

*PHLB16H3S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: ANCIENT GREECE AND MIDDLE AGES*

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STUDY QUESTIONS (II): ARISTOTLE'S *POLITICS*

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*A. Short Answer Questions*

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**Instructions**

Choose four of the seven expressions, terms or phrases listed below and give a **brief explanation** following these instructions:

- (A1) *Endoxa* (=common opinions)
- (A2) *Telos* (=end, goal)
- (A3) **Teleology**
- (A4) **Naturalism**
- (A5) **Human goal**
- (A6) **Family, Village and City-State (= Natural Origin of the State)**
- (A7) **Survival vs. Living well**
- (A8) **City and Human Flourishing**
- (A9) *Zôon politikon* ("political animal")
- (A10) **Domestic authority vs. political authority**
- (A11) **Paternalism vs. instrumental use of others**
- (A12) **Citizenship and Capacity for Deliberation**
- (A13) **"Juryman and Member of the Assembly" (= Aristotle's Citizen)**
- (A14) **'Tragedy of the Commons'**
- (A15) **Private Property and Virtue**
- (A16) **Common interest vs. private interest**
- (A17) **True form of government vs. perverted form of government**
- (A18) **Government of the one, the few and the many**
- (A19) **Democracy as "perverted form of government"**
- (A20) **Polity or Constitutional Government**
- (A21) **Rule of the Middle Class**

**B. Textual Analysis Questions**

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**Instructions**

**Choose 2** of the following 4 sets of questions.

\*Advice: Read the questions and texts carefully; in some cases, part of the answer is already contained in the text and/or question and you just have to spell it out.

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**Questions**

**Question 1.** Comment on the first lines of Aristotle's *Politics* by answering the questions that follow:

Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for everyone always acts in order to obtain that which they think good.

(*Politics* I.1, 1252a1-4)

- (a) Aristotle begins his *Politics* by claiming that every community is founded for the sake of some good --what is the good(s) or goal(s) at which he thinks political communities aim? (5)
- (b) What is the name for 'goal' in Greek? And what is the *name* that we use for theories that explain how things are by appealing to their goals? (5)
- (c) How does the quoted view of the origin of political communities differ from the one presented by Glaucon in the *Republic*? (10)

**Question 2.** Comment on the quoted passage from Aristotle's *Politics* by answering the questions that follow:

When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the mere need of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of the good life.

(*Politics* I.1, 1252a1-4)

- (a) What is the origin of political community according to Aristotle? (5)
- (b) What principle, introduced by Socrates in the *Republic* to explain the origin of his ideal city-state, is also present in Aristotle's view? (5)
- (c) What does Aristotle mean when he says that the city-state continues in existence "for the sake of the good life"? In other words, what is the ultimate purpose of the city-state? (5)
- (d) What is the ultimate goal of human beings according to Aristotle? (5)

**Question 3.** Comment on the following Aristotelian claim about **the origin and purpose of the state**:

The state comes into existence, originating in *the bare needs of life*, and continuing into existence *for the sake of a good life*.

(*Politics* I.2, 1252b29-30)

- (a) What is the original cause and the initial end of the state according to this claim? Explain your answer briefly. (5)
- (b) Connect Aristotle's account of the origin of the state with Socrates' version in *Republic* II –what is the basic principle that leads to the formation of the state according to Socrates? (5)
- (c) What is the ultimate goal of the state according to the above-quote? In other words, what justifies that communities stay together? (5)
- (d) Explain what concrete advantages individuals derive from participating in a political community. (5)

**Question 4.** Aristotle famously claims that the human being is a “**political animal**” [*ζῷον πολιτικόν*]. Explain what he means answering the following questions about the text:

The state is a creation of nature and **human beings are by nature political animals**. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state is either a bad human being or above humanity.

(*Politics* I.2, 1252b29-30)

- (a) What does Aristotle mean when he says that “the state is a creation of nature”? (5)
- (b) What natural tendencies lead human beings to form political communities? (5)
- (c) What is Aristotle's understanding of human flourishing or happiness? (5)
- (d) What kinds of human virtues or excellences can only be developed in the framework of the city? (5)

**Question 5.** In *Politics* II, Aristotle raises several **objections against Plato's proposal to abolish the family**. Explain the following objection by answering the questions below:

Of the two qualities which chiefly inspire regard and affection - that a thing is *your own* and that it is *your only one* - neither can exist in such a state as this.

(*Politics* II.3, 1262b21-24)

- (a) Against which concrete proposal in Plato's *Republic* is this objection directed? In other words, what is Plato's alternative to the traditional family?
- (b) Why does Plato think that this measure is necessary?
- (c) What assumption about the mechanisms of affection underlies Aristotle's objection?
- (d) Explain at least one further objection raised by Aristotle against Plato's project to abolish the family in his ideal state.

**Question 6.** In *Politics* II, Aristotle raises several **objections against Plato's proposal to abolish private property**. Explain the following objection by answering the questions below:

That which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it.

(*Politics* II.3, 1261b33-34)

- Of the consequences that Plato thinks the abolition of private property would have, which one is Aristotle questioning with this objection?
- Give one example of the tragedy of the commons that supports what Aristotle is saying in the quote.
- Give one example that shows that the principle that Aristotle is enunciating here is not always true.
- Explain at least one further objection raised by Aristotle against Plato's project to abolish the family in his ideal state.

**Question 7.** Aristotle thinks **private property** is necessary for the political community's well functioning. Comment on the following quote by answering the questions below:

Property should be in a certain sense common, but, as a general rule, private; for when everyone has a distinct interest, men will not complain of one another, and they will make more progress, because everyone will be attending his own business.

(*Politics* II.5, 1263a25-29)

- Who* concretely is Aristotle arguing against in this quote? (5)
- What argument is Aristotle using here in support of private property? (5)
- What connection does Aristotle see between allowing private property and the development of certain virtues? (5)
- Does Aristotle think that private property destroys the unity of the state? Why?/Why not?(5)

**Question 8.** Aristotle offers a clear criterion for what counts as a **good political regime** in *Politics* III.6. Explain this criterion by answering the questions about this quote:

[G]overnments which have a regard to the *common interest* are constituted in accordance with strict principles of justice, and are therefore *true forms*; but those which regard only the *interest of the rulers* are defective and *perverted forms* -- for they are despotic, whereas a state is a community of freemen.

(*Politics* III.6, 1279a17-21)

- What is the *main* common characteristic of good political regimes according to Aristotle's claims? In other words, what makes a political regime good? (5)
- And the *main* common characteristic of bad political regimes? (5)
- In the light of this passage, would Aristotle agree with Thrasymachus's definition of justice as "the advantage of the stronger" in *Republic* I? Why?/Why not? (5)
- Name the three kinds of government to which Aristotle refers here as "true forms" and those that he calls "perverted forms". (5)

**Question 9.** In *Politics* IV.4, Aristotle proposes a modification of the standard **definition of democracy** as “the government of the many”. Comment on Aristotle’s definition by answering the questions below:

The form of government is a democracy when the free, who are also poor and the majority, govern, and an oligarchy when the rich and the noble govern, they being at the same time few in number.  
 (Politics IV.4, 1290b16-20)

- (a) What condition does Aristotle add to the standard definition of democracy in this quote? (5)
- (b) Is democracy a good form of government for Aristotle? Why?/Why not? (5)
- (c) What other form of government of the many does Aristotle discuss? And how does it differ from democracy? (5)
- (d) To what kinds of government is democracy superior according to Aristotle? Explain your answer briefly. (5)

**Question 10.** In *Politics* III.11, Aristotle argues that the **government of the many is superior to government of one or of few**. Comment on Aristotle’s argument in support of this claim presented in the following passage by answering the questions below:

The principle that the multitude ought to be in power rather than the few best might seem to ... contain ... perhaps even the truth. For the many, of whom each individual is not a good man, when they meet together may be better than a few good, if regarded not individually but collectively ...  
 (Politics III.11)

- (a) Explain the idea that the many are superior when we take them “not individually but collectively”. (5)
- (b) Why did Socrates think that, contrary to what Aristotle is defending here, the opinion of the many is not respectable? (5)
- (c) Does Aristotle proposal work for a representative democracy where people express their opinions by voting? Why?/Why not? (5)
- (d) What is Aristotle’s favoured form of government? (Name it and explain its main characteristics.) (5)

**Question 11.** Comment on Aristotle’s **definition of citizen** by answering the following questions about the text:

[T]he citizen whom we are seeking to define is a citizen in the strictest sense, against whom no such exception can be taken, and his special characteristic is that he shares in the administration of justice, and in offices. ... what we want is a common term that covers both juryman and member of the assembly.  
 (Politics III.1, 1275a19-31)

- (a) What two main tasks does Aristotle think that the citizen should be allowed to perform in the city? (5)
- (b) How does the accomplishment of these two tasks affect the development of individuals? (5)
- (c) What is the basic necessary condition that someone has to fulfill to have right to citizenship according to Aristotle? And who, he thinks, is left out by this requirement? (5)
- (d) What is the connection between this conception of citizenship and Aristotle’s favourite form of government? (5)