

## ARISTOTLE AS AN EXPERT ON URBAN PROBLEMS<sup>1</sup>

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In the varied contents of Aristotle's *Politics* we perceive the wide range of the master's interest in every aspect of the life of the *polis*, historical and contemporary, theoretical and practical. In its richness the book is not easy to use, since it\* is clearly unfinished and incomplete. Most likely it consists of a series of lecture notes, or essays, and the efforts of classical scholars have been directed primarily to the elucidation of the text, to the search for indications of the manner of its composition, and to the study of the evidence for Greek constitutional theory and practice.

Yet the book has immediate interest for the present time. Aristotle's conception of the subject of the *polis* was comprehensive and he considered it essential to record and expound the practical problems of life in the *polis*, that is, the conditions of life in community which may produce what today are called urban problems. Aristotle the psychologist and son of a distinguished physician had a keen eye for all the phenomena of human nature, good and bad, and all his comments on the practical side of life in the city are characterized by his well-known common sense. It is no wonder that Henry

<sup>1</sup> This study was written at Clare Hall in the University of Cambridge. I am grateful to the President and Governing Board of Clare Hall for my election into a visiting fellowship while on sabbatical leave from Indiana University. I acknowledge with thanks a grant in aid of expenses connected with the study from the American Council of Learned Societies. In the following notes, references are to the *Politics* unless otherwise identified. I have used the text of the *Politics* edited by W. D. Ross in the Oxford Classical Texts. I have frequently consulted, with great profit, the masterly translation, with commentary by Sir Ernest Barker (*The Politics of Aristotle*, Oxford, 1946). I have also made use throughout of the edition of the *Politics* by W. L. Newman, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1887-1902). A valuable translation of *Politics*, Books III and IV, with introduction and commentary by Richard Robinson has appeared in the Clarendon Aristotle Series (1962). The introduction contains judicious insights into Aristotle's purpose and method in the *Politics*.

Jackson, the distinguished British classical scholar, wrote concerning the *Politics* in one of his letters, "It is an amazing book. It seems to me to show a Shakesperian understanding of human beings and their ways, together with a sublime good sense."<sup>1</sup> Recently the French scholar Raymond Weil, who is well known for his studies of Aristotle, performed a valuable service for modern readers in publishing in translation a selection of passages in the *Politics* which in a unique fashion will show the contemporary non-specialist reader the contribution that Aristotle's wide range of thought and acute insights can bring to present-day problems of economics, government, the social order, the family, the role of women, the nature and causes of revolution, and many other problems rising from the special conditions of modern society.<sup>2</sup>

If we examine Aristotle's treatment of urban problems from the point of view of what today is called urbanism, we shall see that in spite of the differences between the Greek *polis* and the modern city the problems that may develop in any city, ancient or modern, are basically the same and that the possible precautions and remedies are likewise basically the same. On these topics Aristotle proves to be one of the ancient thinkers with whom the modern student can feel directly in touch. In fact the *Politics* could be described as a treatise on urbanism in the most comprehensive sense, for the distinctive value of Aristotle's study for the present day is his characteristic method of dealing with the problems of the city. All through the *Politics* Aristotle is concerned with method; indeed this is one of the aspects of the text that gives it an unmistakably professorial air. Aristotle shows very clearly that all aspects of the life of the *polis*—legal, administrative, economic, social, hygienic, educational, and moral—are interdependent and that a practical problem that arises in one area must be considered in the light of all other areas of the city's life. Today the word "urbanism" has come to be applied primarily to city planning and the study of the physical problems of cities. But the term urbanism is a modern formation—from Latin *urbs*, not from Greek *polis*—intended to

<sup>1</sup> A letter of 1900, quoted in *Henry Jackson, a Memoir*, by R. St. John Parry (Cambridge, 1926), p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> *Politique d'Aristote, textes choisis et présentés par Raymond Weil* (Paris, A. Colin, 1966), in the Collection U, Série "Idées Politiques."

describe the activities of modern specialists on what are today called urban problems.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle would have appreciated the importance of the findings of modern specialists, who have to deal with physical problems of size and scale in modern cities, which did not exist on the same terms in the *polis*. However, in Aristotle's conception of the *polis* and its problems, what we today call urbanism would have a different scope. A study of Aristotle's *Politics* from the point of view of the modern city planner, civic official, social worker or concerned citizen, will show that Aristotle's treatise is of permanent value, not only because it shows that present-day urban problems existed, *mutatis mutandis*, in ancient cities, but because a major part of Aristotle's concern with the subject was to show the origin of these problems and the way in which they are to be approached. Here we may have something to learn from Aristotle because his training and habit of thought, as philosopher and biologist, with medical knowledge, enabled him to go behind surface appearances in the search for true causes, for example the true causes of crime and poverty in urban conditions, on which, as we shall see, his teaching is still fundamental.

The present essay, which has grown out of discussions of Aristotle's ideas on urbanism at meetings of city planners,<sup>2</sup> essays to illustrate Aristotle's conception of the nature of urban problems and his distinctive method of studying them. The wealth of detail in the *Politics*, and the circumstance that a number of important concepts and problems are discussed more than once, and from different points of view in different contexts, makes it impossible to give a complete exposition of Aristotle's treatment of urban problems in anything less than a monograph. However, it is possible,

<sup>1</sup> "Urbanism" and "urbanist" appear in the Oxford English Dictionary for the first time in the Supplement issued in 1933. Examples of the usages are cited from the London Times of 1929 and 1930. An article published in the issue of 16 July 1929 describes "urbanism" as a "newly coined word". In the same dictionary "town-planning" is recorded for the first time in 1904, and "town-Planner" in 1908. As would be expected, Aristotle in speaking of Hippodamus of Miletus (1267 b 22 ff.) does not describe him by any professional title.

<sup>2</sup> The meetings were held under the auspices of the Brookings Institution of Washington, under the direction of Mr John Osman. I take this opportunity to express once more my thanks to Mr Osman for his invitation to take part in these discussions, and for his stimulus to my studies of Aristotle.

in a shorter study, to illustrate the principal features of Aristotle's thought on urban problems which have direct application to modern interests.

To begin with, we discover that the *Politics* is not an independent study, intended to stand by itself, and does not represent Aristotle's only writing on the *polis*. The *Politics* is in fact the material for the second part of a study of which the *Nicomachean Ethics* forms the first part. The *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, taken together, Aristotle writes in the closing paragraph of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, were intended to form a study which he conceived as "the philosophy of human affairs", a topic that, he declared, had not been adequately treated by his predecessors.<sup>1</sup> The part played by what Aristotle calls "political science" in this plan is described at the opening of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. His task in this work, he writes, is the study of the Supreme Good which is the end and purpose of man's life, and he defines carefully the role of "political science" in this investigation: "This Supreme Good must be the object of the most authoritative of the sciences—some science which is pre-eminently a master-craft. But such manifestly is the science of Politics [*politikê*]; for it is this that ordains which of the sciences are to exist in states, and what branches of knowledge the different classes of citizens are to learn, and up to what point; and we observe that even the most highly esteemed of the faculties . . . are subordinate to the political science".<sup>2</sup>

These definitions of what Aristotle conceived as the "science of the *polis*" and the "philosophy of human affairs", are not explicitly repeated in the *Politics*, but the definitions are taken for granted in everything that Aristotle says in the *Politics*. In fact much is said about ethics in the *Politics*, and much about political science in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Aristotle's approach to the study of "the science of the *polis*" is the study of the *polis* as the setting in which man may attain the Supreme Good. This investigation entails the consideration of the way in which man should live in the *polis* according to the ethical laws that govern human conduct in order to attain the Supreme

<sup>1</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1181 b 13 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Eth. Nic.* 1094 a 27 ff. (translation of H. Rackham in the Loeb Classical Library, with modifications).

Good. The nature of the Supreme Good had been discussed in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and Aristotle takes for granted that the readers of the *Politics* will be familiar with the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Very early in Book I of the *Politics*, which was evidently intended to serve as the introductory portion of the collection of notes or essays which are brought together in the *Politics*, Aristotle announces the terms in which he conceives the whole study. On what is the third page of our printed texts he declares that "it is evident that the *polis* belongs to the things that exist by nature, and that man is by nature a creature intended to live in a *polis*".<sup>1</sup>

The form of this definition is the key to Aristotle's thought on the nature and problems of the *polis* and the life and work of its people. The concept is repeated, and elaborated under different aspects, in other places of the *Politics* and in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle's concern is with man in the context of the *polis* as the natural and best form of human association in which alone man can achieve his highest potential as a social and intellectual creature. The form of Aristotle's pronouncement shows that he was seeking a definition that would express the nature of the city in relation to the nature of man. He was not in this place intent on studying either the nature of man apart from his natural social and political associations, or a definition of the city in its outward appearance, apart from the people who lived in it. Man and the city have to be studied together because neither can exist without the other and neither has significance without the other.—

The words in the definition that provide the clue to Aristotle's

<sup>1</sup> *Pol.* 1253 a 2-3. The description of man in this passage presents notorious difficulty when it has to be put in translation. The literal translation, "man is a political animal", employed e.g. by Jowett, may be misleading to readers not familiar with Greek. Newman's rendering, "man is naturally a political being", has the advantage of employing "being" instead of "animal". Barker's translation, "man is by nature an animal intended to live in a *polis*" comes closer to the Greek but still has the possible disadvantage of employing "animal". H. D. Rankin, *Plato and the Individual* (London, 1969), p. 11, writes "social animal", which brings out an important aspect of Aristotle's thought. J. Aubonnet in the Budé edition of the *Politics* provides a careful and accurate translation: "l'homme est par nature un être destiné à vivre en cité".

<sup>2</sup> *Pol.* 1278 b 19; *Eth. Nic.* 1097 b 12; 1162 a 17. Barker (p. 111) renders the definition at 1278 b 19 as "man is an animal impelled by his nature to live in a *polis*".

thought are "by nature" (φύσει) and "creature" (ζῷον). This is Aristotle the master biologist and son of a distinguished physician speaking. Both the city and man are a part of the order of nature, and so must be studied together. The phrases "according to nature" or "not according to nature" appear throughout the *Politics*, sometimes several times on a page, as descriptions of conditions or activities in the *polis*. The word ζῷον, used to describe man as a living creature in the order of nature, is the biological term to describe any animal.

The marvellous scope of Aristotle's intellectual activity, which embraced theology, philosophy, literary criticism and natural science, meant that when Aristotle treated the *polis* and man in the *polis* this investigation necessarily included all aspects of the *polis* and of man, ethical, intellectual, social, political, biological. In addition to the declaration at the close of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the proper study of "political science" had not been carried out by previous investigators, the way in which Aristotle writes throughout the *Politics* makes it clear that he considered that not only a new study was needed, but a new kind of study. Like Plato, Aristotle insisted that the reorganization of the state must be based on a reorganization of knowledge. The style and treatment of the subject in our text of the *Politics* indicate very clearly that, as Richard Robinson writes, Aristotle "is discussing difficulties felt by those who have already reflected on political matters".<sup>1</sup> It is likewise characteristic of Aristotle's interest in presenting a new approach to the subject that he is careful to discuss both the universal and the particular aspects of the life and problems of the *polis*, insofar as the *polis* provides illustrations of both universal problems and specific problems at the same time.

As examples of the previous treatments of the *polis* which were unsatisfactory Aristotle examines the theories of Plato concerning the ideal city<sup>2</sup> and the doctrines of Hippodamus of Miletus, the celebrated city-planner of the century before Aristotle lived.<sup>3</sup> To Aristotle, such studies were basically unsatisfactory because they were concerned only with particular aspects of the subject, and

<sup>1</sup> R. Robinson's introduction to his translation of Books III and IV, p. x.

<sup>2</sup> 1260 b 27-1266 a 30.

<sup>3</sup> 1267 b 22-1269 a 28.

because they were not founded on practical experience of the functions of the *polis*. It was true of course that Plato and Hippodamus had undertaken only limited studies, but the point, to Aristotle, was that limited studies, of a complex topic such as that of the *polis*, could not be of practical value and could in fact be misleading. In criticizing these theories, Aristotle intended to show what he considered to be the proper method to be applied.

Plato, Aristotle's own master, had dealt at length with the ideal city in successive treatments, in the *Republic*, the *Statesman*, and the *Laws*. Plato's conclusions developed as his mind continued to work on the subject. This was in fact a necessary study in Plato's program, and Aristotle himself in the *Politics* discussed the problem of what the ideal *polis* would be; but with painstaking analysis he demonstrated that even a master mind such as Plato's, if it confined itself to the hypothetical construction of the ideal city without taking into account the realities of life, would be driven to impractical notions such as the doctrine that wives and children should be held in common.<sup>1</sup>

Hippodamus' well known and apparently popular ideas Aristotle found likewise unsatisfactory. Here Aristotle enjoys the opportunity to be a little malicious. Hippodamus evidently had a flair for publicity and lived in a conspicuous style, which, Aristotle observed, was designed to attract attention.<sup>2</sup> Unlike most of the men of distinction of the day, Hippodamus was well known for wearing his hair long and expensively cared for and ornamented, and ostentatiously wore luxurious clothing not only in winter but in summer when everyone else wore light plain clothing.

Hippodamus had recommended that cities be laid out with attention to the use of land for public and private purposes, which was a worthy doctrine, of course; but what Aristotle found unsatisfactory in Hippodamus' style of city planning was that he was in fact not qualified to speak on the best form of government and social structure in the *polis* because he had no direct experience of political affairs himself. The lesson is to beware of overdressed city-planners.

In contrast to views such as those of Plato and Hippodamus,

<sup>1</sup> 1261 a 4; 1262 a 1.

<sup>2</sup> 1267 b 23.

valuable as they were in themselves, Aristotle carried on his study of the *polis* on all levels. He was well acquainted with the everyday problems generated by human associations in any community, and he combined the scientist's curiosity and attention to detail with the philosopher's insistence on inquiring into the ultimate meanings behind the changing surface phenomena, which might be deceptive. Aristotle lets it be understood that he offers explanations and recommendations that were at least to some extent new.

While there did not exist at that time expressions corresponding to our concepts "social psychology" and "human relations", Aristotle recognizes the existence of these areas of inquiry and writes on them as an expert. He knew very well that people living in competition inevitably generate friction. Here we see that the human problems of the urban community are not ours alone, but theirs as well. Aristotle's description of the three ages of man in the *Rhetoric* is a masterpiece.<sup>1</sup> He knows about greed, pride and ambition as these may be seen at work in the urban community. "The naughtiness of men", he writes, in a sentence rendered with particular felicity by Sir Ernest Barker, "is a cup that can never be filled";<sup>2</sup> but it may be that this is what should be expected, for Aristotle remarks elsewhere that the ills to be observed in the city are such as can arise from "the evil that exists in every man's character".<sup>3</sup>

In his analysis of the common causes of friction and hostility in the urban community, Aristotle begins<sup>4</sup> by pointing out that it is inevitable in the nature of things that there should exist in every *polis* different conditions of people, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the helpless, the successful and the unsuccessful, the full citizens and the unenfranchised, the native born and the foreigner.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Rhet.* 1388 b 30-1391 b 4.

<sup>2</sup> 1267 b 1; Barker's translation, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> 1318 b 39.

<sup>4</sup> 1301 b 26. This is the early part of Book V, which is devoted to the causes of revolution and changes in forms of government.

<sup>5</sup> The classes of people in the *polis*, and the differences between them, are discussed in a number of passages in different connections, especially in Books IV and V. Passages which are of special interest in connection with modern urban problems are 1295 b 1 ff., on the classes with different amounts of wealth and the need for friendly relations between them; 1303 a 26, on the dangers that may arise from the presence in the *polis* of people of another race than the native population; 1301 a 25 ff., on the



The discussion of the danger to the state of the presence of a quantity of poor disfranchised citizens is of particular interest for the urban problems of some large modern cities.<sup>1</sup>

In general the conditions of city life mean that a community is composed of haves and have-nots, so that certain kinds of unrest and conflict will, in the order of things, arise. In addition, human nature, always wanting more than it had,<sup>2</sup> was at the bottom of graft and favoritism among magistrates, embezzlement among city employees,<sup>3</sup> insolence on the part of the rich, fear on the part of the poor.<sup>4</sup> There are devices for tricking the public with sham benefits; but these, Aristotle pointed out, always have evil results in the long run.<sup>5</sup>

Aristotle provides a careful classification of the various types of tensions and disorders that may arise in the *polis*, from inequality, broken contracts, perjury and fraud in general, to alienation, class conflicts, oppression of minorities, riots, revolution and civil war.<sup>6</sup> The analyses of these conditions are illustrated by a wide range of examples from Greek history. Aristotle adds some valuable recommendations based on observation. Petty acts of lawlessness must be stopped at once, for if allowed to multiply and spread, they

struggle over political control between classes who are unequal economically and socially; 1318 b 6 ff.; on the way in which the masses can be kept content if they have sufficient opportunities to make money and are allowed to share in the election of magistrates.

<sup>1</sup> 1281 b 24 ff.

<sup>2</sup> 1267 b 3 ff. Barker translates (p. 67): "Men are always wanting something more, and are never contented until they get to infinity. It is the nature of desire to be infinite; and the mass of men live for the satisfaction of desire". One is reminded of Thucydides' comments on the force of *pleonexia*: III 82, 6-8. Indeed there were some doctrines of political action which commended *pleonexia* in the statesman: see A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility, A Study in Greek Values* (Oxford, 1960), p. 235.

<sup>3</sup> 1308 b 37.

<sup>4</sup> 1302 b 2 ff.

<sup>5</sup> 1297 a 10-14.

<sup>6</sup> The causes of conflicts in the conditions of city life are examined in detail in Book V, 1301 a 19 ff. Special points of modern interest are the presence of a class which is despised by the governing class, and the desire of the oppressed for equality, 1306 b 27; conflict provoked by the fraud of magistrates, 1308 b 31; the causes of revolution from circumstances that affect men's private lives as well as their standing in public life, 1308 b 20; 1266 b 8 ff.

will end in real violence.<sup>1</sup> The responsible authorities must know how to detect trouble when it is only in the formative stage. It is important to realize that not every one can detect incipient trouble; this can be done only by an experienced official.<sup>2</sup>

The disorders that had been familiar in Greek *poleis* were, as Aristotle indicates, a general topic of discussion.<sup>3</sup> Many observers believed that the basic cause of friction and unrest was poverty, which bred both crime and social hostility.<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, however, believed that this explanation was essentially superficial. As an illustration, he cited the theory of Phaleas, an older contemporary of Plato's, who had advanced the doctrine that since crime and civil disorder were basically caused by poverty, property should be regulated in such a way that all citizens should own equal amounts.<sup>5</sup> Aristotle criticized this scheme as unworkable.<sup>6</sup> It would be better, he pointed out, to use the surplus of the public revenue to make grants to the poor to enable them to start small businesses or set up as farmers.<sup>7</sup> There were also examples of cities in which public spirited business men had helped the poor to find jobs.<sup>8</sup> These programs, he emphasized, help not only the poor but the prosperous.<sup>9</sup>

But remedies such as these, Aristotle declared, were like many such measures in that they dealt with symptoms, not with the true cause. In all the study that had been devoted to these problems, no one had perceived that in the prevailing economic conditions, the true cause of poverty was overpopulation, and that the real remedy would be population control.<sup>10</sup> Here Aristotle thought he could point to one of the major failures of the *poleis* of his time. In general their legislation, he remarked, was a disorganized heap of laws, and this was true in the present instance.<sup>11</sup> Although it should be obvious that in dealing with poverty and its evil conse-

<sup>1</sup> 1307 b 39.

<sup>2</sup> 1308 a 33.

<sup>3</sup> 1302 a 34; 1309 b 8; 1310 a 12.

<sup>4</sup> 1265 b 10; 1320 b 31.

<sup>5</sup> 1266 a 39 ff.

<sup>6</sup> 1266 b 8.

<sup>7</sup> 1320 a 39 ff.

<sup>8</sup> 1320 b 7.

<sup>9</sup> 1320 b 5.

<sup>10</sup> 1265 b 6 ff.

<sup>11</sup> 1324 b 5.

quences it is essential to control the rate of human reproduction, most *poleis*, failing to understand this, did not attempt to impose any such limitation.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle could cite only one such attempt, which, though bizarre, was so remarkable that he could hardly have omitted to mention it. In Crete a law had been passed segregating women, in an effort to keep them from producing too many children, and by way of compensation male homosexual relationships were sanctioned by law. Aristotle indicates that he does not consider this to be a solution of the problem that should be widely put into practice.<sup>2</sup> In discussing family planning and the regulation of births with a view to the optimum size of the population, Aristotle notes the practice of abortion and the ethical problems that it presents.<sup>3</sup>

The attention that Aristotle devotes to what we would call public health indicates that here too he saw problems of the urban community that were not always sufficiently taken into account. The problems of environmental pollution were already well known and we have a treatise on pure air, clean water and the need for sunlight that goes under the name of the celebrated physician Hippocrates, who died when Aristotle was a young man, though it is not certain that he was the author. Aristotle includes a discussion of pollution which reflects his own medical knowledge. It is of great interest to see that beauty in the city and in its buildings is important along with pure air and water and a healthy location. The city walls, for example, must be aesthetically pleasing as well as adapted for military purposes.<sup>4</sup>

Equally of interest to modern students of urban problems is the attention Aristotle devotes to the matter of the physical quality of the human material of the *polis*. The physical endowment of the citizens is basic to their life and work in the *polis*, and Aristotle devotes several pages to the medical aspects of marriage and childbearing, which he regards as important responsibilities of both the government and the citizens.<sup>5</sup> The way in which he writes

<sup>1</sup> 1326 a 5 ff.; cf. 1265 b 6.

<sup>2</sup> 1272 a 24.

<sup>3</sup> 1335 b 25.

<sup>4</sup> 1330 a 35 ff.

<sup>5</sup> 1334 b 29 ff.

suggests that he considered that parents did not always carry out their duties to themselves and to the state in the matter of family planning and education of their offspring.<sup>1</sup> Citizens must follow the best medical advice as to the proper age for marriage and childbearing, and they must limit the number of their children when this is necessary for the well being of the city. Aristotle even takes care to note that pregnant ladies must take care of their health, must have a proper diet and must take sufficient exercise; but they must not overexert their minds because excessive intellectual effort will divert nourishment from the unborn child.<sup>2</sup> One gains the impression that expectant mothers in Greece did not always follow their doctors' directions, with the result that they might be open to criticism for not producing the best grade of babies. Aristotle makes the interesting observation that parents have an obligation to keep themselves in good physical condition because the good health of the parents will be reflected in the healthy physical development of the children.<sup>3</sup>

Modern city planners will note with interest Aristotle's recommendation that the civic center should be located in an attractive and prominent part of the city and that it should be kept free of all merchandising. The market square for buying and selling should be at a distance from the civic center.<sup>4</sup>

One problem of public health that has a contemporary ring is Aristotle's concern over certain types of music of which young men were fond which he considered had in fact undesirable effects on young people. The flute, it was recognized, was valuable for military training, but when employed in certain styles of music it stimulated the emotions in an undesirable way. Aristotle declares that its use in this type of music should be forbidden to young men and in fact to all persons of free birth.<sup>5</sup>

Another comment of Aristotle's is of interest in connection with "women's liberation". Aristotle's view on such a subject can easily

<sup>1</sup> E.g. 1335 b 38.

<sup>2</sup> 1335 b 12 ff.

<sup>3</sup> 1335 b 2. Aristotle adds that he will discuss this point in greater detail when he comes to consider the training of children. Unfortunately this discussion does not exist in the text that has come down to us.

<sup>4</sup> 1331 a 28 ff.

<sup>5</sup> 1341 a 15.

be guessed. He notes that the Spartan government suffers difficulties because two-fifths of the land in Sparta belong to women and this gives them too much influence in political matters.<sup>1</sup>

We have seen something of the way in which Aristotle considered what might be called the immediate problems of the urban community should be dealt with. But the philosopher was intent on the basic character of human conduct in the *polis*, and the biologist needed to view the city as a part of living nature. Both philosopher and scientist needed to embody their conclusions in precise definitions. Here again was an area of urban studies in which Aristotle considered earlier work unsatisfactory.

For example, some of his predecessors had defined a *polis* as a place where people lived together under a legal system for the sake of commerce. But this formulation dealt only with outward appearance and did not take into account the source of the energy involved and the motivation of the people. To such a definition it would be necessary to add that the true *polis* was an association of members of households—the household being the basic social unit—who joined in creating a good life, for the sake of attaining a perfect and self-sufficing existence. In this sense the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*, taken together, as Aristotle intended them to be, form a textbook on *eudaimonia*.<sup>2</sup>

Here we come to what may be Aristotle's most important contribution to "the science of the city", both for his contemporaries and for us. Aristotle makes two points, which he obviously considered to be new, and to be so important that he takes them up repeatedly in different parts of the *Politics*.

The first point is that the city is to be considered as a *koinonia*. The word strikes the reader because it occurs twice in the opening sentence of the first book of the *Politics*, and again at the beginning of the following sentence. *Koinonia* is in fact, in these two sentences, the first term by which the *polis* is defined as our present text stands. In our translations the word is variously rendered "association", "partnership", or "community". Because of its various shades of meaning, we must here use the word in its Greek form.

<sup>1</sup> 1270 a 24.

<sup>2</sup> 1280 b 29; 1252 b 27; 1253 b 1 ff.; 1280 b 5 ff. See Adkins, *op. cit.* (above, p. 64, note 2), p. 316.

The concept of *koinonia* proves to be the basic link, in Aristotle's thought, between the *polis* and the citizen, and we must be careful to understand the significance the word had for Aristotle and his audience. One of the most important connotations of the term is that it signifies active and purposeful relationship and implies the existence and use of energy. A *koinonia* cannot be inert. The sense of activity is reflected not only in the way in which the noun is employed but in the existence of the accompanying verb, which means "to engage in association (or partnership)". Plato had employed *koinonia* and its cognates on several occasions to describe the association of people in the *polis* but had not made the concept a cardinal term in his definition of the *polis* as Aristotle did.<sup>1</sup> It remained for Aristotle to fix the concept of *koinonia* as the essential description of life and work in the *polis*.

The importance that Aristotle attached to this concept is illustrated by the frequency with which he uses it in the description and analysis of the *polis*. In addition to the three occurrences in the opening lines of Book I, it occurs in the first sentence of Book II, early in Book III, in Book IV, and in important passages in Book VII.<sup>2</sup>

In Aristotle's dominating thought on the *polis*, namely that human associations come about in order to attain some good, and that the sovereign form of association, which embraces all other forms, is the active and purposeful association in the *polis*, he shows that different kinds of *koinonia* join to make up the overall *koinonia* which is the life of the city as a whole.<sup>3</sup> It is "by nature" that all people have an impulse to the *koinonia* of the *polis*.<sup>4</sup> To begin with the basic unit, the household is a *koinonia* which is a necessary and active organism within the larger organism of the *polis*. In this *koinonia* husband and wife each possess certain good things which they exchange in *koinonia* for the benefit of both, and eventually for the benefit of society.<sup>5</sup> Beyond the household, buyer and seller, for example, engage in a basic *koinonia* of the *polis* by exchanging

<sup>1</sup> E.g. *Rep.* 371 B, 462 C.

<sup>2</sup> 1260 b 27; 1275 b 18; 1295 b 24; 1325 a 9; 1328 a 36; 1328 b 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Politics*, ed. Newman, I, pp. 41 ff.

<sup>4</sup> 1253 a 29.

<sup>5</sup> 1252 a 24.

good things.<sup>1</sup> In such exchanges the two parties engage in a common action which is directed toward a good end. In the same way, the citizens of the *polis* in their activities unite to work for the good life which is for the good of the *polis* as well as of themselves. In fact the citizen must be active in public affairs, in *koinonia* with the other citizens, because the continued existence of the community requires such activity.<sup>2</sup> Indeed the whole of the *Politics* is devoted to showing what goes into the making of a *koinonia* in the form of a *polis*. Thus the *polis* is not simply a name and an abstraction or a conglomerate of people who happen to live in the same place because it suits their convenience.<sup>3</sup> Aristotle's definition of the *polis* as a *koinonia* is not just another definition added to those of his predecessors but a new kind of definition.

This brings us to one of Aristotle's most important points concerning the *polis*, one that he stresses throughout his teaching in the *Politics*. Here again we see the influence of Aristotle's medical and biological training. Observation of the history and activity of the *polis* showed, to a biologist, that the city was an active organism. It was a corporate entity that behaved like a living creature. The *polis* was a unit of energy and activity, possessing *dynamis* and *energeia*.<sup>4</sup> The city in its corporate life could be seen to possess and use the same desirable qualities as a human being—fortitude, justice, wisdom.<sup>5</sup> Like the true citizen, the city, if it was a true city, possessed virtue (*aretê*) which produced its energy (*energeia*).<sup>6</sup> The city as a living and active organism has a work (*ergon*) to perform, in conformity with its purpose, just as the citizen has a work to perform.<sup>7</sup> Thus the city, as an organic part of nature, has a life of its own.

But because of its organic nature, resembling that of a human being, the city is subject to the same weaknesses as the human being. It could enjoy health which enabled it to live the good life,

<sup>1</sup> 1256 b 29.

<sup>2</sup> 1280 b 29; 1325 b 14 ff. See Adkins, *op. cit.* (above, p. 64, note 2), pp. 346-7.

<sup>3</sup> 1280 b 5; 1280 b 29.

<sup>4</sup> 1323 b 35; 1328 a 38.

<sup>5</sup> 1323 b 33.

<sup>6</sup> 1328 a 37; cf. Adkins, *op. cit.* (above, p. 64, note 2), p. 336.

<sup>7</sup> 1326 a 13; 1326 b 10.

but it likewise could fall into sin which would destroy it just as sin would destroy a human being.<sup>1</sup> Licentiousness could exist in a city just as it could exist in a human being.<sup>2</sup> Every constitution was liable to degeneration, and the causes of possible degeneration have to be studied carefully.<sup>3</sup> A city may sin by making a wrong judgment, and a small error may lead to a greater evil.<sup>4</sup> It is possible that something that seems to the city its supreme good may in fact be its ruin.<sup>5</sup> Therefore the student of the well-being of the city, when he knows the causes that destroy cities also knows the causes that preserve them.<sup>6</sup> Thus the student of urbanism is concerned with the anatomy and morphology, the physiology and pathology of the city. In terms of the city's health, Aristotle lays great weight upon the rule that a city should not be allowed to become too large. Like an organism or an instrument, a city has a proper size for its work, and if it exceeds this, it will not be able to do its work properly.<sup>7</sup> The conclusion that Aristotle shows must be drawn from the concept of the city as a *koinonia* and the concept of the city as an active organism is that all the aspects of life and work of both the city and the citizen are to be seen as interrelated. All the problems of the city and of man in the community must be studied in relation to each other. Urban problems cannot be attacked separately but must be seen as parts of a larger whole all of whose components must be regulated together. The best interests of city and citizen are the same.<sup>8</sup> The excellence of the citizen must be an excellence relative to the needs of the city.<sup>9</sup> Aristotle sums up this intimate connection by writing that "the goodness of every part must be considered with reference to the goodness of the whole".<sup>10</sup>

Aristotle makes the point that there is a reciprocal relationship and a mutual responsibility. The city has an obligation to the

<sup>1</sup> 1302 b 2; 1302 b 30.

<sup>2</sup> 1310 a 18.

<sup>3</sup> 1301 a 19.

<sup>4</sup> 1303 b 29.

<sup>5</sup> 1261 b 8.

<sup>6</sup> 1307 b 27.

<sup>7</sup> 1276 a 28 ff.; 1326 a 5. Aristotle stresses this point because, he says, "most men think that the happiness of a *polis* depends upon its being large".

<sup>8</sup> 1276 b 15.

<sup>9</sup> 1276 b 27.

<sup>10</sup> 1260 b 9.



citizen, and the citizen has an obligation to the city.<sup>1</sup> Recognition of this responsibility is at the bottom of the lives of both. The city gives the citizen his intellectual equipment and his means for living, and the citizen has an obligation to see that this function is continued.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle emphasizes repeatedly that citizenship has both duties and privileges.<sup>3</sup>

Having shown the basic nature of city and citizen, Aristotle would consider it necessary to identify the essential force or forces which would assure the proper activity of the citizen and thus the proper activity of the *polis*. In our unfinished text of the *Politics* official religion, which was so important in the Greek city-state, does not appear. Aristotle deals at length with moral conduct, and the need for a patriotic citizenry is mentioned as something that is taken for granted. For us, it is illuminating to discover that Aristotle points to education as the one basic factor that was essential to all aspects of the health of the city and that provided the element of cohesion that would hold together a thing as diverse as the *polis*.<sup>4</sup> Since the citizens are the basic component of the *polis*, if they are to function properly in private and public life, the authorities must see to it that the people receive proper education.<sup>5</sup> The success of the active life and work of the community depends on the training of the citizens. Everyone agrees to this principle, Aristotle remarks, but opinion is divided about the contents of the curriculum, and he sees "sad confusion" concerning the purpose of education.<sup>6</sup> Most *poleis* in fact exhibit irresponsible educational programs planned by unqualified people.<sup>7</sup> Aristotle evidently planned to devote detailed study to this vital topic, and it is our loss that the last book of the *Politics*, in which education is treated, has come to us in its unfinished state. Aristotle does, however, stress one point concerning education which is a topic of special interest today, namely that the educational programs must prepare the citizen for the use of leisure, and that it is of importance for the state, as a state, to be able to

<sup>1</sup> 1337 a 27.

<sup>2</sup> 1337 a 11 ff. (at the beginning of Book VIII).

<sup>3</sup> E.g. 1276 b 27.

<sup>4</sup> 1263 b 36; 1337 a 11 ff.

<sup>5</sup> 1333 b 37; 1337 a 11.

<sup>6</sup> 1337 a 35 ff.

<sup>7</sup> 1310 a 12 ff.; 1333 b 5 ff.

enjoy leisure, for a state that cannot use its leisure properly will collapse.<sup>1</sup>

In summary, it might be said that Aristotle's study of man and the *polis* shows (to borrow the phrase of H. D. Rankin) that man's relation to the *polis* emerges as his most significant characteristic, and it follows, of course, that the most significant characteristic of the *polis* is its relation to its people.<sup>2</sup>

The present study has necessarily had to deal with the problems and evils that appear to be an inevitable part of urban life; but as we take leave of Aristotle we may recall one of those genial comments that we encounter throughout his work, observations of a simplicity that comes only from long thought. In one of the passages in which he is discussing the well-being of the city, and the possible threats to this well-being and the available means to preserve it, he remarks, very simply, "that which is good in each thing is what preserves it".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 1334 a 4 ff. A similar thought is expressed in Pericles' Funeral Oration (Thuc. 2. 38. 1).

<sup>2</sup> See Rankin, *op. cit.* (above, p. 60, note 1), p. 115. n. 4. This is a major theme of Pericles' Funeral Oration (Thuc. 2. 35-46).

<sup>3</sup> 1261 b 9.