

# THE POLITICS

## ARISTOTLE

*Thomas Jefferson began studying Greek at the age of nine, and later in life employed so many Greek phrases in his letters that John Adams, his frequent correspondent, complained of them. The Founders' interest in classical languages was not academic, but political and philosophical. Among the ancient books that they drew upon was Aristotle's Politics, a catalog of constitutions and a guide to understanding regimes.*

C. 335–322 B.C.

### BOOK I

CHAPTER I. (1) Since we see that every city is some sort of partnership, and that every partnership is constituted for the sake of some good (for everyone does everything for the sake of what is held to be good), it is clear that all partnerships aim at some good, and that the partnership that is most authoritative of all and embraces all the others does so particularly, and aims at the most authoritative good of all. This is what is called the city or the political partnership. 5

(2) Those who suppose that the same person is expert in political [rule], kingly [rule], managing the household and being a master [of slaves] do not argue rightly. For they consider that each of these differs in the multitude or fewness [of those ruled and not in kind—for example, [the ruler] of a few is a master, of more a household manager, and of still more an expert in political or kingly [rule]—the assumption being that there is no difference between a large household and a small city; and as for the experts in political and kingly [rule], they consider an expert in kingly [rule] one who has charge himself, and in political [rule] one who, on the basis of the precepts of this sort of science, rules and is ruled in turn. But these things are not true. (3) This will be clear to those investigating in accordance with our normal sort of inquiry. For just as it is necessary elsewhere to divide a compound into its un-compounded elements (for these are the smallest parts of the whole), so too by investigating what the 10 15

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city is composed of we shall gain a better view concerning these [kinds of rulers] as well, both as to how they differ from one another and as to whether there is some expertise characteristic of an art that can be acquired in connection with each of those mentioned.

5 CHAPTER 2. (1) Now in these matters as elsewhere it is by looking at how things develop naturally from the beginning that one may best study them. (2) First, then, there must of necessity be a conjunction of persons who cannot exist without one another: on the one hand, male and female, for the sake of reproduction (which occurs not from intentional choice but—as is also the  
10 case with the other animals and plants—from a natural striving to leave behind another that is like oneself); on the other, the naturally ruling and ruled, on account of preservation. For that which can foresee with the mind is the naturally ruling and naturally mastering element, while that which can do these things with the body is the naturally ruled and slave; hence the same thing is  
15 advantageous for the master and slave. (3) Now the female is distinguished by nature from the slave. For nature makes nothing in an economizing spirit, as smiths make the Delphic knife, but one thing with a view to one thing; and each instrument would perform most finely if it served one task rather than many. (4) The barbarians, though, have the same arrangement for female and slave.  
20 The reason for this is that they have no naturally ruling element; with them, the partnership [of man and woman] is that of female slave and male slave. This is why the poets say “it is fitting for Greeks to rule barbarians”—the assumption being that barbarian and slave are by nature the same thing.

(5) From these two partnerships, then, the household first arose, and Hesiod’s  
25 verse is rightly spoken: “first a house, and woman, and ox for plowing”—for poor persons have an ox instead of a servant. The household is the partnership constituted by nature for [the needs of] daily life; Charondas calls its members “peers of the mess,” Epimenides of Crete “peers of the manger.” The first partnership arising from [the union of] several households and for the sake of nondaily  
30 needs is the village. (6) By nature the village seems to be above all an extension of the household. Its members some call “milk-peers”; they are “the children and the children’s children.” This is why cities were at first under kings, and nations are even now. For those who joined together were already under kings: every household was under the eldest as king, and so also were the extensions [of the  
35 household constituting the village] as a result of kinship. (7) This is what Homer meant when he says that “each acts as law to his children and wives”; for [men] were scattered and used to dwell in this manner in ancient times. And it is for this reason that all assert that the gods are under a king—because they themselves are under kings now, or were in ancient times. For human beings assimilate not  
40 only the looks of the gods to themselves, but their ways of life as well.

(8) The partnership arising from [the union of] several villages that is complete is the city. It reaches a level of full self-sufficiency, so to speak; and while coming into being for the sake of living, it exists for the sake of living well. Every city, therefore, exists by nature, if such also are the first partnerships. For the city is their end, and nature is an end: what each thing is—for example, a human being, a horse, or a household—when its coming into being is complete is, we assert, the nature of that thing. (9) Again, that for the sake of which [a thing exists], or the end, is what is best; and self-sufficiency is an end and what is best. 5

From these things it is evident, then, that the city belongs among the things that exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. He who is without a city through nature rather than chance is either a mean sort or superior to man; he is “without clan, without law, without hearth,” like the person reproved by Homer; (10) for the one who is such by nature has by this fact a desire for war, as if he were an isolated piece in a game of chess. That man is much more a political animal than any kind of bee or any herd animal is clear. 15 For, as we assert, nature does nothing in vain; and man alone among the animals has speech. (11) The voice indeed indicates the painful or pleasant, and hence is present in other animals as well; for their nature has come this far, that they have a perception of the painful and pleasant and indicate these things to each other. But speech serves to reveal the advantageous and the harmful, and hence also the just and the unjust. (12) For it is peculiar to man as compared 20 to the other animals that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and other things [of this sort]; and partnership in these things is what makes a household and a city.

The city is thus prior by nature to the household and to each of us. (13) For the whole must of necessity be prior to the part; for if the whole [body] is destroyed there will not be a foot or a hand, unless in the sense that the term is similar (as when one speaks of a hand made of stone), but the thing itself will be defective. Everything is defined by its task and its power, and if it is no longer the same in these respects it should not be spoken of in the same way, 30 but only as something similarly termed. (14) That the city is both by nature and prior to each individual, then, is clear. For if the individual when separated [from it] is not self-sufficient, he will be in a condition similar to that of the other parts in relation to the whole. One who is incapable of participating or who is in need of nothing through being self-sufficient is no part of a city, and 35 so is either a beast or a god.

(15) Accordingly, there is in everyone by nature an impulse toward this sort of partnership. And yet the one who first constituted [a city] is responsible for the greatest of goods. For just as man is the best of the animals when completed, when separated from law and adjudication he is the worst of all. (16) For 40

injustice is harshest when it is furnished with arms; and man is born naturally possessing arms for [the use of] prudence and virtue which are nevertheless very susceptible to being used for their opposites. This is why, without virtue, he is the most unholy and the most savage [of the animals], and the worst with regard to sex and food. [The virtue of] justice is a thing belonging to the city. For adjudication is an arrangement of the political partnership, and adjudication is judgment as to what is just.

CHAPTER 3. (1) Since it is evident out of what parts the city is constituted, it is necessary first to speak of household management; for every city is composed of households. The parts of household management correspond to the parts out of which the household itself is constituted. Now the complete household is made up of slaves and free persons. Since everything is to be sought for first in its smallest elements, and the first and smallest parts of the household are master, slave, husband, wife, father, and children, three things must be investigated to determine what each is and what sort of thing it ought to be. (2) These are expertise in mastery, in marital [rule] (there is no term for the union of man and woman), and thirdly in parental [rule] (this too has not been assigned a term of its own). (3) So much, then, for the three we spoke of. There is a certain part of it, however, which some hold to be [identical with] household management, and others its greatest part; how the matter really stands has to be studied. I am speaking of what is called business expertise.

Let us speak first about master and slave, so that we may see at the same time what relates to necessary needs and whether we cannot acquire something in the way of knowledge about these things that is better than current conceptions. (4) For some hold that mastery is a kind of science, and that managing the household, mastery, and expertise in political and kingly [rule] are the same, as we said at the beginning. Others hold that exercising mastery is against nature; for [as they believe] it is by law that one person is slave and another free, there being no difference by nature, and hence it is not just, since it rests on force.

CHAPTER 4. (1) Now possessions are a part of the household, and expertise in acquiring possessions a part of household management (for without the necessary things it is impossible either to live or to live well); and just as the specialized arts must of necessity have their proper instruments if their work is to be performed, so too must the expert household manager. (2) Now of instruments some are inanimate and others animate—the pilot's rudder, for example, is an inanimate one, but his lookout an animate one; for the subordinate is a kind of instrument for the arts. A possession too, then, is an instrument for life, and one's possessions are the multitude of such instruments; and the slave is a possession of the animate sort. Every subordinate, moreover, is an instrument that wields

many instruments, (3) for if each of the instruments were able to perform its work on command or by anticipation, as they assert those of Daedalus did, or the tripods of Hephaestus (which the poet says “of their own accord came to the gods’ gathering”), so that shuttles would weave themselves and picks play the lyre, master craftsmen would no longer have a need for subordinates, or masters for slaves. (4) Now the instruments mentioned are productive instruments, but a possession is an instrument of action. For from the shuttle comes something apart from the use of it, while from clothing or a bed the use alone. Further, since production and action differ in kind and both require instruments, these must of necessity reflect the same difference. (5) Life is action, not production; the slave is therefore a subordinate in matters concerning action.

A possession is spoken of in the same way as a part. A part is not only part of something else, but belongs wholly to something else; similarly with a possession. Accordingly, while the master is only master of the slave and does not belong to him, the slave is not only slave to the master but belongs wholly to him.

(6) What the nature of the slave is and what his capacity, then, is clear from these things. For one who does not belong to himself by nature but is another’s, though a human being, is by nature a slave; a human being is another’s who, though a human being, is a possession; and a possession is an instrument of action and separable [from its owner].

CHAPTER 5. (1) Whether anyone is of this sort by nature or not, and whether it is better and just for anyone to be a slave or not, but rather all slavery is against nature, must be investigated next. It is not difficult either to discern [the answer] by reasoning or to learn it from what actually happens. (2) Ruling and being ruled belong not only among things necessary but also among things advantageous. And immediately from birth certain things diverge, some toward being ruled, others toward ruling. There are many kinds both of ruling and ruled [things], and the better rule is always that over ruled [things] that are better, for example over a human being rather than a beast; (3) for the work performed by the better is better, and wherever something rules and something is ruled there is a certain work belonging to these together. For whatever is constituted out of a number of things—whether continuous or discrete—and becomes a single common thing always displays a ruling and a ruled element; (4) this is something that animate things derive from all of nature, for even in things that do not share in life there is a sort of rule, for example in a harmony. But these matters perhaps belong to a more external sort of investigation. But an animal is the first thing constituted out of soul and body, of which the one is the ruling element by nature, the other the ruled. (5) It is in things whose condition is according to nature that one ought particularly to investigate what is by nature,

not in things that are defective. Thus the human being to be studied is one whose state is best both in body and in soul—in him this is clear; for in the case of the depraved, or those in a depraved condition, the body is often held to rule the soul on account of their being in a condition that is bad and unnatural.

5 (6) It is then in an animal, as we were saying, that one can first discern both the sort of rule characteristic of a master and political rule. For the soul rules the body with the rule characteristic of a master, while intellect rules appetite with political and kingly rule; and this makes it evident that it is according to nature and advantageous for the body to be ruled by the soul, and the passionate part  
10 [of the soul] by intellect and the part having reason, while it is harmful to both if the relation is equal or reversed. (7) The same holds with respect to man and the other animals: tame animals have a better nature than wild ones, and it is better for all of them to be ruled by man, since in this way their preservation is ensured. Further, the relation of male to female is by nature a relation of  
15 superior to inferior and ruler to ruled. The same must of necessity hold in the case of human beings generally.

(8) Accordingly, those who are as different [from other men] as the soul from the body or man from beast—and they are in this state if their work is the use of the body, and if this is the best that can come from them—are slaves by nature.  
20 For them it is better to be ruled in accordance with this sort of rule, if such is the case for the other things mentioned. (9) For he is a slave by nature who is capable of belonging to another—which is also why he belongs to another—and who participates in reason only to the extent of perceiving it, but does not have it. (The other animals, not perceiving reason, obey their passions.) Moreover,  
25 the need for them differs only slightly: bodily assistance in the necessary things is forthcoming from both, from slaves and from tame animals alike.

(10) Nature indeed wishes to make the bodies of free persons and slaves different as well [as their souls]—those of the latter strong with a view to necessary needs, those of the former straight way of life (which is itself divided between  
30 the needs of war and those of peace); yet the opposite often results, some having the bodies of free persons while others have the souls. It is evident, at any rate, that if they were to be born as different only in body as the images of the gods, everyone would assert that those not so favored merited being their slaves. (11) But if this is true in the case of the body, it is much more justifiable to make this  
35 distinction in the case of the soul; yet it is not as easy to see the beauty of the soul as it is that of the body. That some persons are free and others slaves by nature, therefore, and that for these slavery is both advantageous and just, is evident.