

# Aristotle, *Politics*

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Hum101

# Outline of the Lecture

I-Aristotle: a life between Macedon and Athens

II-Politics as practical philosophy

III- The Polis, a natural community

IV-the Oikos

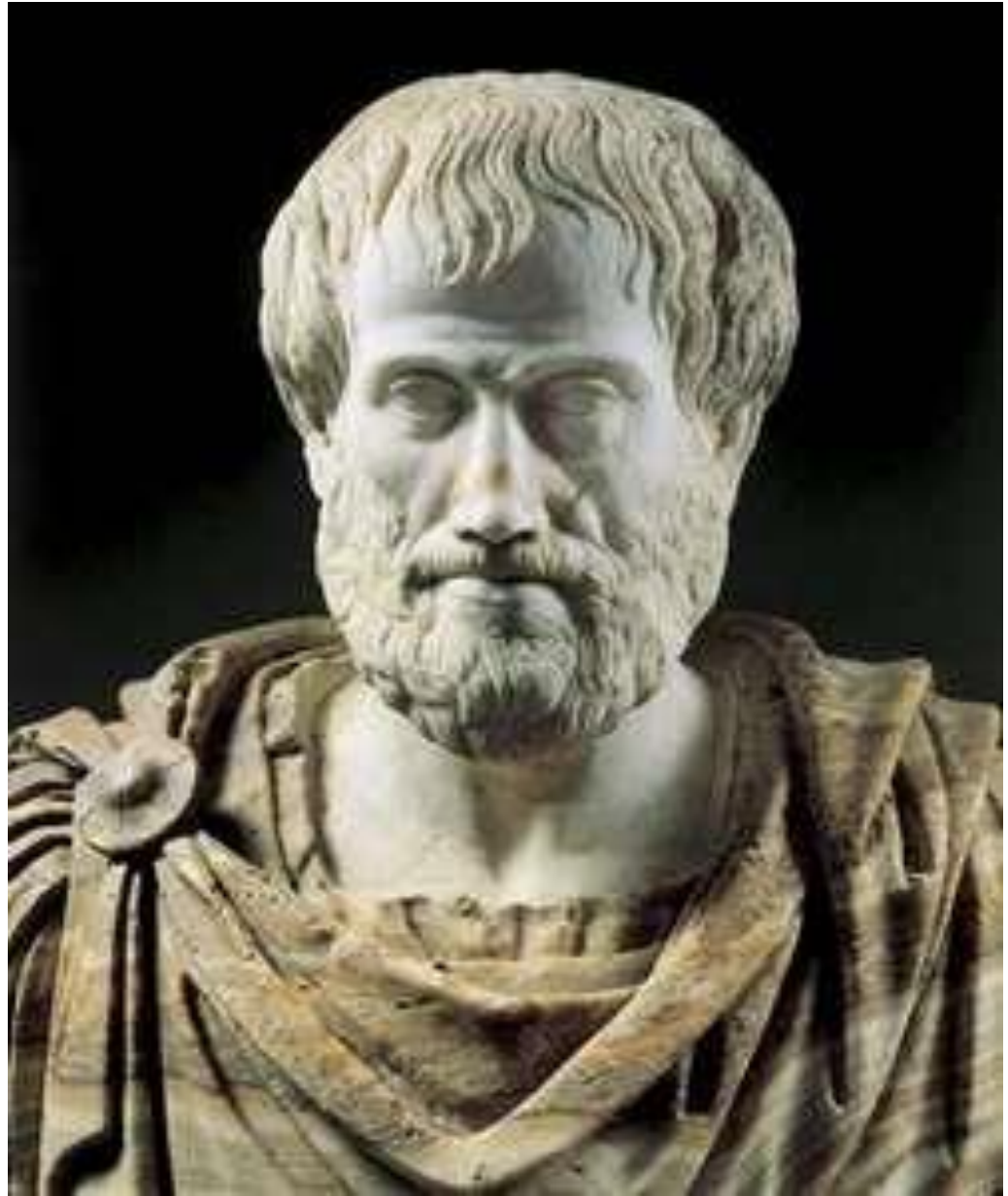
# **The Generation of the Peloponnesian War 431-404**

- **Thucydides, 465-399?**
- **Pericles, 495-429**
- **Euripides, 480-406**
- **Aristophanes, 450-388**
- **Socrates, 468-399**
- **Plato, 428-348**

## **Aristotle, 384-322**

Aristotle, a student of Plato, wrote dialogues like Plato but none of them survived;

Only one-fifth of his work survived, most being his lecture notes that read like treatises.



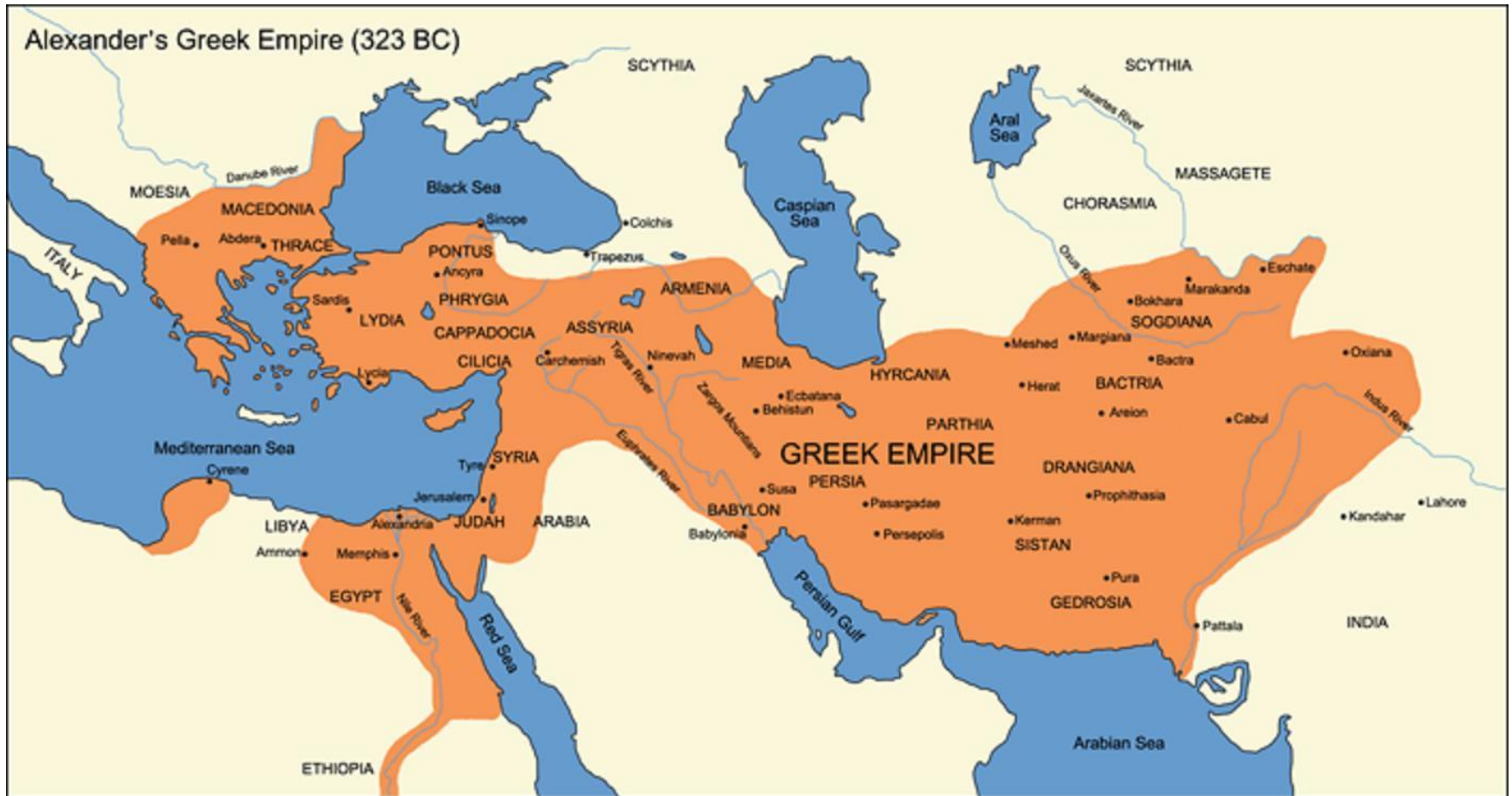
# Aristotle, 384-322

- Aristotle lived in the transition period that saw the end of the free city-states weakened by war with each other and the rising power of the kingdom of Macedon with Philip II.
- In 338, Philip II defeated the Greek city-states and absorb them into his empire; his son Alexander the Great, expanded the empire.
- Aristotle's life is connected to both Athens and Macedon.

# The kingdom of Macedon at the death of Philip II



# Alexander's empire at his death (323)



# Aristotle's life

- Aristotle was born in Chalkidiki (near modern-day Thessaloniki)
- Father: physician in the court of the king of Macedon  
Age 17, comes to Athens—Plato's Academy.
- In Athens, Aristotle is a foreigner, a *metic*: he cannot hold property
- Macedon dominates Greek city-states depriving them of their liberties. Aristotle is the tutor of Alexander the Great.  
Dies in 323
- Anti-Macedonian sentiment: Aristotle leaves Athens.
- Credited to have said that he fears Athenians would commit of “**a second crime against philosophy**” (i.e. death of Socrates in 399)



Raphael, "Philosophy" ( Scuola di Atene, fresco, 1509-11, Apostolic Palace, Vatican)



# Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle

<b>Socrates</b> <b>468-399</b>	<b>Plato</b> <b>428-348</b> <b>Student of Socrates</b>	<b>Aristotle</b> <b>384-322</b> <b>Student of Plato</b>
<p>Athenian</p> <p>No students; no fees; no claim for expertise or body of knowledge to teach</p> <p>Gadfly</p> <p>Marketplace</p> <p>“followers” (disciples)</p>	<p>Athenian</p> <p>Wrote Socratic dialogues</p> <p>Founder of the <b>Academy</b> in 387 in the suburb of Athens where he owns land;</p> <p>Students but no fees</p> <p>His lectures are <b>not public</b></p> <p>➤ Private membership without a fee</p>	<p>Metic (foreigner)</p> <p>Wrote Socratic dialogues (but lost)</p> <p>Age 17, come to Athens and takes out membership in Plato’s Academy (367-347)</p> <p>Founder of the <b>Lyceum</b> in 335 in Athens</p> <p>No fees &amp; public:</p> <p>Treatises; lecture notes</p>

# Plato and Aristotle

The master and the teacher;



# Doing philosophy

## Plato

- Questioning; reasoning
- Metaphysics, ethics, logic & mathematics, dialectic
- what is a good life?  
What is justice? What is the just polis?

## Aristotle

- **Observation** (vs. questioning and reasoning)
- **All topics:** zoology, biology, physics, poetry, ethics, politics etc
- Major concept “**nature**” *physis*
- **Telos:** nature has a purpose; it fulfills a function
- Human’s telos: ***eudaimonia***  
Happiness, good life
- Arete=virtue

# Aristotle, *Politics*

- Politics= **Practical philosophy**

Not only pursuit of truth but action; no distinction between ethics and politics. Both are practical knowledge (vs. Plato):

*If a happy life is the one lived in accordance to virtue, which political community does best produce virtuous citizens?*

*Politics* is famous for its empirical material: Aristotle and his students gathered the history and form of government of 158 cities.

Who can attain this practical knowledge? (mature) **free men vs. women and slaves**. The study and practice of politics is the preserve of a small fraction of the population. How is it justified?

# Natural beings

- Aristotle distinguishes things which exist by **nature** and those by **causes**:
- those things that exist by nature have a nature of their own that explain their development (growth, decay, or alteration) ex: a feline embryo that would develop into a cat;
- Ex: a house does not develop, its causes are external that is, in the craftsman's work.
- A thing's nature (*physis*) has a function (*ergon*) and an end (*telos*).
- **Virtue**: not a set of rules but fulfillment of one's nature.

# Telos: a purpose, an end

- Living a virtuous life is fulfilling one's humanity.
- Yet an individual can only fulfill his **telos** under the right political community.
- Hence it requires inquiry into the ***purpose*** (or *telos*) of the polis, and in doing so, Aristotle posits the ***naturalness*** of the polis or the polis as a natural phenomenon.

# Aristotle, *Politics* (B1): vs. two common opinions

Ch.1 “Statesman, king, household manager, and master of slaves” are the same kind of rulers”. The only difference being that they rule over either “few” or “many”.

**“But these claims are not true”**

- To a difference in **degree**, Aristotle opposes a **difference in kind**.

Ch. 6 To be a slave is a matter of legal status, i.e. defined **by law**.

- To a **legal definition** of the slave, Aristotle opposes the category of **natural slave** that is, one born to be a slave.



# The naturalness of the polis and the origin of political communities

- **Against the opinion** that the statesman, king, household manager, and master of slaves are of the **same kind of authority**; the difference being that they rule over few or many
- “the assumption being that there is no difference between large household and city-state. (ch1,10-11)

# Natural Partnerships

Natural partnership: “who cannot exist without each other”(ch 2, 25)

- Female and male for the sake of procreation (vs. deliberate choice)
- Natural ruler and natural ruled: master and slave-mutually beneficial.

Preservation, survival.

Households (oikos) form villages, villages, a polis.

# “human being is a political animal”

Outside the polis, he is either “a beast (poor specimen) or a god (superhuman)”.

He is a political animal because he is equipped with **rational speech** that is with **logos** (speech/reason)

rational speech allows distinctions:

**Beneficial or harmful, just or unjust:** man is a moral agent

# Aristotle's political naturalism

- The **polis prior in nature** to the household;  
For Aristotle, the move from household, to village and to *polis* amounts to the development of **human virtue** and **practical wisdom**.
- The polis is self-sufficient not only because it satisfies essential needs but because only the polis provides the condition for the **fulfillment of the nature and function of humanity**.
- “For if the whole body is dead, there will no longer be a foot or a hand”.

# The naturalness of the oikos (household)

- **Three natural subordinate relationships:**

The master rules over the slave

The husband rules over the wife

The father rules over the child

The master, the husband, and the father is the same person .

# A differentiated humanity: Natural inferiority and superiority

- “For free rules slaves, males rules female, and man rules child in different ways, because while the parts of the soul are present in all these people, they are present in a different way.
- The **deliberative part of the soul is entirely missing from a slave**; a woman has it but it **lacks authority**; a child has it but it is **incompletely developed.**”

# Aristotle's conception of citizenship:

- The master/father/husband is also the citizen;
- The women and slaves are what allow him to be a citizen. He is free by legal status but also from the task of reproduction of life.

# A difference in kind:

## Ruler of household (oikos)

- household manager rules over **free (wife and children) and non-free.**
- **He does not rule them the same way**

## Ruler of the polis

### (statesman)

- statesman rules over people who are **naturally free and equal.**



# Soul and body distinction

- “Soul and body are the basic constituents of an animal: the soul is the natural ruler; the body the natural subject”
- Soul rules the body;
- Slave lacks deliberative part of the soul
- A slave is a sort of part of his master- a sort of living separate part of his body;
- Slave is just a body=**animate tool**
- Hellenistic period, body *soma* when unqualified designate a slave.

# Slavery: a fact of life

- Slavery was a fact of life and **taken for granted**.  
Plato never addresses the question of slavery in his ideal city (*Republic*)  
Aristotle considers the master-slave relationship as a primary partnership alongside the male-female (for procreation)
- Slaves perform many works (farming; mines; domestic work; skilled work)
- Most of them are non-Greeks. Athenians do not enslave Athenians.

# The slave in the polis

- Excluded from political decision
- Excluded from participating in war
- Condition slaves share with women
- Pericles' funeral oration: soldiers – manliness– courage– male citizen –education
- Women should remain silent
- Significantly, Pericles emphasizes a “we” as “citizens and foreigners (*metics*)” but never mentions slaves
- Yet slaves: part of the community– they participate to religious festivals.
- They are not “beasts” but a slave is not fully human either.

# Slavery: legal status vs. natural condition?

## Common opinion: slave by law

- by law
- Piece of property
- Lacks freedom

Debate: mismatch justice and legal category  
just/unjust wars

What is justice: Power of the strongest?

## Aristotle: slave by nature

- by birth-- natural
- Piece of property
- Animate tool;
- a body
- Lacks deliberate part of the soul
- Slavery is **just**
- Master/slave relationship: **mutually beneficial**

# Slaves and women

- “There is a natural distinction, of course, between what is female and what is servile.”
- But this distinction is lost with Barbarians where women and slaves “occupy the same position”.
- Why is it so?
  - Lack a ruler: Greeks have political freedom; Barbarians ignore it.
  - That is why our poets say it is proper for Greeks to rule non-Greeks

# Natural slave: individual and collective

- Individual:
  - Lacks deliberative part of the soul
- Collective (Barbarians):  
Lacks proper rulership (i.e. political)

# Questions

- What are the major differences between the *kallipolis* and Aristotle's polis?
- Do you think Lysistrata lacks authority? Do you think Aristotle is convincing when he differentiates women and slaves? What is the telos of a woman? Is it different from the destiny ascribed to women in Aristophanes?
- If the slave is just a body, is he fully human? Is there a physical difference between the free man and the slave? Is the master-slave relationship mutually beneficial? Can it be one of friendship?