***Aristotle, Politics, Book I***

1. One useful approach to the beginning of the *Politics* is to think of Aristotle as concerned with the question “What one must know to exercise political power properly?”. This question immediately raises some others:
   1. Is that knowledge theoretical (as the understanding of physics or philosophy might be)? Is it productive (like knowing how to build a house)? Is it practical (like knowing how to ride a bike)? Is it some combination?
   2. What is its subject matter? That is, what is it that someone who has this kind of knowledge knows how to make or do? Manage a household? Boss slaves around? Run a business? Command an army? Something else?

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Study the nature of what is ruled by someone with political power, the polis or the city-state

1. Note that Aristotle begins by implying that the city-state is established for the sake of some good. To understand the city-state, then, we will have to see that good at which it aims.
   1. Why think, as Aristotle seems to imply at the end of chapter 1, that we can see what that good is by resolving the whole into its constituents?
   2. Examining the constituents will, Aristotle seems to think, show the falsity of the claim that various kinds of rulership are essentially the same, differing only in the number of their subjects. Who would think that in the first place?
2. One thesis prominently associated with Aristotle is the claim that human beings are naturally political animals. To see what he means by that, let’s ask:
   1. What does Aristotle think we learn by looking at the process of growth of the polity, as at the beginning of chapter 2? (HINT: How will looking at this process help us see the good at which the polity is aimed?)
   2. Why does the polity “grow out of” smaller associations or relationships?
      1. Does this imply that Aristotle thinks the constituents of the polity are relationships rather than individuals? Is this plausible? Why or why not?
      2. What are the smaller associations? At what are they aimed? What are they insufficient for?
      3. What does Aristotle mean by calling the polity self-sufficient at 1252b27ff.? What light does this shed on Aristotle’s remark at 1252a5 that the good of the polity is the most sovereign and inclusive?
      4. Now let’s return to the thesis prominently associated with Aristotle: How do these considerations show that human beings are naturally political? (HINT: explain the important passage at 1252b30ff.)
      5. What does Aristotle mean by saying at 1253a19 that the city state is prior by nature to the household and to each of us individually? Do you think Rawls would agree? Why or why not?
3. At 1253b17ff. Aristotle distinguishes political rule from other kinds of rule; many philosophers have followed him in this, including those as different from him as Hobbes and Locke. Why is the distinction important?
   1. What are the various relations and kind of rule within the household?
   2. What do you think are the purposes or ends of the following relationships:
      1. Husband-wife
      2. Parent-child
      3. Master-slave - Are there natural slaves? How are they distinguished? Why does Aristotle therefore think that slavery is beneficial for them?
   3. Now let’s return to the point raised at 1253b17: how does the extended consideration of slavery confirm that the different kinds of rule Aristotle distinguishes are indeed different?
4. Having distinguished various kinds of rule, Aristotle asks what kind of knowledge is required to exercise each. Note that this knowledge will be knowledge of the ends at which each kind of rule aims. So by distinguishing the knowledge needed for each kind of rule, we can get a fix on the good at which the polis is aimed.
   1. What must one know in order to acquire slaves and to rule them well?
      1. Is Aristotle serious about the licitness of hunting slaves at 1255b39 and 1256b25?
      2. What does Aristotle mean by saying at 1255b13 that when a natural slave is subject to a natural master, there is mutual benefit and friendship? Cf. 1260b5 on producing goodness in slaves.
   2. Now let’s turn to the knowledge necessary for household management:
      1. What are the two forms of wealth acquisition?
      2. Which one is part of household management and which one is not? See 1257b20; also the remark about property “ready to hand” at 1258a34.
      3. What does Aristotle mean by saying at 1258 a 14 that the one is naturally limited but the other is not?
      4. At 1257b40 to 1258a14, Aristotle seems to discuss those who treat money as what Rawls would call a “dominant end”. Explain. What conclusion does Aristotle think we should reach about them?
         1. What do you think Aristotle means by the phrase “living well” at 1257b42?
         2. Note that at 1258b42-43, Aristotle tries to explain why some people have an unlimited desire for wealth. Recall that in *TJ*’s argument that a well-ordered society would not engender destructive envy, Rawls identifies the desire for income and wealth with a desire for status. Still other thinkers have thought that the desire for wealth comes from a desire to overcome our finitude. Which, if any, of these explanations strikes you as right? Why?
      5. Why is the trade of the usurer the most unnatural – might we say, the most perverted -- of all?
      6. Is Aristotle right to assert that the art of money-making has a natural limit? What might he say about those who accumulate large fortunes and then engage in acts or [pledges](http://givingpledge.org/) of philanthropy? About those who acquire such fortunes and then spend them gaining political office? (See this early [profile of Michael Bloomberg](http://nymag.com/nymetro/news/people/features/14573/).)
      7. In the beginning of Chapter 13, Aristotle states an important conclusion about what household management aims at. Explain the conclusion and Aristotle’s argument for it.
         1. Can slaves have virtues? Women? Children? What are the differences among them?
   3. Political rule
      1. What does Aristotle mean by saying at 1259b4 that the statesman and those he rules are on a footing of equality?
      2. Why does this imply that in a polity, citizens should rule and be ruled?
      3. Who are the vulgar craftsmen Aristotle refers to at 1260a38? What is the difference between a vulgar craftsman and a slave?
      4. Why does Aristotle think that in order to determine the virtues relevant to various members of society requires the study of constitutions?