Aristotle (384-322 BCE): First theorist of democracy

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Contributions

- Major political, and social thinker
- First theorist to argue for democracy
  - vs. Plato 's critique of democracy, 5th c. BCE;
- Biologist:
  - used scientific method to analyze political institutions;
- Database of 158 constitutions,
  - the *Constitution of Athens* = only extant example.
- Father of logic:
  - the 'organon', or tool.

Aristotle

- 384 born in Stagira (in Macedonia)
  - son of a court physician, Nicomachus;
- 367-347 studied in Plato's Academy, Athens
- Could not become an Athenian citizen b/c his parents were not Athenian.
- 347 Plato dies; Aristotle leaves Athens for Assos, Mytilene and Macedonia;
- Studied marine organisms in Asia Minor
- 342 tutored the Macedonian prince, Alexander:
  - -little discernible influence
- 335 returned to Athens.

Ancient Greece

School of Athens by Raphael

Relationship to Plato

Plato

Soul-Society Analogy

- soul: 3 pts: reason, spirit, appetite
- Society: rulers, guardians, people
- Method; determine the Form of the Good;

Absolutist: the philosopher-king should rule the city;

No democracy!.

- Aristotle
- Soul-Society Analogy
- Soul: 2 pts: reason and appetite
- Society: rulers and ruled (all citizens)
- Method: empirical: examine phenomena & opinion
- Relativist: different regimes for different cities
- Democracy not best, but best of worst regimes.

Aristotle's Biology

- Biology informs Aristotle's view of human happiness, the good life and telos;
- Major idea: *teleology* (study of purpose); we understand things by their purpose or end;
  - Telos = goal or end; the end of an acorn is to become an oak; that is natural for acorns.
  - This can be done for man and society as well as organisms,
  - what is the final end of man?

Aristotle the biologist

- Major Works in Zoology:
  - *Parts of Animals*
  - *History of Animals*
  - *Movements of Animals*
- Recall that Aristotle's father was a physician;
- Aristotle studied marine organisms and other animals!

Aristotle's General Method

- Examine the phenomena, that is,
  - the facts, data, organisms, etc.
  - This could include dissection; e.g. *Pol.* 1.1:
    - resolve compounds into constituent elements;
- Examine opinions others hold;
- Reach conclusions based on critical consideration of all of the above.
- Compare this to Plato's approach
  - In Raphael's painting Aristotle points downward, Plato upward.

Aristotle's Four Causes

- Formal:
  - form or nature of an object (polis = community, not individuals leading separate, independent lives);
- Material:
  - stuff of which something is made
- Efficient:
  - the way a thing comes into being, e.g. the carpenter builds the table, the statesmen legislate for the polis.
- Final:
  - end or goal (telos) of a thing; the end of the polis is the highest good for man, the good, or virtuous life.

Happiness

- What is happiness? Aristotle applies his method:
  - *All* agree that it is the final good for man;
  - Man on the street's answer: wealth, fame, beauty, physical gratification. This view inadequate:
  - We must first ask: What is man? What is his nature, final end, purpose?
- This enables us to determine what is the good life for man? What is his most fulfilling way of life?
  - Answer: Man is unique for having reason, and his *telos* (final end) must be to use that reason;
  - Happiness is an *activity* of the soul (*anima*: the reasoning part of our being) in accordance with virtue.

Virtue

- Everything has a virtue
- Virtue means acting well, in accordance with one's nature;
- Slaves, plants, animals, humans all have virtues, just as they have goods;
- Man's particular virtue to act from reason, and unless he is a philosopher, to act for his community.

Virtue

- Virtue is *active*, not passive;
- The end of man is to pursue virtue:
  - The end of the polis
- Virtue of *character;*
  - we can become *habituated* to virtue through repetition of fine actions;
- The statesman legislates good habits for citizens to follow
  - e.g. the right *harmoniai* in music;
  - Statesmen must therefore study the soul;
- Mean between extremes:
  - Examples: courage, generosity, truthfulness, even-temperedness.

Hierarchy of Beings

- Hierarchy is *natural* (*Pol*., I);
- Each being has its own kind of soul (*anima*):
  - not to be confused w/ Christian idea of soul;
  - Plants: vegetative soul; stays in one place;
  - Animals: sensitive soul; have locomotion
  - Humans: rational soul, locomotion, activity
- Higher and lower humans:
  - those who have the capacity to rule (statesmen and men in general, Greeks)
  - Those who must be ruled (slaves, women, barbarians).

Aristotle's Political Thought

Father of political science:

-Lyceum, a rival to Plato's Academy, launched first scientific study of politics;

Political science is the master science:

-it directs all the others, e.g. music, mathematics and gymnastic;

Database: constitutions of 158 Greek cities (all lost) except for:

- *Constitution of Athens*: political history and description of contemporary constitution;

- Aristotle classifies regimes according to which interests are dominant (the rich, the poor, the middle class);

- Analyzes diseases of political regimes, by analogy to biology.

Political Science = Master Science

- Political Science is 'the most controlling science':
  - It 'prescribes which of the sciences ought to be studied in cities, and which ones each class in the city should learn';
  - '…even the most honored capacities, e.g. generalship, household management and rhetoric, are subordinate to it';
  - '…it uses other sciences concerned with action';
- "Hence, its end will include those of the other sciences" (*NE* I.2).

Political science, cont.

- Political science and the good:
- "…knowledge of the good is also of great importance for the conduct of our lives, and if, like archers, we have a target to aim at, we are more likely to hit the right mark."
- Applies notion of goal or *telos*.

Major Political Ideas of Aristotle

Philosophical inquiry should examine the *Good,* the highest life for *man*

- What is the *telos* or purpose *o*f *man*?
  - 'by nature a political animal' (*Pol.* 1.2)
- The *Polis* (city-state) provides the highest life for man, by enabling him to fulfill his purpose.
- So how can man realize his highest nature?
  - The *Polis* (city-state), a community of the highest and best sort aimed at the highest Good; citizens function as "statesmen" and rule each other by turns (rotation);
  - In life of contemplation (philosophy), also an activity; not passive, and yielding the greatest pleasure.

Regimes

- Aristotle classifies regimes—good vs bad;
- The best regime promotes the good of *all*, not just of one class, group or section of the population.
- A city is not a mere alliance for defense or a trading association; it has a higher purpose or end:
  - '…the identity of a city is not constituted by its walls' (*Pol*. III.3);
  - 'He who would inquire into the essence and attributes of various kinds of government must first of all determine *what* a state is' (*Pol*. III.1).
- Plato's advocacy of communism is misguided (*Pol*., Bk II);
  - *private* property is best, but not too much, not from trade (agricultural economy is best).