

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

The Political Animal

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, it is *information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support and justify accepting the author's conclusions as opposed to other ones.

Reading

Aristotle. (2017). *Politics: A New Translation* (C. D. C. Reeve, Trans.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett. (Original work from c.350 BCE).
(Excerpts are from book I.)

Questions

1. In chapters 1 and 2, Aristotle says wants to better understand political rule while also comparing it to other forms of rule, e.g., of managers over households, masters over slaves, men over women, and fathers over their children. (Yes, Aristotle is sexist and endorses slavery—issues we will discuss during class.) He does this by breaking down the city into its smallest parts (or communities), examining them and then seeing how they naturally come together to form larger communities.

What are the two necessary “couples” that Aristotle considers most basic? (Aristotle considers these to be the smallest types of communities that people naturally form. What is the purpose of each type of couple? How do these two couples come together to make up larger communities of people? What is the purpose of these larger communities?

How does all this lead Aristotle to conclude that “a human is by nature a political animal” (p. 4, 1253^{a1}) and that “the city is prior in nature to the household and to each of us individually” (p. 4, 1253^{a19})?

2. In chapters 3–7 and 12–13, Aristotle focuses on the three forms of rule associated with household management.
What are the three parts of household management? What purposes does each fulfill? Are the virtues (moral excellences) of those involved the same or different?
3. In chapters 8–11, Aristotle focuses on property acquisition, and on wealth acquisition in particular. He notes (on pages 12 and 13, 1257^{a3}) that there are actually two forms of wealth acquisition, one that is good and natural and another that is vulgar and not natural.

What are these types of wealth acquisition? Should the household manager and the politician practice both?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses (unless you miss or are late to class, and must then submit a written reading question review).

You do need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting. You may, during the following class, be randomly selected to present answers to these if selected to do so for a verbal reading question review.