



Aristotle and Utopia

Antonio Donato¹

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Abstract

Aristotle and utopia may seem an odd combination. Anthologies of utopian texts do not contain passages from Aristotle's writings. He also typically does not feature in histories of utopia. Nonetheless, a close reading of the *Politics* reveals that Aristotle had an extensive and rather distinctive interest in the enterprise of imagining utopias or ideal cities. The peculiarity of his exploration of utopia lies in its multifaceted approach. He combines critical assessments of some of his predecessors' ideal cities with the creation of several of his own. This article explores the hypothesis that Aristotle's lengthy and varied analysis of ideal cities plays a crucial, though not obvious, role in the history of utopia. The relevance of his speculation lies in identifying (i) distinct ways of conceptualizing the activity of imagining a utopia and (ii) themes and concerns fundamental to designing it. However, the importance of Aristotle's place in the history of utopia is not primarily due to his direct impact on later utopists – his major influence is limited to a handful of Renaissance authors. Instead, his significance lies predominantly in the fact that he was one of the very first thinkers to recognize and articulate key elements of the utopian endeavour. This study examines the points of contact between Aristotle's utopias and representative modern/contemporary utopias and dystopias. It aims not to institute strict parallels between these works and the *Politics* but to show how they share some of the 'essential ingredients' of utopian literature.

Aristotle and utopia may seem an odd combination. Most anthologies of utopian texts do not contain any of Aristotle's writings.¹ He also does not typically feature in the histories of utopia.² In their monumental and highly influential history of

¹ J. Carey, *The Faber Book of Utopias*, London, 2000; *The Utopia Reader*, ed. G. Claeys and L. T. Sargent, New York, 2017; J. W. Johnson, *Utopian Literature: A Selection*, New York, 1968.

² J. O. Hertzler, *The History of Utopian Thought*, New York, 1923; L. Mumford, *The Story of Utopias*, New York, 1922. An exception is M. L. Berneri, *Journey Through Utopia*, London, 1950, pp. 9, 28, 57, 145.

✉ Antonio Donato
antonio.donato@qc.cuny.edu

¹ Philosophy Department, Queens College, CUNY, Queens, NY, USA

utopian thought, Manuel and Manuel mention Aristotle only in passing.³ Even those scholars who study the utopian sections of the *Politics* do not investigate whether the treatise merely presents some utopian elements or makes a distinct contribution to the history of utopia.⁴ Yet, Aristotle's specific, extensive interest in the enterprise of imagining utopias or ideal cities/states calls for an exploration of his contributions to the genre.⁵

The peculiarity of Aristotle's exploration of utopia lies in its multifaceted approach. In the first part of the *Politics* (II.1–8), he provides detailed, critical assessments of the ideal cities envisaged by some of his predecessors: Plato, Phaleas and Hippodamus.⁶ Although Aristotle criticizes specific characteristics of these ideal cities, he does not question the value of the exercise of imagining an ideal city. Instead, he implies that it is an essential component of political thought. The development of the *Politics* confirms this idea. Later in the treatise, he engages in the same intellectual exercise several times by depicting, in varying detail, not one but several ideal or best cities.⁷ His descriptions of the best city most suitable for most human beings (IV.11) and the best cities attainable by improving ordinary cities (IV.12–16; VI) culminate in the depiction of the *absolute* best city, which could be established if all desirable factors were to occur (VII–VIII).⁸ Thus, Aristotle combines two approaches to utopia: critical assessments of some of his predecessors' ideal cities and creation of several of his own. His distinctive approach to exploring utopias features prominently in the *Politics*. Among its eight books, one contains extensive examinations of some of his predecessors' ideal cities (II.1–8), and five are partially (III.13, IV.11–16) or entirely (VI, VII–VIII) devoted to depicting the various types of ideal cities he envisages.

Aristotle's sustained, multidimensional interest in ideal societies makes us wonder why scholars of utopia have not examined his utopianism vis-à-vis those of others. His dual role as critic and proponent of ideal cities should have earned him a place

³ F. E. Manuel and F. P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 4, 10, 12.

⁴ See Section I below.

⁵ The expressions 'ideal city/state' and 'utopia' are often interpreted as referring to two distinct ways of depicting the 'best society': the former characteristic of Greco-Roman thinkers, the latter of modern/contemporary authors. I use 'utopia' and 'ideal city/state' interchangeably.

⁶ The ideal states Aristotle considers are all πόλεις. The Greek term πόλις is typically translated as 'city' or 'city-state'. These expressions must, however, be used carefully. Πόλις refers to not only the physical environment, which includes both the city and the surrounding territory, but also what we call 'civil society' (i.e. a network of family ties, economic and religious practices and social organizations and relations) and the 'state' (i.e. a political association with legitimate power over a territory and its people). Aristotle often refers to a state using the expression πολιτεία. Although πολιτεία is conventionally translated as 'constitution' or 'state', he employs the term rather broadly to indicate a city's political system and a way of organizing people's lives (*Politics*, 1274b36–38). Cf. C. A. Bates, *Aristotle's "Best Regime": Kingship, Democracy, and the Rule of Law*, Baton Rouge, 2003, pp. 17–27. For the hypothesis that Aristotle envisaged a world-state, see S. M. Stern, *Aristotle on the World-State*, Oxford, 1968, pp. 35–66.

⁷ Section III below examines the sense in which the 'ideal' city is also the 'best'.

⁸ I adopt the traditional manner of ordering the books of the *Politics*; see R. Kraut, *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, Oxford, 2002, pp. 181–91.

in the history of utopia alongside figures such as More, Doni, Zuccolo, Butler, Wells, Huxley and Le Guin, who, although in very different ways, were also both critics and creators of utopias.⁹ In this article, I explore the hypothesis that Aristotle's lengthy, varied analysis of ideal societies plays a critical, though not obvious, role in the history of utopia. The significance of his speculation lies in identifying distinct ways of conceptualizing the activity of imagining an ideal state and the themes and concerns fundamental to designing a utopia. The importance of Aristotle's place in the history of utopia is not, however, mainly due to his direct impact on later utopists – his major influence is limited to a handful of Renaissance authors. Instead, his significance lies primarily in being one of the very first thinkers to identify and articulate key elements of the utopian endeavour. Although later utopists were often unaware of his views, they explored and rediscovered, throughout the history of the genre, many of the elements that he had singled out. My study examines the points of contact between Aristotle's utopias and representative modern/contemporary utopias and dystopias.¹⁰ I attempt not to institute strict parallelisms between these works and the *Politics* but to show how they share some essential ingredients of utopian literature.¹¹

This article is structured as follows. Section I critiques the main trends in the scholarship on Aristotle's utopianism. Section II briefly clarifies my use of the term 'utopia'. Section III examines Aristotle's decision to pay considerable attention to ideal cities in a work of practical science (i.e. the *Politics*) and its implications. Sections IV and V discuss Aristotle's critical assessment of some of his predecessors' ideal cities. Finally, Sections VI and VII explore the various ideal societies he depicts in the *Politics*.

I

The scholarly literature is somewhat ambivalent about Aristotle's utopianism. Although nearly all anthologies and histories of utopia exclude him, several classicists have extensively studied the utopian sections of the *Politics*.¹² The

⁹ L. T. Sargent, *Utopianism*, Oxford, 2010, pp. 18–19, notes that Aristotle was both a critic and a creator of utopias; however, he examines neither of these two attitudes towards utopia nor how they are to be reconciled.

¹⁰ I follow an established scholarly view according to which dystopias are an integral part of the history of utopia; see *ibid.*, pp. 26–30.

¹¹ My selections of modern/contemporary utopias may be questioned. I favour Italian Renaissance utopias since Aristotle's direct influence on them is indisputable. I also discuss several modern/contemporary utopias to convey a sense of the recurrence throughout history of themes and ideas found in Aristotle's writings.

¹² W. J. Oates, 'The Ideal States of Plato and Aristotle', in *The Greek Political Experience: Studies in Honor of William Kelly Prentice*, Princeton, 1941, pp. 187–213; P. A. Vander Waerdt, 'Kingship and Philosophy in Aristotle's Best Regime', *Phronesis*, 30, 1985, pp. 249–73; G. L. Huxley, 'On Aristotle's Best State', *History of Political Thought*, 6, 1985, pp. 139–49; R. C. Bartlett, 'Aristotle's Best Regime', PhD diss., Boston College, 1992; J. Chuska, *Aristotle's Best Regime: A Reading of Aristotle's 'Politics' VII.1–10*, Lanham, 2000; Kraut, 'Aristotle' (n. 8 above), pp. 192–240; R. T Long, 'Aristotle's Egalitarian Utopia: The Polis Kat'Euken', in *The Imaginary Polis: Symposium, January 7–10, 2004*, Acts of the Copenhagen Polis Centre, Vol. 7, ed. M. H. Hansen, Copenhagen, 2005, pp. 164–96; F. D. Miller, 'Aristotle on the Ideal Constitution', in *A Companion to Aristotle*, ed. G. Anagnostopoulos, Oxford, 2009, pp. 540–54.

source of this discrepancy seems to lie in how these scholars approach Aristotle's utopianism. Some (e.g. Huxley, Vander Waerdt) do not use the term 'utopia' (and its cognates) when referring to Aristotle's ideal cities. Others (e.g. Kraut, Long) employ 'utopia' to identify a normative model without implying any connection to the utopian genre.¹³ 'Utopia' thus becomes merely a convenient expression to label specific sections of the *Politics*, while Aristotle's contribution to utopia's history remains unexplored.¹⁴ Classicists avoid investigating Aristotle's links to later utopists partially because such an enterprise exceeds the scope of their research, which aims to interpret the *Politics*. Classicists also seem wary of the potential risks of investigating Aristotle's place in the history of utopia. According to an established interpretation, Greco-Roman ideal cities are fundamentally different from modern/contemporary utopias.¹⁵ Ancient ideal cities are seen as lacking the literary elements characteristic of utopias (e.g. voyage narrative, encounter with a new society and depiction of the utopia's way of life) and promoting institutions and values that modern/contemporary authors find undesirable.¹⁶ Greco-Roman and modern/contemporary authors are also thought to conceptualize utopia differently.¹⁷ The former purportedly envisage ideal societies as theoretical standards; the latter view their utopias as political programmes. However, classicists' reluctance to investigate possible connections between Aristotle and the utopian tradition appears unjustified in light of the findings of Renaissance scholars. For example, Nelson and White have demonstrated that Books VII–VIII of the *Politics* are crucial for More,¹⁸ the genre's undisputed father, and recent studies have documented Aristotle's vital role in Italian Renaissance utopianism.¹⁹

Nonetheless, some scholars have departed from the dominant scholarly trend and tried to position Aristotle within the history of utopia. Jackson shows that Aristotle articulates a 'logic of political imagination' that can be found in later utopists.²⁰ Horn and Dawson argue that Aristotle's way of conceptualizing the ideal city is authentically utopian, as he develops a normative model against which actual cities

¹³ For a qualified rejection of the view that Aristotle was a utopist, see J. Ferguson, *Utopias of the Classical World*, London, 1975, pp. 80–8.

¹⁴ Some scholars argue that Aristotle's ideal city is not a utopia; see S. Salkever, 'Whose Prayer? The Best Regime of Book 7 and the Lessons of Aristotle's *Politics*', *Political Theory*, 35, 2007, pp. 29–46.

¹⁵ Although contemporary utopists do not typically refer to Aristotle, Wells is a significant exception, given his central role in the history of utopia. In *A Modern Utopia*, he combines a depiction and a critique of a utopian world (Utopian Earth), in which he often refers to famous utopists (Plato, Aristotle, More, Campanella, Cabet, Morris, Bellamy, Howells and Hertzka). Aristotle's presence in this group is noteworthy.

¹⁶ B. Baczkó, *Utopian Lights: The Evolution of the Idea of Social Progress*, New York, 1989; L. Bertelli, 'Genesi e vicenda dell'utopia greca', in *Utopia e distopia*, ed. A. Colombo, Bari, 1993, pp. 221–52 (225–6); K. Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Oxford, 1987, pp. 2–7 and 24.

¹⁷ D. Dawson, *Cities of the Gods. Communist Utopias in Greek Thought*, New York, 1992, pp. 3–8.

¹⁸ E. Nelson, 'Utopia Through Italian Eyes: Thomas More and the Critics of Civic Humanism', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 59, 2006, pp. 1029–57; T. I. White, 'A Study of the Influence of Plato and Aristotle on Thomas More's *Utopia*', PhD diss., Columbia University, 1974, pp. 151–224; id., 'Aristotle and *Utopia*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 29, 1976, pp. 635–75.

¹⁹ A. Donato, *Italian Renaissance Utopias: Doni, Patrizi, and Zuccolo*, Cham, 2019.

²⁰ M. Jackson, 'Designed by Theorists: Aristotle on Utopia', *Utopian Studies*, 12, 2001, pp. 1–12 (10).

can be judged.²¹ These authors, however, provide only limited examinations of the traits Aristotle shares with other utopists.²² His role in the genre's history is thus *asserted* but not conclusively demonstrated. A fundamental question remains: if Aristotle is a utopist, what critical elements do his accounts of ideal cities share with those of more prominent representatives of the utopian genre?

To study Aristotle's role in the history of utopia it is necessary to confront the issue arising from the contributions of classicists. Can commonalities be identified between his analyses of ideal cities and modern/contemporary utopias without stumbling into serious conceptual and historical problems? What makes this enterprise possible is that the differences between Greco-Roman ideal cities and modern/contemporary utopias are not as radical as has traditionally been believed. The view that ancient utopias are not proper utopias because they lack the characteristic literary features of modern/contemporary ones is at odds with many texts regarded as core works of utopian literature.²³ Anthologies and histories regularly include texts that lack such literary characteristics.²⁴ Moreover, contrary to the dominant interpretation, modern/contemporary utopias often do not formulate programmes for political action.²⁵ As for classical utopias, some are not intended as articulations of theoretical standards but are instead concerned with the realizability of their ideas.²⁶

Assessing Aristotle's role in the history of utopia also requires being mindful of the broader issue of the possible continuity between ancient and modern/contemporary utopias. I shall explore this topic in detail. Before proceeding further, however, I must briefly discuss my understanding of the term 'utopia'.

II

A brief clarification of the term 'utopia' is a necessary step in exploring whether, contrary to the dominant view, Aristotle's ideal cities and modern/contemporary utopias share characteristics that justify comparing them. Defining 'utopia' is

²¹ C. Horn, 'Aristotle's "City of our Prayers" Within the History of Political Utopianism', in *Utopias in Ancient Thought*, ed. P. Destrée et al., Berlin, 2021, pp. 167–84; Dawson, *Cities* (n. 17 above), pp. 7–8, 35–43.

²² Dawson, *Cities* (n. 17 above), pp. 7–8.

²³ Defining a utopian text is notoriously difficult. In the past century, however, anthologies and histories of utopia have implicitly identified a more or less accepted core of utopian works that appear in most collections.

²⁴ E.g. Johan Eberlin von Günzburg, *Wolfaria*, 1521; Francesco Patrizi, *La città felice*, 1553; Ludovico Agostini, *Repubblica immaginaria*, 1591; Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621; Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill*, 1794; Begum Rokeya, *Sultana's Dream*, 1905.

²⁵ E.g. Anton Francesco Doni, *Mondo Savio e Pazzo*, 1552; Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World*, 1666; Samuel Butler, *Erewhon*, 1872; M. A. Pittock, *The God of Civilization. A Romance*, 1890; Ignatius Donnelly, *The Golden Bottle*, 1892.

²⁶ Further examples of classical utopias that are not conceived as normative models include the satirical utopias of Aristophanes and Lucian and the Hellenistic 'utopias of escape' of Diodorus Siculus and Iambulus.

a notoriously difficult task; however, the seminal studies of Survin and Sargent have brought significant conceptual clarity to the debate.²⁷ Sargent has usefully distinguished three aspects or ‘faces’ of utopianism: the literary, the communitarian and the social. Survin focuses on utopia as a ‘literary genre’, which he defines as ‘the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms and individual relationships are organised according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community’.²⁸ Sargent’s definition of literary utopias has similarities with Survin’s but introduces the critical difference between ‘body utopias’, which are attained without human effort, and ‘city utopias’, which emerge from human interventions.²⁹

In this study, I examine only literary utopias and adopt most elements of Survin and Sargent’s definitions, with some critical modifications. My account of utopia aims to encapsulate the essential characteristics shared by ancient and modern/contemporary utopias. I consider utopia a literary creation that articulates the human aspiration for a better society.³⁰ This *utopian drive* has been channelled throughout history into various domains, including architecture, art, political and social reform and religion. Literary utopias constitute only one particular way of conveying the utopian drive. It amounts to a self-aware act of imagining a state, perceived as maximally desirable by its creators, which is brought about and maintained by human political intervention and reasonably well thought out.³¹ These utopias arise due to human intervention in that they result from adopting a particular political structure, creating certain laws, establishing specific economic and health systems, instituting social mores, introducing distinct ethical values and devising specific urban plans. The human intervention in question is political since it unfolds through political institutions and participation. The utopias I examine are reasonably thought out because they describe ideal societies in considerable detail and with a fair degree of internal coherence. Finally, the act of imagining an ideal society, which defines the utopias I consider, is self-aware because these works not only envisage an ideal state but also reflect (directly or indirectly) on the practical and theoretical significance of the enterprise of conceiving such a state.

The depictions of ideal societies I examine all qualify as utopias since they express the same way of channelling the utopian drive. The issue remains, however, of *how* their specific strategies of conveying the same type of utopianism are related. My investigation of Aristotle’s analyses of ideal cities will explore this issue.

²⁷ D. Suvin, ‘Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia: Some Historical Semantics, Some Genology, A Proposal and A Plea’, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 6, 1973, pp. 121–45; L. T. Sargent, ‘The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited’, *Utopian Studies*, 5, 1994, pp. 1–37.

²⁸ Suvin, ‘Defining the Literary Genre’ (n. 27 above), p. 132.

²⁹ Sargent, ‘The Three Faces’ (n. 27 above), pp. 4, 10–1, 19.

³⁰ I offer *only* an account of utopia since I adopt the view of Kumar, *Utopia*, (n. 16 above), p. 32, that defining utopia is highly problematic.

³¹ I disagree with Sargent, ‘The Three Faces’ (n. 27 above), p. 5, that being a ‘no-place’ is a necessary condition for a utopia.

III

Few treatises in Western political tradition engage with utopias to such an extent as Aristotle's *Politics*. His sustained interest in critiquing and creating ideal societies, however, seems to expose a fundamental tension in the text. As is well known, Aristotle regards ethics and politics as practical sciences. They are not studied for theoretical reasons but to articulate ideas that show us how to live properly as individuals and as a society.³² Because political theories must serve as a guide for action, his extended engagement with ideal cities is puzzling. Why should he study ideal cities if he intends to develop practical strategies for shaping his society? Aristotle does not offer a direct response, but the *Politics* provides numerous hints as to how he addresses this issue.³³

In assessing the role of Aristotle's utopianism in the *Politics*, we should be aware that he does not regard the ideal societies he examines as 'no places' that are beyond the realm of possibility.³⁴ Instead, he conceives them as possible, though their realization is unlikely.³⁵ In II.1–8, Aristotle rejects the ideal societies proposed by some of his predecessors not because they are unachievable but because they are not the best.³⁶ In Books VII–VIII, he clearly states that bringing to life his best city would require a set of extremely difficult, but not impossible, conditions.³⁷ In Books IV (IV.11–16) and VI, he envisages other cities that, though still ideal, are more feasible than the absolute best one.

That Aristotle deems the ideal cities he studies to be realizable is an initial indication of how he can consider their study relevant to a work of practical science like the *Politics*. This point becomes more evident in IV.12–16 and VI, where he analyses how to transform common city types into more idealized versions of themselves. As described in Section VII below, Aristotle explores how abstract models can be useful guides to improve existing cities. The relevance of his best city from Books VII–VIII for the real world appears more difficult to establish; however, a helpful indication can be found in a specific historical development. The creation of new cities outside Greece was a recurring feature of Greek history. Establishing colonies throughout the Mediterranean allowed ancient Greeks to found new cities that could deviate, at least in part, from traditional social and political models dominant in the motherland. Philosophers (e.g. Parmenides, Protagoras and Pythagoras) traditionally

³² *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.2, 1094^a18–^b11, X.9, 1180^b30–1181^b12.

³³ F. Fiorentino, 'L'utopia in Aristotele e in Tommaso d'Aquino', in *L'Utopia: Alla ricerca del senso della storia. Scritti in onore di Cosimo Quarta*, ed. G. Schiavone, Milan, 2015, pp. 183–209 (186–95).

³⁴ L. Bertelli, 'L'utopia in Grecia tra progetto politico ed evasione', in *Utopia. Storia e teoria di un'esperienza filosofica e politica*, ed. C. Altini, Bologna, 2013, pp. 43–78 (58–9); L. Cervera Vera, 'La Ciudad ideal de Aristóteles', *Academia: Anales y Boletín de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando*, 56, 1983, pp. 23–47.

³⁵ L. Bertelli, 'Progettare la polis', in *I Greci. Storia, cultura, arte, società*, II.2: *Definizione*, ed. S. Settis, Turin, 1997, pp. 567–618.

³⁶ Aristotle does object (II.6, 1265^a10–18) that the size of the ideal city of Plato's *Laws* is unrealistic, but he finds the city otherwise feasible.

³⁷ *Politics*, VII.4, 1325^b32–1326^a5; VII.13, 1332^a29–39. Aristotle, *Politik*, ed. A. Dreizehnter, Munich, 1970. All translations are mine.

played a critical role in designing the social and political structures of new (or recently founded) cities. During Aristotle's lifetime, the conquests of Alexander the Great, who had a particular interest in founding new cities, further expanded these opportunities.³⁸ The possibility of creating new cities from scratch, which were less constrained by traditional Greek social and political models, in faraway territories was very real in Aristotle's time and may have influenced him to think that the act of imagining alternative (and more ideal) types of societies had a practical dimension.³⁹

Aristotle's interest in the feasibility of ideal cities helps us to understand the role of this exploration in a work of practical science such as the *Politics*; however, it seems to put him at odds with modern/contemporary utopists. The dominant trend in the history of utopia, from More's *Utopia* to Wright's *Islandia*, has been to think of utopias as 'best places' that are also 'no places'.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, carefully considering modern/contemporary utopias reveals an often overlooked strain of utopianism that has much in common with Aristotle.⁴¹ These lesser-known utopias depict societies that are plausibly improved versions of those of their authors.⁴² Using an apparent oxymoron, we can call them 'realistic utopias'.⁴³ The connection between these 'realistic utopias' and Aristotle's *Politics* is, at times, direct.⁴⁴ Several Italian Renaissance utopists, who describe societies meant to be moderate improvements of sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Italy, were not only familiar with the *Politics* but also often referred to it.⁴⁵

Other realistic utopias are not influenced by Aristotle's utopianism, yet they express the same intention of conceiving relatively feasible societies. A telling example is the utopian section of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. He examines the utopias of More, Campanella, Andreae and Bacon but dismisses them as 'mere

³⁸ P. M. Fraser, *Cities of Alexander the Great*, Oxford, 1996.

³⁹ J. Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*, Princeton, 2002, pp. 339–51.

⁴⁰ Some scholars (e.g. R. Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, Syracuse, 1991, p. 7) find the expression 'best place' (or 'best state') problematic since it suggests the idea of a flawless society, which most utopias are not intended to be. Some prefer the phrase 'better place'. Although this argument is compelling, from Aristotle onwards, 'best state' (ἀριστή πολιτεία) has often been used to refer not to a flawless society but to the most desirable society humans can hope to achieve. I adopt this common sense of 'best state'.

⁴¹ See More, *Utopia*; Tommaso Campanella, *La città del sole*, 1602; Étienne Cabet, *Voyage en Icarie*, 1840; Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race*, 1871; H. G. Wells, *Men like God*, 1923.

⁴² On utopias as ideals capable of being 'realized', see A. Colombo, *L'utopia. Rifondazione di un'idea di una storia*, Bari, 1997.

⁴³ M. Eliav-Feldon, *Realistic Utopias*, Oxford, 1982, pp. 13–14, introduced the expression 'realistic utopias'. She referred to better-known Renaissance utopias (e.g. *Utopia; La città del sole; Christianopolis; and New Atlantis*) as 'realistic' because of their detailed depictions of the ideal states. John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, Cambridge, 1999, and E. O. Wright, 'Real Utopias', *Contexts*, 10, 2011, pp. 36–42, have made this expression more common. My use of the phrase 'realistic utopias' is closer to that of Wright, for whom real utopias combine the aspiration of human flourishing with the elaboration of viable alternatives, than to Eliav-Feldon's. I consider 'realistic' those utopias that propose institutions and ways of life that do not depart too significantly from those of their authors' societies.

⁴⁴ L. Bertelli, 'L'Utopia greca', in *Storia delle idee politiche, economiche e sociali*, I, ed. L. Firpo, Turin, 1982, pp. 463–581 (475–8, 548), also describes Aristotle's ideal city as 'realistic'.

⁴⁵ Antonio Brucioli, *Dialoghi* VI, VII, 1526; Patrizi, *La città felice*; Agostini, *Repubblica Immaginarìa*; Lodovico Zuccolo, *La repubblica d'Evandria*, 1625; Fabio Albergati, *La repubblica regia*, 1627.

chimaeras'.⁴⁶ Instead, he envisions an ideal society closely connected to the England of his time. Unlike other Renaissance utopists, he sees his utopia less as an intellectual and literary exercise and more as a tool to formulate plausible correctives to his age's essential problem: melancholy.⁴⁷ The 'Puritan utopists' (e.g. Gott, Harrington, Hartlib, Neville and Winstanley), writing during the English Civil War, appear to have taken realistic utopianism a step further. Whereas Burton's utopia was not action-orientated, they intended their ideal commonwealths as actionable solutions to the problems of their time and expected their rulers to put their proposals into practice.⁴⁸ Realistic utopias, however, are not limited to the Renaissance and early modern era. A telling example is Crocker's *That Island*. The novel depicts a society which had initially closely resembled that of the United States in the latter part of the nineteenth century but was transformed into a utopia through measures (e.g. abolition of the gold standard, introduction of an eight-hour workday, nationalization of the railroad and removal of protective tariffs) that Crocker's contemporaries would have found radical but not fanciful.⁴⁹ Robinson's ecotopia *Pacific Edge* is an example of a realistic utopia from the twentieth century. Relying on his characteristic attention to the plausibility of his social and scientific analyses, Robinson describes an ecologically sustainable future society, which is achieved through the transformation, the details and challenges of which are carefully and credibly traced, of our current institutions and infrastructure.⁵⁰

Aristotle's focus on *realizable* ideal societies raises a question: is it correct to refer to these cities as 'ideal'? Aristotle's best city and those envisioned by the thinkers he criticizes are often called 'ideal'; but his Greek expression is $\kappa\alpha\tau'\epsilon\upsilon\chi\eta\nu$, which means 'according to wish, hope or prayer'. Translating $\epsilon\upsilon\chi\eta$ as 'ideal' is plausible if we avoid the various preconceptions that the term 'ideal' may carry. It is possible to interpret 'ideal' as referring to something that exists only in our imagination or is purely speculative. These meanings are appropriate for depicting various modern/contemporary utopias, but not those evaluated and created by Aristotle. Yet, 'ideal' can also be used to describe the most favourable setting in which something can occur, such as in the phrase 'the race took place in *ideal* conditions'. This meaning can imply as well that ideal environmental conditions allow something to actualize its nature fully. When 'ideal' is taken in this way, it can encapsulate Aristotle's ontological principle that each thing has a nature that tends to its actualization but requires proper conditions. For example, a city can become 'the best' only if all favourable factors are present. This meaning of 'ideal' is in line with Aristotle's philosophical outlook and his several claims that his best city can, in fact, be established, if all the most desirable, yet possible, circumstances are

⁴⁶ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, New York, 2001, p. 101.

⁴⁷ Eliav-Feldon, *Realistic Utopias* (n. 43 above), pp. 28–9; J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516–1700*, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 86–104.

⁴⁸ Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought* (n. 3, above), pp. 324–66; J. N. Shklar, 'Ideology Hunting: The Case of James Harrington', *The American Political Science Review*, 53, 1959, pp. 662–92.

⁴⁹ See also Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*, 1888; B. F. Skinner, *Walden Two*, 1948.

⁵⁰ See also Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Ministry for the Future*, 2020.

present.⁵¹ ‘Ideal’ can also be understood as signifying a standard we should strive to achieve. This meaning is appropriate for the societies imagined by Aristotle because, as has been argued, they can be taken as models against which real societies can be judged and, thus, improved.⁵² The normative function of Aristotle’s ideal cities further indicates why he includes utopian explorations in a work of practical science. ‘Normative’ utopianism played a critical role in the history of utopia. Campanella offered one of the clearest accounts of the normative dimension of the utopian endeavour.⁵³ More recently, authors such as Cabet and Morris also conceived of their utopias as inspirational models. Aristotle’s normative utopianism, however, raises an exegetical difficulty. How can his utopianism’s normative dimension be reconciled with its realistic one? A possible answer is that his best city is a model that is both theoretical and feasible since it exists at the edge of what is possible. Its existence is realistic because it is not inconceivable, yet it is sufficiently unlikely that it can be regarded as a not fully attainable model towards which we should strive but may never entirely reach.⁵⁴

Although Aristotle primarily examines realistic utopias, he appears to consider at least one utopia which is a ‘no place’. Alexander has argued that in III.13 Aristotle quietly presents the *truly* best regime.⁵⁵ This state differs from the one in Books VII–VIII and is superior to it. It consists of the rule of a single individual whose exceptional character exceeds anyone else’s. A state ruled by such an outstanding individual will be equally outstanding. Nevertheless, as the existence of such a man is highly improbable, the regime of III.13 is merely a hypothesis that does not merit sustained attention in a work of practical science.⁵⁶ If we accept Alexander’s exegesis, Aristotle has a unique place in the history of utopia.⁵⁷ He is a utopist familiar with utopias that are ‘no places’ but recognizes that only normative-realistic utopias deserve extended attention in political science.

Aristotle examines ideal cities in a work of practical philosophy since he regards them as feasible models. Although normative utopias have been popular, his normative-realistic utopianism had a limited influence on the genre. It was pursued rarely and often without awareness of his work. Nevertheless, it constitutes a critical contribution to the history of the conceptualization of utopia.

⁵¹ *Politics*, VII.1, 1323^a18–19; VII.4, 1325^b33–41.

⁵² Horn, ‘Aristotle’s “City”’ (n. 21 above), p. 169; Kraut, *Aristotle* (n. 8 above), pp. 187, 242, 247; Miller, ‘Aristotle’ (n. 12 above), p. 543. For a critique of the normative reading of Aristotle’s ideal city, see Aristotle, *La politica, Libro VII–VIII*, ed., transl. and comment. L. Bertelli et al., Rome, 2022.

⁵³ Tommaso Campanella, *Philosophia realis, Pars Tertia, Politica*, Paris, 1637, p. 102 (q. IV, art. 1, co.).

⁵⁴ Horn, ‘Aristotle’s “City”’ (n. 21 above), p. 179.

⁵⁵ L. A. Alexander, ‘The Best Regimes of Aristotle’s *Politics*’, *History of Political Thought*, 21, 2000, pp. 189–216.

⁵⁶ In II.18, 1288^a39–^b3 and IV.2, 1289a32–4, Aristotle also mentions aristocracy, together with monarchy, as the truly best regime; however, the brevity of his account makes it difficult to assess it.

⁵⁷ For an alternative reading of III.13 and its connection to the discussion of the ideal city in Books VII–VIII, see Vander Waerdt, ‘Kingship’ (n. 12 above).

IV

Having discussed Aristotle's motivation for studying ideal cities in a work of practical science, I now turn to the utopian sections of the *Politics*. Book II's primary objective is to evaluate the constitutions deemed desirable by reputable people. In chapters 1–8, Aristotle examines 'ideal' constitutions – that is, intellectual creations that were never realized. In the remainder of the chapter (II.9–12), he investigates some real constitutions highly regarded in his time.⁵⁸ This method would not surprise anyone familiar with his writings. Aristotle frequently begins his investigation of a subject by examining the most esteemed beliefs in the Greek world, as he thinks they provide crucial insights into the subject.⁵⁹

Aristotle's extensive consideration of ideal cities envisaged by other thinkers reveals, although indirectly, that he regards the exercise of imagining an ideal city as an integral part of political thought.⁶⁰ His approach is historically significant since it ascribes full dignity to a mode of political speculation that would remain at the margins of political science throughout history. Political thinkers discuss the importance of utopian theorizing, but their explorations of utopia tend not to come in the form of speculative fiction or detailed examinations of literary utopias.⁶¹ In contrast, Aristotle gives the exercise of envisioning an ideal state and commenting on other thinkers' utopias a prominent role in a work that is universally regarded as a foundational text of political thought. Moreover, political thinkers typically prefer treatises to utopias. They usually consider these two kinds of works distinct intellectual enterprises that do not converge. In the *Politics*, however, Aristotle integrates the analysis of ideal societies into a political treatise. Plato had paved the way for his student's approach since the creation of several ideal cities (in the *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Critias* and *Laws*) played a central role in his own political speculations. Aristotle, however, shows the relevance of this endeavour to political philosophy more clearly than his master.

In II.2–8, Aristotle examines four ideal cities conceived by his predecessors, but his reason for selecting these specific ones rather than others is not apparent.⁶² Although his choice of studying Plato's utopias is obvious, his motivation for examining those of Phaleas and Hippodamus, whose views are known to us only through these pages of the *Politics*, is unclear. Parallelisms between some features of Aristotle's ideal city of Books VII–VIII and those of the utopias of Plato, Phaleas and

⁵⁸ Bertelli, 'L'Utopia greca' (n. 44 above), pp. 474–5, shows that Aristotle was the first Greek thinker to juxtapose real constitutions with ideal ones.

⁵⁹ Aristotle, *On the Soul* (I.23, 403^b24–407^b25); *Physics* (I.2–6, 184^b15–189^a11–^b29); *Metaphysics* (I.3–10, 983^a24–993^a27).

⁶⁰ Bertelli, 'L'utopia in Grecia' (n. 34, above), pp. 47–9.

⁶¹ T. Nagel, *Equality and Partiality*, Oxford, 1991, pp. 21–32; R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, New York, 1974, pp. 297–334; Z. Stemplowska and A. Swift, 'Ideal and Nonideal Theory', in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ed. D. Estlund, Oxford, 2012, pp. 373–89. For an analysis of literary utopias in political theory, see D. Mao, *Inventions of Nemesis: Utopia, Indignation and Justice*, Princeton, 2020, pp. 85–141.

⁶² Bertelli, 'L'utopia in Grecia' (n. 34, above), p. 56.

Hippodamus suggest he thinks that their ideal cities present traits that are critical to consider when envisaging a utopia.⁶³

In II.2–6, Aristotle analyses Plato's ideal cities. He examines those presented in the *Republic* (i.e. Kallipolis) and *Laws* (i.e. Magnesia) but leaves out the lost city of Atlantis, which appears in the *Timaeus* and *Critias*. Atlantis is a different type of ideal city from Plato's other two. Its exclusion by Aristotle is significant because it indirectly indicates the types of ideal cities that he considers relevant to his political discourse. He does not explain the reasoning behind his decision, but at least three factors appear to have motivated him. One is that the evocative depiction of Atlantis lacks the theoretical depth of the accounts of the characteristics of the ideal state in the *Republic* and *Laws*. Moreover, given Aristotle's interest in ideal but realizable cities, the mythical city of Atlantis has little relevance to his purpose, despite its similarities to Plato's Athens. Atlantis's power, urban scale and wealth are beyond the realm of possibility. By contrast, despite their ideal status, Kallipolis and Magnesia are still constrained, to some extent, by the social and political realities of Plato's time. When some unusual institutions (e.g. the communism of property and women) are proposed, Plato explicitly discusses their unfeasibility in his time.⁶⁴ Finally, in II.2–6 Aristotle focuses on examining the fundamental principles on which to build a city from scratch. In the *Timaeus* and *Critias*, Atlantis is presented as a fully developed ideal city, and its foundational principles are mentioned only in passing.

Aristotle devotes four chapters (II.2–5) to the evaluation of Kallipolis. His famous critique has been extensively studied, but how his analysis articulates concerns fundamental to most utopists has not been explored. In II.2, Aristotle concurs with his master that the best city cannot merely be a collection of individuals but must be an association of united people. Aristotle, however, rejects the type of unity envisaged by Plato.⁶⁵ Whereas in Kallipolis the uniformity among citizens is as strong as possible, for Aristotle, it should consist of a careful balance of diversity and commonality. He rejects the kind of unity of Kallipolis in part because he thinks that a city cannot be a unity in all respects without ceasing to be a city.⁶⁶ As Kallipolis is divided into three classes with clearly defined roles, Aristotle's critique may seem unfounded. His objection, however, seems to refer to Plato's idea that the citizens of Kallipolis should lack individuality (ἰδιότης): they must share the same beliefs and even the same feelings.⁶⁷

Aristotle's criticism of Kallipolis's type of unity is one of the earliest formulations of an issue intensely debated by utopists and their critics – that is, determining to what degree citizens of a state must be unified. Since the Renaissance, the hallmark

⁶³ T. C. Lockwood, 'Politics II: Political Critique, Political Theorizing, Political Innovation', in *Aristotle's Politics: A Critical Guide*, ed. T. C. Lockwood and T. Samaras, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 64–83.

⁶⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 456C.

⁶⁵ *Politics*, II.2, 1261^a12–^b6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, II.5, 1264^a3–^b6.

⁶⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 462B–C.

of many utopias has been the creation of complete uniformity among their citizens.⁶⁸ Dystopias (e.g. Zamyatin's *We*; Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*; Karp's *One*; Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*) also often engage with this issue by illustrating the dangers of erasing individual differences to create a highly homogeneous state. Aristotle's way of approaching the issue of uniformity between citizens is different from that of modern/contemporary authors of utopias and dystopias, but the concern is quite similar.

In rejecting Kallipolis's type of unity, Aristotle holds that the strength of a state critically depends on having a diverse citizen body and being able to harmonize it.⁶⁹ This view had a significant influence on some Renaissance utopists. The best example is Zuccolo's *Molino* – a Renaissance utopia, heavily derivative from Aristotle, that considers friendship between citizens the main ingredient of an ideal state. The friendship in question is of a peculiar type: it is a bond between people differing in age, experience, skills, social status, virtue and wealth. Zuccolo argues that because citizens are different, they can form the kind of friendship that is essential for creating an effective and resilient state.⁷⁰

In II.4–5, Aristotle criticizes Plato's excessive faith in the ability of specific economic and social structures (e.g. communism of wives and property) to make people – or, more accurately, the Guardians and the Auxiliaries – virtuous.⁷¹ He argues that it is preferable to find ways to improve human character – a topic he examines extensively when describing his best city (VII.13–VIII.7) – than to imagine social structures that may prevent them from acting immorally. Given that attempting to shape the character of the citizens of Kallipolis is a central aspect of the *Republic*, Aristotle's remark may appear puzzling. He is not, however, denying Plato's sustained effort to make citizens virtuous. Instead, Aristotle intends to indicate that, at times, his master would rather devise social structures designed to counteract the negative tendencies of human nature than teach people how to control them. For example, the Kallipolis's communism of property could indeed stop the Guardians and the Auxiliaries from acting greedily, but it would also prevent them from mastering virtues such as self-restraint and temperance.⁷² Similarly, Aristotle opposes Plato's strategy of instilling love among the Guardians and the Auxiliaries by removing private forms of love and abolishing the family, whose love can trample that for other citizens.⁷³ Aristotle seems to imply that only by loving one's family does a person learn how to love his fellow citizens.

⁶⁸ In utopias, the attempt to erase manifestations of individuality is often pursued in various ways. For example, many of them impose strict dress codes that cause citizens to look the same and thus suppress a common way of expressing one's individuality. See More, *Utopia*; Doni, *Mondo Savio e Pazzo*; Thomas Lupton, *Sivqila*, 1580–1; Cabet, *Voyage en Icarie*.

⁶⁹ *Politics*, II.2, 1261^a22–5; *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII.1, 1155^a5–15; 1155^a33–1155^b2.

⁷⁰ Lodovico Zuccolo, *Il Molino*, in id., *La Repubblica d'Evandria e altri dialoghi politici*, Rome, 1944, pp. 119–33 (121–22).

⁷¹ *Politics*, II.5.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1263^b7–14. See D. Dobbs, 'Aristotle's Anticommunism', *American Journal of Political Science*, 29, 1985, pp. 29–46.

⁷³ *Politics*, II.4, 1262^a40–^b24.

The issue of whether maintaining or removing institutions such as private property is an effective remedy against the ills of human societies has been much debated by utopists, though they were not always aware of Aristotle's analysis. Following Plato's lead (intentionally or not), many utopists (e.g. More, Doni, Campanella, Cabet and Bellamy) thought that abolishing private property was the most effective way to curb people's self-interest and greed. By contrast, other utopists thought that making people virtuous was the only desirable path. A compelling Renaissance illustration of this approach is Patrizi's *La città felice*, which owes much to the pedagogical programme of Aristotle's best ideal city. Other utopias explore the difficulty of determining whether eliminating private property or developing people's characters is the essential factor for a good state. In *Beyond the Bourne*, Fiske argues that greed is best avoided by training people's character; however, he also envisions a world where eliminating private property is critical for people's happiness.

Aristotle's criticism of Plato's proposal to prevent the Guardians and the Auxiliaries from having a family raises another set of issues that plays a central role in the history of utopia. What role should the family have in a state? What challenges can the family pose to creating authentic love among citizens? During the Renaissance, the debate on the institution of the family was polarized. Some utopists (e.g. Campanella and Doni) regarded it as an impediment to civic unity and rejected it. Others (e.g. Andreae and More) considered the family critical for creating civic bonds and defended it. Later, especially in the nineteenth century, utopists developed more nuanced positions. They argued that the potential contribution of the family to social cohesion depends on the characteristics of the family and, thus, proposed different types of families. Few utopists endorsed the traditional family in which wives depend on their husbands.⁷⁴ Most utopists suggested a new model in which both husband and wife are socially and economically equal.⁷⁵ A minority held that the family should be based exclusively on love, whereas economic considerations should be irrelevant.⁷⁶ Most utopists were unaware of Aristotle's analysis of the role of the family in an ideal state, but he should nonetheless be credited for being one of the first thinkers to recognize the issue's significance.

Politics II.6 examines Magnesia, the ideal city of Plato's *Laws*, to which Aristotle devotes less attention than to Kallipolis, while highlighting the fundamental continuity between the two cities.⁷⁷ In pointing out that Magnesia is intended by Plato as a more realizable version of Kallipolis, he captures a critical feature of Plato's utopianism that he will borrow and explore in Books IV and VI of the *Politics*: the same ideal city can take various forms that differ depending on their level of realizability. Aristotle's analysis of Magnesia contains yet another indication of the realism of his utopianism. His assessment of Magnesia betrays a distinct interest – at times overt, at times implicit – in determining its feasibility.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Richard Michaelis, *Looking Further Forward*, 1890.

⁷⁵ Bellamy, *Looking Backward*; William Dean Howells, *A Traveler from Altruria*, 1894.

⁷⁶ Charles Joseph Bellamy, *An Experiment in Marriage: A Romance*, 1894.

⁷⁷ *Politics*, II.6, 1265^a3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1265^a16–17.

In criticizing Magnesia's excessive size, the amount of property available for each citizen, the relationship between the rulers and the ruled and the constitution of the city, his apprehension is that such a city may never be realized. Aristotle's investigation of whether a state conceived as ideal can be a practical model is a theme that occasionally appears in the history of utopia. Among the early readers of More's *Utopia*, several enquired if the text depicted an existing commonwealth that could be a model for European states. Some German and Italian Renaissance editors of *Utopia* encouraged this interpretation by omitting Book I, thus removing much of the ambiguity of More's work.⁷⁹ In the nineteenth century, we encounter an extreme example of reading a utopian novel as a feasible model. Bellamy's *Looking Backward* famously inspired the creation, throughout the United States, of clubs designed to turn his utopian vision into a reality.

Aristotle's critique of Plato's ideal cities explores themes and concerns that played a critical role in the history of utopia. In the next section, I consider whether the same is true also for his study of other Greek creators of ideal cities.

V

In II.7, Aristotle examines Phaleas's ideal city, which emerges as a prototypical 'economic utopia'.⁸⁰ Throughout the history of utopia, we encounter many of these utopias that espouse the view that economic inequality is the *primary*, if not exclusive, reason for political and social tensions. By choosing to engage with Phaleas's ideal city, Aristotle implicitly acknowledges the importance of discussing a type of utopia that will be prominent in the genre's history.

Aristotle regards Phaleas's focus on the city's economic system as a rather pragmatic approach since it directly addresses one of the critical necessities of any state: material well-being. Although Aristotle engages with some of the features of Phaleas's proposal – he notes, for example, that his idea of redistributing properties can be difficult to implement (1266^b1–20) – he concentrates on Phaleas's disproportionate emphasis on economic inequality. Aristotle acknowledges that great disparity in wealth is a significant cause of political and social conflict. He disagrees, however, that it is the *only* or even the *primary* cause. He is especially concerned with the corruptive power of excessive wealth which, he thinks, may cause political and social unrest if citizens had access to it.⁸¹ In Aristotle's view, a further problem with Phaleas's exclusive attention on economic equality is that it causes him to overlook other critical causes of political and social strife such as inequality in power and honour.⁸² Aristotle also argues that Phaleas fails to recognize that one of the primary reasons for societal conflict is not economic but psychological. By reflecting on human desire, Aristotle notes that most people are unsatisfied with the resources

⁷⁹ C. Rivoletti, *Le Metamorfosi dell'Utopia*, Lucca, 2003, pp. 49–76.

⁸⁰ *Politics*, II.7, 1266^a39.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1266^b24–8.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 1266^b38–1267^a1.

necessary to live a comfortable life. Instead, they are forever desirous of more.⁸³ The unquenchable nature of desire causes some to commit crimes. Therefore, Aristotle concludes that ‘educating’ the citizens’ desires is more critical to removing conflict from society than the equal distribution of wealth.⁸⁴

Aristotle’s criticism of Phaleas’s position that economic equality is the essential factor for a good state anticipates a central debate in the history of utopia. Several utopists would have substantially agreed with Phaleas. Davis shows that a crucial aspect of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century utopias (from More to the Harrigtonians) is the idea that lessening economic disparities is vital for political and social stability.⁸⁵ This idea is even more critical in several nineteenth-century utopias. Cabet’s *Voyage en Icarie*, Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and Howells’s *A Traveler from Altruria* are just a few notable examples of the view that erasing economic disparity is the primary way to overcome most social ills. Merrill’s *The Great Awakening* is a lesser-known example of this type of utopia, in which the equal distribution of wealth is the crucial factor that transforms the Age of Degeneration (the nineteenth century) into an ideal world. Similarly, twentieth-century works such as Bogdanov’s *Red Star* and Sinclair’s *The Millennium* regard eradicating economic disparity through the abolition of capitalism as the essential component of a functional and happy state.

Some utopists, however, rejected the notion that economic equality is the sole component of a good state and emphasized the importance of other factors in ways Aristotle would have approved. In true Aristotelian fashion, Agostini and Patrizi contend that a lack of equilibrium in the human soul is frequently the root cause of political and social conflict. In the nineteenth century, Morris provided one of the most articulate critiques of the limitations of ‘economic utopias’. He argued that the equal distribution of wealth is not the primary factor of civic harmony. Factors such as finding pleasure in one’s work, balancing urban and rural life and pursuing beauty are equally critical.⁸⁶ Aristotle did not inspire Morris, but he would probably have approved of his holistic approach to the design of a best society.

Hippodamus of Miletus is the last ancient utopist examined by Aristotle. Though Aristotle is critical of his position, he regards Hippodamus as important enough to be included in the select group of utopists he deems worthy of his attention. He describes Hippodamus as the person who ‘invented the division of cities’, but it is unclear what he means.⁸⁷ Traditionally, based on a later passage of the *Politics*, it has been argued that Aristotle credits Hippodamus with inventing the orthogonal plan.⁸⁸ In recent years, however, archaeological evidence has shown that the orthogonal

⁸³ Ibid., 1267^b1–5.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 1267^a9–10.

⁸⁵ Davis, *Utopia* (n. 47, above), pp. 36, 300–67.

⁸⁶ Morris’s critique is primarily directed against Bellamy, but its principles can be applied to all ‘economic utopias’. See William Morris, ‘Looking Backward’, in *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, ed. M. Morris, II, Oxford, 1936, p. 502. Interestingly, Bellamy praised most of the features of Morris’s utopia; see E. Bellamy, ‘Review of William Morris’ *News from Nowhere*, in *The Utopia*, ed. Claeys and Sargent (n. 1 above), pp. 339–40.

⁸⁷ *Politics*, II.8, 1267^b23.

⁸⁸ Ibid., VII.11, 1330^b24.

plan was a common way of laying out streets in Greek cities before Hippodamus. Thus, it is plausible that Aristotle thought that Hippodamus was the first thinker to invest an existing urban plan with economic, political and social functions.⁸⁹ This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by Aristotle's selection of the specific characteristics of Hippodamus's ideal city that he chooses to examine. He concentrates on Hippodamus's idea of dividing a city into three parts based on usage (private, public and religious) and the economic, political and social effects that such a division is meant to have on its three classes of citizens (farmers, skilled workers and soldiers).⁹⁰ Although Aristotle does not state it explicitly, he appears to regard Hippodamus as the first person to recognize that urban planning is a crucial tool for governance due to its impact on nearly every aspect of citizens' lives.

Prior to Aristotle, ancient utopists did not extensively investigate the relation between a city's urban layout and its economic, political and social structure. In the *Republic*, Plato does not discuss Kallipolis's urban design. In the *Timaieus* and *Critias*, he hints at the connection between Atlantis's urban layout and its political and social features, but the issue is not thoroughly explored. In the *Laws*, Plato pays greater attention to the connection between Magnesia's urban plan and its other traits.⁹¹ Aristotle is one of the first authors to study the significance of this relation thoroughly by critically assessing Hippodamus's view. He does not object to the principle that a city's urban plan is strictly related to its other structures but criticizes *how* Hippodamus divides his ideal city's territory to bring about its several goals.⁹² Aristotle observes that the proposed way of allocating the different classes of citizens to various parts of the city creates an imbalance by giving excessive power to the military class.⁹³ In VII.12, while presenting the urban plan of his ideal city, Aristotle proposes an alternative arrangement.⁹⁴

The realization that a city's urban plan has crucial effects on the nature of its society played such a central role in the history of utopia that it gave rise to a distinct utopian tradition: the ideal cities designed by architects. In the Italian Renaissance, artists and architects such as Alberti, Filarete, Francesco di Giorgio Martini and Leonardo da Vinci devised 'ideal cities' in which buildings, infrastructure and urban layout were designed to instil specific moral, political and social values in their citizens.⁹⁵ This utopian tradition continued in the seventeenth (e.g. Perret and Scamozzi), eighteenth (e.g. Patte, L'Enfant Plan and Ledoux) and nineteenth (e.g. von Fischer, Owen, Pemberton and Howard) centuries. In the twentieth century, it

⁸⁹ S. Ferrucci, 'La *ariste politeia* di Ippodamo di Mileto', *Mediterraneo Antico*, 20, 2017, pp. 31–58; L. Mazza, 'Plan and Constitution: Aristotle's Hippodamus: Towards an "Ostensive" Definition of Spatial Planning', *The Town Planning Review*, 80, 2009, pp. 113–41.

⁹⁰ *Politics*, II.8, 1267^b31–7.

⁹¹ Plato, *Laws*, 745B, 746A, 760C–D, 778C, 848E.

⁹² *Politics*, II.8, 1268^a16–^b4.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1268^a14–29.

⁹⁴ On the connection between urban design and political form in Aristotle's ideal city, see C. Berizzi and C. Zizza, 'Designing the Ideal City of Aristotle's Thought', in *Putting Tradition into Practice: Heritage, Place and Design*, ed. G. Amoruso, Cham, 2017, pp. 645–53.

⁹⁵ C. T. Arjan, *The Renaissance City*, New York, 1969.

found one of its most powerful, yet controversial, expressions in Le Corbusier. The depiction of the urban structures of cities is also a hallmark of modern/contemporary utopias and dystopias. In these works, the portrayal of the city's urban structure is not just an effective literary device designed to provide the reader with an initial sense of the nature of the state that is about to become revealed. Instead, the urban structure is intended to organize the city in such a way as to make possible the existence of specific economic, political and social traits. In the Renaissance, utopists adopted various geometrical urban plans – orthogonal (More's *Utopia*), concentric squares (Andreae's *Christianopolis*) or radial (Campanella's *La città del sole*, Doni's *Mondo Savio e Pazzo* and Stiblin's *De Eudaemonensium republica*) – that were meant to reflect the rational nature of their societies. In nineteenth-century utopias (e.g. Cabet's *Voyage en Icarie*), cities often have urban plans that allow all citizens to experience aesthetic enjoyment, comfort, ease of movement and healthy and safe lives. A century later, in *Ionia: Land of Wise Men and Fair Women* Craig envisioned a city built in a neoclassical style that mirrors the elegant and refined nature of the utopia's way of life. Dystopias also explore how urban design impacts people. In Zamyatin's *We*, the city of the One State has an oppressive urban structure devised to reduce every person to a mere part of it. The city also has buildings made of transparent glass that deprive people of any privacy and thus dehumanize them.

Aristotle's final criticism of Hippodamus's ideal city also has special relevance for the history of utopia.⁹⁶ In his proposal, Hippodamus stresses the importance of innovation by designing a state that rewards those who improve it. Aristotle is especially concerned about changes to the city's legal system because he fears it will be politicized and harm the city. He worries that frequent changes to the laws would make it difficult for citizens to obey them and develop the virtuous habits they are designed to instil in people. The power of laws depends largely, Aristotle argues, on their constancy. Nevertheless, he concedes that Hippodamus raises a legitimate issue since the complexity of human interactions and changes in customs over time make it unreasonable to leave laws unchanged. Section VII will show that, in Books VII–VIII, Aristotle hints at an alternative solution.

Aristotle's reflections on societal transformation are at the heart of a recurring motif in utopias. Utopists are often criticized for creating rigid societies resistant to change and thus susceptible to totalitarianism.⁹⁷ Most dystopias illustrate the countless, dangerous consequences of having a state that opposes change. Some utopists who were familiar with Aristotle's ideas, however, achieved a balance between the need for change and the need for stability that he would have approved of. Agostini offers a profound theoretical meditation on this challenge. In his ideal state, customs and laws are regularly modified to meet new challenges, yet they remain true to the

⁹⁶ *Politics*, II.8, 1268^b31–1269^a28.

⁹⁷ This objection may be disputed for two reasons. First, depictions of utopias inevitably capture a moment in time, making them appear more static than they, in fact, are. Moreover, since, in some utopias (e.g. Bacon's *New Atlantis*; Wright's *Islandia*; Zuccolo's *La repubblica d'Evandria*), citizens are required to explore the world to learn new things, they would likely bring back new ideas that could change their societies. Nevertheless, the criticism of utopias as static may still be considered valid, since their depictions may only hint at the need for change without thoroughly examining it.

state's fundamental principles.⁹⁸ Wells also explores the relation between change and stability in utopia. In *Men Like Gods*, he describes a utopian state that changes considerably over time, but the change is so gradual and constant that it is almost imperceptible and thus does not cause any upheaval.

Politics II.1–8 constitutes a key chapter in the history of both utopia and political thought for two main reasons. It reveals the essential role that speculating about an ideal state has for the discipline of politics and also identifies several critical issues that utopists explored throughout the history of the genre. In some cases, Aristotle's analyses influenced utopian works. Even though later utopists were largely unaware of his ideas and concerns, they could not avoid stumbling into them when creating their ideal societies.

VI

A critical feature of Aristotle's utopianism, overlooked in the scholarly literature, is that it involves not only evaluating and creating utopias but also developing an 'integrated approach' in which the fashioning of his utopias arises from critiquing those of others. His role as a creator of utopias emerges fully in Books VII–VIII, which depict the best city.⁹⁹ To assess the contribution of Aristotle's best city to the utopian genre, it is less promising to focus primarily on its specific traits (e.g. economy, defence system and pedagogy), as these tend to reflect the mindset of his age. Instead, at least initially, it is more useful to examine issues that are recurrent in utopian literature, such as the way utopia is conceptualized, the structure of the representation of the ideal city and the account of how the best state is founded.

As we have seen, Aristotle pioneered a realistic way of envisaging ideal cities.¹⁰⁰ Books VII–VIII further reveal his particular utopianism in several ways. One is through his choice of Plato's *Laws* as his primary source.¹⁰¹ Aristotle's decision to follow his master is not surprising.¹⁰² It may seem puzzling, however, that he selected Plato's 'second-best' city (the best being Kallipolis) as the model for his own best city.¹⁰³ Aristotle's motive becomes clearer when considering the relation between Kallipolis and Magnesia. Magnesia is Kallipolis stripped of the 'great waves', the factors most disconnected from classical Greece's social and political

⁹⁸ Ludovico Agostini, *La Repubblica Immaginaria*, Turin, 1957, ff. 68^v–69^v.

⁹⁹ Aristotle explicitly identifies the ideal city of Books VII–VIII as the best in VII.4, 1325^b38–41; VII.9, 1328^b33–6; VII.13, 1332^a1–6.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. C. Rowe, 'Aristotelian Constitutions', in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, ed. C. Rowe and M. Schofield, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 366–89.

¹⁰¹ In Books VII–VIII, Aristotle heavily borrows from the *Laws* stylistically and thematically; see M. Schofield, 'The *Laws*' Two Projects', in *Plato's 'Laws': A Critical Guide*, ed. C. Bobonich, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 12–28 (14–15).

¹⁰² It is not surprising that Aristotle used an ideal city he previously criticized (II.6) as a model, since he took exception to only some aspects of Magnesia.

¹⁰³ Plato, *Laws*, 739A3–40C3.

characteristics.¹⁰⁴ As Magnesia is more in line with the historical realities of Plato's age, it is not surprising that Aristotle, given his realistic utopianism, regarded it as a better model for his ideal city than Kallipolis.¹⁰⁵

The realism of Aristotle's account of the ideal city of *Politics* VII–VIII is further revealed by its deliberate closeness to the mindset of his age. His city possesses traits – e.g. the poor treatment of manual workers (βούλοισι) – that make us, as contemporary readers, wonder how such a city could be desirable. The answer may lie in the nature of Aristotle's utopian project. He could have envisioned a more inclusive state. For Aristotle, however, challenging some deeply entrenched features of his society would have meant adopting the *Republic's* imaginative type of utopianism, consisting of conceiving institutions and ways of life unfeasible in the utopist's time, which has dominated the utopian genre from More onwards. Instead, in Books VII–VIII, Aristotle chose to employ a different model. He intentionally limited his imagination by designing a state that was, broadly speaking, compatible with the main features of his society.¹⁰⁶

The realism of Aristotle's utopianism, however, manifests itself not only negatively in his tendency to maintain unjust characteristics of his society but also positively by expanding its desirable features.¹⁰⁷ A telling example is the significant role of music education in his ideal city; its discussion takes up three chapters (VIII.3, 6–7). The degree to which Aristotle's ideal city promotes the musical education of its citizens is extraordinary for his time, but the idea is grounded in well-established practices of his age. Music played a central role in classical Greece. It was a critical ingredient of a child's education, and recitations accompanied by music were one of the most common forms of private entertainment.¹⁰⁸

It would be erroneous, however, to conclude that Aristotle's realistic utopianism led him to envisage a city that merely replicates the characteristics of his age. In several significant ways, the ideal city of Books VII–VIII is quite innovative. For example, Aristotle devotes substantial attention to its government-run education system (VII.17–VIII.7). Following Plato and departing radically from the customs of his time, Aristotle envisages a society where all citizens receive the same education at the state's expense. The educational programme is the cornerstone of his utopia as it is a critical tool that the state employs to pursue its primary goal, that is, the happiness of its citizens.¹⁰⁹ The decisive role of public education in Aristotle's ideal

¹⁰⁴ Plato believed that the rule of the philosophers and the communion of goods and women could be realized only in a different historical setting; see M. F. Burnyeat, 'Utopia and Fantasy: The Practicability of Plato's Ideally Just City', in *Plato 2: Ethics, Politics, Religion, and the Soul*, ed. G. Fine, Oxford, 1999, pp. 297–308.

¹⁰⁵ J.-M. Bertrand, 'L'utopie magnète: Reflexions sur les *Lois* de Platon', in Hansen, 'The Imaginary' (n. 12 above), pp. 152–63.

¹⁰⁶ F. L. Lisi, 'Prefigurations', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Utopian and Dystopian Literature*, ed. P. Marks et al., Cham, 2022, pp. 79–89 (80–1); C. Carsana and C. Zizza, '¿Dónde fundaremos nuestra ciudad? Lugares y constituciones ideales en Platón, Aristóteles y Cicerón', *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne*, 45, 2019, pp. 167–96.

¹⁰⁷ Huxley, 'On Aristotle's Best State' (n. 12 above), pp. 146–9.

¹⁰⁸ M. L. West, *Ancient Greek Music*, Oxford, 1992, pp. 13–38.

¹⁰⁹ *Politics*, VIII.1, 1137^a21–30.

city is another example of an almost universal utopian theme central in his account. The essential role of public education in promoting the way of life of a best state is a recurring feature of utopias throughout history. The authors of dystopias also recognize the power of public education, although they see it as a potential tool for the indoctrination of citizens by the authorities.

Although Aristotle's utopian realism is relatively rare in the utopian genre's history, the structure of his depiction of the ideal city is thoroughly conventional. Books VII–VIII read very much like modern/contemporary utopias, except for the absence of a travel narrative. Aristotle begins by examining the population, territory and climate of the best state (VII.4–7); he moves on to describe its social and economic structure (VII.8–9); and then he addresses various other traits such as common meals and land distribution (VII.10), health and defence system (VII.11) and urban plan (VII.12). He concludes by depicting the city's education system (VII.14–VIII.8). Throughout history, most utopists, from More to Wells, articulated the portrayals of their utopias by examining the same traits, though often in a different order.¹¹⁰

The similarities between Aristotle's account of the best state and those of modern/contemporary utopists extend beyond the structure of the utopia's depiction. Like most utopists, he is also concerned with how the utopia is established. Utopias often have a foundation story: the ideal commonwealth is either created *ex novo* or constitutes a radical break from the previous society. These stories have a critical theoretical significance since they reveal the utopian society's goals. In Renaissance utopias, ideal commonwealths are often established in faraway lands, which tend to have perfect climates, ideal locations for commerce and defence, and fertile soils. Typically, utopias are founded by an individual (e.g. Bacon's *New Atlantis*) or a community (e.g. Campanella's *La città del sole*). People voluntarily relocate to the new land to escape corruption in their societies and create a different world that possesses the virtues their previous societies lacked. In the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century utopias, ideal states exist in either a remote location or far in the future (euchronia). In most cases, they emerge from the ashes of a revolution, an environmental disaster or a social collapse that caused a dramatic change. This shift can be a transition from capitalism to socialism (e.g. Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Morris's *News from Nowhere*), from inhabiting the surface of the earth to living underground (e.g. Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race*), from a hyper-technological world to a pastoral one (e.g. Hudson's *A Crystal Age*) or from a male-dominated society to one where men and women are equal (e.g. Adams's *NEQUA or The Problem of the Ages*). In most instances, the utopias' inhabitants accept the new system resulting from the collapse of society and view it as desirable.

Books VII–VIII do not contain a foundation story, but Aristotle is intensely concerned with how his utopia is established. Like most modern/contemporary utopias, his ideal city is created *ex novo* in a territory with an ideal climate and location. He envisages an imaginary founder, whom he calls the 'statesmen' (πολιτικός) or

¹¹⁰ The topics and the order of More's depiction of Utopia resemble closely those of *Politics* VII–VIII.

the ‘legislator’ (νομοθέτης), who determines the city’s goals and organization.¹¹¹ Aristotle also implies that people joining the new city would do so voluntarily and subscribe to the founder’s aims and values.¹¹² His interest in how his ideal city is founded shows that, like most utopists, he thinks that a utopia cannot arise by adjusting some of the traits of the existing society but requires a radical break from the past. Starting a society in ideal conditions *ex novo* has an additional advantage: its members can express their full potential unhindered by undesirable external factors the management of which may require coercion.¹¹³ Aristotle’s ideal city would thus not require the repressive measures characteristic of those utopias that lack such ideal settings (e.g. Skinner’s *Walden Two*).

Aristotle’s significance in the history of utopia is not limited to his introduction of themes that numerous later authors examined. His merit also lies in having explored compelling ideas that could have moved the genre in fruitful directions had later utopists embraced them more wholeheartedly. One example is his conviction that an ideal city should be rooted in advanced ethical, metaphysical and psychological theories. Most modern/contemporary utopias lack such robust theoretical foundations. Starting with Book II of More’s *Utopia*, many utopias often have a reactive character, that is, they are a sort of reverse positive image of their authors’ societies. They present a commonwealth in which the main defects of the societies of the utopists have been replaced by their positive counterparts.¹¹⁴ These works often do not contain sustained theoretical reflections on the metaphysical, moral, political and psychological foundations of the state they describe. Instead, the reader is presented with various customs and institutions that provide individual solutions to problems in the utopist’s society but do not have strong theoretical bases. The authors of these utopias did not necessarily lack the necessary theoretical knowledge, but their creations are not grounded in it. There is, however, a different strain of utopian texts in which the ideal state is based on sophisticated theoretical accounts of reality. These works are closer to the spirit of Aristotle’s approach. The case of Campanella is particularly significant since he explicitly states that his utopia is rooted in his metaphysical theories.¹¹⁵ Several nineteenth- and twentieth-century socialist (e.g. Cabet’s *Voyage to Icaria*; Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*; and Yefremov’s *Andromeda*) and capitalist (e.g. Macnie’s *The Diothas; or, A Far Look Ahead*; and Hertzka’s *Freiland – ein soziales Zukunftsbild*) utopias are built on quite developed theories. Their theoretical foundations, however, are limited to economic doctrines and do not have the scope and depth of Aristotle’s.

Since Aristotle grounds his ideal city in his philosophical outlook, the consideration of human nature plays a central role in how he constructs it. Thus, while

¹¹¹ *Politics*, VII.4, 1226^a4; VII.14 1333^a37.

¹¹² Kraut, *Aristotle* (n. 8 above), p. 238.

¹¹³ D. J. Depew, ‘Aristotle’s Critique of Plato’s Ideal States’, in *Utopia e modernità: Teorie e prassi utopiche nell’età moderna e postmoderna*, ed. G. Saccaro Del Buffa and A. O. Lewis, 2 vols, Rome, 1989, II, pp. 727–38; (736–7).

¹¹⁴ See Cavendish, *The Blazing World*; Alice Ilgenfritz Jones and Ella Merchant, *Unveiling a Parallel*, 1893; Voltaire, *Candide*, 1759.

¹¹⁵ Campanella, *Politica* (n. 53 above), p. 102 (q. IV, art. 1, co.).

utopists often design ideal societies that aim to achieve political ideals (e.g. equality, justice and peace), Aristotle's focus is the actualization of the goal of human life, that is, happiness intended as the practice of virtue. Each aspect of his utopia (e.g. educational system, institutions and way of life) is specifically designed to ensure its citizens attain this goal.¹¹⁶ Aristotle does intend his state to be just and harmonious, but these traits are not his primary goal. They are more consequences of creating the perfect environment for fully expressing human potential.

Aristotle's view that the best state offers the ideal environment for human flourishing influenced several Italian Renaissance utopists, some of whom mentioned him directly. Patrizi begins his utopia with an account of the nature of the human soul. He then shows how the various institutions and customs of his ideal city are instrumental in allowing some of its citizens to achieve happiness, which, in true Aristotelian spirit, consists in pursuing the political and theoretical life.¹¹⁷ The ultimate aim of Agostini's utopia is also perfecting human nature. He imagines a republic in which institutions, laws and ways of life are designed to guide human beings to overcome their fundamental inner struggle: the clash between spiritual aspirations and physical desires.¹¹⁸ Zuccolo, too, stresses the importance of founding the ideal state on a robust account of human nature. In his critique of *Utopia*, he argues that More's fundamental mistake was trying to create an ideal state without considering the complexity of human nature.¹¹⁹ Except for these Italian Renaissance authors, however, it is difficult to find utopists who ground the traits of their utopias on a philosophical analysis of the human soul as Aristotle does.

Later utopians have largely ignored Aristotle's notion that a utopia should be rooted in sophisticated philosophical theories. This development is unfortunate because his approach has the benefit of protecting his best city from some recurring criticisms of utopian societies. One of the primary arguments against utopias is that those born into these societies lack the liberty enjoyed by their founders. The education and structures of their society are designed to ensure that its members accept the utopia as it is. By grounding his utopia in his theory (articulated in *Politics*, VII.1–3) that the virtuous life is the ultimate aim of human existence, however, Aristotle is immune to this objection. His best city is designed to be the perfect environment that allows its citizens to fulfil the final goal towards which they naturally yearn. In this city, they are free because they live according to their authentic desire. By contrast, the citizens of most modern/contemporary utopias lack the freedom Aristotle's citizens enjoy. These societies tend to be rooted not in what human beings naturally desire but in appeals, often not fully developed theoretically, to ideals (e.g. equality, justice and knowledge) the value of which was open to their citizens to question.

The solid philosophical foundations of Aristotle's best city protect it from another widespread objection against utopia: utopias cannot adapt to the constant changes occurring in human society because they are too static. Aristotle may appear

¹¹⁶ *Politics*, VII.1–3.

¹¹⁷ Patrizi, *La città felice*, chs I–II.

¹¹⁸ Agostini, *La Repubblica Immaginata* (n. 98 above), f. 53^r.

¹¹⁹ Zuccolo, *Aromatarario*, in id., *La Repubblica*, (n. 70 above), p. 97.

particularly vulnerable to this criticism, given his concerns about change in his evaluation of Hippodamus; however, his utopia's philosophical roots save him once again. In his description of the best city, Aristotle assumes his sophisticated ethical theory, according to which 'practical wisdom' (φρόνησις) is one of the essential ingredients for a virtuous life. By indicating that the citizens of the ideal city possess this virtue, he implies that they can make good decisions about specific circumstances in light of accepted general principles.¹²⁰ The tension between the need to maintain the utopia's core characteristics and adapt to the change endemic to any society would likely also remain in Aristotle's ideal city. Its citizens' practical wisdom, however, should make them capable of adapting to new developments and maintaining their society's fundamental values and structures.

With only a few notable exceptions (e.g. Campanella and Patrizi), Aristotle's theoretical approach to utopia had little success in the genre's history. Nevertheless, it remains a compelling model. It has the merit of combining two ways of conducting political science that historically rarely crossed paths: the imaginativeness and vividness of utopias and the rigour of political treatises.

VII

Another peculiar trait of Aristotle's utopianism is that he envisages not just one utopia, like most utopists, but multiple types of best states that are interconnected and not isolated.¹²¹ Strangely, this critical and uncommon characteristic of Aristotle's utopianism has been overlooked in the scholarly literature. His several utopias share some essential features, but they manifest them according to different degrees of perfection because they arise from different external circumstances.¹²² Aristotle borrows this concept from Plato's *Laws* but elucidates his criterion for ranking his ideal cities more explicitly.¹²³ The best city (VII-VIII) could occur when all desirable conditions are present, which is a situation that is possible but unlikely. The 'second-best' (IV.11) may take place if all the conditions that are *likely* to come about are present. The 'third-best' (IV.12–16; VI) city can take various forms, so it may be more accurate to speak of a *type* of city in this case. Third-best cities may arise if some specific practical constraints make it impossible to adopt (many of) the traits of the other two (more ideal) cities.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Kraut, *Aristotle* (n. 8 above), pp. 237–8.

¹²¹ In *Politics*, II.1, 1260^b27–8, Aristotle indicates that there may be various ideal cities that reflect different people's aspirations, conditions and characteristics. This comment is critical for the history of utopia since it underscores that the yearning towards a political ideal is a constitutive element of human beings as political animals.

¹²² *Politics*, IV.1, 1288^b10–1289^a25; 1289^b12–25. See Miller, 'Aristotle' (n. 12 above), pp. 542–3.

¹²³ Plato, *Laws*, V, 739A–C.

¹²⁴ Aristotle does not use the expressions 'second-best' and 'third-best', but they capture his point effectively.

At IV.1, Aristotle ranks his three best cities based on their degree of perfection.¹²⁵ He suggests that they are variations of each other, but he does not clarify what makes them all ideal. Do they share core values, specific institutions or ways of life? Comparing Aristotle's three utopias is challenging because of how he examines them. He dedicates two books to the best city and only several chapters to the other two. The different lengths of these analyses reflect a difference in scope. Aristotle's descriptions of the second-best and third-best cities concentrate only on a few of their features, whereas his depiction of the best city examines all of its essential characteristics. A brief analysis of the second-best and third-best cities will shed light on the issue.

The second-best city's structure is described as the most fitting for most *actual* cities and more attainable for most humans. Aristotle calls it πολιτεία.¹²⁶ This city is 'ideal' since it provides the best environment that most cities can offer by allowing the largest possible number of its citizens to lead a virtuous life. This environment results from the city's social composition: the largest number of its citizens are the μέσοι. They are a social group that economically is between the rich and the poor – the μέσοι are wealthy enough to possess arms. Their numerical superiority gives rise to the second-best city for four reasons, all of which depend on the μέσοι's ability to avoid the excessive tendencies of the other two groups. The μέσοι are the most likely to adhere to reason, given that when the gifts of fortune are excessive (the wealthy) or deficient (the poor), they lead to insolence and criminality, respectively.¹²⁷ The μέσοι are also more willing to accept the principle of rotation in office, one of the critical principles of government for a state of equals and free individuals. On the contrary, the rich are too proud to obey and the poor are too humble to rule.¹²⁸ By accepting more readily to be ruled and rule, the μέσοι also tend to avoid the extremes of mastery and slavery and are more likely to generate the conditions needed to develop the proper form of political relationship between equals: 'civic friendship'.¹²⁹ Finally, the μέσοι are better suited to maintain the overall balance of power because they keep the ambitions of the other two groups in check.¹³⁰

For a study of Aristotle's utopianism, one of the πολιτεία's critical features is that it is a variation of the best city of Books VII–VIII. The two utopias employ a similar political system characterized by widespread political participation based on merit. In both cases, the rule of many results in a stable and ordered society, an

¹²⁵ The *Politics* contains other classifications of constitutions, but this is the critical one for the study of Aristotle's utopian thought since it reveals the relation between various ideal cities and their level of feasibility and his criterion in ranking his ideal cities.

¹²⁶ Aristotle uses the term πολιτεία to refer to different constitutions. I follow the suggestion of K. M. Cherry, 'The Problem of Polity: Political Participation and Aristotle's Best Regime', *The Journal of Politics*, 71, 2009, pp. 1406–21, that πολιτεία describes both a genus of regimes and a particular species that is the most developed within the genus. This prototypical πολιτεία is the second-best state. I shall therefore refer to it simply as πολιτεία.

¹²⁷ *Politics*, IV.11, 1295^b1–2.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1295^b16–19.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1295^b24–5.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1295^b34–1296^a7.

environment that puts citizens in the condition to pursue moral virtue. In both cities, citizens share a strong bond of civic friendship. Despite these similarities, the *πολιτεία* is only the second-best city for several reasons. Its citizens attain a lower degree of virtue than those of the best city. Furthermore, whereas only some citizens in the *πολιτεία* have the resources to pursue literary *otium*, all citizens have this privilege in the best city. It may seem that the best state extends the principles of the *πολιτεία* only quantitatively.¹³¹ There are also, however, qualitative critical differences between the two cities. In the *πολιτεία*, citizens develop only the virtue of courage. Although this virtue is essential, it is insufficient to become fully virtuous. Courage leads to the acquisition of the ability to obey and rule but leaves out the other ethical virtues and all intellectual virtues. In the best city, all citizens acquire courage when they are young, but eventually they also develop all the ethical and intellectual virtues. The most crucial difference between two cities is in *how* their citizens attain virtue. In the *πολιτεία*, their virtuous behaviour is the accidental result of the city's socio-economic conditions. By contrast, virtue in the best city does not arise incidentally. It is the intended outcome of carefully designed pedagogical strategies, institutions and ways of life. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental continuity between the two cities due not only to the features they share but also to their idealistic dimension. Since the *πολιτεία* requires fewer demanding conditions than the best state, it is more likely to come into being; nevertheless, its existence is still quite unlikely. Aristotle notes that 'it is either never established or is established seldom, and in a few cities'.¹³² The *πολιτεία* and the best city are variations of the *same* city, differing in their degree of perfection.¹³³

Few utopists embraced Aristotle's view that an ideal state can have different incarnations, reflecting varying degrees of perfection depending on external constraints. Although Aristotle did not always directly influence them, several influential utopists developed positions close in spirit to his. Some show that, depending on the circumstances, the same essential ingredients can give rise to various utopian societies. This approach is best illustrated by Wells, who envisioned a bewildering variety of utopias designed to address the same fundamental issues (e.g. authority, class structure, private property, the advancement of science and technology and its risks, and world government).¹³⁴ A variation on this theme is the provocative idea that the very features that could shape a society into a utopia could also make it a dystopia. Several of Wells's dystopias illustrate this point (e.g. *When the Sleeper Wakes*), but the most compelling example is Huxley's *Island*, which is not merely a utopia, but is intended as the counterpart to the dystopian society of *Brave New World*. He shows that when the factors that make the state of *Brave New World* a

¹³¹ Cf. W. T. Bluhm, 'The Place of the *Polity* in Aristotle's Theory of the Ideal State', *The Journal of Politics*, 24, 1962, pp. 743–53.

¹³² *Politics*, IV.11, 1296^a36–7.

¹³³ Aristotle's second-best city had a direct influence on some Italian Renaissance utopists. Brucioli (*Dialoghi*, VI, VII) alludes to IV.11, and Zuccolo quotes sections of IV.11 in both his utopias (*La Repubblica d'Evandria* and *Il Belluzzi ovvero la città felice*). In *La Repubblica d'Evandria*, his most ambitious utopia, Zuccolo synthesizes elements of Aristotle's *πολιτεία* and best state.

¹³⁴ See Wells's *A Modern Utopia* and *Men Like Gods*.

dystopia (e.g. the abolition of the family, behavioural conditioning, genetic engineering, hallucinogenic drugs and subliminal indoctrination) are employed differently, the result is the utopia portrayed in the *Island*. Aristotle may have inspired Wells but not Huxley. Yet, the similarities in their way of conceptualizing utopia reveal that, throughout time, some utopists ended up developing similar *conceptual modes*, often without awareness of each other's works.

Aristotle describes not only a best and a second-best state but also a third-best state, which consists of multiple ideal cities – that is, cities that adopt different types of constitutions (democracy and oligarchy) and variants for each type. Aristotle groups these constitutions in the same category since they share common traits. They are all *existing* constitutions and are thus different from the best one which has never been realized; however, they are also unlike the second best, which is rare, in that they occur frequently. The third-best cities also have the peculiarity of resulting from a transformation, described in *Politics*, IV.12–16 and VI, that turns ordinary cities into more ideal versions of themselves, as far as their circumstances permit. Although different cities require different types of reform, Aristotle employs the same general recipe. In each case, he modifies their core features, that is, their economic and constitutional systems.

The analysis of the third-best cities poses various exegetical and theoretical challenges, but two issues stand out for scholars of Aristotle's utopianism. In what sense are these cities ideal? How are they related to the best and second-best? In *Politics*, IV.1, Aristotle indirectly answers these questions by ranking the three types of ideal cities. By placing them on the same scale, he implies that they can be compared, though he does not specify *how*. It seems that he considers all three types of cities ideal since they all provide the environment necessary for their citizens to become virtuous. Since, however, the attainment of virtue, for both individuals and cities, admits different degrees, the cities too are ideal according to different degrees. The best city is the most ideal because it offers *all* the desirable elements required for all its citizens to attain the highest degree of virtue. The second best is less ideal since it provides only *some* of these desirable factors. Thus, most but not all of its citizens become virtuous, and their level of virtue is not the highest. The third-best cities are the least ideal because they possess the *minimum* conditions necessary for some citizens to attain a basic degree of virtue. Such conditions, which the other ideal cities also possess, are order and stability.¹³⁵

Aristotle's account of the third-best cities did not directly influence later utopias. Nevertheless, his analysis develops two ideas that recur, in different forms, among utopists, though they were often unaware of his contribution. One is the concept of a minimal utopia: a society with only the minimum requirements necessary to be an ideal state. An example of this type of utopia is Zuccolo's *Belluzzi*, in which Aristotle is often quoted, that depicts an actual city-state of his time: San Marino. Although poor, San Marino is an ideal city because of its long-standing political freedom from foreign rule (an impressive feat for an Italian Renaissance city-state) and its citizens' ability to live together in harmony and lead simple but honest lives. Zuccolo knows

¹³⁵ C. J. Rowe, 'Reality and Utopia', *Elenchos*, 10, 1989, pp. 317–36 (336).

that San Marino lacks many qualities of the *truly* best city, which he describes in the *La Repubblica d'Evandria*; however, he still regards it as an ideal city.

The second utopian concept explored by Aristotle is utopian reformism. This is the process by which an ordinary type of city is turned into a more ideal version of itself by trying to approximate a model city.¹³⁶ A variant of this process is at play in many English Renaissance Puritan utopias. These works do not depict no places; they portray fictionalized but easily identifiable improved versions of seventeenth-century England. English Puritan utopists also outlined the steps required to turn their society into a different one, which is close to the ideal one whose features they traced. For instance, Harrington's *Oceana* and Neville's *Plato Redivivus* are idealized versions of the England of their time and were intended to instruct political leaders on how to transform their society. Similar to Aristotle, English Puritan utopists thought that the process of turning an existing state into an ideal one should focus primarily on economic and constitutional reforms. A more recent example of utopian reformism is Adams's *President John Smith: The Story of a Peaceful Revolution*, which outlines a series of constitutional and economic reforms designed to transform the nineteenth-century United States into a more desirable society. Rob-
inson's *The Ministry for the Future* is another example of utopian reformism. Starting by carefully examining our society's economic, environmental, social and technological challenges, Robinson describes a set of reforms that will turn it into an ideal state by addressing some of its more pressing issues. The utopias of Adams and Robinson occupy a vastly different conceptual terrain from the cities of *Politics* IV.12–16 and VI. Nevertheless, they are expressions of a similar utopian sensibility (i.e. utopian reformism), which Aristotle pioneered and which has recurred throughout the history of utopia in various ways.

Aristotle's three types of ideal cities share *some* essential ingredients and offer a captivating alternative to the popular type of utopianism made influential by More. Aristotle does not conceive the 'best or ideal place' as a 'no place' since he considers the ideal and the real to exist on a spectrum. The ideal is not a rigid model destined to be at odds with reality; it is dynamic and allows variations depending on circumstances. Even though Aristotle's way of conceptualizing utopia had a limited impact on the history of the genre, it nevertheless deserves the attention of scholars of utopia.

Conclusion

Studying the utopian sections of the *Politics* reveals Aristotle's peculiar role in the history of utopia. Many of his themes and ideas became commonplaces in utopian literature; however, his most significant contribution may lie in having investigated

¹³⁶ There is disagreement on this issue. I follow P. Destrée, 'Aristotle on Improving Imperfect Cities', in *Aristotle's Politics: A Critical Guide*, ed. T. C. Lockwood and T. Samaras, Cambridge, 2015, pp. 204–23 and T. H. Irwin, 'Moral Science and Political Theory in Aristotle', *History of Political Thought*, 6, 1985, pp. 150–68. For an alternative view, see Rowe, 'Reality' (n. 135 above), pp. 320, 324–5 and 329–34.

unusual venues. He is among the few political theorists who regarded examining and envisaging ideal societies as essential to political thought. Unlike most utopists, Aristotle was also keen to explore the various ways in which utopia can be conceptualized. He showed that a utopia can be both a dream of an unlikely society and an attainable ideal that can be realized in varying degrees. His approach led him to develop specific types of utopias (minimal, normative and realistic) and a distinctive form of utopianism: utopian reformism. Unlike most utopists, Aristotle combined the rigour of philosophical analyses and utopian imagination to an unusual degree. By grounding his utopias in his philosophical theories, he provided them with robust defences against some of the most persistent criticisms of utopia.

Several original characteristics of Aristotle's utopianism never achieved widespread acceptance, but they did appear in some later utopias, whose authors were frequently unaware of his views. The recurrence of Aristotle's uncommon views among some utopists calls into question long-held beliefs about the nature of utopia and reveals that the genre is more diverse and complex than is commonly believed. Therefore, the study of Aristotle's utopianism not only sheds light on an overlooked chapter in the history of utopia but also deepens our understanding of the genre.

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