

Significance of polis
for aristotles
understanding of
politics philosophy
essay



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How Aristotle thought about human nature and his views of human nature can be written in one sentence ' Man is by nature a political animal.' He insists that human beings cannot live alone. They should connect each other narrowly in pairs widely in society or in a Polis in order to reproduce or to provide workforces and to survive and satisfy their everyday needs. '...There is in everyone by nature an impulse toward this sort of partnership...'

(Aristotle,) At the first, male and female joined together because they could not exist apart and the pairs start to make family from primitive period. After that, several families get together for making satisfy the condition of basic and additional needs and self preservation. Then, the group of families connected with other group for better condition and a village is made in according with nature. Finally, a community is made from that villages combined, is a Polis, which might be the minimum size of community for self-sufficiency. He thought this process making a Polis is expected to be the part of the eventual end of form of society and this whole of process is performed by nature. Thus, it can be seen that the concept of human beings are by nature a political being and the formation of city or Polis is nature place where human beings are naturally joining together.

Aristotle said that man is by nature a moral or an ethical being. In his view, human beings a nature life is a life of justice. (Boucher and Kelly, 2003, p76) Aristotle stressed that " virtue of justice belongs to the soul and a virtue is the best arrangement, character or ability of something useful or available." (Aristotle, 1883) He argued that it makes human beings differentiate from other species of animals. According to his view, every human being lives for a ' good life'. Human beings live for trying to achieve a condition '

eudaimonia' which can translate as 'happiness' or 'fulfilment' or 'self-perfection'. He insists that seeking 'eudaimonia' is our unique telos.

Since Aristotle explains human's attitude for virtue is unique one comparing with other animals, the virtuous life is the special mode of existence for the citizen of the city-state (the Polis). The virtue of justice can be seen as an individual ethic and also can be seen as a social ethic. An individual ethic of virtue of justice can be understood as expanding one into a whole of state as social or un-individual ethic. "All men mean by the term justice a moral state such that in consequence of it men have the capacity of doing what is just, and actually do it, and wish it." (Aristotle 1999, p. 101) When citizens possess all the virtues the city-state requires, it rather should be said that these citizens are themselves possessed by virtue, for that is the ultimate cause of all their actions, the only correct lifestyle of the citizen (Gusejnof 1992, p. 149) The virtuous were to cultivate the ideal of the final good (telos) of the city-state (Polis) community through long lives dedicated to the ethic of harmony, which ultimately makes the life of virtue coherent and good for individual citizens (Miller 1999, p. 113). Thus, it can be said that the Polis is the place where the citizen by nature can follow or pursue 'the life of justice' or 'good life' with in harmony.

The Aristotle's understanding of politics is that politics can make human beings are able to reach 'telos' or 'eudaimonia', which is considered as the highest human goal. He thought that the city state (Polis) must be governed by those who are able to lead a 'good life' with practical wisdom, which can help to make right decision in the both matter of political and ethical. He

insist that politics and ethics were closely related each other. Because in his <https://assignbuster.com/significance-of-polis-for-aristotles-understanding-of-politics-philosophy-essay/>

view, ethics guide human beings' action to 'just' way and he thought politics is a way of resolving problem of distributive 'justice', which 'justice' is considered as a core virtue of Aristotle's ethics. He argued that this cooperation within politics and ethics influence on the way of human's behaviour which is what we ought to do or we ought not to do. In Aristotle's view of politics, he emphasise the city state (the Polis) rather than the national state. Because he believed that only the city state could allow citizens being able to share their every voice (face to face) can be heard for their 'happiness'.

Furthermore, he concerned more about political institutions in Polis unlike Plato. In the matter of the issue 'who should rule the state', Aristotle was more concerned about the political system of government, not like Plato who thought a particular group must rule the state. Plato divided class into three group; Guardian, Auxiliary and Artisan. Plato insists that the state must be ruled by Guardian (philosopher). Because they are able to rule the state by true knowledge of form. However, Aristotle disagrees with the idea of one class holding political power and he focused on political system of government in state. He believed that these constitutions could help to adopt their distribution of powers and interests in their state. He thought that there are existed six kinds of political constitutions; king ship, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, polity and democracy. Aristotle divided these political constitutions in which power is in the hands of one person which are king ship and tyranny, of few persons which are aristocracy and oligarchy or of all citizens which are polity and democracy. If the rulers rule for the benefit of all, monarchy is the best option, followed by aristocracy and finally 'polity',

which is a mixture of oligarchy and restricted democracy with strong 'rule of law'. (Wijnberg, 2000)

The polis was

set up to allow political participation on the part of the average citizen (Hacker 80).

The good man is not a saint. But the good

man will take notice of the interests of others and

of the communities to which he belongs and will

make an effort to exercise his virtues in balancing

these interests. The aim of the city is to allow its

citizens to live good lives.

The end or final cause of the city is to

allow man to live human life as good and completely

as possible.