

Aristotle's Views on Plato and Property

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Reprise of *Republic*: class and property system

◆ Two classes:

- Warriors (aka 'Guardians'):
 - ◆ Produces 3rd class: philosopher-kings.
- Husbandmen, craftsmen, and all others (2.5).

◆ Warrior class:

- community property—women, children, goods.

◆ Sparta and Crete:

- common meals from public or private lands;
- Aristotle approves of this.

Plato's argument for community property (communism)

- ◆ Guardians of city should work together as a team;
- ◆ They will not work as a team if they think of "mine" and "yours";
- ◆ So property must be eliminated:
 - - no personal goods—housing and meals are shared
 - - no marriage or life partners
 - - child-rearing by the community.

Aristotle's Critique (*Pol.* 2.2)

- ◆ "There are many difficulties in the community of women" in *Republic*;
- ◆ "...the principle on which Socrates rests the necessity of such an institution...is not established by his arguments";
- ◆ "...as a means to the end which he ascribes to the state, the scheme, taken literally, is impracticable," i.e. "that it is best for the whole state to be as unified as possible";
- ◆ Plato's state will not be a state, but a family, and finally, an individual!

Aristotle's skepticism about unity

- ◆ Skeptical that unity is desirable:
 - "But even supposing that it were best for the community to have the greatest degree of unity, this unity is by no means proved to follow from the fact of all men saying 'mine' and 'not mine' at the same instance of time, which, according to Socrates, is the sign of perfect unity in a state" (2.3).
- ◆ So even if unity is desirable (which it might not be), Socrates may not have chosen best way to achieve it.

Objections, cont. (2.4): Homosexuality

Objects to Plato's permissiveness toward homosexuality, versus his restrictions on heterosexuality:

It is "strange" that Socrates permits familiarities b/w father and son, brothers: "since even without them love of this sort is improper."

See *Rep.* 403a: "authentic love is a disciplined and cultured love of someone who is restrained as well as good-looking."

The point, according to Plato, is to avoid manic pleasure.

Political Philosophy and the Institution of Property

◆ Plato (4th century BCE)

- Guardians should have common property so that they will all regard the same things as their own, thereby unifying the state.

◆ Aristotle (4th century BCE)

- Property should not be common because of free-riding, and other social and moral problems, but its fruits can be.

◆ John Locke (17th century CE)

- Private property is the basis of the state, and the reason for the state to exist.

Property Regime Options

All things in common, e.g. for guardians (Plato, <i>Rep.</i>)	Some things in common; some not.	None in common
Conceivable, but plagued with problems, e.g. free-riding, 2.3	E.g. fruits of private lands for common meals, (Sparta, 2.5; cf. <i>Pol.</i> 7.10—public land for meals).	Impossible—must at least have <i>city</i> in common!

Problems with common property (2.5)

- ◆ Aristotle reprises the free-rider problem:
 - When “husbandmen [farmers] are not the owners...the question of ownership will give a world of trouble.”
- ◆ Those who work hard complain against those who do not;
- ◆ Fellow-travelers “fall out over everyday matters”;
- ◆ Whereas: “...when everyone has a distinct interest, men will not complain...and will make more progress, because everyone will be attending to his own business.”

Objections to Common Property: the Free-rider problem

◆ Free-riding:

- ..."that which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it. Everyone thinks of his own, hardly at all of the common interest...everybody is more inclined to neglect something which he expects another fulfill [take care of]..."
- "how much better is it to be the real cousin of somebody than...a son after Plato's fashion!"
- G. Hardin, "Tragedy of the Commons" *Science* 162 (1968).

Objections, cont. (2.4): Crime

- ◆ Crime problems:
- ◆ Assaults, homicides, quarrels, slanders;
- ◆ Such crimes even more unholy when committed against a relative whom the perpetrator does not recognize as related:
- ◆ Crimes “...more likely to occur if the relationship is unknown than if it is known...”

Aristotle's Exceptions

- ◆ Husbandmen might hold wives and children in common
 - "...for if they have wives and children in common, they will be bound to one another by weaker ties, as a subject class should be, and they will remain obedient and not rebel." What does he mean?
- ◆ Wives and children in common dilutes love—father-son relationship will be meaningless,
- ◆ Friendship will not exist, as friends will merge;
- ◆ "Of the two qualities which chiefly inspire regard and affection—that a thing is your own and that it is precious—neither can exist in such a state."

What about the rest?

- ◆ “The population is divided into two classes—one of husbandmen [farmers], and the other of warriors” (39); philosopher-kings selected from warriors;
- ◆ Plato ignores the rest of the population;
 - He “has not determined whether the husbandmen and artisans are to have a share in the government...carry arms and share in the military service, or not” (39).
- ◆ These are the “real citizens” (38);
- ◆ “...nor is their character of small importance if common life of the guardians is to be maintained” (38-9);
- ◆ Plato in effect creates “two states in one,” that the city in speech was to overcome.

Further Objections

- ◆ Concentration of power in hands of one or few;
 - “And if this is often a cause of disturbance among the meaner [the poor] sort, how much more among high-spirited warriors?” (39).
- ◆ Happiness deprivation: “...he deprived the guardians even of happiness, and says that the legislator ought to make the whole state happy”;
 - “But the whole cannot be happy unless most, or all, or some of its parts enjoy happiness” (39);
 - “And if the guardians are not happy, who are? Surely not the artisans or the common people” (39);
- ◆ But why shouldn't the latter be happy?

Is Plato wrong?

- ◆ Yes, because he makes state into a *unity*, i.e. one individual, in effect;
- ◆ Institutes community of women, property and children for guardians;
- ◆ Rather, state is and should be a *plurality*;
 - Should be a unity “in some respects only”;
- ◆ Plato should have instead used
 - ‘philosophy ...customs and laws, like those that prevail at Sparta and Crete respecting common meals, whereby the legislator has made property common’ (37).

Private families, common property (2.5)?

Soil private	Soil private	Soil common	Soil common
Produce private	Produce common	Produce private	Produce common
Athens	Sparta: uses dogs and horses in common	"certain foreigners" do this	Communism, but not Plato's version--why?

Aristotle's view of human nature

◆ Aristotle:

- "...surely the love of self is a feeling implanted nature, and not given in vain [nature does nothing in vain]...."

◆ What is Plato's view of human nature?

- hint: a political philosopher's view of HN is often the key to his philosophy!

Virtues of temperance and liberality

- ◆ “Temperance...is a mean concerned with pleasures” (*NE* 1117b25), i.e. the mean between excess consumption total abstention.
- ◆ Liberality “seems...to be the mean about wealth” (*NE* 1119b25), between waste and stinginess:
 - Spending and giving, with pleasure
 - Giving to the right people, ends
 - Aiming at what is fine.

Virtue of “liberality” depends on private property

- ◆ What is “liberality”?
- ◆ An important Aristotelian virtue, also called “generosity” (*Nic. Ethics*, 4.3);
 - practiced by individuals, from their own resources.
- ◆ To be generous we must have something of our *own* to give:
 - Versus use of public monies, not at our individual disposal.
- ◆ Is one way better than the other?

Common *use* of property

- ◆ Property privately held, equal shares;
- ◆ Public use (as in *Pol.* II, VII):
 - “Friends will have all things in common” (Arist.);
 - slaves, horses, dogs all available for those who need them;
 - Food provided for messes from hunt.
- ◆ Common punishment of children:
 - but know who their fathers are (cf. Plato, *Rep.*);
 - their own father punishes them again if another man has already done so.

Is Aristotle promoting altruism?

- ◆ "'Friends'...will have all things common";
- ◆ "It is clearly better that property should be *private*, but the *use* of it common";
- ◆ Spartans allow fellow-citizens use of their slaves, dogs and horses!
 - "...there is the greatest pleasure in doing a kindness or service to friends...which can only be rendered when a man has *private* property" (36).
 - "...the special business of the legislator [law-giver] is to create in men this *benevolent* disposition" (36).

Regulation of Property

- ◆ Many constitutions recognized influence of property on society:
 - No one imitated Plato's communism.
- ◆ Athens:
 - Solon prohibited unlimited property.
- ◆ Phaleas of Chalcedon--equal possessions:
 - Easier in colonies;
 - Not very feasible in established states;
 - But Lycurgus equalized property at Sparta.

Property-Population Connection (2.6)

- ◆ If property to be regulated, population must also be regulated:
 - actuarial methods: child mortality and sterility rates of couples.
- ◆ Why?
 - Some ancient legislators thought number of families should remain unchanged.
 - Aristotle: a city may decide to regulate population, even by abortion (*Pol.* 7).

Is Inequality a problem?

◆ Plato:

- “two cities” of the rich and the poor.

◆ Class war

◆ Injustice:

- some in want, while others rich.

◆ Equality = unjust if land parcels not sufficient to sustain the possessor.

Effects of Inequality

- ◆ Aristotle: “That the equalization of property exercises an influence on political society was clearly understood even by some of the old legislators. Laws were made by Solon and others prohibiting an individual from possessing as much land as he pleased...” (43);
- ◆ Size matters: too large or too small, leading to luxury or poverty (44);
- ◆ Also other forms of wealth should be taken into account: slaves, cattle, movable goods;
- ◆ “Clearly, then, the legislator ought not only to aim at the equalization of properties, but at moderation in their amount” (44).

Is equalization a solution to social strife?

- ◆ Yes and no:
- ◆ “The equalization of property is one of the things that tend to prevent the citizens from quarrelling”;
- ◆ And “[t]here are crimes for which the motive is want,” i.e. stealing food;
- ◆ But “...the greatest crimes are caused by excess and not by necessity” (44);
- ◆ The nobles fight over honour (we might say power, social recognition), not necessarily property;
- ◆ Solution? “...train the nobler sort of natures not to desire more, and to prevent the lower from getting more; that is to say, they must be kept down, but not ill-treated” (45).

Later views on inequality

- ◆ John Locke: since the institution of property and money men have tacitly agreed to an unequal possession of the earth
- ◆ ("Property," *Second Treatise on Government*, 1688, chap. 5).
- ◆ J.-J. Rousseau: the institution of property is one of the worst evils that mankind ever invented because it gives rise to inequality and exploitation of the poor by the rich, the weak by the strong.
- ◆ *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality among Men* (1754).

Land distribution

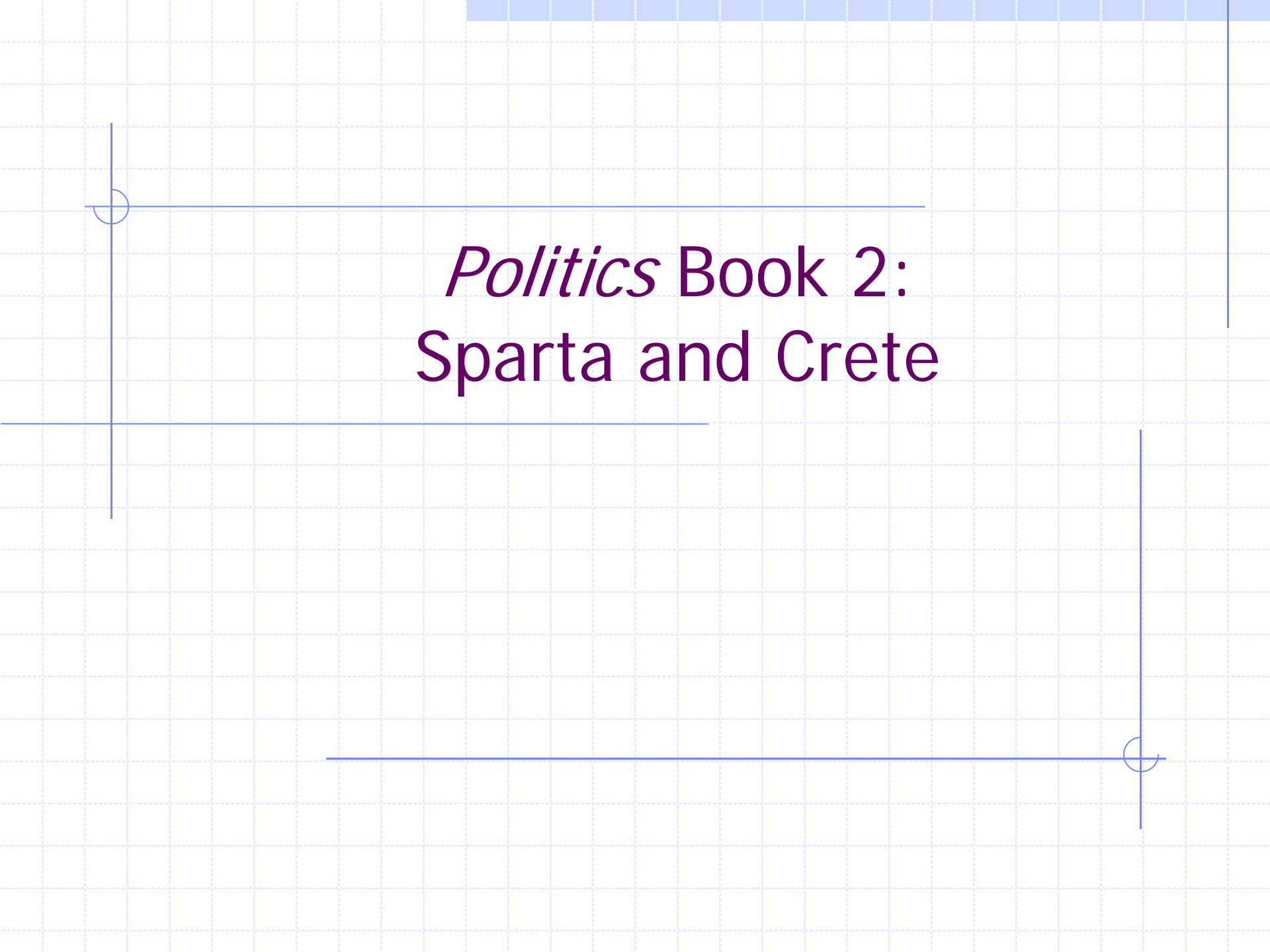
- ◆ Starting from land equalization prescribed in Plato's *Laws*, Aristotle analyzes the amount of land necessary to practice virtue;
 - Plato prescribes enough to live temperately;
 - But "...a man must have so much property as will enable him to live not only temperately but liberally" (40);
 - "For liberality and temperance are the only eligible qualities [virtues] which have to do with the use of property" (40-1).

Land distribution, cont.

- ◆ In *Laws*, population unlimited, yet land parcels of equal size may not be further divided to pass on to future generations (cf. Sparta, where land was divided and many parcels too small);
- ◆ “There is...an absurdity in equalizing the property and not regulating the number of citizens” (41; see also 43);
- ◆ “...even more necessary to limit population than property”:
 - “...the limit should be fixed by calculating the chances of mortality in the children, and of sterility in married persons” (Aristotle the actuary!);
- ◆ To neglect the population-land ratio is “a never-failing cause of poverty...and poverty is the parent of revolution and crime” (41).

Moderation in equalization (2.7)

- ◆ If properties equal, they should be of moderate size;
- ◆ Rich should not be made poor, for they will cause revolutions;
- ◆ The real issue is not property size, but men's *desires*
- ◆ How are these to be regulated?
- ◆ By education!



Politics Book 2:
Sparta and Crete

Ancient Greece, including Crete



Spartan economy (Xen.)

- ◆ "...Lycurgus forbade freeborn citizens to have anything to do with business affairs...their own concern [being] only those activities that make for civic freedom [meaning?]" (159-61).
 - Equal property and contributions to meals, same living standard for all;
 - Keeping gold and silver subject to a fine
 - Iron coinage made accumulation impractical;
 - "...there is not even any need of money to spend on cloaks; for their adornment is due not to the price of their clothes, but to the excellent condition of their bodies" (161);
- ◆ Hence no foreign trade:
 - who would go to Sparta to make money?
 - Kept out foreign influences (customs, religion).

Spartan Exclusion of Foreigners

- ◆ Dual purpose:
- ◆ Preserve Spartan way of life, laws and virtue;
- ◆ Discourage trade: Result of iron coinage prescribed by Lycurgus;
- ◆ Some foreign soldiers allowed, attested by Xen., *Const. Lac.*

Views of the Outside World: Athens

- ◆ “Yesterday I went down to the Piræus...to worship the goddess and also because I wanted to see how they would conduct the festival on this, its first performance” (*Rep.*, 327a).
- ◆ Plato refers to Bendis, the Thracians’ hunting goddess (like Artemis).
- ◆ “Our city is open to the world, and we have no periodical deportation in order to prevent people observing or finding out secrets which might be of military advantage to the enemy” (Thucydides, “Pericles’ Funeral Oration,” *History of the Peloponnesian War*).

Comparison of Institutions of Sparta & Crete

Institution	Sparta	Crete
Slavery	Helots ally w/ neighbors	Neighbors don't ally w/ Perioeci b/c own serfs would rebel
Women	Too wealthy & free, dominate men	Presumably docile
Common meals	At private expense; not enough for poor	Tribute & fruits of ** <i>public</i> lands**
Land	Too unequal, causes poverty	**Public and private portions**
Ephors/Cosmi	Too powerful & popular	Too powerful & oligarchic

Consequences of collective enslavement

- ◆ Accepted “in a well-ordered state”:
 - “...citizens should have leisure and not have to provide for their daily wants” (49);
- ◆ Slave revolts occur when a class of serfs, e.g. Helots, can ally w/ masters’ neighbors, who are also enemies;
 - “...when these are the results the citizens of a state have not found out the secret of managing their subject population” (50);
- ◆ Cretan lawgiver gave Perioeci (serfs) same institutions as everyone else:
 - forbade them weapons and gymnastic (38).

Women's domination

- ◆ All warrior peoples, except homosexual ones (Celts), are dominated by women:
 - Men at war; women rule at home;
- ◆ Spartan women especially unruly due to their considerable wealth, own 40% of the country;
 - Hence, "...half the city may be regarded as having no laws" (50);
- ◆ Wealthy due to their dowries and right to inherit under Spartan law (51);
- ◆ Wealth is valued where women dominate—
 - is there any justification for such a claim?

Sparta's citizen deficit

- ◆ Xenophon: Sparta is powerful despite its low population;
- ◆ Aristotle: severe dearth of citizens a few decades later;
 - From 10,000 in past to 1,000 citizens;
- ◆ Better to equalize property so that all may have minimum support (see common meals).
- ◆ Law encourages large families, but inheritance practices lead to unequal land distribution, so many receive nothing;
- ◆ Cretan solution:
 - law separates "men from women, lest they should have too many children" (55).

Common meals: a democratic institution?

- ◆ Directly dependent on land distribution;
- ◆ Spartan land is private, providing the food;
- ◆ Result: the poor cannot contribute, leading to loss of citizenship (53-4, 55);
- ◆ Crete:
 - common meals “better managed than the Lacedaemonian,” and “of a more popular character”.
 - tribute of perioeci and produce from public lands.

Social Consequences of Land Distribution

- ◆ Sparta: all property private; fruits are shared, but many too poor to contribute;
- ◆ Crete:
 - Public land plays a significant role, model for Sparta (54);
 - ◆ "...one portion is assigned to the gods [meaning?] and the service of the state (55);
 - ◆ Another portion of *public* land provides for the common meals;
 - ◆ Rest is presumably privately held.
- ◆ See also Politics, VII.

High Office

Feature	Sparta (Ephors)	Crete (Cosmi)
Accountability	None	None, except by expulsion
Tenure	Life; tyranny leading to democracy (52)	Life
Eligibility	Everyone; poor men open to bribes, but people support Ephorate	Only some families, but rest do not object (why not?)
Opportunity to profit?	Yes; see above	No

A final word about Sparta

- ◆ “The charge which Plato brings, in the *Laws*, against the intention of the legislator [Lycurgus], is likewise justified;
- ◆ the whole constitution has regard to one part of excellence only—the excellence of the *soldier*, which gives victory in *war*.
- ◆ So long as they were at war, therefore, their power was preserved, but when they had attained empire they fell, for of the arts of *peace* they knew nothing...” (emph. added; 54).