The Ethics and Politics

Aristotle's political philosophy and ethics are inextricably welded together, although they are expounded in separate treatises, primarily the Politics and Nichomachean Ethics.

The "polis" ("state" or "city-state") is the perfect or complete form of human association, since only the state can provide all the requisites for human happiness.

The human good is happiness, since this is the only thing always sought for its own sake.

Human happiness consists of the excellence proper to human beings, which in turn consists of a disposition towards the best exercise of the capacities proper to humanity.

The primary discussion of happiness occurs in the Nichomachean Ethics.

Capacity: the power or ability to feel or do something.

Disposition: the tendency to feel or act in a certain way.

The capacity proper to humanity: reason.

[Note: according to Aristotle, "to live" has a number of meanings: roughly, (1) to be nourished and to reproduce; (2) to sense and move; and (3) to think. Plants live in only the first sense; animals other than human beings in only the first and second senses, and human beings in all three senses.]

Thus happiness consists of the disposition toward the best exercise of man's rational capacity. This Aristotle calls "virtue."

There are two kinds of virtue: moral and intellectual, corresponding to the appetitive and rational parts of the soul.

Intellectual virtue consists of theoretical knowledge.

Moral virtue pertains to the way in which one desires / pursues or has an aversion to / avoids the fine and the base, the useful
and the useless, and the pleasant and the painful.

Moral Virtue

Moral virtue consists of a disposition to feel or act according to the proper mean between opposing vices in various fields of feeling or activity. The proper mean is the point at which the pleasant correlates with the fine and the useful and the painful with the base and the useless.

The proper mean is that which is dictated by the "right rule" -- i.e., right with respect to time, manner, person, etc.

The right rule is determined by the rational capacity which deals with particulars rather than universals, as does the capacity for theoretical knowledge -- this is the "calculative" capacity. The proper exercise of the calculative capacity in the various spheres of activity to which virtue pertains is "prudence."

Examples of virtues and their corresponding vices of excess and defect:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIELD</th>
<th>DEFECT</th>
<th>VIRTUE</th>
<th>EXCESS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fear and confidence</td>
<td>cowardice</td>
<td>courage</td>
<td>rashness</td>
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<td>pleasure and pain</td>
<td>insensibility</td>
<td>temperance</td>
<td>licentiousness</td>
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<td>getting and spending</td>
<td>insensibilty</td>
<td>liberality</td>
<td>prodigality</td>
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<tr>
<td>anger</td>
<td>lack of spirit</td>
<td>patience</td>
<td>irascibility</td>
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There are two senses of "justice."

Sense 1: Obedience to (natural) law. (In this sense the just and the virtuous are the same, though perhaps not the same in definition.)

Sense 2: Fairness.

There are three kinds of friendship, and within each kind there are two kinds -- friendships among equals and friendships between superior and inferior.

Friendship 1: friendship based on virtue.
Friendship 2: friendship based on pleasure.

Friendship 3: friendship based on utility (usefulness).

Friendship 1 is the highest and in a sense the only true form of friendship. It is the only form in which the other is loved as the self and for the sake of the beloved.

We can round out Aristotle's account if we hypothesize that he means to say that nature creates certain obligations which are the grounds of all instances of Friendship 1, and that by "friendship" Aristotle means every kind of human association.

Thus nature creates the obligation and inclination for parents to love their children, husbands and wives to love each other, and citizens to love each other as partners in the state. These are all instances of Friendship 1, although the first two are not between equals. (Aristotle obviously thinks the husband more capable than the wife, and thus able to contribute more to their association; however, the falsity of this view [as I see it] does not seriously impinge on his general account.)

Nature creates the obligation of citizens to love each other as partners in the state because according to Aristotle the state is a creation of nature as the most perfect and complete form of human association.

Pleasure

The chief rival to Aristotle's theory of happiness is that pleasure is happiness, a theory Aristotle cites as advanced by Eudoxus.

Eudoxus apparently (according to Aristotle) argued for this position much in the same way as did the nineteenth-century philosopher John Stuart Mill -- namely by saying that pleasure, and the absence of its opposite, pain, are the only things everyone seeks as an end.

Aristotle: there are two opposite errors to be avoided -- (1) that pleasure is the same as happiness, and (2) that pleasure is not good at all.

Argument against Eudoxus: there are some things everyone seeks as ends, although they are not in every instance pleasurable: maturity, excellence, sensation, knowledge.
Argument of some who think that no pleasure is good: Pleasure is a process, namely the satisfaction of desire. Thus it is not the pleasure itself that is good, but the satiation which results from the pleasurable action (since that is the goal of the activity). Since pleasure is only a process, and is present only as long as desire is being satisfied, and since desire is always finite, pleasure cannot sustain itself, even if the pleasurable action is continued, and must always alternate with pain (desire).

Aristotle's rebuttal: this view ignores the pleasures which are not attendant on the satisfaction of desire, but rather on the activity, or perfection, of some capacity, such as the pleasures which accompany sensation and thought.

Aristotle's analysis of pleasure: pleasure is the crowning perfection of the exercise of a faculty -- i.e., an activity constituting life. Pleasures differ from each other according to the activities of which they are the perfections. It is life activities which are sought by all as ends and not merely as means, and thus it is life activities (in accordance with excellence or virtue) which constitute happiness.

(Thus we are not active for the sake of idleness, but rather are idle in order to restore our capacity for activity.)

Notes on Aristotle's Politics

I. The polis (state, society) in general (Book I, Chapters 1-2)
   A. The polis aims at the highest human good.
      1. Proof:
         a. Every (deliberate) act aims at some (perceived) good.
         b. Thus the forming of every association aims at some good.
         c. The polis is the most inclusive of associations, and thus includes all other associations, as well as all individuals who make up the polis, as parts.
         d. Thus the polis is sovereign over other associations and over individuals.
         e. The most sovereign in any set of ordered enterprises or entities aims at the highest good.
         f. Thus, the polis aims at the highest good [of
those which are pursued by human beings or associations of human beings].

B. The statesman (the officeholder in the polis) does not belong to the same genus as the king, the householder, or the slave-master, differing only in degree of sovereignty, but belongs rather to a different genus (essentially because the polis is the sovereign association).

1. Summary of erroneous view:
   a. The statesman differs from these others only in degree and in the number of people he rules.
   b. There is no difference between a large household and a small polis.
   c. A statesman and a king differ only in that the authority of the statesman is conditioned by the rules of the art of statesmanship and by other statesmen who rule him, while the authority of the king is unconditioned.

2. Approach to demonstrating the correct view -- analysis of the polis as constructed from its elements.

C. (Bk. I, Ch. 2) The analysis of the polis.

1. Levels of association in the polis.
   a. Unions of those who are co-dependent (i.e., not in the recently coined popular sense of that word, but in the sense of being mutually dependent for their existence)
      (1) The union of the sexes -- marriage
          (a) The sexes are co-dependent for reproduction and nurture.
      (2) The master-slave relation.
          (a) The master and slave are co-dependent because the slave needs the master's guidance and the master needs the slave's power to do work.
          (b) The master and slave are so by nature because of their respective superior mental and physical abilities.
      (3) The opinion that the male-female and master-slave relation are one and the same is erroneous.
          (a) Among barbarians, contrary to nature, the female and the slave occupy the same position.
(b) This is because there is no naturally ruling element among them, and thus they are all slaves, male and female alike.

b. The most elementary association, the household, results from the two types of co-dependent association, male-female and master-slave.

c. The second level of association is the village, which is based on the relation of living in the same (small) place.

- 5 -

(1) A village is often an extension of the household through a succession of generations, and thus is often bound also by kinship.

d. The third and final level of association is the polis.

(1) The polis exists for the sake of self-sufficiency, and for the good life, as opposed to mere life.

(2) The polis exists by nature
   (a) because it is the natural culmination of the process of association, and
   (b) because the good at which it aims, self-sufficiency, is the highest in the hierarchy of goods at which all human associations aim.

(3) Because the polis exists by nature, the human being is naturally constituted so as to live in the polis.

(4) Thus the being who is solitary by nature is either sub-human or super-human (a beast or a god)
   (a) The man who is solitary by nature "at once plunges into a passion for war."

(5) Humans among animals are especially fitted for political existence (existence in the polis) by the possession of language.
   (a) Human language and the sounds made by other animals are different in nature:
      i) The sounds made by other
animals signify only pleasure and pain.

ii) The sounds made by humans signify the good and the bad, the just and the unjust, etc.

(b) [Although he does not say so here, Aristotle bases this distinction on what he takes to be the uniquely human possession of reason.]

(6) Although the individual human is prior to the polis in time, the polis is prior in nature. I. e., the individual human being is what it is only insofar as it is a part of the polis.

(a) Analogy
i) The severed hand is a hand in name only, or "homonymously," because it has lost its function.

ii) Likewise with the individual severed from the polis.

(7) There is an immanent impulse in all human beings towards the formation of a polis.

(8) The man who first constructed such an association was the greatest of benefactors.

(9) The human being, when perfected, is the best of animals, but when isolated from law and justice is the worst.

(10) Injustice is graver when aided by weapons, and man is born with certain weapons (e. g., language), by means of which he is aided in the pursuit of virtue, but which also may be used for the opposite end.

(11) Justice belongs to the polis, for justice is an arrangement of the political association.

II. The household (Book I, Chs. 3-13)
A. The household is defined by three relationships and an art:
1. The master-slave relationship
2. The marriage relationship
3. The parent-child relationship
4. The acquisitive art
B. The master-slave relationship

1. In general
   a. A slave is a living tool
   b. If tools performed their tasks automatically, there would be no need for slaves
   c. A slave is a human being whose nature it is to belong to another

2. Justification of slavery in general
   a. In all composite things there are ruling and ruled components -- for example, in an animal, the soul and body
   b. There are various kinds of ruling relationships -- the master-slave relation is different from the statesman-citizen relation
   c. The master-slave relation resembles the soul-body relation, while the statesman-citizen relation resembles the intelligence-appetite relation
   d. Since there are people who are fit only for bodily work, it is natural that they should belong to others, and be ruled by them, since they cannot rule themselves to their own advantage
   e. The natural slave is a human being who can understand the reasoning of another but cannot reason actively himself

3. The de facto vs. the natural slave
   a. There is a traditional law of conquest, by which captives in war are often made slaves
   b. But this does not accord with nature, if those captives are not slaves by nature
   c. The master and the natural slave have common interests, and are bound by friendship, in the same way as are the soul and body of a human being, while the master and "legal" slave (made so by the law of conquest) have divergent interests

4. The acquisitive art
   a. The chief necessity of life is food, and thus food is the primary object of acquisition

5. Natural forms of property acquisition
   a. Nomadism
   b. Agriculture
   c. Piracy
   d. Hunting
e. Fishing

6. Acquisition by warfare is natural if it is warfare against those who by nature should be ruled but who refuse. [Are these the same as the "slaves by nature"?]

7. The material necessities of life are the only true form of wealth

8. Acquisition by exchange and money-making
   a. It becomes convenient and beneficial in human associations to exchange goods
   b. Exchange is facilitated by money -- a common measure of value
   c. As long as the acquisition of money serves the purpose of the acquisition of household goods, it is natural
   d. But when the acquisition of money becomes an end in itself, it is contrary to nature (reference to the myth of King Midas, who prayed that everything he saw would turn to gold, and thus starved)
   e. The lending of money at interest is unnatural, because it presupposes that money is a form of true wealth

9. The marriage relation
   a. The husband, except in exceptional and unnatural circumstances, should rule over the wife in the same way as the statesman rules over the citizen, except that the statesman and citizen rotate roles
   b. This is because by nature the man is superior to the woman (although not as superior as a free person is to a natural slave)
   c. [This is a confusing point -- just what sort of superiority is Aristotle claiming for the male? Later he says that the deliberative faculty of a woman is "ineffective", that of a child incomplete, and that of a natural slave wholly absent. The "deliberative faculty" is that capacity by which it is possible to make a moral choice.]

10. The parent-child relation
    a. The parent is [initially] superior as being more mature (perfected), and thus by nature should rule the child for the child's benefit

11. Can all human beings possess virtue? Yes, insofar as their rational faculties permit
NOTES ON ARISTOTLE CONTINUED

DISCUSSION OF CONSTITUTIONS CONTINUED,
AND OTHER MINOR TOPICS

THE SPARTAN CONSTITUTION

Text of the Spartan Constitution (from Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans, as quoted in W. G. Forrest, A History of Sparta, p. 41):

I (a) When a sanctuary of Zeus Sullanios and Athena Sullania has been established,
(b) the people divided into tribes and oboi
(c) and thirty men, including the kings, appointed as a Gerousia [Senate].
II The Appellai [a feast of Apollo] shall be celebrated from time to time between Babyka and Knakion.
III Thus questions shall be introduced and withdrawals made.
IV To the assembly of the citizens shall also be given the final authority.
V [according to Plutarch a later amendment] If the people speaks crookedly, the elders [the Gerousia] and the kings shall be setters-aside.

In some way this was thought to embody the laws given to the Spartans by the "Lawgiver" Lycurgos.

The "Spartan Constitution" was greatly admired, and contains a feature which Aristotle regards as the essence of a constitution -- namely the apportionment of political authority among the inhabitants.

Aristotle's criticisms of the Spartan Constitution:

Fundamental criticism: The Spartan Constitution was subordinated to the wrong purpose, namely war and conquest. Hence the Spartans lacked the virtues necessary to fare well in times of peace. He especially seems to have temperance in mind, and he criticizes the Spartans and all martial peoples as doting excessively on their women.

Aristotle says that although the Spartan male citizens had once
numbered as many as 10,000, by the time of the battle of Leuctra their number had shrunk to 1000. He attributes this, by obscure arguments, to the excessive concentration of land in a few hands, and disproportionately in the hands of women (2/5).

Although Aristotle's school had collected the histories of 158 constitutions, only one (The Constitution of Athens) survives. Probably there was a more specific account of Sparta's decline in "The Constitution of Sparta," if one existed.

At any rate, we see from this analysis that population control was a political issue even in antiquity (although in antiquity the problem was often population decline).

THE KINDS OF CONSTITUTIONS

Monarchy: rule by one, with consent of the governed

Tyranny: rule by one, without consent of the governed

Aristocracy: rule by the "best"

- 9 -

Oligarchy: rule by the wealthy (the few)

"Polity": co-operative rule, whereby political authority is apportioned among the various classes of inhabitants

Democracy: rule by the poor (the many)

CITIZENSHIP

A "citizen" is one who, perhaps on a rotating or even random basis (offices were often filled by drawing lots), shares in political authority.

Aristotle never even considers making women citizens, although something like this theme had already been raised in Aristophanes' and Euripides' plays.

Aristotle is also wary of making foreigners and laborers citizens.

EQUALITY

The correct concept of political equality is that political authority should be possessed in proportion to one's ability to
contribute to the general good.

Thus, other things being equal, the polity is the best constitution.

However, the differing circumstances of states dictate different optimum constitutions.

CORRESPONDING GOOD AND BAD CONSTITUTIONS

GOOD/BAD:

MONARCHY/TYRANNY

ARISTOCRACY/OLIGARCHY

POLITY/Democracy

The bad constitutions are bad because they produce faction through injustice, and thus fail to achieve the common good.

Tyrants do not respect laws or rights

Oligarchs oppress and impoverish the many

Democrats rob from the wealthy and lack good judgement

THE APPROPRIATENESS OF CONSTITUTIONS TO VARIOUS KINDS OF POPULATIONS

Monarchy: Aristotle is fascinated by the idea of there being a single man among the population of god-like or heroic virtue. Should such a man exist in a state, he should be given kingship for life, since he would be so disproportionately virtuous that there would be no point in endowing anyone else with political authority.

Aristocracy: (reading between the lines) in an excessively commercial city the many have too little virtue and too much wealth and idleness. Therefore it is dangerous to give them political authority.

Polity: if the many have sufficient virtue and sufficient preoccupations to keep them from being busybodies (again, reading between the lines), namely by being predominantly farmers, this is the best form of government. In this form, all participate in the deliberative body, but the magistracies are filled to some extent
on the basis of ability, where ability encompasses both skill/knowledge and property.

(Of course all these constitutions have many varieties, and there is sometimes a fine line between extremes of any type and its nearest neighbor, both in terms of how many are enfranchised and in terms of whether the state is good or bad.)

CLASSIFICATIONS OF OFFICES -- BK 3, BK 6

BK III: offices are generally divided into legislative, judicial, and magisterial (overseeing).

BK VI: offices: covering areas of
- religion
- warfare
- income and expenditure
- the market
- the town and harbors
- the countryside
- the courts
- registration of contracts
- prisons
- the exaction of penalties
- computing and auditing of accounts
- additional scrutinies of holders of office
- deliberation (policy and legislation)

THE CAUSE OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Injustice and the resulting faction

GREATNESS IN QUANTITY VS QUALITY

Many states, especially those who think that the purpose of the state is warfare and conquest, err in confusing quantitative and qualitative greatness. Qualitative greatness, or virtue, is the appropriate mean with regards both population and territory. Minimal state: can achieve self-sufficiency. Maximal state: a more extensive state cannot be overseen.

EDUCATION

Some think that education is a matter only for the household, but this is wrong, because education begins the process of forming virtue in the future citizen
Education for the free man: grammar, arithmetic, gymnastic, and music

The 3 kinds of music: ethical, active, and exciting. Ethical music molds character by habituating people to love the right things. Active music and exciting music have their roles in relaxation and the purgation of emotions.

A NOTE ON 2 CONCEPTS

In order to make sense of Aristotle we must see that for him leisure and relaxation are not the same. Relaxation is the temporary cessation of physical labor for the purposes of rejuvenation, but leisure is the freedom from the necessity of physical labor which is necessary in order to pursue more noble activities, such as philosophy and statesmanship. By "free man" Aristotle seems to mean a person who possesses such leisure.

COMMONALITY WITH SOCRATES

For all his criticisms of the Republic (impractical, aims at too much unity, misanalyzes the changes of constitution), Aristotle endorses two of Socrates' fundamental premises in political philosophy: (1) that the state exists for the sake of virtue, and (2) that the state is the individual writ large -- the good in the state & in the individual are the same: virtuous activity.