

Aristotle's *Politics*

- **Polis as most perfect form of human community.**
- **The 'highest goal'.**
- **Role of nature.**

Polis:

The 'polis' (city state) is the self-sufficient end of social orders of individuals, households and villages, that provides citizens the means to live *well*, (*Eudaimonia*), as opposed to simply living (*Eudaimonia*).

Aristotle explains the production of the polis in terms of four causes: material, formal, efficient and final.

- **Material** – made up of individual citizens, which are ordered by households, classes, villages and natural resources.
- **Formal** – its constitution, meaning 'certain ordering of the inhabitants' (not the written document). It is the way of life of the citizens, how their lives are ordered and sets out the polis' aim. i.e. oligarchy, democracy etc. In order for the polis to be truly perfect it must be ordered by a constitution that aims for the 'common advantage', not just the advantage of the rulers.
- **Efficient** – the ruler. According to Aristotle, community can only possess order if it has a ruling authority. This authority is compared to a craftsman who fashions material into the finished product.
- **Final** – human flourishing, *Eudaimonia*. 'The good life', often translated as 'happiness' or 'flourishing' is the proper end of the polis, which is therefore the most perfect form of human community.

It's important to remember that in Aristotle's account, a 'citizen' is one who has the right to participate in office. The term 'citizens' is inapplicable to children, slaves, most ordinary workers and women.

According to Aristotle, every community is established for the sake of some good and aims at some good. The community that has the most authority and includes all the others aims highest at this good. This authority is the city-state or 'polis'. It comes into being for the sake of life and exists for the good of life.

The 'ideal' state is defined through the bounds of possibility. The state cannot be happy (this being the ultimate goal, *a priori*) without prosperity. It cannot prosper without good actions, cannot entail good actions without virtue. Thus, the very existence of a 'happy' state indicates virtue, good actions and prosperity. ('Virtue' is consistently acting in the right way for the right reasons.)

Polis and the Highest goal:

Aristotle's 'highest goal' of humanity is to engage the rational part of the soul. The only way to do this is through leisure. This means social stratification is necessary to keep the state running and allow for those at the higher echelons to pursue rationality.

There is a flow-on effect as the politicians, leaders and philosophers can then be involved in rational decision-making that ideally improves the well-being of others.

Aristotle's polis is ruled by elites; the enlightened, reasonable, rational. It is a creator of human intelligence. It raises humanity above "mere animals".

An individual is useless if cut off from the polis, as we can only exercise skills and capabilities through/within the state. It is the means and ends to be good.

Aristotle believes the value of the polis is both intrinsic (valued for itself) and extrinsic (for the value they give others, in this case human nature.)

The polis (city state) governs the practical sciences such as military, household and rhetoric, and thus these sciences serve the polis' end (used here to mean 'ultimate purpose'), which is nothing less than human flourishing.

The scope of the polis appeals to Aristotle, as he says that to attain the capacity for one individual to live well, it is "greater and more complete to do so for a nation".

Role of Nature:

'Nature' in relation to Aristotle's politics, refers to the essential feature of humanity, i.e. "human nature". Aristotle defines 3 claims that explore the concept of nature:

1. The city-state exists by nature as it emerges from more primitive natural associations and serves their end in its self-sufficiency.
2. Humans are 'by nature' political animals who seek to live together, because nature has equipped them with speech and reason and therefore humans are able to communicate moral concepts such as justice. As such, there are natural dichotomies; that of master/slave, man/woman, knowledge/physical, rational/irrational. According to Aristotle, these pairs cannot exist apart. Male/female join to reproduce, master/slave for self preservation. From these primitive communities arose the household, which combine into villages, which together form the polis, all according to nature. He argues that the State is the natural conclusion of the amalgam of all these 'natural' parts. Thus, the State is a human 'telos' (end, conclusion).
3. The polis is naturally prior to the individuals, as individuals cannot perform their natural functions apart from the city-state, as they are not self-sufficient.

Thus, everyone naturally has an impulse to form communities.