**ARISTOTLE ON FACTION[[1]](#endnote-1)\***

In the fifth book of the *Politics* Aristotle discusses the issue of change in political constitutions.[[2]](#endnote-2) He focuses primarily (though not exclusively) on constitutional changes which are brought about by faction (*stasis*).[[3]](#endnote-3) In this chapter I examine Aristotle’s account of faction. I support two main theses:

1. Aristotle distinguishes different types of faction based on the diverse motives of agents of faction. Those who start faction may be motivated by a wide variety of considerations ranging from ideological concerns to personal vengeance.
2. Aristotle studies the phenomenon of faction from two related but distinct perspectives. On the one hand, he tries to explain the phenomenon of faction by reference to factors which influence the psychology of those who start faction. On the other, he offers a sociological account of the origins of faction and tries to explain faction by reference to sociological factors, namely, ideological conflict and the injustice of the constitution.

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section I try to substantiate the first thesis. In particular I argue that Aristotle distinguishes two different types of faction. Those who start the first type of faction are primarily motivated by ‘political’ considerations, for example, a desire to gain more political power than they currently possess. For this reason I call this type of faction ‘politically motivated faction’. The agents of the second type of faction are primarily motivated by a desire to settle private disputes. I call the second type of faction ‘faction due to personal rivalry’. I draw a further distinction within the first type of faction. On the one hand, those who desire greater political power may believe that their current constitution deprives them of their fair share of political power. I call this sub-type of politically motivated faction ‘injustice induced faction’. On the other, the desire for greater political power may not be triggered by a sense of injustice but may be simply an instance of an unjust desire to have more. I call the second sub-type of politically motivated faction ‘greed induced faction’. These diversely motivated factions have common political consequences. The generated political dissent threatens the existence of the constitution.

In the remaining two sections I focus on the second thesis. In the second section I explore Aristotle’s psychological account of politically motivated faction which is introduced in chapter 2 of book V. I argue that Aristotle draws a distinction between three different factors which influence the psychology of agents of faction. First, he identifies a nexus of beliefs and desires which incline the agents to start faction but do not suffice to get them to act. Second, he identifies the aims of faction, namely, the kind of ends those who start faction pursue. Third, he identifies what I call ‘motivational enablers’ which are reasons which strengthen the resolve of those who are already inclined to start faction and get them to act.

In the third section I focus on Aristotle’s sociological account of faction. I argue that for Aristotle political injustice is a feature of a political structure, namely, the constitution which is defined as an organisation of political offices. Aristotle considers political injustice understood in structural terms to be a cause of injustice induced faction. I explain that when Aristotle writes of political injustice as a cause of faction he does not refer to perceived injustice and thus does not identify a psychological cause of faction. Rather Aristotle writes as a political sociologist who explores how political structures effect social changes.

1. The typology of faction

The general theme of the fifth book of the *Politics* is constitutional change. The first type of constitutional change Aristotle distinguishes is change *of* constitutions, for example, change from democracy to oligarchy (V 1, 1301b6-10). But constitutional change is not always a change of constitutions. Sometimes the constitution remains the same but simply changes hands (1301b10-13). Sometimes constitutional change is a matter of degree. For example, a certain city-state may become more or less democratic (1301b13-17). Finally, sometimes one part (primarily a governing institution) and not the whole of the constitution changes (1301b17-26).

These types of constitutional change share a common feature. The manner (*tropon*)in which constitutional change occurs involves the use of force or deception (V 4, 1304b5-17). In this respect the constitutional changes which are the object of book V differ significantly from legitimate transfers of power within a constitution (for example, through elections or rules of succession).

Aristotle identifies faction as a major vehicle of constitutional change. I translate with ‘faction’ the Greek word *stasis*. *stasis* is what Finley (1983: 105) calls a ‘portmanteau-word’. It covers a wide spectrum of conflicts ranging from personal rows to political dissent. In the context of book V of the *Politics* *stasis* denotes a specific type of private[[4]](#endnote-4) or political conflict which threatens the constitution. The translation of *stasis* as ‘revolution’ is not altogether successful. ‘Revolution’ has implications which do not accord with uses of *stasis* in the *Politics*. For example, Aristotle uses *stasis* to describe conflicts between oligarchs which result in constitutional change. The latter conflicts could hardly be characterised as ‘revolution’. ‘Faction’ is preferable as a translation of *stasis* since it both captures the idea that the relevant conflict threatens the constitution and can account for types of political dissent not captured by ‘revolution’. ‘Faction’ has an additional advantage as a translation of *stasis* as it successfully conveys the dual meaning of *stasis*. *stasis* may denote not only the conflict people engage in but also a group of people who engage in the conflict.[[5]](#endnote-5)

The motives of those who start faction are a major focus of Aristotle’s study of faction in book V. He illustrates those motives by adducing an array of historical examples. Based on his account of the motives of agents of faction we may reconstruct an interesting typology of faction.[[6]](#endnote-6) I call the first type of faction Aristotle distinguishes ‘politically motivated faction’. At V 2, 1302a31-34 (a passage which I discuss in detail in section 2) Aristotle claims that those who start faction aim at getting more political honours and wealth which accrues from them than they possess under the current constitution.[[7]](#endnote-7) Those agents of faction are clearly motivated by political considerations. He also remarks that the desire for increased political power is sometimes just and sometimes unjust (1302a28-9). This remark allows us to introduce a further distinction between two sub-types of politically motivated faction.

First, those who start political faction may be motivated by a sense of political injustice, namely, they may believe that the constitution deprives them from their due share of political power. Aristotle mentions relevant cases in the first chapter of book V.[[8]](#endnote-8) He discusses factions started by the rich in democracies and the people in oligarchies. In both cases those who start faction believe that they are having less political power than they deserve. This belief is partly justified as both the oligarchic and the democratic principle of distribution of political power contains some justice (*dikaion ti*, 1301a25-36). I will call this sub-type of politically motivated faction ‘injustice induced faction’.

Factions motivated by a sense of political injustice are not restricted to factions started by the rich in democracies or the people in oligarchies. They may also be started by some rich people who are discriminated against within the context of a specific form of oligarchy (for relevant cases see V 6, 1305b2-16). The relevant discriminations may arise because of specific qualifications of the oligarchic principle of distribution of political power (for example, in certain oligarchies relatives may be precluded from holding office simultaneously).

Aristotle also identifies another motivating factor which operates in the political realm. It primarily consists in a desire to have more (*pleonektein*). This desire is a predominant motivating force of actions of the notables rather than the people: ‘...the majority of citizens ...are quite content with an equal share; whereas if the rich are granted superiority by the constitution, they act arrogantly and try to get even more for themselves (*hubrizein zêtousin kai pleonektein*)’ (V 7, 1307a18-20). Aristotle explicitly assumes that the actions of the notables in oligarchies and aristocracies are determined by this desire to have more: ‘because all aristocratic constitutions are oligarchic in character the notables in them tend to get more’ (1307a34-35).

In these passages the aims of the notables are political. In accordance with his account of the aims of those who start faction at 2, 1302a31-34, we should understand that those notables do not simply want to get any type of honour or profit. Rather like agents motivated by a sense of political injustice they desire to attain political honours and the profit which accrues from the possession of political power. So when Aristotle speaks of the notables’ desire to have more he does not have in mind their acquisitiveness in general but rather more specifically their excessive desire for political power.

Aristotle understands this motivating factor to be different from a sense of political injustice. First, the association of the desire to have more with arrogance (*hubrizein*) suggests that in this context this desire is intrinsically unjust.[[9]](#endnote-9) By contrast, as we have seen, he allows that the sense of political injustice which motivates the rich in democracies or the people in oligarchies to start faction is just to an extent. Second, considerations of political injustice motivate people when they are not in power. But once they are in power, considerations of political injustice become immaterial to them. As Aristotle remarks ‘equality and justice are always sought after by the weaker party; the strong (*oi kratountes*)pay no heed to them’ (VI 3, 1318b4-5).

Some cases of politically motivated factions Aristotle mentions are best understood as having been caused by this excessive desire for political power rather than by a sense of political injustice. These cases include, first, politically motivated factions which are caused by the rivalry of oligarchs who seek popular leadership (*dêmagôgountôn*) (V 6, 13005b22-39). These ambitious oligarchs try to gain more political power than they already possess by carrying favour with either the people or other oligarchs. They do not appear to be moved by a sense of political injustice. Rather, as Newman rightly observes, they act ‘with a view to their own aggrandizement’ (1902, 352). We may understand in a similar fashion the predominant motive of, second, the tyrants who started as popular leaders (V 10, 1310b14-31) and, third, the notables in aristocracies who try to become monarchs (7, 1307a2-5).[[10]](#endnote-10)

We may thus identify a second sub-type of politically motivated faction.[[11]](#endnote-11) It is actuated by an unjust desire to get more political power. For convenience I will summarily call it ‘greed induced faction’.

There is evidence, however, that, apart from politically motivated faction, Aristotle identifies a second general type of faction. At the beginning of chapter 4 of book V Aristotle gives six examples of factionin which the primary motivation of those who initiate factional conflictand the ends of their actions are not political. In all these examples, factions arise from what he calls ‘small’ (*smikrôn*) issues (1303b18). The first is an example of a rivalry between two young members of the ruling class in an oligarchy concerning a matter of love (1303b20-26). The second concerns a quarrel between two brothers over an inheritance (1303b32-37). The remaining four examples concern fights between notables concerning issues of marriage to heiresses in which one of the rival parties felt insulted (1303b37-1304a17). In the first example a factionwas initiated by a rivalry between two notables or two families and then divided all members of the ruling class (1303b25-26). In the other examples the whole city joined in the faction (1303b31-32).

It is plausible to assume that in these examples those who initiate a factional conflict are moved by anger (see the use of *chalepênas*, 1303b24) and aim at taking revenge. They are subjects of arrogant treatment (*hubristhentes*, 1304a2), and, as Aristotle observes, ‘[p]eople are particularly apt to be led by their angry spirit on account of arrogant treatment’ (V 10, 1312b29-30). He also remarks that ‘most angry people act out of revenge not ambition’ (13011a34-36). Furthermore, those who initiate a factional conflict are all members of the ruling class and there is no suggestion that their political rights are in any sense restricted. In this respect they differ significantly from, on the one hand, the people in oligarchies or the rich in democracies and, on the other, some rich people who are excluded from political power in oligarchies. So, their anger neither stems from nor is coupled with political discontent. We can thus say that they are not motivated by political considerations and their actions do not have a clear political end.

Aristotle indicates that he wants to differentiate factions motivated by personal rivalry from factions which have a clear political end. In chapter 6 (1306a31-b1), he singles out the kind of faction he mentions in the examples at the beginning of chapter 4 (which, as we have seen, are motivated by personal rivalry) as an independent cause of the destruction of oligarchies. This cause of the destruction of oligarchies is differentiated from other causes which involve factions motivated by political considerations, like a desire to share in political power by those excluded by the oligarchic constitution (1305a37-b22) or, by an unjust desire for more political power (1305b22-39).

To sum up, I suggest that Aristotle distinguishes two types of faction. The first type is politically motivated faction and arises from ‘important’ (that is, political) issues. Those who start this type of faction aim directly at constitutional change and are primarily motivated by a desire to get more political power than they currently possess. There are two sub-types of politically motivated faction. When agents of faction desire to increase their political power because they believe that they are treated unfairly in political terms, the generated faction is induced by a sense of injustice. When the agents of faction are notables who desire more political power not out of a sense of injustice but out of greed, we get greed induced faction.

The second type of faction is faction motivated by personal rivalry. It arises from ‘small’ issues, namely, petty rivalries between members of the ruling class. In contrast to the first type of faction neither the primary motivation of those who start faction nor the end of their actions is political. Rather they are moved by non-political, personal considerations (primarily a desire for revenge).[[12]](#endnote-12)

Though factions due to personal rivalry do not have direct political ends they may have important political consequences. Like politically motivated factions which aim directly at constitutional change, they also pose a threat to the constitution. This is why Aristotle claims that the factions arising from small issues (like personal disputes about a love-affair or a personal insult) are about important issues (V 4, 1303b17-18).[[13]](#endnote-13) So, for Aristotle it is not necessary for social conflicts to count as factional conflicts that those who start them have direct political ends or are actuated by political motives. It suffices that those social conflicts have important political consequences, namely, that they put the existing constitution at risk.[[14]](#endnote-14)

Politically motivated faction and in particular injustice induced faction is more central to Aristotle’s explanatory account of faction than faction due to personal rivalry. First, in his psychological account of the origins of faction in chapter 2 (which I discuss in the following section) Aristotle refers exclusively to politically motivated faction. Second, in his account of the sociological account of faction (which I discuss in section 3) he focuses exclusively on injustice induced faction. We have, thus, reason to think that he treats politically motivated faction and in particular injustice induced faction as the paradigmatic type of faction.

1. The psychology of faction

The fact that Aristotle offers a typology of faction based on the motives of agents of faction indicates that political psychology is a significant part of his study of faction. The importance he ascribes to political psychology is further evinced in his account of the general causes of faction in chapter 2 of book V.[[15]](#endnote-15) As I have already mentioned, the general type of faction chapter 2 focuses upon is politically motivated faction. Aristotle identifies three different kinds of general causes of politically motivated faction. The first relates to the mental states of those who start faction, primarily their dominant motivating beliefs and desires (1302a20-31). The second concerns the aims of agents of faction (1302a31-34). Aristotle takes the third kind of cause to be concerned with ‘origins’ (*archai*) and ‘causes’ (*aitiai*) of faction which are intrinsically connected with the mental states and aims of agents of faction (1302a34-35). Thus, Aristotle traces the causes of faction to elements of the psychology of agents of faction.

How should we understand each one of those causes and how are they related to each other? I will start by considering the first cause. Aristotle gives the following account of it:

...those who desire equality start faction when they believe that they are getting less, even though they are the equals of those who are getting more; whereas those who desire inequality (that is to say, superiority) do so when they believe that though they are unequal, they are not getting more but the same or less. (Sometimes these desires are just, sometimes unjust.) For inferiors start factions in order to be equal, and equals do so in order to be superior. So much for the condition of those who start faction. (1302b24-31)

The mental states Aristotle refers to are a nexus of beliefs and desires. The agents of faction believe that the constitution treats them unfairly. Their belief that they are the subjects of unfair treatment is conditioned by their views about the amount of political power they deserve (which in the following section I identify with their political ideology). Those who start faction desire to implement their preferred principle of distribution of political power. This account of the mental states of agents of faction fits nicely the condition of the rich in democracy and the people in oligarchy Aristotle mentions in chapter 1.[[16]](#endnote-16) In democracy the rich believe that they deserve more political power than they actually hold and desire to establish a political order which guarantees that they get more. In oligarchy the people believe that they are getting less political power than they deserve and desire to change the constitution so that they actually achieve equal political power.

Aristotle’s elliptical remark that sometimes the desire to implement a new constitution may be unjust indicates that he intends the first cause to also account for the condition of agents of greed induced faction. The cause of this sub-type of politically motivated faction would again be a nexus of beliefs and desires of agents of faction, primarily, their unjust desire to have more coupled with the belief that the distribution of political power under the current constitution does not satisfy their political ambitions.

The second cause of faction concerns the ends for the sake of which people start faction. According to Aristotle, these ends are either the attainment of political honours and the material profits which accrue to one or one’s friends from the possession of political power[[17]](#endnote-17) or the avoidance of political dishonour and fines (1302b31-33). Aristotle shifts from the beliefs and desires of agents to the ends the agents aim at achieving by starting faction. This account of the ends of agents of faction further elucidates their mind-set.

Aristotle provides the following account of the third cause:

The cause and origins of the changes, in the sense of the factors that dispose people to feel the way we described [that is, in the account of the first cause of faction in chapter 2] about the issues we mentioned [that is, about the ends of faction as described in the account of the second cause of faction in chapter 2], are from one point of view seven in number and from another more. Two are the same as those just mentioned, but not in their manner of operation. For people are also stirred up by profit and honor and not simply in order to get them for themselves, which is what we said before, but because they see others, whether justly or unjustly, getting more. Other causes are: arrogance, fear, superiority, contempt, and disproportionate growth. Still other ones, although operating in another way, are electioneering, carelessness, gradual alteration, and dissimilarity. (1302a34-b5)

I would like to make two initial remarks about Aristotle’s account of the third cause. First, it is not clear why Aristotle thinks that electioneering, carelessness, gradual alteration and dissimilarity operate in a different way from the other factors which fall under the rubric of the third cause. One possible explanation is that in contrast to those factors they do not always causally contribute to the occurrence of factional conflict.[[18]](#endnote-18) Electioneering, carelessness and gradual alteration may sometimes cause constitutional change without causing faction (1303a13-25). Dissimilarity or more precisely the political empowerment of dissimilar groups[[19]](#endnote-19) may cause faction only in societies which have not yet learned how to properly merge dissimilar groups (1303a25-26).

Second, honour and profit are mentioned in both the second and the third cause. Their manner of operation is different though. In his account of the second cause Aristotle refers to the attainment of honour and profit (or the avoidance of dishonour and fines) by the agent and his friends. Furthermore, honour and profit are the ends of faction. By contrast in his account of the third cause Aristotle refers to the perception of people other than the agent (or his friends) achieving honour or profit. The perception of other people’s getting honour or profit functions rather as a motivational enabler of political factions in a sense which I explain shortly.

What is the relation between the third cause and the other two causes Aristotle identifies in chapter 2? It has been suggested that the causal factors which come under the heading of the third cause are temporarily prior to the other two causes and in fact cause the agents of faction to realize that they are worse off under the constitution and to desire its change.[[20]](#endnote-20) The idea is that, for example, an occasion of extreme arrogance by the rich in an oligarchy may make the poor realize that they are treated unfairly, create in them a desire for equal political power and lead them to actions which aim at the attainment of political honor and profit.

This interpretation, however, does not square with the level of entrenchment of the relevant mental states and aims of either the oligarchs or the democrats which motivate them to start faction.[[21]](#endnote-21) The unwillingness of the rich (as well as of anyone who has abundance of external goods) to be ruled (coupled with lack of knowledge of what is involved in obeying someone else) is ‘a characteristic they acquire right from the start at home while they are still children; for because of their luxurious lifestyle they are not accustomed to be being ruled even in school) (IV 11, 1295b15-18).[[22]](#endnote-22) It is presumably similar early habituation to a life of subservience and lack of resources which makes the poor accustomed to being ruled like slaves (1295b19-20), fills them with envy for the rich (1295b21) and makes them desirous of their wealth (1295b31-32). So, the relevant mental states and aims of either the oligarchs or the democrats which come under the rubric of the first two causes should be considered to grow out of deeply rooted character traits of agents of faction fostered by early habituation to particular lifestyles.

I suggest an alternative interpretation of the relation between the third cause and the other two causes Aristotle identifies in chapter 2. On this interpretation the nexus of beliefs and desires and the ends of agents of faction captured by Aristotle’s account of the first two causes is considered an entrenched feature of their psychology. This entrenched feature inclines them towards starting faction. But it may not suffice to get them to act. The agents may consider certain conflicting reasons which may disincline them from starting faction and prevail in their practical deliberations. These reasons involve negative assessments of the prospects of the success of a revolt. As Aristotle observes, when the many acquire great power the rich may be unwilling to engage in faction and vice versa. Similar considerations prevent the truly virtuous from starting faction (V 4, 1304b2-5).

Sometimes, however, these inhibitions are overcome. I suggest that this is because additional reasons strengthen the underlying beliefs and desires of the agents which incline them to factionalize or weaken the strength of the averting reasons. The causes of political faction which come under the rubric of the third cause in chapter 2 are this kind of additional reasons. For example, the arrogance or the acquisitiveness of the rulers in an oligarchy may lead the many to overcome their doubts about the prospect of a revolt and resolve them to start faction. Similarly, the fear of some notables that the many may be plotting against them (see, for example, the case mentioned at 1302b22-24) may weaken any reservations which kept their inclination to factionalize under control and lead them to action. In the same manner their practical deliberations may be influenced by their perception of others getting honours or themselves being dishonoured (1302b10-14), their gaining superior power (1302b15-21), their contempt towards the political order established by the constitution (1302b25-33), the disproportionate growth of their class (1302b33-1303a25) or the political empowerment of an ethnically different tribe (1303a25-1303b3).[[23]](#endnote-23)

These reasons function as ‘motivational enablers’, in the sense that they enable the entrenched beliefs and desires of the agents which incline them to start faction to get them to act. They defeat any countervailing considerations which restrained the entrenched beliefs and desires of the agents and allow the latter to guide their actions. In the absence of motivational enablers though the agents may still feel discontent with the existing constitution and be inclined to start faction they may never start faction.

Motivational enablers depend in an important sense on the entrenched beliefs and desires of the agents. As we have already seen, Aristotle indicates that the factors which come under the heading of the third cause relate to the operations of the first cause. Arrogance, for example, does not by itself *directly* cause faction. It causes faction by strengthening the motivational clout of the sense of injustice which already permeates the hearts of agents of faction or by defeating countervailing considerations. Thus, arrogance operates differently in politically motivated factions which are the subject of chapter 2 than in factions motivated by personal rivalry. There the arrogance of a notable generates in the heart of his victim a desire for revenge which becomes the starting point of faction. The arrogance of the notable is not a consideration which is to be added to pre-existing reasons in favour of faction or defeats some averting reasons but creates *ab initio* a reason for faction.

Motivational enablers operate both in cases in which one has a partly justified sense of not having received one’s due in political terms and in cases in which one harbours unjust political ambitions due to greed. For though one’s unjust ambitions may incline one to start faction, they may be outweighed by averting considerations relating, for example, to the negative prospect of realizing one’s ambition. But some additional considerations may change one’s perception of the balance of reasons. For example, one’s political superiority may strengthen one’s resolve to pursue one’s political ambitions and help one overcome one’s previous inhibitions.

The importance Aristotle ascribes to motivational enablers for the generation of faction is illustrated in the pieces of advice he offers about how constitutions should be preserved. In his account of what generally preserves constitutions in chapter 8 he admonishes the ruling party to take measures so as to ensure that nobody becomes exceedingly superior in power and even to send abroad those who, despite the measures taken, acquire superiority (1308b10-19). He speaks in favour of harsh punishment for arrogant behaviour of officials especially when the victims are those who do not share in the constitution, for example, the poor in oligarchies (1309a20-23). In his account of how tyranny could be best preserved in chapter 11 he similarly guards against all forms of arrogant behaviour by the tyrant and his circle and especially corporal punishment and arrogance towards adolescents (1315a14-16; cf. 1314b22-27). He also urges the tyrant to achieve a reputation for military virtue so as to avoid rousing contempt (1314b20-23).

To sum up, in chapter 2 Aristotle offers a three-fold classification of causes of faction. The first cause comprises mental states of agents of faction, namely, a nexus of beliefs and desires, which incline them to start faction but may not get them to act. The second cause concerns the ends of those who start faction. The third cause includes reasons which enable agents who are inclined to start faction to overcome their inhibitions and start faction.

This three-fold classification of causes of faction corresponds to three different ways in which one may reply to the question of why a faction occurred. First, one may reply by identifying the entrenched mental states which in the first place inclined the agents to start faction. For example, one may say that in an oligarchy the poor started faction because they believed that the distribution of political power was unjust. Second, one may respond by identifying the ends of faction. For example, one may say that the poor started faction in order to gain access to important political offices. Third, one may respond by identifying a reason which made the poor overcome their inhibitions and heed their inclination to start faction. For example, one may say that the poor started faction because the oligarchs embezzled public funds.

What kind of entities count as causes on this three-fold account of the causes of faction? As we have seen, the first cause comprises mental states, namely beliefs and desires, and the second cause ends of actions. The third cause is not unified. Some motivational enablers are mental states of the agents of faction: envy for the honours others receive, fear of punishment or unfair treatment, contempt for the constitution and its officers. Others, however, are objects of mental states of agents of faction rather than the corresponding mental states themselves. For example, Aristotle identifies the arrogance of officials, that is, their acquisitive behaviour, as a cause of faction rather than the poor’s perception of the acquisitive behaviour of officials. In similar manner Aristotle speaks of the superiority of an individual, that it is, his actual possession of supreme power or wealth, as the cause of faction and not of the sense of superiority entertained by him. And it is the actual disproportionate growth of one class and the actual political empowerment of dissimilar groups rather than the perceived growth or the perceived political empowerment respectively which count for Aristotle as causes of faction.

The identification of causes with objects of mental states of agents of faction as opposed to the corresponding mental states themselves accords with relevant ordinary uses of ‘cause’. For example, when I say that the perpetrator’s arrogance caused the victim’s outburst I mean to identify the arrogant behaviour of the perpetrator and not the victim’s perception of it as the relevant cause. Though it is true that if the victim were unaware of the perpetrator’s arrogant behaviour she might be able to control herself the point I want to make is that it is the perpetrator’s behaviour that made the victim unable to control herself. If someone interpreted my statement as meaning that the victim’s perception of the perpetrator’s arrogant behaviour caused her outburst I would respond that she has missed the point of my statement. In a similar manner Aristotle should be understood as conveying the idea that the actual arrogant behaviour of oligarchs made the poor start faction (by making them overcome their inhibitions and fostering their desire for equal political power) and not the poor’s perception of it.

It is clear from the above that in chapter 2 Aristotle tries to elucidate the psychology of politically motivated faction. He identifies the main mental states which incline the agents to start faction and the aims of agents of faction. He also singles out reasons (some of which are mental states of the agents and some of which are objects of relevant mental states) which enable the agents to overcome their inhibitions and start faction.

1. The sociology of political faction

Aristotle does not try to elucidate the nature of faction only from a psychological perspective. He also offers what I call a ‘sociological’ account of the origins of faction. On this sociological account what causes faction is the injustice of the constitution. Aristotle does not equate the injustice of the constitution with unjust actions of political officials. Rather he treats the constitution as a political structure and analyzes its injustice in structural terms. For example, he speaks of the injustice of democracies and oligarchies as consisting in their failure to combine proportionate and numerical equality and of the injustice of so-called aristocracies and polities as consisting in the wrong mixture of democracy and oligarchy. Furthermore what counts as the cause of faction from Aristotle’s sociological perspective is the injustice of the constitution *per se* and not mental states of agents of faction like their perception of the injustice of the constitution or else their sense of being treated unfairly in political terms.

Aristotle’s interest in the sociology of faction becomes clear in the first chapter of book V. There Aristotle links the causes of political factions to one of the two main factors which explain the diversity of constitutions.[[24]](#endnote-24) The first factor relates to the actual class stratification[[25]](#endnote-25) of a city-state. By ‘class’ stratification I understand the stratification of the three traditional Greek classes, the well-born, the rich, and the free men. Aristotle alludes to this factor in chapter 1 when he remarks that given that wealth and freedom are more widespread than good birth and virtue, two constitutions primarily arise: oligarchy and democracy (1301b39-1302a2). Aristotle’s remark relates to his more general thesis that different people are suited for different constitutions upon which he elaborates at III 17, 1288a6-29. Aristotle explains that different multitudes may be naturally suited for aristocracy, policy or kingship. Thus the actual class stratification of an existing city-state may explain the diversity not only of deviant but also of correct constitutions.[[26]](#endnote-26)

The second factor is more complex. Aristotle describes it as follows:

...many constitutions have come into existence because, though everyone agrees about justice (that is to say, proportional equality), they are mistaken about it...For democracy arose from those who are equal in some respect thinking themselves to be unqualifiedly equal; for because they are equally free, they think they are unqualifiedly equal. Oligarchy, on the other hand, arose from those who are unequal in some respect taking themselves to be wholly unequal; for being unequal in property they take themselves to be unqualifiedly unequal. The result is that the former claim to merit an equal share of everything, on the grounds that they are all equal, whereas the latter, being unequal, seek to get more (for a bigger share is an unequal one). (1, 1301a26-36)

By ‘unqualifiedly equal’ Aristotle signifies what is equal in truth, that is, according to the true principle of distribution of political power, as opposed to what is equal according to the principle of distribution of political power of a specific constitution (in this case oligarchy or democracy).[[27]](#endnote-27) The principle of distribution of political power is unqualifiedly just when it accords with the general principle of proportionate equality of benefits. The principle of proportionate equality states that the distributed benefits should be proportionate to the merit of their recipients (see *Nicomachean Ethics* V 3). Given that the distribution of *political* power is concerned, the relevant merit of individuals must be determined on the basis of their contribution to the political life of the city-state.[[28]](#endnote-28) At *Politics* III 12, 1283a14-22 Aristotle states two criteria by virtue of which the contribution of an individual to the political life of the city-state is assessed. The first criterion concerns the contribution of individuals to the existence of the city-state. On this criterion all three traditional Greek classes, the free-born, the wealthy and the well-born, have some legitimate claim to political offices and power. The second criterion relates to how well individuals would manage the city-state if they were given political power. As Aristotle clarifies, to satisfy the second criterion the possession of neither freedom nor wealth nor good birth suffices. Rather one must possess political virtue (III 9, 1281a1-8).

Thus Aristotle relates the diversity of constitutions to mistaken views about the principle of distribution of political power. Each of the traditional Greek classes overstates the value of its contribution to the existence of the city-state and its management. The overstatement is gross. Each of the traditional Greek classes believes that its own mark of status (good birth, wealth, or freedom) is the sole standard for the assessment of one’s contribution to the existence of a city-state and its management. We may understand the content of these beliefs as comprising the political ‘ideology’ of each class.[[29]](#endnote-29)

The content of the ideological beliefs of each class differs from the content of those beliefs which are treated as causes of faction according to Aristotle’s account of the first cause in chapter 2. The former beliefs are about the correct principle of distribution of political power. That is, they are about the amount of political power each class *deserves*. The latter beliefs are about how well each class *fares* in the current constitution. The relevant measure is the ideology of each class, that is, the views of each class about how much power each class deserves to possess. Obviously the former beliefs condition the latter. That is, democratic ideology furnishes the people in oligarchies with framework of concepts and ideas which enables them to understand that they are treated unfairly as members of a political group (and not simply as private persons) and that the solution to their predicament is political (i.e. constitutional change).

The first factor explains the diversity of all constitutions. The second factor explains the diversity only of deviantand some *mixed*[[30]](#endnote-30) constitutions. As we have seen, Aristotle takes the oligarchic and democratic principles of the distribution of political power to misrepresent the true principle of the distribution of political power and to be ideological constructs. By contrast, correct constitutions get it right about what is unqualifiedly just (III 6, 1279a17-19). So, we may formulate Aristotle’s account of the diversity of constitutions in the first chapter of book V as follows:

*Diversity of constitutions*. (a) Constitutions differ because of the different class stratification in different city-states; and (b) deviant and some mixed constitutions in particular also differ because of the different political ideologies of the traditional Greek classes.

Aristotle relates the cause of faction to the second factor of the diversity of constitutions (V 1, 1301a25-6). He claims: ‘All these constitutions [that is, oligarchies and democracies] possess justice of a sort (*ti dikaion*), then, although unqualifiedly speaking they are mistaken. And this is why (*dia tautên tên aitian*), when one or another of them does not participate in the constitution in accordance with their assumption [about the principle of distribution of political power], they start faction’ (1301a35-39).

In this passage Aristotle refers to injustice induced faction. He traces its origin to the prevailing political ideology in a city-state. When the ideology of either the rich or the people prevails in a city-state, a distribution of political power is established which is truly unjust, that is, deficient with respect to the true standard of political justice. As a result, the classes which do not share in political power are treated unjustly in political terms.

It is important to stress that, according to Aristotle, those who are excluded from political office in deviant constitutions do not simply think of themselves as being unfairly treated in political terms. Aristotle believes that they actually suffer some injustice. After all their political ideology rests on an overstated perception of their status and not on a complete misrepresentation of its value. As Aristotle puts it, oligarchy and democracy possess ‘justice of a sort’. In normal circumstances[[31]](#endnote-31) all classes have actually some legitimate claim to political power. At the very least they all contribute to the existence of the city.[[32]](#endnote-32) So, when the political ideology of one class prevails in a city the classes which are excluded from political power are actually discriminated against.

We can ascribe to Aristotle the following explanatory schema of the occurrence of (injustice induced) faction: political ideologies cause political injustice (understood as unjust distribution of political power) and political injustice causes in turn faction. On this schema the proximate cause of faction is the political injustice which is incorporated in the principles of the constitution. The relevant political injustice results from the implementation of the political ideology of the class which is in power.

At the beginning of chapter 1 Aristotle focuses on the political ideology of oligarchy and democracy considered in general. He does not discuss the political ideology and the related principles of political justice of specific forms of oligarchy or democracy. His explanatory schema, however, applies equally to the latter. For example, instead of speaking of the general political ideology of oligarchy one may speak of a specific form of oligarchic ideology, i.e. views about the correctness of specific oligarchic principles of distribution of political power. According to these principles, there may be restrictions to the amount of wealth one may need to possess in order to have political office. Given that these principles depart from the true principle of political justice, they lead to systemic political injustice. In this case, it will not be only the poor who are treated unfairly but also possibly some rather wealthy individuals. Consequently it may not be only the people who will start faction in oligarchies but also those wealthy individuals who are politically discriminated against. This allows us to explain why Aristotle believes that oligarchies are threatened by two kinds of faction. The first is started by the people while the second is started by some rich, namely, those who are politically discriminated against (1302a9-11).[[33]](#endnote-33)

As we have seen, the principle of distribution of political power must accord with the standard of proportionate equality. True or unqualified political injustice amounts to true or unqualified political inequality. Furthermore, the debate between the opposing political ideologies of different classes may be described as a disagreement not only about what is unqualifiedly (politically) just but equivalently about what is unqualifiedly equal. This allows Aristotle to also speak of inequality as the cause of factions (1301b26-27).

It is now time to reflect on Aristotle’s account of the cause of faction in chapter 1. First, it is clear from this account that it is only the deviant and some mixed constitutions which become unstable due to faction. This accords with Aristotle’s general thesis that the correct constitutions are devoid of faction (see III 15, 1286b1-3 and IV 11, 1296a7-9). Second, Aristotle focuses on two deviant constitutions, oligarchy and democracy, and their political ideologies. This choice of focus makes good sense within the overall context of Aristotle’s theory of constitutions. On the one hand, as Aristotle explicitly states in chapter 1, most cities are governed by either oligarchs or the people. On the other, the majority of the other constitutions, i.e. the so-called aristocracies and polities, are mixtures of oligarchy and democracy. As we will see, he clarifies that their principal source of demise is to be located in their failure to achieve a good mixture of oligarchy and democracy (V 7, 1307a6-11).

Third, political injustice or inequality is analysed by Aristotle in structural terms and is not treated as shorthand for unjust actions of officials of the constitution. Aristotle defines the constitution as follows: ‘...a constitution is the organization (*taxis*) of offices, and all constitutions distribute these either on the basis of some sort of equality common to them (I mean, for example, of the poor or the rich, or some equality common to both). Therefore, there must be as many constitutions as there are ways of organizing offices on the basis of the superiority and varieties of the parts.’ (*Politics* III 3, 1290a7-13). Thus, Aristotle defines the constitution as a political structure, namely an organisation of political offices.

Aristotle understands political injustice or inequality as a feature of the constitution. To call a constitution unjust is to claim that its organization of political offices departs from the principle of proportionate equality. Aristotle treats political injustice or inequality as consisting in insularity or incorrect mixture of standards of distributions of political offices. For example, in chapter 1 Aristotle claims that democrats understand political equality as numerical equality while oligarchs understand it as proportionate equality or equality according to merit.[[34]](#endnote-34) Consequently in democracies political power is distributed on the principle of numerical equality while in oligarchies on the principle of proportionate equality. This is where the mistake in these constitutions lies:

...it is a bad thing for a constitution to be organized unqualifiedly and entirely in accord with either sort of equality. This is evident from what actually happens, since no constitution of this kind is stable. The reason (*aition*) is that when one begins from an erroneous beginning (*archê*) [[35]](#endnote-35), something bad inevitably results in the end. Hence numerical equality should be used in some cases, and equality according to merit in others. (1302a2-8)

Similarly, in chapter 7 Aristotle provides the following account of the political injustice of (so-called) aristocracies and polities:

Polities and aristocracies are principally overthrown[[36]](#endnote-36)...because of a deviation from justice within the constitution itself. For what begins the process (*archê*) in a polity is failing to get a good mixture of democracy and oligarchy, and in aristocracy, failing to get a good mixture of these and virtue as well, but particularly the two. I mean by the two democracy and oligarchy, since these are what polities and most so-called aristocracies try to mix. For aristocracies differ from what are termed polities in this, and this is why the former of them are less and the latter more stable. For those constitutions that lean more toward oligarchy get called aristocracies, whereas those that lean more toward the multitude get called polities. That is why, indeed, the latter sort are more secure than the former. For the majority of citizens are the more powerful party and they are quite content with an equal share; whereas if the rich are granted superiority by the constitution, they act arrogantly and try to get even more (*pleonektein*) for themselves. (1307a5-20)

In both these passages, political injustice or inequality is considered in abstract terms and is described as involving insularity or incorrect mixture of standards of distribution of political power which generates unstable political structures. On this conception of political injustice or inequality the primary focus is not on actions of specific individuals. That is, the political injustice or inequality of a constitution is not conceived as merely an aggregate of unjust actions of political officials. Rather it is conceived as a feature of a political structure. Thus, Aristotle employs a characteristically sociological vocabulary to describe political injustice or inequality which focuses on features of social institutions rather than actions of specific individuals.

Fourth, it is clear from the last two cited passages that political injustice or inequality understood in structural terms is identified as cause of faction. In the first passage, the origin of faction in democracies and oligarchies is traced to their failure to combine the standards of numerical and proportionate equality. In the second passage, the incorrect mixture of democracy and oligarchy is considered the cause of faction in so-called aristocracies and polities is. These two passages speak against an interpretation which credits Aristotle with what I call a ‘psychologically reductionist’ account of the causes of political factions.[[37]](#endnote-37) According to it, political injustice or inequality as a feature of a constitution is not an irreducible cause of injustice induced factions. Rather, only the related mental state of those who start factions, namely, their perception of political injustice or inequality counts as a proper cause of faction.

On the one hand, the insularity or mixture of standards of distributions of political power, which is identified by Aristotle as cause of faction, is clearly not equivalent with or reducible to perceptions of injustice or inequality. On the other, as we have already seen in section 2, Aristotle allows that objects of mental states and not the corresponding mental states themselves may be validly considered causes of faction. For example, for Aristotle it is the acquisitive behaviour of the oligarchs which causes the revolt of the people and not the latter’s perception of it. In a similar manner we may understand him as saying, for example, that it is the incorrect mixture of democracy and oligarchy which causes faction in polities and not the perception of incorrect mixture by the citizens. This way of identifying the cause of faction is in perfect harmony with ordinary ways of explaining social events. For example, one may explain social violence in the post-Reconstruction South by reference to the ‘Jim Crow’ system (and its mistaken combination of segregation and equality), or one may treat apartheid as the cause of the revolt of black people in South Africa.

Thus, I believe that Aristotle offers a more complex explanation of the occurrence of injustice induced faction than the reductionist interpretation allows for. Aristotle explains faction from two different perspectives, a sociological and a psychological perspective.[[38]](#endnote-38) On the one hand, he traces the origin of faction to political injustice or inequality understood as a feature of a political structure, namely, the constitution. Aristotle introduces this sociological account of the causes of faction in the first chapter of book V of the *Politics*. On the other, he offers a psychological account of the causes of faction. He focuses on the motives of agents of faction and analyzes their mind-set. On this psychological account, a sense of political injustice counts as a cause of faction. It is the mental state which inclines people to start faction, directs their minds towards the attainment of political ends, and, in the presence of appropriate motivational enablers, gets them to act.

What is the relation between these two accounts of the causes of faction? The key to understanding their relation is found in a remark Aristotle makes in his presentation of the first cause of faction, namely the entrenched beliefs and desires of agents of faction, in chapter 2. He claims: ‘The principal general cause of people being in some way disposed to change their constitution [i.e. of people having the nexus of beliefs and desires which inclines them to start faction] is the one we have in fact already mentioned [i.e. in chapter 1].’ (1302a22-24) Aristotle claims that the disposition of agents of faction, namely the nexus of beliefs and desires which inclines them to start faction, is itself the outcome of the workings of the causal factors he discussed in chapter 1, namely the political injustice of the constitution and the ideology of each class. This means that, for example, the people in an oligarchy come to believe that they are treated unjustly in political terms and develop a desire for redistribution of political power because they live in a city in which all political power is in the hands of oligarchs and believe that they deserve equal political power.

We may understand the causal influence of political injustice and ideology on the nexus of beliefs and desires which inclines agents to start faction as follows. The distribution of political power within an institution shapes people’s social lives by affecting their political options. Those who are deprived from political power are bound to feel resentment and envy and to desire to change their condition. Political resentment and envy feed on the entrenched psychological features of the rich and the poor which I have already mentioned, like the unwillingness of the rich to be ruled or the envy of the people for the wealth of the rich. The political ideology of the oppressed furnishes them with a particular conceptual framework which enables them to account for their predicament and with a set of normative ideals which enables them to shape their political ends. As a result they understand themselves as victims of political injustice, that is, they realize that they are discriminated against as members of a class or social group. They also understand that the remedy to their political predicament is constitutional change (and not, say, personal revenge). Consequently, they become inclined to take political action and start faction.

Thus, political injustice understood in structural terms relates in two ways to the mental states which motivate agents of faction. On the one hand, it is the object of those mental: agents of faction believe that the constitution wrongs them and desire to remedy its injustice. On the other, in conjunction with political ideology it is the cause of those mental states: it generates and shapes them. The injustice of the constitution generates in the people a sense that they are treated unfairly in political terms and a desire to change the constitution.

1. Conclusion

Aristotle offers a rather comprehensive account of the nature of faction and its causes. He studies faction from two distinct perspectives. On the one hand book V may be read as an intriguing essay on the political psychology of faction. Aristotle presents a rich taxonomy of faction based on the diversity of motives of agents of faction. He also accounts for the occurrence of faction by reference to elements of the psychology of agents of faction. On the other, he studies faction from a sociological perspective. From this perspective the primary focus are not the agents of factions and their motives. Rather Aristotle focuses on the constitution of a city-state which is understood in structural terms as an organisation of political offices. He traces the origin of faction to a feature of the constitution, namely the injustice of its principle of distribution of political power.

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2. For discussions of the fifth book of the *Politics* see Newman 1887 & 1902, Mulgan 1977: 116-138, Wheeler 1978, Polansky 1991, Yack 1993, 209-41, Miller 1995: 276-308, Keyt 1999, Kalimitzis 2000, Weed 2007, and Skultety 2009. Throughout the chapter I use Reeve’s (1999) translation. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Electioneering, carelessness in the selection of officials or unnoticed small constitutional alterations may sometimes cause constitutional change without the occurrence of faction (*Pol*. V 3, 1303a13-25); see p. 11 [of this paper] [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. For example, for Aristotle the private rivalry between two young notables counts as *stasis* (see *stasiasantôn*, V 4, 1303b21-22) even before other notables join in (i.e. before the rivalry acquires a political character) (1303b25-26). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. See, Keyt 1999: 63-65. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. I, thus, disagree with Skultety (2009: 349-51) who takes *stasis* to have a narrow scope and denote only a specific type of faction which is roughly equivalent to what I call ‘injustice induced faction’. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. I agree with Wheeler (1977: 162) that when in chapter 2 Aristotle mentions profit as one of the aims of those who start factions he has in mind material goods which result directly from possession of political power. Of course Aristotle does not think that according to the principle of unqualified justice one should profit from one’s possession of political office. He claims that ‘the most important thing in every constitution is for it have the laws and the managements of other matters organized in such a way that it is impossible to make profit from holding office.’ (V 8, 1308b30-33) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. As I explain in section 3, in chapter 1 Aristotle tries to explain the occurrence of faction by reference to sociological factors and not by reference to the motives of agents of faction. It is clear, however, that in the examples of faction he adduces in chapter 1 the agents of faction are motivated by the consideration that they are treated unjustly in political terms. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. It is not the case that all instances of having more and all desires to have more are unjust. Aristotle allows that sometimes the relevant desires are just (V 2, 1302b24-29) or more accurately just to an extent (in view of 1, 1301a35-36). For example, the desire of the rich in democracies to have more political power is just to extent. My point is that when the desire to have more is coupled with arrogance as is the case in V 7, 1307a18-20 Aristotle takes it to be intrinsically unjust. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Aristotle mentions another case of political faction. He claims that in general those in power start faction when after a superior achievement they do not want to monopolize power (V 4, 1304a37-38). This kind of faction can be reduced to the two sub-types of politically motivated faction I distinguished. If those rulers believe that they deserve as a matter of political justice a greater share of power, then they are moved out of a sense of injustice. If they are just greedy, they should be considered to start faction out of an intrinsically unjust desire to have more. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Recognition of the second species of political factions brings Aristotle’s thought close to Thucydides’ who recognizes the motivating power of political ambitions as a main cause of factions (*History* 3.82.6). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Two objections may be raised against my distinction between two types of factions. First, it may be objected that factions due to personal rivalry would never be a threat to the constitution unless people who are motivated by political considerations joined in. The second is that issues of marriage in particular had important implications about the political and legal status of people. Both objections contain elements of truth but fail to grasp the gist of Aristotle’s distinction between small and important issues from which factions arise. It is true that as the rivalry between two notables affects the whole city the entrenched politically motivated conflict between the rich and the poor will eventually kick in. But it would be a mistake to think that Aristotle would for this reason treat all factions as being politically motivated. For, as the distinction between important and small issues from which factions arise indicates, Aristotle is concerned with the origins of factions in the sense of the issues which can be identified as their starting points. In this sense there is a distinction between factions arising directly out of political discontent and factions which arise from non-political conflicts. Similarly, if in his examples at the beginning of chapter 4 Aristotle was actually thinking of the political and legal significance of marriages he would not have considered factions over them to be ‘small’. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Cf. Keyt 1999: 94-95. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. There is a further complication concerning Aristotle’s views about the nature of faction. He mentions as a cause of the destruction of tyrannies and kingships attacks (*epitheseis*) against the *person* of the ruler (V 10, 1311a31-32). These attacks are contrasted to attacks against the *office* of the ruler (1311a32) which have a clear political motive, i.e. a sense of political injustice (1311a22-28). The attacks against the person of the ruler are motivated by a wide range of non-political, personal motives: *inter alia*, revenge (1311a33-1311b6), disgust at sexual relations (1311b7-23) and love for fame (the fame reached for killing a tyrant) (1312a21-39). Though some of these attacks involve conspiracies or plots (1311a39) and thus the collaboration of numerous people, Aristotle does not call these attacks to ‘factions’ (*staseis*). It is unclear why they do not count as factions arising from small issues which have nevertheless significant political consequences like factions due personal rivalry. In this context Aristotle applies the label ‘faction’ only to the revolts which start by those who participate in a tyranny (1312b9-17) or a kingship (1312b40-1313a1) (which I take to be greed induced factions). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. I will not examine how Aristotle’s doctrine of four causes connects to his account of the causes of faction (for relevant discussion see, Polansky 1991 and Keyt 1999: 75-79). I am somewhat sceptical about the viability of the connection. First, as Keyt (1999: 75-76) admits ‘the explanatory framework of the four causes is scarcely visible in the *Politics*’. Second, Aristotle draws a distinction between the ends of action and the psychological disposition of agents in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (VII 3, 1146b14-18) and in *Rhetoric* (I 10, 1368b27, 12, 1372a4-5) which maps the distinction between the first two causes in *Politics* V 2. But neither in the *Nicomachean Ethics* nor in *Rhetoric* does he relate this distinction to his doctrine of the four causes. Cf. Skultety 2009: n. 5 at 349. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. See his reference to the first chapter of book V at *Politics* V 2, 1202a22-24; cf. note 7 and page 25. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. See note 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. This explanation has been suggested by Newman (1902, 296); cf. Barker (1946, 206-208). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. See note 22. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. See Skultety 2009: 350ff. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Furthermore, the main textual evidence in its support is at best ambivalent. The relevant text reads: *ai d’ aitiai kai archai tôn kinêseôn,othen autoi te diatithentai ton eirêmenon tropon kai peri tôn lechthentôn* (1302b34-35). Aristotle clearly believes that there is a causal link between the third cause of factions and the psychological condition of those who start faction described in Aristotle’s account of the first and the second cause in chapter 2. But the text does not guarantee that the causal link is one of generation. The crucial point is the following. Though one cannot be said to desire something unless one feels an inclination towards it, one may be validly said to desire something even though that desire does not control one’s actions. Skultety’s interpretation requires that the agent’s desires for political power are generated by factors which come under the rubric of the third cause. This means that these factors cause the agent to be inclined towards getting (some or more) political power. *diatithentai*, however, need not have here the meaning of merely being inclined towards getting political power. It could equally denote something stronger like becoming in the grip of the relevant desire, or having it control one’s action. In the latter case, the third cause may be understood not to generate an inclination towards getting political power but to turn this inclination into the dominant motivation of the agent. In the interpretation I propose in the main text I follow the latter reading of *diatithentai*. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Here Aristotle refers to the excessively rich, that is, those who count as rich in comparison to members of citizens of moderate property within the context of the middle constitution. His point, however, applies to the rich in oligarchies as well. The absence of citizens of moderate property in oligarchies indicates that the rich in oligarchies should be considered to possess excessive rather than moderate wealth. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. I assume that Aristotle ascribes causal significance not to the mere presence of an ethnically different group but to its political empowerment (namely, the fact that ethnically different groups acquire citizenship rights). This becomes clear from the fact that Aristotle speaks of members of ethnically different groups as co-founders and late-settlers. I believe that Aristotle assumes that agents of faction have entrenched racist attitudes which are fostered by the political empowerment of an ethnically different group. Aristotle’s remark that ‘every difference seems to result in factional division’ (V 3, 1303b14) suggests that those entrenched racist attitudes are simply an aspect of one group’s entrenched attitudes of hostility towards any other different group. Aristotle gives another example of intra-group entrenched hostile attitudes: he claims that groups living in different locations of a city-state may end up in factional division (1303b7-14). Again the point seems to be that it is the political empowerment of these groups (namely, the fact that members of both groups have citizenship rights) which, functioning as a motivational enabler, fosters the resolve of members of these groups to start faction. The political empowerment of dissimilar groups does not lead to faction in all societies but only in those in which groups have not learned yet how to cooperate (1303a25-26). [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Cf. the discussion of the diversity of constitutions in *Pol.* IV 3-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. I use ‘class’ rather loosely and not in its specific Marxist sense (cf. Finley 1983: 10). I cannot discuss here de Ste Croix’s challenging Marxist interpretation of Aristotle’s account of class conflict (1981: 69-80). For a criticism see Yack 1993: 209-18. For a contrast between Marxist and Weberian accounts of Aristotle’s political sociology see Ober 1991. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Correct constitutions include kingship, aristocracy and polity. Deviant constitutions include tyranny, oligarchy and democracy. Apart from these six constitutions Aristotle mentions certain mixtures of democracy and oligarchy, the so-called aristocracies and polities. Newman (1902: xii-xxi) and Miller (1995: 252ff.) take so-called aristocracies and polities to be correct constitutions. As we will see, Aristotle allows that some aristocracies and polities (presumably the so-called aristocracies and polities) may be prone to faction because of a departure from justice within their constitution (V 7, 1307a5-7). This creates some doubt about whether so-called aristocracies and polities may count as correct constitutions. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. See Keyt 1999: 60-62. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. This explains why Aristotle takes the aims of injustice induced faction to be political honours and wealth which accrues from them (V 2, 1302a20-34) (see note 6). Political justice concerns the distribution of political honours and wealth which directly accrues from them and not the distribution of all honours and means of accumulating wealth. Consequently, those who start faction aim at establishing a new distribution of political honours and wealth which directly accrues from them and not a new distribution of all honours and means of accumulating wealth. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. I use ‘ideology’ and its cognates as evaluative terms. Ideology implies false consciousness. Thus by characterizing the views about the distribution of political power of the oligarchs and the democrats as ‘ideological’ I imply that they are substantially mistaken. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. The so called aristocracies and polities; cf. note 25. Tyranny is also considered a mixture of ultimate oligarchy and ultimate democracy (V 10, 1310b3-4). [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. That is, excluding cases in which a supremely virtuous individual who exceedingly surpasses all other members of the city in virtue lives in a city (III 17, 1288a15-29). In these cases Aristotle believes that justice requires that this supremely virtuous individual be given absolute power and everyone else be subordinated to his authority. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. It is possible that on the basis of his celebrated argument for the authority of the multitude (*Pol*. III 11) Aristotle believes that at least in some cases (III 11, 1281b15-17) the collective judgement of each class may be valuable to the management of the city. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. Given that Aristotle has not introduced in chapter 1 the unjust desire to have more as a political motive I do not think that he refers to greed induced faction at 1302a9-11. Furthermore, according to the logic of Aristotle’s explanatory schema of the occurrence of faction, different forms of democracy may systemically discriminate against some of the poor free-men. However, as a matter of historical reality this is not so. Aristotle observes that in democracies no serious factions arise among the many (V 1, 1302a11-13). [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. This claim seems to be at odds with Aristotle’s initial claim that both oligarchs and democrats agree that justice is proportionate equality (V 1, 1301a26-28). Perhaps Aristotle implies that the democrats’ conception of proportionate equality amounts to numerical equality (see Newman 1902: 291). [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. There is a pun here which is missed in the English translation: *archê* denotes not only the beginning but also those in power. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. The relevant vehicle of the demise of so-called aristocracies and policies is faction. This becomes clear from the example of Thurii Aristotle uses to illustrate the change from a so-called aristocracy to democracy (1307a27-33). [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. See for example, Yack 1993: 218-224, Miller 1995: 277, Skultety 2009. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. I am convinced by Lukes (1968) that nothing crucial hangs on the debate between methodological individualism and holism. For this reason I see no point in trying to ascertain in which of those opposing camps Aristotle can be most plausibly considered to belong. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)