

17.03. Introduction to Political Thought

Lecture Outline: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* Bk X (ch. 9); *Politics* Bk 1, Bk 2 (chs. 1-5)

Dates: b. 384 B.C. d. 322 B.C.

I. Background

A. Personal

1. Family: Father was Nichomachus, physician to family of king of Macedon
2. Joined the Academy, Plato's school in Athens
3. Returned to Macedon and appointed tutor of Alexander

B. Method

1. Scientific in that he is concerned to describe and explain the natural world, including human affairs
2. In the *Politics* he combines conceptual analysis with attention to facts (studied 158 constitutions to explore what preserves and destroys states)
3. Begins inquiry by examining views of earlier thinkers and actual practice of human affairs

C. Aristotle's teleology

1. The final end or good for human beings is *eudaimonia* (happiness)
2. Purpose of politics is to help citizens achieve *eudaimonia*

II. Political community (*polis*) as natural

A. Dual meaning of "natural"

1. Necessary for survival, like the family
2. Final end or *telos* of a thing

The political community is natural in this second sense.

B. "...the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual..."

C. Key qualities of the political community

1. Equality (ruling and being ruled in turn)
2. Heterogeneity/plurality

III. The household (*oikos*)

A. Different relations within the household

1. master and slave
2. husband and wife
3. father and children

B. Aristotle's defense of natural slavery

1. Slavery by nature v. slavery by convention
2. Capacity for reason and speech, and human excellence

C. Hierarchy and equality

IV. Critique of Socrates's proposals in Plato's *Republic*

A. Unity v. plurality of the state

B. Aristotle's defense of private property