

Classical Political Thought: Lectures, Hilary Term 2006

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3. Polity: politics and friendship

1. Key Terms:

Science (techne) We think of this as a body of knowledge, or as a technology (skill); but it is argued that for Aristotle it is more like a perfection of the knowing subject, a disposition

Ethics: ta ethikai – ‘matters to do with character’;

ethike arete – excellence of character (ie not moral virtue as that is thought later...)

Zoon politikon: often translated as ‘social animal’ – this translation emphasises the importance of ‘philia’ (friendship) and ‘koinonia’ (community, sharing, association, company) in ‘polis life’; but nb that polis life also involves laws (nomos) and office

2. Political Science

NE: I.ii:

What is the supreme good and of which science is it the object? – it must be the object of some science which is preeminently a master-craft. ... such is manifestly the science of Politics; ‘for it is this that ordains which of the sciences are to exist in states, and what branches of knowledge the different classes of citizens are to learn,... Inasmuch as the rest of the sciences are employed by this one, and as it moreover lays down laws as to what people shall do and what things they shall refrain from doing, the end of this science must include the ends of all the others’

3. Forms of Government

True forms:	kingship	aristocracy	polity
<i>govern w regard to common interest</i>	one	few	many
People:	capable of producing a race superior in excellence	submit to be ruled as freemen by excellence	war like multitude
	<i>a resource for the better off</i>	<i>rich+poor+excellent</i>	<i>rich+poor ‘a mean and best way between oligarchy and dem’</i>
Perversions:	tyranny	oligarchy	democracy
<i>govern w regard to int of governors</i>	one individual	rich (few)	poor (many)
Best	accountable; welfare oriented	close to aristocracy	close to polity
Worst	brutal		disorderly; factious
		<i>oligarchy+dem in their most extreme forms; a resource for the poor against the notables; resource for women</i>	<i>good for women</i>

4. Friendship

NE VIII.i.

For friendship is a virtue, or involves virtue; and also it is one of the most indispensable requirements of life.

For no one would choose to live without friends, but possessing all other good things.

VIIIx, xiii: analogies between friendship and justice; conduct between friends governed by justice; we are interested in our friends' virtue; IX.xii: 'a man stands in the same relation to a friend as to himself, but the consciousness of his own existence is a good; so also therefore is the consciousness of his friend's existence ...'

5. Prudence (phronesis):

NE VI.v:

It is the mark of a prudent man to be able to deliberate rightly about what is good and advantageous for himself, and what is conducive to the good life in general; should be thought of as a permanent disposition which presides over action

6. Nature and Harmony

Politics I.

- natural = the nature of a thing, what it is destined to be;
- the end of a thing is a self-sufficing state – eg the reproducing oak tree, the self-sufficient polis
- but corruption is also part of nature
- life is full of excess and disharmony:
 - the excess of women [*Politics* I.13, V.11]
 - the excess of wealth [I.9]
 - the excess of extremes [IV.11]

Texts

Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics; The Politics*

Cicero *On Friendship, On Duty*

References

Bodeus, Richard. *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle's Ethics*. Translated by Jan Edward Garrett. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.