

# Aristotle and plato on stasis

Experience, Meaning of Life



On Aristotle's view, stasis represented an arrest of the political processes of a healthy polis. The health of the polis corresponded directly to the participation of its citizens in political friendship, *homonoia*, which is correctly translated, according to, as "together-mindedness or like-mindedness. Greek's usage usually prefers the impersonal verb form which "conveys the meaning of a conflict that includes the entire polis, not just its factioneers. To provide a broader context for the Aristotelian material, analyzation of Thucydides' description of the advanced stages of stasis at Kerkyra is essential. There are five generic themes characteristic of stasis, including the rhetorical replacement of common values by values of private interest, the use of terror and fraud to satisfy desires for honor (*philotimia*) and unfair gain (*pleonexia*), and the unfettered passions that generally rule a state convulse by stasis. Thucydides' historical account of Kerkyra shows stasis to be an irrational and destructive process whose ends are endlessly various and unpredictable. Plato's philosophical explanation of the underlying causes of stasis, showing how Plato's theory informed Aristotle's later work. Plato applied the concept of stasis to composite units, such as the body, soul, or social groups, whose cooperating parts cease to operate in accordance with their nature, thereby interrupting the telic operation of the entire organism. Plato therefore defined stasis not by reference to specific features, such as violence or unconstitutionality, but as an aberrant condition due to a disruption of the work of the organism. In political terms, when reason ceases to govern, justice ceases its work of ensuring cooperation, friendship, and like-mindedness within the polis Aristotle connects the activity of the soul with participation in political justice and links happiness

with logos and justice in the actualization of the human soul's capacity for engagement in the work of justice. Aristotelian justice can be seen as a unity, as he argues for the priority of political justice that is participation in the polis over universal justice and particular justice. All three components of justice are joined teleologically, and stasis may emerge from weaknesses in any area. For Aristotle the legislator is responsible for promoting standards of universal justice through a "cultural program of paideia". This cultivates true pleasures, meaning pleasures that do not disrupt the well-being of the polis. Particular justice comprises both corrective measures in private transactions and distributive justice, which governs the distribution of communal assets like wealth and honors. Distributive justice is concerned with the preservation of mutual satisfaction and the avoidance of pleonexia. While the precise definition of mutual satisfaction may vary depending on the type of constitution in question, Aristotle regards the perception of unfair advantage as a certain cause of stasis. Aristotle's theory of the four causes as a methodological tool for the practical analysis of stasis. The conceptual framework provided by the four causes prescribes the political conditions necessary for a model constitution, while remaining sufficiently flexible to account for a variety of historical contingencies. He also considers the material and final causes of stasis: its origins in the perception of injustice, how its ends and means differ from those of justice, and how virtuous citizens may work to prevent it. Aristotle's view on stasis as that it defies precise definition; all one can say of stasis is that its recurring trait, beneath all its protean transformations, is its private-interest form. Hence then also

addresses efficient cause and human agency in the archai or "beginnings" of stasis.