

Politics, Book I:
The Polis, Slavery

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Key Concepts:

- The Good (for man/humans)
 - The nature of a thing
 - Final Cause/End—*Telos*
- Happiness = *practicing* virtue
 - final end of man;
- Nature (see ‘the Good’)
- Polis
- Hierarchy

Aristotle's idea of The Good

- Many goods—the good of each thing, organism:
 - The good of cats
 - The good of trees
 - The good of society
 - The good of philosophers
- The good of a thing is determined by examining its *nature*:
 - i.e. its goal or *telos*.

Teleology

- Aristotle (4th c. BCE):
 - studies organisms; tries to understand their goals, trajectories, e.g. acorn => oak tree.
- Aquinas (13th c. CE) posits a God-driven teleology.

An acorn's *telos*



Debating *telos*:

Determinists vs non-determinists

- Determinists:
 - Darwinians?
 - Humans = end point of evolution
 - Creationists/Intelligent Design
 - We are hard-wired,
 - by our genes, or
 - by God;
 - Our lives are pre-determined
 - by fate, a deity, an over-mind, etc.

Telos debate, cont.

- Indeterminate view (there is no telos):
 - organisms =
 - result of contingency/chaotic events,
 - e.g. interaction of genes & environment
 - there is no master plan or programme
 - Chaos theory.
- There is no fate.

What is the polis?

1. Greek city-state (historical)
2. A special *association*
(political, ethical) with a telos.

Definition of the polis

- “Every state is a **community** of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which they think good.”
- “...the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the **highest** good” (*Pol.* 1.1).
- “...a *partnership* of citizens in the constitution” (3.3)
- The state (polis) is **NATURAL**.

Key characteristics of the polis

- Community
- All-embracing
- Whole greater than sum of parts
- Hierarchical
- Aims at good in a greater degree
- Not just any good:
 - Polis aims at *highest* good.

What the polis is not (elaborated in later books of *Pol.*)

- Not a
 - Trade association
 - Defense organisation, e.g. Sparta
 - Ethnic group, e.g. Cantonese
 - Geographical area, e.g. HKSAR
 - ‘...the identity of a city is not constituted by its walls’ (*Pol.* III.3).

Two Ways to Understand Polis

Historically:

- Household: master rules wife, slaves, children
- Villages: ruled by chief or king = *monarchical*;
- City: equal citizens rule in turns as statesmen: *constitutional* rule;
- Each form is natural;
- Different kinds of rule in different organizations.

Organically:

Body-polis Analogy

The polis is the body, the whole that is prior to the parts;

The citizens are the *interdependent* parts;

Whole could do w/out some parts, but parts cannot do w/out whole.

What are **your** affiliations?

Family?

Other community, e.g. church?

State?

Therefore:

The Whole is greater than the
sum of its parts.

What are some implications?

Aristotle's view of the soul

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graph TD; Reason[Reason] --- Desires[Desires]
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Reason

Desires

Polis & Man's telos

- ‘...we must look for intentions of nature in those things which retain their nature’;
- Study therefore the *best* man, not just any man (*Pol.* 1.5).
- Man is a political animal, intended by nature for a social life:
 - *Zoon politikon*;
- One who is not social is ‘either a beast or a god’ (*Pol.* 1.2);
- Each person contains ruling and ruled elements.

Hierarchy

Central to thought of
Plato and Aristotle.

Hierarchy & Its Justification

Despotical & Const. Rule	Man, Citizen Master Husband	Woman Mother Wife	Slave Barbarian non-Greek
Ruling Element	Reason (soul vs intellect)	Partial Reason	Appetite
Corresp. Body part	Brain	Brain & Body	Body

Each person's fundamental attributes are *by nature*.

Therefore: Hierarchy is natural.

Slavery

A natural condition?

Comment

- ‘I think that even if there is some justification for the view that the master is more rational than the slave, it cannot justify slavery.’
- I think rationality is important, but it alone cannot override the freedom of the slave. In other words, no matter whether there are some people who are more rational than others or not, the notion of rationality cannot justify slavery.’
- N.B. The Greek word for reason is **logos**, which refers to speech and reason exercised together.

Response

- ‘Aristotle is in essence saying: slavery is justified because it is natural.
- I think this gives a possible answer to your question: slaves, by *nature* or should we say by definition, are those who are inferior in rationality.
- If someone is not inferior in rationality, he cannot be a slave in the first place in the argument for slavery defended by Aristotle.’

Master-Slave relationship (*Pol.* 1.5-1.7)

- Aristotle posits a ‘natural’ slave
 - naturally servile character, requires guidance
 - ‘some are slaves everywhere, others nowhere’
- Slaves = living tools or instruments
- Science of the master:
 - How to order
- Science of the slave
 - How to perform assigned tasks
- Humane slavery:
 - Master should not abuse his authority;
 - Master and Slave can be friends and have common interest.
- Relation must be *natural*, not conventional!

Conventional slavery (*Pol.* 1.6, p. 18)

- Convention is not necessarily right, it's just customary
 - however, it is 'a sort of justice';
 - e.g. convention that people captured in war may be made slaves;
 - even if the cause of the war may not be just;
- Idea of kings or nobles being slaves is absurd:
 - b/c presumably more excellent than ordinary men;
 - 'That is why people do not like to call themselves slaves, but confine the term to foreigners'.

Actual Slavery

Status

- No rights;
- Property of master, who could kill or punish in any way he wished;
- Law required slaves to be tortured when giving evidence;
- Manumission (grant of freedom) rare in ancient Greece (common in Rome).

Sources of slaves

- Birth
- Conquest/War
- Criminal conviction; in Athens this meant being sent to the silver mines, where death was certain;
- The reality was different from Aristotle's theory!

Other views of slavery

Sophists: teachers of rhetoric to lawyers

- They taught that slavery is a *convention*;
 - not a natural institution;
- People become slaves through capture in war (or birth);
 - there is no slave *by nature*;
- It is therefore incorrect to assume that Aristotle's review simply *reflects* the view of his peers!
- This would be Historicism: reduction of a view or idea to being simply a product of its era.

Uniform characteristics of ancient slavery

- No rights or privileges
- Could not marry
- Could not attain citizenship
- At disposal of master
- Had no kin, no family gods (had to worship those of master's family)
- Owner gives him/her his/her name.

Elaboration on ancient slavery

In Athens

- Domestic servitude:
 - Debated and codified
 - Personal dependence
 - Essential element of *oikos* (household)
 - Manumission rare & contracts offered few advantages
 - Closed system—did not offer passage to citizenship
- Penal slavery in city's silver mine = certain death.

Elsewhere

- 'Helotage': enslaved communities,
 - e.g. Sparta's Helots
 - retained their own identities, customs, gods, etc.
- Roman manumission strategically created patron-client networks;
- Christians did not abolish slavery
 - being a slave an opportunity for charity, virtue;
- Stoic view of slavery
 - a condition in this life that one must bear.

Manumission, to manumit

- Latin: *man mittere* < *man* , ablative singular of *manus* the power of a father or master (lit. 'hand': cf. MANUS *n.1 2*) + *mittere* to release, send (see MISSION *n.*); *man*
- **1. trans. a.** To release (a person) from slavery, bondage, or servitude; to set free. Also *intr.*: to obtain one's release from slavery, etc. *Oxford English Dictionary* online.

Examples of Manumission Contracts

- “...Sophrona...hands over to the Pythian Apollo to be free the female house-born slave named Onasiphoron, priced at three silver minae, and has received the whole price...if anyone touches Onasiphoron in order to enslave her, then she who has sold her and the guarantor together are to ensure that the sale to the god is valid...”
 - “...many of these contracts survive, inscribed on...public buildings at Delphi and similar religious centres” (Wiedemann, *Greek and Roman Slavery*, p. 46-47).

Manumission, cont.

- But,
 - ‘Onasiphoron is to remain with Sophrona for the whole period of the latter’s life, doing whatever she is ordered to do without giving cause for complaint. If she does not do so, then Sophrona is to have the power to punish her in whatever way she wishes to. And Onasiphoron is to give Sophrona a child’ (quoted in Wiedemann, pp. 46-7).
- The slave might have to remain with the master’s *heirs* as well!

‘All men are created equal...’

**Ancient thinkers never thought
this way!**

Slaves vs Citizens: Plato and Aristotle

Low vs High music

Application of idea of hierarchy

Logocentrism of higher classes

Preferred instrument (children only): the *Kithara* [lyre]



A slave instrument: the *Auloi* [Pipes]

