

## **Considering Aristotle in respect to constitution.**

### **Setting Context:**

From an Aristotelean / Greek (500BC) perspective, children / women are unable to think rationally, due to their pre-disposition to being ruled by their own emotions.

Non-Greeks are automatically an inferior race and thus considered 'Natural' slaves. Some other Greeks are also worthy of slavery, although, they are considered 'enforced slaves'; however, the word 'Slave' may not have the exact same connotations as it does today. It seems, 'Slaves' in the Greek sense were those 'others' who can only help 'obtain' (benefit) in life, in partnership with their master. They are considered incapable of being able to survive on their own merits – they are considered to 'need' a master to survive, just as a child and a woman 'require' a man to rule – this I think is how we hear on occasion of friendship between slave and master, portraying a relationship with care and compassion in places, rather than the brutality typically associated to the principle of slavery today.

### **Ruling:**

Aristotle proposes a democracy / oligarchy, or other social principle of rule is typically formed to ensure those (men / heads of house hold) with an evolved capacity to reason are given the chance to direct the masses for 'good' social outcomes.

From such origins, that our modern day sensitivities will find contextually challenging, we can consider the way Aristotle broke down society into three types, which have endured.

In their positive form they are,

- Monarchy,
- Aristocracy and
- Polity,

and in their (inverse / negative) “**corrupt**” form, they are

- Tyranny,
- Oligarchy and
- **Democracy**.

Aristotle's Biologist / Taxonomy training effect's this framing (*worldview – way of thinking*).

He considers it essential to answer only two questions;

- **Who rules?** And
- **On who's behalf?**

This is where we have to consider, what constitutes 'good rulers'.

Those who are 'good', i.e. ruling on behalf of the state, are considered good because they are considered [pre-determined] to be 'virtuous'.

The rulers in these conditions are unsurprisingly required to have sufficient leisure time, to be able to effectively function in the judicious and deliberative methods of the state and to access the education required to act in a deliberative and reflective way.

(This may seem self-serving, but it is also wise – today, with advances in neuroscience, we can understand the negative neural impact a fast paced life and relative 'Stress' has on us, inhibiting rational thinking capabilities / learning capacity and damaging long term health through cellular scarring).

**In a monarchy, aristocracy or polity, *Corruption* is considered to be apparent, when the acquisition of wealth becomes a priority (a-priori) over the acquisition of virtue.**

Wealth must always be seen as an outcome and / or, a means to an end, where that end is virtue. The ultimate end for the state is to allow its citizens to flourish and provide a good life for its citizens – this is virtuous.

The 'good' life, must be the life of virtue, *we cannot flourish unless we actualize all our faculties and these must include our moral and intellectual capabilities.*

**Different kinds of democracy** – Again, Aristotle holds a taxonomic view.

At it's best democracy is close to oligarchy. i.e. the best democracy from a class based view/ analysis, is one in which everyone is rich, but, the primary base of democracy is the poverty of the masses, making a 'predominantly 'rich' democracy a conflict in principle; whereas the primary base of oligarchy is the wealth of the masses.

Hence we get an overlap of these 'corrupt' social models. Interestingly, Athens became increasingly democratic, to the point, *the rule of law* was minimised in favour of the masses self-legislating and ruling for the good of the masses, .... until collapse.

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**Reason:**

We must always acknowledge the purpose of political rule is to serve the ruled, as opposed to master / slave rule which serves the ruler.

In a democracy, oligarchy or tyranny, *the interest is in favour of the ruling group*, either;

- The poor,
- The rich or
- The tyrant,

This is why they are corrupt and a deviated form of 'constitution'.

The idea of corruption being relative to '**wealth**' rather than '**who is being served**' isn't black and white however, they are intrinsically linked.

**The primary idea (thought) is that 'serving the good' is the purpose of a constitution.**

(NB: this still requires consensus / educated opinion about what 'is' 'good' – i.e. it still requires people to 'think' in a similar way and consider goodness in all it's complexity).

Aristotle's premise is that

***Where the criterion for citizenship is not virtue, there you have corruption, because virtue is the only thing that can act in the interest of us all.***

The 'ethics' of the leading group are assumed as understood to be the life of virtue, in accordance with **reason**, (the faculty that distinguishes man from all other animals).

In the 'Polis' (City of approx. 100,000 people living in close proximity to each other) Plato thought one's obligation to oneself was to climb out of the cave of the city, a la, allegory of the cave – that 'city-life' itself was false and restrictive.

Aristotle's opinion is that he [Plato] has the entire principle wrong. Plato states the idea is for the polis to be as much 'one' as possible, based on ideas of unity.

Aristotle's contention is that unity destroys the polis. **A polis is not about unity, it is about diversity .... in community.**

This hopefully helps set the scene behind the purpose of a constitution, as this is exactly what constitutions are supposed to do, to accommodate polarity and diversity in a constructive way, to the benefit of all.

In the absence of a supremely virtuous individual or group (Who could in principle exist above the law), it is stated, we have to opt for polity.

Aristotle's utopia was to have laws against extreme poverty or wealth, a majority middle class, state educated to share values and beliefs ... (perhaps rather optimistically this is imagined to make them less prone to faction and more rational).

There is a lot to be said for this model, educated and shared values of 'Good' in a dense population of diversity that accommodates and recognizes polarity as part of that goodness ... it's not a bad model ...

BUT ...

What we cannot afford to ignore is that at the time of constructing such thoughts and models of social direction and rule, Aristotle wanted to 'butter-up' to Alexander [the great].

With that considered, we can recognize that all of this 'positioning' (even where we take into account the context in which such ideas were manifest) leads to the allowance of a particularly virtuous monarch as 'good' on earth, in preparation for 'good' in heaven as is Alexander's ego / perception of self, propped up by those around him (Aristotle being one of them).

This highlights the potential for all of Aristotle's Ethics and thoughts on constitution to be as self-serving as any action by the next man ... and therein lies the real depth of the issues to address — due to our design [as humans], even those who speak of virtue may fall foul of their own neuro-psychological disposition to attain approval and comfort for themselves from those most influential around them (be that a mother, teacher, boss or politician).

It is at this level we undermine our capacity to do good through virtue — we are unable to see our own contradictions. When we consider how we improve conditions such that humans remove the automatic need to do what's best for self, through fear, such that they can truly do what's best for others, then we may see the human race take an educated step forwards — until such a time as we achieve this, all the politics, democracy and wealth creation (capitalism) in the absence of virtue will lead us no-where, other than towards the ever faster consumption and destruction of the planet, environment by environment, one species at a time ... until it's the Human Species that go extinct.