

4- Is man by nature a political animal?

From these things therefore it is clear that the city-state is a natural growth, and that man is by nature a political animal, and a man that is by nature and not merely by fortune citiless is either low in the scale of humanity or above it like the “clanless, lawless, hearthless” man reviled by Homer, for one by nature unsocial is also ‘a lover of war’) inasmuch as he is solitary, like an isolated piece at draughts. And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possess speech? The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well (for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and to indicate those sensations to one another, but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state.

ARISTOTLE (IVth c. B.C), Politics, I

Biography

Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC) (in ancient Greek: Ἀριστοτέλης [aristotele:s] is a Greek philosopher of antiquity. With Plato, of whom he was a disciple at the Academy, he is one of the most influential thinkers the world has ever known. He is also one of the few to have approached almost all areas of knowledge of his time: biology, physics, metaphysics, logic, poetics, politics, rhetoric and punctual economy. In Aristotle, philosophy is understood in a broader sense: it

is at once a search for knowledge for itself, a questioning of the world and science of science.

The life of Aristotle is known only in its broad outlines. His work contains very few biographical details and few testimonies from his contemporaries have survived; his doxographers (Denys of Halicarnassus, Diogenes Laertius, etc.), are posterior to him for a few centuries. He was the preceptor of Alexander the Great to whom he transmitted the critical and philosophical spirit as well as the feeling of belonging to Hellenism. According to his biographers, including Diogenes Laertius, Aristotle would have been endowed with a certain humor and would have either stammered or had a hair on the tongue.

Problematic

The famous formula of Aristotle, "man is a political animal", refers to several questions, all of which question the nature of man and the definition of its essence.

Is man naturally or culturally inclined to organize his life with other men? Are all animal communities political in nature, or is it a human exception? Is loneliness, withdrawal from city life inhuman attitudes? Are not the conflicts the proof that we are not naturally made to live according to the political rules?

Position of the author

Aristotle gives as an essential definition of man that he is "a political animal" in addition to being "a rational animal". Which means three things: the nature and the end or perfection of man is in the construction of a life with his fellows. The isolated being, excluded from the community, is a being degraded, savage, punished or superhuman.

What distinguishes man from animal is the nature of that community. It is not survival, the distribution of tasks necessary for life that binds men, but an intelligent connection based on discourse, rational exchange, and organization around laws made to ensure happiness. The animal community (bees, ants, etc.) is biological and serves survival. The political bond is language and serves well-being and freedom.

Politics as a space of free speech What distinguishes polis (life in the city, in the political world) from other forms of human community, such as family, home, fellowship, is that it is not based on a balance of power or domination. There is in the political life an equality which is recognized to the men who share it. The citizen has a public status of free man and equal to other citizens, while the family, the home are built on an absolute authority of the father over his offspring, given as weak, unequally endowed.

It is thus a space where it is the word, and the dialogue in the laws and to make the laws that dominates and regulates the human relations, whereas in the home or the animal communities it is the force or the domination which governs.

Text comment

But this optimistic position, which bases the political order on the very nature of humanity, has been challenged, notably by Hobbes. He considers that "man is a wolf for man", and it is the conflict, "the war of all against all", jealousy, crime, the relations of force and servitude that are at stake. State of nature the common lot of humanity. It is only artificially, by imposing an absolute power, held in the hands of a single sovereign, and by forcing men to divest themselves of their natural power, that a political and civilized life is possible.

Politics is therefore an artificial construction that must be imposed by force on naturally a-social men. b. Machiavelli: politics is an art not a nature The

artificial nature of the civil status, which is opposed to the state of nature, violent and unstable, is added the idea that is found in Machiavelli that the Politics is an art. The government of men must be based on an understanding of men, but "we must first assume the wicked men."

Only by cunningly using the violent and unsocial passions of men can we govern them and achieve political ends. The end justifies the means for Machiavelli, and politics is only a technique, a practice that must aim at efficiency, and this can only be done without the knowledge of men who naturally kill each other, plot and tear each other endlessly. Only the Prince's ability can turn selfish natures and hazardous circumstances into projects for a community.