed extensively.[2] In the recent literature, an important aspect of this topic has

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[1] The term *stasis* could be translated with «upheaval», «civil war», «sedition», «faction», «factional conflict», «rebellion» or «revolution». In her part of the introduction to a recent commentary on Books 5 and 6 of the *Politics*, Maria Elena De Luna explains that a perfect translation of the term is impossible due to its «densità semantica»: De Luna, Zizza, Curnis 2016, 7. For the term *stasis*, see also Hatzistavrou 2013, 276-277, and Skultety 2019, 5-32, who argues that Aristotle uses the term «with great precision» and that in his political philosophy it means solely «civil war» (Skultety 2019, 5).

[2] See, e.g., Wheeler 1951; Contogiorgis 1978; Gehrke 1985; Polansky 1991; Gehrke 2001; Hatzistavrou 2013; Saxonhouse 2015; De Luna, Zizza, Curnis 2016; Skultety 2019; Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2020 and 2022.

come into focus: the connections of Book 2 of the *Rhetoric* and Book 5 of the *Politics*.[3] The significant connection of these two Books is also the topic of this article. It focuses on disagreements on political justice and on how emotional reactions such as 'indignation' (*nemesan*) and 'anger' (*orge*) could trigger factional conflict or civil war. Section 2 demonstrates that disagreements on political justice and political systems are a central topic of Aristotle's *Politics*. Section 3 continues this demonstration and explains Aristotle's view that moral and political disagreements on justice are the cause of *stasis*. Section 4 examines some significant connections of Book 2 of the *Rhetoric* and Book 5 of the *Politics*. Groups of citizens who are excluded from political power or who believe that they do not get their fair share become morally outraged and angry and thus motivated to engage in *stasis*. Section 4 also argues that Aristotle's studies on the function of 'anger' and 'indignation' in the *Rhetoric* allow for a better understanding of his theory of *stasis*. As overarching theses, this article claims (a) that Aristotle holds the perception of political injustice to be the most important general cause of civil war;[4] and (b) that Aristotle is the founder of a political psychology of motivation.[5] While section III explains that Aristotle distinguishes between three forms of general causes of *stasis*, section V, the conclusion, briefly illustrates how these three general causes are connected.

[3] The connection of *Rhetoric* 2 and *Politics* 5 has been examined illuminatingly by Gastaldi 2017 and De Luna 2021. Also another recent article notices «a similarity of the causes of *stasis* and the analysis of emotions in the *Rhetoric*» and claims that *Rhet.* 2.1-11 «provides a more promising analytical model than Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes» (Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2020, 553, 570). However, both analytical models do not mutually exclude each other. Despite its references to the *Rhetoric*, the article by Douglas Cairns, Mirko Canevaro and Kleanthis Mantzouranis (2022) does not scrutinize the emotions 'indignation' (*nemesan*) and 'anger' (*orge*) and their importance for Aristotle's theory of *stasis*. Gastaldi 2021 examines the relationship between the so-called 'competitive emotions', 'envy' (*phthonos*), 'indignation' (*nemesan*), and 'emulation' (*zelos*). The emotions 'envy' and 'emulation' do not seem pertinent to explaining *stasis* because they appear to be relevant only among equals while civil war mostly occurs between unequals, the rich and the poor (in oligarchies and democracies). However, future research could show that these two emotions are also relevant to explaining *stasis* and 'change' (*metabole*) of political systems.

[4] In the literature, claim (a) has repeatedly been acknowledged as one of the main results of Aristotle's theory of *stasis* (Contogiorgis 1978; Polansky 1991, 327-328, 335; Gehrke 2001; Ottmann 2001, 208; Hatzistavrou 2013, 278-279, 287-295; De Luna, Zizza, Curnis 2016; Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2020, 552, and Iid. 2022, 20, 27; for more literature, see Saxonhouse 2015, 186; Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2020, 552). In contrast, Rayon K. Balot claims that «Aristotle's own evidence and analysis suggests that the perception of injustice is not at the core of political stability»; Balot asserts that «Aristotle believes that the real root of political instability is self-aggrandizing behavior of every sort» (Balot 2001, 56; cf. 22-57).

[5] In a recent article, it has been noticed that the causality of *stasis* «needs to be investigated in terms of motivation – from within the minds of those who act, and from the point of view of the factors that lead to the decision to act»: Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2020, 552-553. This view is defended again in Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2022, 1, 20.

2. Disagreements on political justice and political systems

Aristotle's analysis of disagreements on political justice and 'political systems' (*politeiai*) is at the center of his *Politics*. Aristotle starts his analysis of disagreements on justice as early as in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 5, which was written in all likelihood before the *Politics*.[6] These disagreements concern distributive justice, which mainly regulates a just distribution of political offices and of the recognition or honor that citizens can gain through exercising them. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle only gives a brief outline of this political kind of justice (5, 1130b30–34; 1131a18–b24). In a just political distribution, shares should be bestowed on citizens «according to merit or worth» (*kat' axian*), which usually means that every male citizen gets allotted a share in proportion to his unequal «merit» or «worth» (*axia*). Citizens of one and the same *polis* have different political convictions and therefore disagree on the appropriate standard or criterion for measuring *axia*. Aristotle mentions four groups with fundamentally different political convictions and their four corresponding standards: «for democrats it is freedom (*eleutheria*), for supporters of oligarchy it is wealth (*ploutos*), for others it is noble birth (*eugeneia*), and for aristocrats it is virtue (*arete*)» (*Eth. Nic.* 5, 1131a27–29, my translation).[7]

In Book 3 of the *Politics*, Aristotle takes up the issue of disagreements on just distributions of political offices and honor, giving reasons for his own position. However, in the *Politics* (explicitly in Books 5 and 6) he no longer presents democratic justice as one interpretation of justice «according to merit», but as an application of 'numeric' or 'arithmetic' equality (*Pol.* 5, 1301b29–30; 6, 1317b4: κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀλλὰ μὴ κατ' ἀξίαν; cf. *Pol.* 6.2 and 6.3, 1318a3 ff.).[8] In the political dispute relating to just political distributions, all four political groups or parties can put forward valid arguments. The supporters of an oligarchic conception of distributive justice, who Aristotle equates with the rich, argue that they are «usually more reliable in matters of contract» and that they «have a larger share of the land», which is «a matter of public interest» (*Pol.* 3, 1280a25–31; 1283a31–33, trans. E. Barker). Because of these merits they hold an unequal share in the distribution of political power to be just, and claim that an oligarchy, in which the offices are distributed in proportion to wealth,

[6] That *Nicomachean Ethics* was written before the *Politics* is indicated by the back references of the *Politics* to Book 5 of *Eth. Nic.* (which corresponds to Book 4 of the *Eudemian Ethics*): *Pol.* 3, 1280a18; 1282b19–20. Another argument for this claim is the draft of a future political treatise at the very end of *Eth. Nic.* (10, 1181b12–23). In all likelihood, this refers to the eight Books of the *Politics*: Knoll 2011, 128–130.

[7] For more detailed interpretations of these four criteria or standards see Keyt 1991, 243–247, and Knoll 2016, 70–73.

[8] In the *Politics*, Aristotle opposes 'numeric' or 'arithmetic' equality to proportional equality or equality «according to merit» (*kat' axian*). For a different view, see Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2020, 554–558, concerning democratic justice and equality (in particular 556). Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2022, 12–17, explain their position on the tension between numeric and proportional equality in more detail and criticize my view. For a response to this criticism, see Knoll 2023.

is the appropriate 'political system' (*politeia*). The adherents of a democratic conception of distributive justice argue that all male citizens are equal because they are all born as free men. Because of their equal freedom they hold it to be just that both the poor and the rich get an equal share in political power and claim that a democracy is the appropriate political system. Contrary to the supporters of both democratic and oligarchic conceptions of distributive justice, the members of the good families refer to their 'noble birth' (*eugeneia*). They argue that they are citizens to a greater degree than those of low birth, that good birth is honored in every community, and that descendants of good parents are likely to be better than children of the low-born because noble birth is the virtue of the family. With these arguments the better-born claim that it is justified that they get a bigger share in political power than the low-born (*Pol.* 3, 1283a33-37).

This reconstruction of the arguments of the supporters of oligarchy, of the democrats, and of the well-born shows that each conception of distributive justice is linked with its corresponding political system. Each conception justifies the distribution of political power that characterizes its corresponding political system. Aristotle understands the different political systems – with the exception of tyranny – as embodiments of different conceptions of distributive justice.[9] Therefore, the disagreements on political justice are also disagreements on 'political systems' (*politeiai*).

In the *Politics*, Aristotle presents several arguments for his preference for the aristocratic conception that holds political virtue (*politike arete*) to be the most justified claim for political offices and power. Aristotle's main reason for this preference is that political virtue contributes substantially to reaching the good life or 'human flourishing' (*eudaimonia*), the true goal of the *polis*. Because of the close link between the four conceptions of distributive justice and their respective political systems, regarding his political convictions, Aristotle has to be classified as a supporter of aristocracy.[10] For Aristotle, the best political system is a true aristocracy in which the morally and intellectually best men rule.[11]

3. Disagreements on political justice and political systems as cause of civil war

Disagreements on political justice are of high practical relevance because they can lead to violent 'factional conflict' or 'civil war' (*stasis*). Aristotle considers

[9] Cf. Keyt 1991, 238; Mulgan 1991, 310; Miller 1995, 79; Knoll 2016, 76; Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2020, 564.

[10] For reconstructions of Aristotle's arguments for the conception of distributive justice he favors, see Keyt 1991, 247-259, and Knoll 2016, 73-86; cf. Miller 1995, 127, and Bertelli 2011.

[11] Cf. Keyt 1991, 260-270; Miller 1995, 192; Kraut 2002, 232; Bertelli 2011, 76; Knoll 2016, 86-94; Langmeier 2018, 317-368; Giorgini 2019, 138. For a critique of a different line of interpretation that understands Aristotle's best political system as a mixed government, which he calls 'polity' (*politeia*), and the literature on this issue see Knoll 2016, 60, 87-94.

the perception of political injustice as the most important general cause of factional conflict or civil war. Referring back to *Pol.* 5.1 and summarizing its content, Aristotle himself highlights the perception of political injustice as the «principal and general cause of an attitude of mind which disposes men towards change» (*Pol.* 5, 1302a23-31, trans. E. Barker). This general cause of *stasis* concerns the mental state or psychic motivation of the citizens, which leads them to start an uprising. From this cause, Aristotle distinguishes two further forms of general causes of *stasis*. The second form should be interpreted as the final causes of factional conflict. If we know the goal (*telos*) of an uprising, we are able to explain why it happens.[12] Aristotle holds the two general goals of factional conflict to be honor or recognition (*time*) and profit or 'material gain' (*kerdos*). Those who start an uprising either seek profit and honor or try to avoid losing these goods «either for themselves or for their friends (*Pol.* 5, 1302a31-34, trans. C. Lord). The third form of general causes of *stasis* should be interpreted as their efficient causes that constitute their initial impulse or trigger such as the arrogance or insolence (*hybris*) of those who are in office or citizens' fear of suffering injustice or of being punished for committed injustices (*Pol.* 5, 1302a16-b5). Aristotle lists profit and honor also as origins or efficient causes of uprisings (*Pol.* 5, 1302a34-35; 1302b2). However, whether and how Aristotle's theory of the four causes can be applied to his theory of *stasis* is a disputed issue in the literature. The same is true for the relationship between the three general causes of factional conflict or civil war.[13]

Aristotle holds the perception of political injustice to be the most important general cause of civil war. If a group of citizens holds its particular share in political power to be unjust, it is prone to *stasis*. Aristotle discusses this cause or motive of *stasis*, which has been adequately denominated as «injustice-induced faction»,[14] in the crucial first chapter of *Pol.* 5. In the chapter, Aristotle focuses on democracy and oligarchy, which he recognizes as the prevailing political systems of his time (*Pol.* 5, 1301b39-40; cf. *Pol.* 3., 1286b20-22). Already Thucydides informs us of how unstable both of these constitutional types were. During the Peloponnesian War, Athens, the champion of democracy, aimed at constitutional change by supporting democratic parties in oligarchic political systems. While Athens triggered revolutions in order to make Greece 'safe for

[12] For Aristotle's account of a final cause, as one of four causes, see *Ph.* 2, 194b16-195a3.

[13] For detailed interpretations of all three general causes and the literature, see Hatzistavrou 2013, 281-287; Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2020 and 2022. In a recent article, it has been claimed that «Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes […] is not designed to be applied to actions» (Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2020, 553). This contention is not comprehensible because (a) Aristotle uses actions to illustrate the efficient and the final cause, e.g., «the father is cause of the child» and «health is the cause of walking about» (*Phys.* 2, 194b31-33) and because (b) to scientifically explain something means for Aristotle to acquire knowledge of its origins (*archai*) and causes (*aitiai*) (cf. *Metaphys.* 1.1). For the literature on the disagreement whether Aristotle's doctrine of the four causes can be applied to explain the causes of *stasis*, see Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2022, 11 n. 20.

[14] Hatzistavrou 2013, 276, 278, 290.

democracy', its rival Sparta destabilized the democratic allies of Athens in order to introduce oligarchic political systems.[15]

At the beginning of *Pol.* 5, Aristotle attributes the origin of democracy and oligarchy to the opposing conceptions of justice of their supporters, which have been examined in section 2. Due to their equal freedom, the democrats consider equal political participation, and therefore a democratic system of government, to be just. In contrast, based on their unequal wealth and unequal contribution to the *polis*, the rich hold an unequal share in the government and an oligarchic political system to be appropriate. As origins and causes of their corresponding systems of government, Aristotle assesses both conceptions of justice to be ultimately mistaken because they are the reason that democracies and oligarchies are instable and cannot be steadily preserved (*Pol.* 5, 1301a35-36; 1302a4-7). The rich citizens strive to overthrow democracies because they retain a distribution of political power, in which every citizen has an equal claim, to be unjust. In contrast, in oligarchies uprisings happen because the poor citizens are excluded from political life, which causes their indignation and anger. As a result, and in line with their conception of justice, they request to participate in government equally (*Pol.* 5, 1302a22 ff.; 1303b3-7; 1316a39-b5). While the rich strive for a form of political participation that is equal in proportion to their wealth and contribution, the poor aspire to partake in the political life equally in a numerical sense.[16] This is why Aristotle arrives at the overall conclusion that «in general it is equality they seek when they engage in factional conflict»; or, «factional conflict is everywhere the result of inequality» (*Pol.* 5, 1301b26-29, trans. C. Lord). However, uprisings each time originate from the citizens, or group of citizens, who are not in power or do not have the amount of power they feel entitled to: «The inferior always seek equality and justice; those who dominate them take no thought for it» (*Pol.* 6, 1318b4-5, trans. C. Lord).

4. Indignation and anger as causes of civil war: Aristotle's political psychology of factional conflict

According to the central argument of *Pol.* 5.1, the perception of political injustice is the most important general cause of 'factional conflict' or 'civil war' (*stasis*). As previously mentioned, this is one of the main results of Aristotle's theory of *stasis*. The importance he himself attributes to this result is easily recognized by how often he comes back to it in Book 5 (1302a22 ff.; 1303b3-7; 1316a39-b5). The perception of political injustice concerns the psychic constitution or mental state of the citizens who engage in factional conflict. Such perceptions cause

[15] Thuc. 3.82; *Pol.* 5, 1307b19-24; Bleicken 1994, 58-59. Also after the Peloponnesian War, in the 4th century BC, several bloody revolutions happened, e.g. in Thebes and Thessalia: cf. Gehrke 1985. For Aristotle's view of the transformation of the democratic idea in Athens and for the role justice plays in the constitutional changes of this *polis*, see Poddighe 2014.

[16] Cf. n. 8.

indignation and anger which in turn can cause an uprising (cf. *Rhet.* 2.2 and 2.9). Perceptions of political injustice are possible because of the human sense of justice, which is a distinctive human faculty. In the context of his famous definition of man as the only living being that possesses *logos*, speech and reason, Aristotle explains «that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and the other things of this sort» (*Pol.* 1, 1253a14-18, trans. C. Lord). The human sense of justice is the anthropological or psychic base of the opposing and irreconcilable conceptions of political justice and thus of all perceptions of political injustice. This distinctive human faculty plays an essential role in generating the indignation and anger that motivates factional conflict. Aristotle is not only among the pioneers of a theory of moral and political disagreement, but also among the founders of a political psychology of motivation.

Although Aristotle does not explicitly refer to his *Rhetoric* in *Pol.* 5, Book 2 of *Rhetoric* allows for a better understanding of political actions and their motives and therefore of his theory of *stasis*.[17] *Rhet.* 2 contains a theory of human 'emotions' and 'passions' (*pathe*), e.g. anger, love, hatred, fear, desire, and indignation (cf. *Eth. Nic.* 2.4). Of the main *pathe* Aristotle examines in *Rhet.* 2, in *Pol.* 5 he explicitly mentions only fear (*phobos*) as a catalyst of *stasis* (*Pol.* 5, 1302b2). However, in *Pol.* 5 he also refers to the arrogance or insolence (*hybris*) of those who are in office and to contempt (*kataphronesis*),[18] which could cause or trigger factional conflict or a civil war (*Pol.* 5, 1302b2-3, 5-10, 25-33). In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains that such behaviors are forms of 'lack of respect' (*oligoria*)[19] that usually cause anger (*orge*), in particular if the ones who behave arrogantly or contemptuously have no right to do so (*Rhet.* 2, 1378a31-b34). That is especially the case if they are inferiors in birth, power, or virtue (*Rhet.* 2, 1378b34-35). In particular the rich and well-off citizens, «if the regime gives them preeminence, seek to act arrogantly and aggrandize themselves (ὑβρίζειν ζητοῦσι καὶ πλεονεκτεῖν)» (*Pol.* 5, 1307a19-20, trans. C. Lord). This shows again that Aristotle's analysis of anger is particularly relevant in the political context and for his theory of *stasis*. When human beings have to endure lack of respect and belittlement, they get angry and thus feel a desire for revenge

[17] In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle alludes to the relation of this science to his political and ethical writings. He claims that «rhetoric is an offshoot of dialectic and also of ethical studies. Ethical studies may fairly be called political; and for this reason, rhetoric masquerades as political science» (*Rhet.* 1, 1356a25-28, trans. W. Rhys Roberts). Machiavelli and Hobbes seem to draw significantly on Aristotle's theory of human 'passions' and 'emotions' (*pathe*), which he presents in *Rhet.* 2.

[18] In *Pol.* 5, Aristotle does not refer to the contempt which those who are in office show towards the ruled as catalyst of *stasis* but to the contempt that those who are excluded from power feel (a) towards the few rulers in oligarchies or (b) towards the disorder and chaos in a democracy (*Pol.* 5, 1302b25-33).

[19] In the context of Aristotle's definition of anger (*orge*) in *Rhet.* 2.2, «lack of respect» or «mancanza di riguardo» (C. Viano) seems to be the best translation of *oligoria*. Also the German word *Geringschätzung* would be an appropriate translation. Other common translations such as «slight esteem or regard» (E.M. Cope and J.E. Sandys) or «slight» (W. Rhys Roberts) in the meaning of 'Kränkung' (F.G. Sieveke) seem too specific or not general enough and therefore less appropriate.

and for a renewed self-affirmation.[20] Aristotle defines anger as a desire (*orexis*), «accompanied by pain, for a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight at the hands of men who have no call to slight oneself or one's friends» (*Rhet.* 2, 1378a31-33, trans. W. Rhys Roberts). A 'slight' or 'lack of respect' (*oligoria*) causes pain, resentment, and the desire for revenge, which can trigger *stasis*. However, this desire is not enough to cause a civil war but needs the underlying judgement that those who show no respect have no right to do so. In the political context, this judgement presupposes the perception of political injustice, which illustrates that the first and the third general cause of *stasis* are connected. Claims to respect in the political context and angry responses to a lack of respect are linked to political disagreements on the question of who should rule in the *polis*. As Aristotle explains, the «ruler demands the respect of the ruled, and the man who thinks he ought to be a ruler demands the respect of the man whom he thinks he ought to be ruling» (*Rhet.* 2, 1379a3-4, trans. W. Rhys Roberts).

Anger is not the only emotion that is particularly relevant in the political context and for Aristotle's theory of civil war. The same is true for 'indignation' and for a more potent version of this emotion, which is usually referred to as 'moral outrage'.[21] Both are emotions that are accompanied by pain. In *Rhet.* 2.9, Aristotle explains that «not any and every man» «deserves any given kind of good; there is a certain correspondence and appropriateness in such things […]. Indignation may therefore properly be felt when anyone gets what is not appropriate for him» (*Rhet.* 2, 1387a27-32, trans. W. Rhys Roberts). Aristotle's central normative claim in *Rhet.* 2.9 is that we should «feel indignation at unmerited prosperity» (*Rhet.* 2, 1386b10); for this claim he argues: «for whatever is undeserved is unjust» (*Rhet.* 2, 1386b15, trans. W. Rhys Roberts). This statement is based on the concept of distributive justice that Aristotle introduces in *Eth. Nic.* 5: a just distribution is a distribution «according to merit» (*kat' axian*).[22] If we observe someone having unmerited success or good fortune, our sense of justice detects that this is unjust. According to Aristotle, this perception of injustice should cause an immediate emotional reaction: we should feel indignation or even moral outrage. At

[20] Cristina Viano astutely explains that anger is «une réaction à la diminution de soi, une opposition à l'imposition de l'autre, une ré-attestation de soi»: Viano 2002, 242.

[21] In *Rhet.* 2.9, for the emotional reactions 'indignation' and 'moral outrage' Aristotle only once uses the noun *nemesis* (*Rhet.* 2, 1386b23), which he lists as an ethical virtue in *Eth. Nic.* 2, 1108a35-b6. Usually he refers to these reactions with the verb *nemesan*, also *kalousi nemesan* or *eu nemesan* (*Rhet.* 2, 1386b9-14). Gastaldi 2021, 70, convincingly explains Aristotle's preference for verbs in the *Rhetoric*: «This preference is attested also in the case of other emotions (e.g., *philein* rather than *philia*, and *misein* rather than *misos*), and suggests that Aristotle regarded each *pathos* as psychological reaction that occurs at a particular moment in time and has a limited duration». Aristotle does not propose different terms for different magnitudes or strengths of indignation, but it is obvious that graduations of this emotion exist. In all likelihood, mild indignation does not motivate political action, while moral outrage could easily trigger an uprising.

[22] Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 5, 1131a25-26 and section 2 of this article. Aristotle holds merit (*axia*) to be a supreme moral value; cf. Gastaldi 2021, 66.

bottom, Aristotle holds that it is the perception of injustice that should cause indignation or moral outrage.

In *Rhet.* 2.9, Aristotle makes clear that indignation is an emotion that is particularly relevant in the political context. Analyzing on what grounds we experience this emotion, he explains: «Indignation is roused by the sight of wealth, power, and the like – by all those things, roughly speaking, which are deserved by good men and by those who possess the goods of nature – noble birth, beauty, and so on» (*Rhet.* 2, 1387a13-16, trans. W. Rhys Roberts).

In the literature, Aristotle's political leanings and convictions are a disputed issue. His normative theory of indignation, however, adds evidence to the thesis that he is an aristocratic political thinker.[23] In *Rhet.* 2.9, Aristotle argues that indignation is proper to the good or noble character (*ethos chreston*) (*Rhet.* 2, 1386b13). Such a character is supposed to feel indignation by the unjust achievements of the newly rich, in particular if they are «obtaining office through their riches» (*Rhet.* 2, 1387a23-24, trans. W. Rhys Roberts).[24] Despite the normative and aristocratic core of Aristotle's treatment of indignation, his theory can be applied to all four political groups he mentions in *Eth. Nic.* 5.[25] The supporters of democracy, oligarchy, true aristocracy, and nobility by birth have opposing political convictions and different standards of desert or merit (*axia*). Nevertheless, based on their particular perceptions of *axia* they are all prone to feel indignation or even moral outrage. While the few wealthy citizens feel indignation because they hold an equal distribution of power and recognition in a democracy to be unjust, the many feel the same emotional pain in an oligarchy because they think the wealthy do not deserve the amount of power and recognition they enjoy in such a political system. Despite the fact that such perceptions of *axia* frequently cause indignation or moral outrage, Aristotle leaves no doubt that in the political context only the true aristocrats, the truly virtuous citizens who have a good or noble character, are most entitled to feel indignation. Nonetheless, when they are not in government, they hardly strive to seize political power: «Those who are outstanding in virtue would engage in factional conflict most justifiably, yet they do it the least of all» (*Pol.* 5, 1301a39-40, trans. C. Lord). Aristotle does not explain whether he holds this to be a good or a bad attitude, but as he nowhere advocates the overthrow of political systems, likely he approves.

Indignation and anger usually operate together as causes of civil wars. However, it is dubious whether Aristotle really holds that indignation can transform itself into anger in certain situations as has been claimed.[26] Rather, indignation and anger seem to be painful emotions that have different causes or originate

[23] The thesis that Aristotle is an aristocratic political thinker is defended in Knoll 2009.

[24] This could be interpreted as an aristocratic argument against oligarchy.

[25] Cf. *Eth. Nic.* 5, 1131a25-26 and section 2 of this article.

[26] De Luna 2021, 41. De Luna's claim is plausible but does not seem supported by Aristotle's text. De Luna refers to similar reflections on the relation of indignation and anger by Campeggiani 2014, 194.

from different sources. Nevertheless, they often occur at the same time. In the political context, indignation is the painful emotion I feel when I look at others and perceive the injustice that they enjoy power and recognition they do not deserve.[27] In contrast, anger is the painful emotion I feel when others treat me with a lack of respect, which is the case when I do not get the amount of recognition that I think I deserve. Indignation is caused by what happens to others, anger is caused by what happens to me. Anger is especially excited when others, in particular arrogant holders of political offices, treat me with lack of respect and I feel belittled, slighted, or even humiliated. Anger and moral outrage occur at the same time when ambitious citizens are excluded from political power and strive for recognition while they see that others enjoy these goods without deserving them (cf. *Rhet.* 2, 1387b8-10). In such cases, the 'theoretical' moral disagreement on just distributions of political offices and power can easily turn into 'practical' political action and can lead to civil war. Aristotle's studies on the function of anger and indignation in the *Rhetoric* allow for a better understanding of his theory of *stasis*.

As previously mentioned, Aristotle understands honor or recognition (*time*) and profit or 'material gain' (*kerdos*) as both second and third general causes of *stasis* and thus as final and efficient causes of civil war. One explanation of the central role of the striving for profit and honor in Aristotle's analysis of *stasis* is that he views them as basic human drives. The same is true for an extreme striving for these goals called 'greed' (*pleonexia*)[28] and 'ambition' (*philotimia*). Concerning the relation of the striving for material gain and for honor, Aristotle explains that «the many strive more for profit than for honor» (*Pol.* 6, 1318b16-17, trans. C. Lord). However, in particular the few wealthy citizens have a strong desire for honor or recognition.[29] In Greek culture, the 'competition' or 'contest' (*agon*) for honor in spheres such as sports, cultural performances, and politics was a central element. The citizens' striving for political honor equals their striving for political power and offices because one achieves recognition by executing political offices. Aristotle even identifies political offices with honor or recognition, «For we say that offices are honors» (*Pol.* 3, 1281a31; trans. C. Lord).[30]

[27] Gastaldi 2021, 67, astutely points out that indignation contains both «a comparison with others» and «a moral evaluation».

[28] For Aristotle, *pleonexia* is a morally reprehensible drive to get more than one deserves with particular regard to external goods such as political power, honor and gain. This drive is primarily a characteristic of the rich and well-off citizens (*Pol.* 5, 1307a17-20, 29-31). Aristotle holds *pleonexia* to be a vice so prevalent and significant that he identifies it with particular injustice, which he opposes to «justice as a part of virtue» (*Eth. Nic.* 5, 1129b1-10; 1130a15-b4; cf. Knoll 2009, 65-68). For the erroneous claim that in Aristotle's *Politics pleonexia* is not focused on honor, see Balot 2001, 1, 64; for this criticism see also Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2020, 563.

[29] For the relation of the goals *time* and *kerdos*, see Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2022, 29. The authors argue convincingly for the «primacy of honour when it comes to the factors that trigger social upheaval» (p. 28).

[30] For honor as one goal of a political life, see *Eth. Nic.* 1, 1095b20-31; the 'great-souled person' (*megalopsychos*) chooses wealth and power for the honor they bring (*Eth. Nic.* 4, 1124a17-19).

In political systems, offices are institutionalized sources of recognition. From this perspective, a democracy deprives the few wealthy citizens of the amount of honor or recognition – along with the material gain – that they think they deserve. This perceived lack of respect could easily arouse their anger (*orge*) and make them oppose the democratic political system they are citizens of. At the same time, the few wealthy citizens feel that the common citizens who hold most offices in a democracy do not deserve their power and recognition. They perceive this lack of merit as an injustice and this perception could easily cause indignation or even moral outrage (*Rhet.* 2, 1386b10-16; 1387a8-11). Both their anger and their indignation can trigger an uprising against the democratic political system, which treats them as common citizens. When the wealthy few engage in *stasis*, they aim both at the respect or recognition – along with the profit – they think they deserve and at the loss of power of those who do not deserve it in their view. Similar psychological mechanisms, perceptions, and motivations explain the instability of oligarchies. In such political systems the many who are common citizens are excluded from all important political offices and recognition. They experience this exclusion as unjust and as a lack of respect or recognition that could easily cause their anger. When the many engage in *stasis*, they do not only aim at political power but at the equal respect or recognition they think they deserve. At the same time, they feel that the rich do not deserve their power and recognition, which could easily cause their indignation or even moral outrage.

5. Conclusion

Finally, it is possible to briefly illustrate how Aristotle's three general causes of *stasis* are connected.[31] The perception of political injustice, which is the most important general cause of civil war, frequently goes along with a painful feeling of citizens excluded from power: they often experience this exclusion as a lack of respect or lack of recognition, which causes their anger. This painful experience is usually connected with the perception that those who rule do not deserve their power and recognition, which causes indignation or even moral outrage. Both painful emotions could motivate a civil war in which the insurgent leaders not only seek political power but the recognition or honor – along with the material gain – they think they deserve. The perception of political injustice is experienced by the citizens excluded from power as a painful lack of recognition or honor (*atimia*) which can trigger an uprising (third general cause). Such an uprising is not only motivated by injustice, indignation, and anger, but also by the goal to obtain a fair share of recognition and material gain (second general cause).

[31] For an astute and extensive interpretation of this connection, see Cairns, Canevaro, Mantzouranis 2020, 558 ff. The authors convincingly claim that «it is within the framework of the first, fundamental cause of *stasis* that the second and third cause need to be understood» (p. 558); cf. Iid. 2022, 22-27.

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