



# Aristotle - *Politics*

## BOOK ONE

### I

1 EVERY STATE is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a  
view to some good; for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think good.  
But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the  
highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any  
5 other, and at the highest good.

Some people think that the qualifications of a statesman, king, householder, and master are  
the same, and that they differ, not in kind, but only in the number of their subjects. For  
example, the ruler over a few is called a master; over more, the manager of a household; over  
10 a still larger number, a statesman or king, as if there were no difference between a great  
household and a small state. The distinction which is made between the king and the  
statesman is as follows: When the government is personal, the ruler is a king; when,  
according to the rules of the political science, the citizens rule and are ruled in turn, then he  
is called a statesman.

15 But all this is a mistake; for governments differ in kind, as will be evident to any one who  
considers the matter according to the method which has hitherto guided us. As in other  
departments of science, so in politics, the compound should always be resolved into the  
simple elements or least parts of the whole. We must therefore look at the elements of which  
20 the state is composed, in order that we may see in what the different kinds of rule differ from  
one another, and whether any scientific result can be attained about each one of them.

## II

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He who thus considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a state or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them. In the first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely, of male and female, that the race may  
5 continue (and this is a union which is formed, not of deliberate purpose, but because, in common with other animals and with plants, mankind have a natural desire to leave behind them an image of themselves), and of natural ruler and subject, that both may be preserved. For that which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature intended to be lord and master, and that which can with its body give effect to such foresight is a subject, and by  
10 nature a slave; hence master and slave have the same interest. Now nature has distinguished between the female and the slave. For she is not niggardly, like the smith who fashions the Delphian knife for many uses; she makes each thing for a single use, and every instrument is best made when intended for one and not for many uses. But among barbarians no distinction is made between women and slaves, because there is no natural ruler among  
15 them: they are a community of slaves, male and female. Wherefore the poets say,

It is meet that Hellenes should rule over barbarians;

as if they thought that the barbarian and the slave were by nature one.

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Out of these two relationships between man and woman, master and slave, the first thing to arise is the family, and Hesiod is right when he says,

First house and wife and an ox for the plough,

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for the ox is the poor man's slave. The family is the association established by nature for the supply of men's everyday wants, and the members of it are called by Charondas 'companions of the cupboard,' and by Epimenides the Cretan, 'companions of the manger.' But when several families are united, and the association aims at something more than the supply of daily needs, the first society to be formed is the village. And the most natural form of the  
30 village appears to be that of a colony from the family, composed of the children and grandchildren, who are said to be suckled 'with the same milk.' And this is the reason why Hellenic states were originally governed by kings; because the Hellenes were under royal rule before they came together, as the barbarians still are. Every family is ruled by the eldest, and therefore in the colonies of the family the kingly form of government prevailed because they  
35 were of the same blood. As Homer says:

1 Each one gives law to his children and to his wives.

For they lived dispersedly, as was the manner in ancient times. Wherefore men say that the  
Gods have a king, because they themselves either are or were in ancient times under the rule  
5 of a king. For they imagine, not only the forms of the Gods, but their ways of life to be like  
their own.

When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly  
or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and  
10 continuing in existence for the sake of a good life. And therefore, if the earlier forms of  
society are natural, so is the state, for it is the end of them, and the nature of a thing is its  
end. For what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature, whether we are speaking  
of a man, a horse, or a family. Besides, the final cause and end of a thing is the best, and to  
be self-sufficing is the end and the best.

15 Hence it is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political  
animal. And he who by nature and not by mere accident is without a state, is either a bad  
man or above humanity; he is like the

Tribeless, lawless, hearthless one,

20 whom Homer denounces—the natural outcast is forthwith a lover of war; he may be  
compared to an isolated piece at draughts.

Now, that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animals is  
25 evident. Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal whom  
she has endowed with the gift of speech. And whereas mere voice is but an indication of  
pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the  
perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further),  
the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore  
30 likewise the just and the unjust. And it is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense  
of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who  
have this sense makes a family and a state.

Further, the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the  
35 whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example, if the whole body be destroyed, there will  
be no foot or hand, except in an equivocal sense, as we might speak of a stone hand; for

1 when destroyed the hand will be no better than that. But things are defined by their working  
and power; and we ought not to say that they are the same when they no longer have their  
proper quality, but only that they have the same name. The proof that the state is a creation  
of nature and prior to the individual is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-  
5 sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. But he who is unable to live  
in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a  
god: he is no part of a state. A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature, and yet he  
who first founded the state was the greatest of benefactors. For man, when perfected, is the  
best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all; since armed  
10 injustice is the more dangerous, and he is equipped at birth with arms, meant to be used by  
intelligence and virtue, which he may use for the worst ends. Wherefore, if he have not  
virtue, he is the most unholy and the most savage of animals, and the most full of lust and  
gluttony. But justice is the bond of men in states, for the administration of justice, which is  
the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society.

### 15 III

Seeing then that the state is made up of households, before speaking of the state we must  
speak of the management of the household. The parts of household management correspond  
to the persons who compose the household, and a complete household consists of slaves and  
20 freemen. Now we should begin by examining everything in its fewest possible elements; and  
the first and fewest possible parts of a family are master and slave, husband and wife, father  
and children. We have therefore to consider what each of these three relations is and ought  
to be: I mean the relation of master and servant, the marriage relation (the conjunction of  
man and wife has no name of its own), and thirdly, the procreative relation (this also has no  
25 proper name). And there is another element of a household, the so-called art of getting  
wealth, which, according to some, is identical with household management, according to  
others, a principal part of it; the nature of this art will also have to be considered by us.

Let us first speak of master and slave, looking to the needs of practical life and also seeking to  
30 attain some better theory of their relation than exists at present. For some are of opinion that  
the rule of a master is a science, and that the management of a household, and the  
mastership of slaves, and the political and royal rule, as I was saying at the outset, are all the  
same. Others affirm that the rule of a master over slaves is contrary to nature, and that the  
distinction between slave and freeman exists by law only, and not by nature; and being an  
35 interference with nature is therefore unjust.

## BOOK THREE

### I

HE who would inquire into the essence and attributes of various kinds of governments must first of all determine ‘What is a state?’ At present this is a disputed question. Some say that the state has done a certain act; others, no, not the state, but the oligarchy or the tyrant. And the legislator or statesman is concerned entirely with the state; a constitution or government being an arrangement of the inhabitants of a state. But a state is composite, like any other whole made up of many parts; these are the citizens, who compose it. It is evident, therefore, that we must begin by asking, Who is the citizen, and what is the meaning of the term? For here again there may be a difference of opinion. He who is a citizen in a democracy will often not be a citizen in an oligarchy. Leaving out of consideration those who have been made citizens, or who have obtained the name of citizen any other accidental manner, we may say, first, that a citizen is not a citizen because he lives in a certain place, for resident aliens and slaves share in the place; nor is he a citizen who has no legal right except that of suing and being sued; for this right may be enjoyed under the provisions of a treaty. Nay, resident aliens in many places do not possess even such rights completely, for they are obliged to have a patron, so that they do but imperfectly participate in citizenship, and we call them citizens only in a qualified sense, as we might apply the term to children who are too young to be on the register, or to old men who have been relieved from state duties. Of these we do not say quite simply that they are citizens, but add in the one case that they are not of age, and in the other, that they are past the age, or something of that sort; the precise expression is immaterial, for our meaning is clear. Similar difficulties to those which I have mentioned may be raised and answered about deprived citizens and about exiles. But the citizen whom we are seeking to define is a citizen in the strictest sense, against whom no such exception can be taken, and his special characteristic is that he shares in the administration of justice, and in offices. Now of offices some are discontinuous, and the same persons are not allowed to hold them twice, or can only hold them after a fixed interval; others have no limit of time—for example, the office of a dicast or ecclesiast. It may, indeed, be argued that these are not magistrates at all, and that their functions give them no share in the government. But surely it is ridiculous to say that those who have the power do not govern. Let us not dwell further upon this, which is a purely verbal question; what we want is a common term including both dicast and ecclesiast. Let us, for the sake of distinction, call it ‘indefinite office,’ and we will assume that those who share in such office are citizens. This is the most comprehensive definition of a citizen, and best suits all those who are generally so called.

1 But we must not forget that things of which the underlying principles differ in kind, one of  
them being first, another second, another third, have, when regarded in this relation,  
nothing, or hardly anything, worth mentioning in common. Now we see that governments  
differ in kind, and that some of them are prior and that others are posterior; those which are  
5 faulty or perverted are necessarily posterior to those which are perfect. (What we mean by  
perversion will be hereafter explained.) The citizen then of necessity differs under each form  
of government; and our definition is best adapted to the citizen of a democracy; but not  
necessarily to other states. For in some states the people are not acknowledged, nor have they  
any regular assembly, but only extraordinary ones; and suits are distributed by sections  
10 among the magistrates. At Lacedaemon, for instance, the Ephors determine suits about  
contracts, which they distribute among themselves, while the elders are judges of homicide,  
and other causes are decided by other magistrates. A similar principle prevails at Carthage;  
there certain magistrates decide all causes. We may, indeed, modify our definition of the  
citizen so as to include these states. In them it is the holder of a definite, not of an indefinite  
15 office, who legislates and judges, and to some or all such holders of definite offices is reserved  
the right of deliberating or judging about some things or about all things. The conception of  
the citizen now begins to clear up.

He who has the power to take part in the deliberative or judicial administration of any state  
is said by us to be a citizens of that state; and, speaking generally, a state is a body of citizens  
20 sufficing for the purposes of life.

## II

But in practice a citizen is defined to be one of whom both the parents are citizens; others  
25 insist on going further back; say to two or three or more ancestors. This is a short and  
practical definition but there are some who raise the further question: How this third or  
fourth ancestor came to be a citizen? Gorgias of Leontini, partly because he was in a  
difficulty, partly in irony, said—‘Mortars are what is made by the mortar-makers, and the  
citizens of Larissa are those who are made by the magistrates; for it is their trade to make  
30 Larissaeans.’ Yet the question is really simple, for, if according to the definition just given  
they shared in the government, they were citizens. This is a better definition than the other.  
For the words, ‘born of a father or mother who is a citizen,’ cannot possibly apply to the first  
inhabitants or founders of a state.

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1 There is a greater difficulty in the case of those who have been made citizens after a  
revolution, as by Cleisthenes at Athens after the expulsion of the tyrants, for he enrolled in  
tribes many metics, both strangers and slaves. The doubt in these cases is, not who is, but  
whether he who is ought to be a citizen; and there will still be a furthering the state, whether  
5 a certain act is or is not an act of the state; for what ought not to be is what is false. Now,  
there are some who hold office, and yet ought not to hold office, whom we describe as  
ruling, but ruling unjustly. And the citizen was defined by the fact of his holding some kind  
of rule or office—he who holds a judicial or legislative office fulfills our definition of a  
citizen. It is evident, therefore, that the citizens about whom the doubt has arisen must be  
10 called citizens.

### III

Whether they ought to be so or not is a question which is bound up with the previous  
inquiry. For a parallel question is raised respecting the state, whether a certain act is or is not  
15 an act of the state; for example, in the transition from an oligarchy or a tyranny to a  
democracy. In such cases persons refuse to fulfill their contracts or any other obligations, on  
the ground that the tyrant, and not the state, contracted them; they argue that some  
constitutions are established by force, and not for the sake of the common good. But this  
would apply equally to democracies, for they too may be founded on violence, and then the  
20 acts of the democracy will be neither more nor less acts of the state in question than those of  
an oligarchy or of a tyranny. This question runs up into another: on what principle shall we  
ever say that the state is the same, or different? It would be a very superficial view which  
considered only the place and the inhabitants (for the soil and the population may be  
separated, and some of the inhabitants may live in one place and some in another). This,  
25 however, is not a very serious difficulty; we need only remark that the word 'state' is  
ambiguous.

It is further asked: When are men, living in the same place, to be regarded as a single city—  
what is the limit? Certainly not the wall of the city, for you might surround all Peloponnesus  
30 with a wall. Like this, we may say, is Babylon, and every city that has the compass of a nation  
rather than a city; Babylon, they say, had been taken for three days before some part of the  
inhabitants became aware of the fact. This difficulty may, however, with advantage be  
deferred to another occasion; the statesman has to consider the size of the state, and whether  
it should consist of more than one nation or not.

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1 Again, shall we say that while the race of inhabitants, as well as their place of abode, remain  
the same, the city is also the same, although the citizens are always dying and being born, as  
we call rivers and fountains the same, although the water is always flowing away and coming  
again Or shall we say that the generations of men, like the rivers, are the same, but that the  
5 state changes? For, since the state is a partnership, and is a partnership of citizens in a  
constitution, when the form of government changes, and becomes different, then it may be  
supposed that the state is no longer the same, just as a tragic differs from a comic chorus,  
although the members of both may be identical. And in this manner we speak of every union  
or composition of elements as different when the form of their composition alters; for  
10 example, a scale containing the same sounds is said to be different, accordingly as the Dorian  
or the Phrygian mode is employed. And if this is true it is evident that the sameness of the  
state consists chiefly in the sameness of the constitution, and it may be called or not called by  
the same name, whether the inhabitants are the same or entirely different. It is quite another  
question, whether a state ought or ought not to fulfill engagements when the form of  
15 government changes.

#### IV

20 There is a point nearly allied to the preceding: Whether the virtue of a good man and a good  
citizen is the same or not. But, before entering on this discussion, we must certainly first  
obtain some general notion of the virtue of the citizen. Like the sailor, the citizen is a  
member of a community. Now, sailors have different functions, for one of them is a rower,  
another a pilot, and a third a look-out man, a fourth is described by some similar term; and  
while the precise definition of each individual's virtue applies exclusively to him, there is, at  
25 the same time, a common definition applicable to them all. For they have all of them a  
common object, which is safety in navigation. Similarly, one citizen differs from another, but  
the salvation of the community is the common business of them all. This community is the  
constitution; the virtue of the citizen must therefore be relative to the constitution of which  
he is a member. If, then, there are many forms of government, it is evident that there is not  
30 one single virtue of the good citizen which is perfect virtue. But we say that the good man is  
he who has one single virtue which is perfect virtue. Hence it is evident that the good citizen  
need not of necessity possess the virtue which makes a good man.

35 The same question may also be approached by another road, from a consideration of the best  
constitution. If the state cannot be entirely composed of good men, and yet each citizen is  
expected to do his own business well, and must therefore have virtue, still inasmuch as all the



1 citizens cannot be alike, the virtue of the citizen and of the good man cannot coincide. All  
must have the virtue of the good citizen—thus, and thus only, can the state be perfect; but  
they will not have the virtue of a good man, unless we assume that in the good state all the  
citizens must be good.

5 Again, the state, as composed of unlikes, may be compared to the living being: as the first  
elements into which a living being is resolved are soul and body, as soul is made up of  
rational principle and appetite, the family of husband and wife, property of master and slave,  
so of all these, as well as other dissimilar elements, the state is composed; and, therefore, the  
10 virtue of all the citizens cannot possibly be the same, any more than the excellence of the  
leader of a chorus is the same as that of the performer who stands by his side. I have said  
enough to show why the two kinds of virtue cannot be absolutely and always the same.

But will there then be no case in which the virtue of the good citizen and the virtue of the  
15 good man coincide? To this we answer that the good ruler is a good and wise man, and that  
he who would be a statesman must be a wise man. And some persons say that even the  
education of the ruler should be of a special kind; for are not the children of kings instructed  
in riding and military exercises? As Euripides says:

20 No subtle arts for me, but what the state requires.

As though there were a special education needed by a ruler. If then the virtue of a good ruler  
is the same as that of a good man, and we assume further that the subject is a citizen as well  
as the ruler, the virtue of the good citizen and the virtue of the good man cannot be  
absolutely the same, although in some cases they may; for the virtue of a ruler differs from  
25 that of a citizen. It was the sense of this difference which made Jason say that 'he felt hungry  
when he was not a tyrant,' meaning that he could not endure to live in a private station. But,  
on the other hand, it may be argued that men are praised for knowing both how to rule and  
how to obey, and he is said to be a citizen of approved virtue who is able to do both. Now if  
we suppose the virtue of a good man to be that which rules, and the virtue of the citizen to  
30 include ruling and obeying, it cannot be said that they are equally worthy of praise. Since,  
then, it is sometimes thought that the ruler and the ruled must learn different things and not  
the same, but that the citizen must know and share in them both, the inference is obvious.  
There is, indeed, the rule of a master, which is concerned with menial offices—the master  
need not know how to perform these, but may employ others in the execution of them: the  
35 other would be degrading; and by the other I mean the power actually to do menial duties,

1 which vary much in character and are executed by various classes of slaves, such, for example,  
as handicraftsmen, who, as their name signifies, live by the labor of their hands: under these  
the mechanic is included. Hence in ancient times, and among some nations, the working  
5 classes had no share in the government—a privilege which they only acquired under the  
extreme democracy. Certainly the good man and the statesman and the good citizen ought  
not to learn the crafts of inferiors except for their own occasional use; if they habitually  
practice them, there will cease to be a distinction between master and slave.

This is not the rule of which we are speaking; but there is a rule of another kind, which is  
10 exercised over freemen and equals by birth -a constitutional rule, which the ruler must learn  
by obeying, as he would learn the duties of a general of cavalry by being under the orders of a  
general of cavalry, or the duties of a general of infantry by being under the orders of a general  
of infantry, and by having had the command of a regiment and of a company. It has been  
well said that 'he who has never learned to obey cannot be a good commander.' The two are  
15 not the same, but the good citizen ought to be capable of both; he should know how to  
govern like a freeman, and how to obey like a freeman—these are the virtues of a citizen.  
And, although the temperance and justice of a ruler are distinct from those of a subject, the  
virtue of a good man will include both; for the virtue of the good man who is free and also a  
subject, e.g., his justice, will not be one but will comprise distinct kinds, the one qualifying  
20 him to rule, the other to obey, and differing as the temperance and courage of men and  
women differ. For a man would be thought a coward if he had no more courage than a  
courageous woman, and a woman would be thought loquacious if she imposed no more  
restraint on her conversation than the good man; and indeed their part in the management  
of the household is different, for the duty of the one is to acquire, and of the other to  
25 preserve. Practical wisdom only is characteristic of the ruler: it would seem that all other  
virtues must equally belong to ruler and subject. The virtue of the subject is certainly not  
wisdom, but only true opinion; he may be compared to the maker of the flute, while his  
master is like the flute-player or user of the flute.

From these considerations may be gathered the answer to the question, whether the virtue of  
30 the good man is the same as that of the good citizen, or different, and how far the same, and  
how far different.

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There still remains one more question about the citizen: Is he only a true citizen who has a share of office, or is the mechanic to be included? If they who hold no office are to be deemed citizens, not every citizen can have this virtue of ruling and obeying; for this man is a citizen. And if none of the lower class are citizens, in which part of the state are they to be placed? For they are not resident aliens, and they are not foreigners. May we not reply, that as far as this objection goes there is no more absurdity in excluding them than in excluding slaves and freedmen from any of the above-mentioned classes? It must be admitted that we cannot consider all those to be citizens who are necessary to the existence of the state; for example, children are not citizen equally with grown-up men, who are citizens absolutely, but children, not being grown up, are only citizens on a certain assumption. Nay, in ancient times, and among some nations the artisan class were slaves or foreigners, and therefore the majority of them are so now. The best form of state will not admit them to citizenship; but if they are admitted, then our definition of the virtue of a citizen will not apply to every citizen nor to every free man as such, but only to those who are freed from necessary services. The necessary people are either slaves who minister to the wants of individuals, or mechanics and laborers who are the servants of the community. These reflections carried a little further will explain their position; and indeed what has been said already is of itself, when understood, explanation enough.

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Since there are many forms of government there must be many varieties of citizen and especially of citizens who are subjects; so that under some governments the mechanic and the laborer will be citizens, but not in others, as, for example, in aristocracy or the so-called government of the best (if there be such an one), in which honors are given according to virtue and merit; for no man can practice virtue who is living the life of a mechanic or laborer. In oligarchies the qualification for office is high, and therefore no laborer can ever be a citizen; but a mechanic may, for an actual majority of them are rich. At Thebes there was a law that no man could hold office who had not retired from business for ten years. But in many states the law goes to the length of admitting aliens; for in some democracies a man is a citizen though his mother only be a citizen; and a similar principle is applied to illegitimate children; the law is relaxed when there is a dearth of population. But when the number of citizens increases, first the children of a male or a female slave are excluded; then those whose mothers only are citizens; and at last the right of citizenship is confined to those whose fathers and mothers are both citizens.

1 Hence, as is evident, there are different kinds of citizens; and he is a citizen in the highest  
sense who shares in the honors of the state. Compare Homer's words, 'like some dishonored  
stranger'; he who is excluded from the honors of the state is no better than an alien. But  
when his exclusion is concealed, then the object is that the privileged class may deceive their  
5 fellow inhabitants.

As to the question whether the virtue of the good man is the same as that of the good citizen,  
the considerations already adduced prove that in some states the good man and the good  
citizen are the same, and in others different. When they are the same it is not every citizen  
who is a good man, but only the statesman and those who have or may have, alone or in  
10 conjunction with others, the conduct of public affairs.

## VI

Having determined these questions, we have next to consider whether there is only one form  
15 of government or many, and if many, what they are, and how many, and what are the  
differences between them.

A constitution is the arrangement of magistracies in a state, especially of the highest of all.  
The government is everywhere sovereign in the state, and the constitution is in fact the  
20 government. For example, in democracies the people are supreme, but in oligarchies, the few;  
and, therefore, we say that these two forms of government also are different: and so in other  
cases.

First, let us consider what is the purpose of a state, and how many forms of government  
25 there are by which human society is regulated. We have already said, in the first part of this  
treatise, when discussing household management and the rule of a master, that man is by  
nature a political animal. And therefore, men, even when they do not require one another's  
help, desire to live together; not but that they are also brought together by their common  
interests in proportion as they severally attain to any measure of well-being. This is certainly  
30 the chief end, both of individuals and of states. And also for the sake of mere life (in which  
there is possibly some noble element so long as the evils of existence do not greatly  
overbalance the good) mankind meet together and maintain the political community. And  
we all see that men cling to life even at the cost of enduring great misfortune, seeming to find  
in life a natural sweetness and happiness.

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There is no difficulty in distinguishing the various kinds of authority; they have been often defined already in discussions outside the school. The rule of a master, although the slave by nature and the master by nature have in reality the same interests, is nevertheless exercised primarily with a view to the interest of the master, but accidentally considers the slave, since, if the slave perish, the rule of the master perishes with him. On the other hand, the government of a wife and children and of a household, which we have called household management, is exercised in the first instance for the good of the governed or for the common good of both parties, but essentially for the good of the governed, as we see to be the case in medicine, gymnastic, and the arts in general, which are only accidentally concerned with the good of the artists themselves. For there is no reason why the trainer may not sometimes practice gymnastics, and the helmsman is always one of the crew. The trainer or the helmsman considers the good of those committed to his care. But, when he is one of the persons taken care of, he accidentally participates in the advantage, for the helmsman is also a sailor, and the trainer becomes one of those in training. And so in politics: when the state is framed upon the principle of equality and likeness, the citizens think that they ought to hold office by turns. Formerly, as is natural, every one would take his turn of service; and then again, somebody else would look after his interest, just as he, while in office, had looked after theirs. But nowadays, for the sake of the advantage which is to be gained from the public revenues and from office, men want to be always in office. One might imagine that the rulers, being sickly, were only kept in health while they continued in office; in that case we may be sure that they would be hunting after places. The conclusion is evident: that governments which have a regard to the common interest are constituted in accordance with strict principles of justice, and are therefore true forms; but those which regard only the interest of the rulers are all defective and perverted forms, for they are despotic, whereas a state is a community of freemen.

VII

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Having determined these points, we have next to consider how many forms of government there are, and what they are; and in the first place what are the true forms, for when they are determined the perversions of them will at once be apparent. The words constitution and government have the same meaning, and the government, which is the supreme authority in states, must be in the hands of one, or of a few, or of the many. The true forms of government, therefore, are those in which the one, or the few, or the many, govern with a view to the common interest; but governments which rule with a view to the private interest, whether of the one or of the few, or of the many, are perversions. For the members of a state,

1 if they are truly citizens, ought to participate in its advantages. Of forms of government in  
which one rules, we call that which regards the common interests, kingship or royalty; that in  
which more than one, but not many, rule, aristocracy; and it is so called, either because the  
rulers are the best men, or because they have at heart the best interests of the state and of the  
5 citizens. But when the citizens at large administer the state for the common interest, the  
government is called by the generic name—a constitution. And there is a reason for this use  
of language. One man or a few may excel in virtue; but as the number increases it becomes  
more difficult for them to attain perfection in every kind of virtue, though they may in  
military virtue, for this is found in the masses. Hence in a constitutional government the  
10 fighting-men have the supreme power, and those who possess arms are the citizens.

Of the above-mentioned forms, the perversions are as follows: of royalty, tyranny; of  
aristocracy, oligarchy; of constitutional government, democracy. For tyranny is a kind of  
monarchy which has in view the interest of the monarch only; oligarchy has in view the  
15 interest of the wealthy; democracy, of the needy: none of them the common good of all.

## VIII

But there are difficulties about these forms of government, and it will therefore be necessary  
to state a little more at length the nature of each of them. For he who would make a  
20 philosophical study of the various sciences, and does not regard practice only, ought not to  
overlook or omit anything, but to set forth the truth in every particular. Tyranny, as I was  
saying, is monarchy exercising the rule of a master over the political society; oligarchy is  
when men of property have the government in their hands; democracy, the opposite, when  
the indigent, and not the men of property, are the rulers. And here arises the first of our  
25 difficulties, and it relates to the distinction drawn. For democracy is said to be the  
government of the many. But what if the many are men of property and have the power in  
their hands? In like manner oligarchy is said to be the government of the few; but what if the  
poor are fewer than the rich, and have the power in their hands because they are stronger? In  
these cases the distinction which we have drawn between these different forms of  
30 government would no longer hold good.

Suppose, once more, that we add wealth to the few and poverty to the many, and name the  
governments accordingly—an oligarchy is said to be that in which the few and the wealthy,  
and a democracy that in which the many and the poor are the rulers—there will still be a  
35 difficulty. For, if the only forms of government are the ones already mentioned, how shall we

1 describe those other governments also just mentioned by us, in which the rich are the more  
numerous and the poor are the fewer, and both govern in their respective states?

5 The argument seems to show that, whether in oligarchies or in democracies, the number of  
the governing body, whether the greater number, as in a democracy, or the smaller number,  
as in an oligarchy, is an accident due to the fact that the rich everywhere are few, and the  
poor numerous. But if so, there is a misapprehension of the causes of the difference between  
them. For the real difference between democracy and oligarchy is poverty and wealth.  
10 Wherever men rule by reason of their wealth, whether they be few or many, that is an  
oligarchy, and where the poor rule, that is a democracy. But as a fact the rich are few and the  
poor many; for few are well-to-do, whereas freedom is enjoyed by an, and wealth and  
freedom are the grounds on which the oligarchical and democratical parties respectively  
claim power in the state.

## 15 IX

Let us begin by considering the common definitions of oligarchy and democracy, and what is  
justice oligarchical and democratical. For all men cling to justice of some kind, but their  
conceptions are imperfect and they do not express the whole idea. For example, justice is  
20 thought by them to be, and is, equality, not, however, for however, for but only for equals.  
And inequality is thought to be, and is, justice; neither is this for all, but only for unequals.  
When the persons are omitted, then men judge erroneously. The reason is that they are  
passing judgment on themselves, and most people are bad judges in their own case. And  
whereas justice implies a relation to persons as well as to things, and a just distribution, as I  
have already said in the Ethics, implies the same ratio between the persons and between the  
25 things, they agree about the equality of the things, but dispute about the equality of the  
persons, chiefly for the reason which I have just given—because they are bad judges in their  
own affairs; and secondly, because both the parties to the argument are speaking of a limited  
and partial justice, but imagine themselves to be speaking of absolute justice. For the one  
party, if they are unequal in one respect, for example wealth, consider themselves to be  
30 unequal in all; and the other party, if they are equal in one respect, for example free birth,  
consider themselves to be equal in all. But they leave out the capital point. For if men met  
and associated out of regard to wealth only, their share in the state would be proportioned to  
their property, and the oligarchical doctrine would then seem to carry the day. It would not  
be just that he who paid one mina should have the same share of a hundred minae, whether  
35 of the principal or of the profits, as he who paid the remaining ninety-nine. But a state exists

1 for the sake of a good life, and not for the sake of life only: if life only were the object, slaves  
and brute animals might form a state, but they cannot, for they have no share in happiness  
or in a life of free choice. Nor does a state exist for the sake of alliance and security from  
injustice, nor yet for the sake of exchange and mutual intercourse; for then the Tyrrhenians  
5 and the Carthaginians, and all who have commercial treaties with one another, would be the  
citizens of one state. True, they have agreements about imports, and engagements that they  
will do no wrong to one another, and written articles of alliance. But there are no magistrates  
common to the contracting parties who will enforce their engagements; different states have  
each their own magistracies. Nor does one state take care that the citizens of the other are  
10 such as they ought to be, nor see that those who come under the terms of the treaty do no  
wrong or wickedness at an, but only that they do no injustice to one another. Whereas, those  
who care for good government take into consideration virtue and vice in states. Whence it  
may be further inferred that virtue must be the care of a state which is truly so called, and  
not merely enjoys the name: for without this end the community becomes a mere alliance  
15 which differs only in place from alliances of which the members live apart; and law is only a  
convention, 'a surety to one another of justice,' as the sophist Lycophron says, and has no  
real power to make the citizens

This is obvious; for suppose distinct places, such as Corinth and Megara, to be brought  
20 together so that their walls touched, still they would not be one city, not even if the citizens  
had the right to intermarry, which is one of the rights peculiarly characteristic of states.  
Again, if men dwelt at a distance from one another, but not so far off as to have no  
intercourse, and there were laws among them that they should not wrong each other in their  
exchanges, neither would this be a state. Let us suppose that one man is a carpenter, another  
25 a husbandman, another a shoemaker, and so on, and that their number is ten thousand:  
nevertheless, if they have nothing in common but exchange, alliance, and the like, that  
would not constitute a state. Why is this? Surely not because they are at a distance from one  
another: for even supposing that such a community were to meet in one place, but that each  
man had a house of his own, which was in a manner his state, and that they made alliance  
30 with one another, but only against evil-doers; still an accurate thinker would not deem this  
to be a state, if their intercourse with one another was of the same character after as before  
their union. It is clear then that a state is not a mere society, having a common place,  
established for the prevention of mutual crime and for the sake of exchange. These are  
conditions without which a state cannot exist; but all of them together do not constitute a  
35 state, which is a community of families and aggregations of families in well-being, for the  
sake of a perfect and self-sufficing life. Such a community can only be established among



1 those who live in the same place and intermarry. Hence arise in cities family connections,  
brotherhoods, common sacrifices, amusements which draw men together. But these are  
created by friendship, for the will to live together is friendship. The end of the state is the  
good life, and these are the means towards it. And the state is the union of families and  
5 villages in a perfect and self-sufficing life, by which we mean a happy and honorable life.

Our conclusion, then, is that political society exists for the sake of noble actions, and not of  
mere companionship. Hence they who contribute most to such a society have a greater share  
in it than those who have the same or a greater freedom or nobility of birth but are inferior  
to them in political virtue; or than those who exceed them in wealth but are surpassed by  
10 them in virtue.

From what has been said it will be clearly seen that all the partisans of different forms of  
government speak of a part of justice only.

15 X

There is also a doubt as to what is to be the supreme power in the state: Is it the multitude?  
Or the wealthy? Or the good? Or the one best man? Or a tyrant? Any of these alternatives  
seems to involve disagreeable consequences. If the poor, for example, because they are more  
20 in number, divide among themselves the property of the rich—is not this unjust? No, by  
heaven (will be the reply), for the supreme authority justly willed it. But if this is not  
injustice, pray what is? Again, when in the first division all has been taken, and the majority  
divide anew the property of the minority, is it not evident, if this goes on, that they will ruin  
the state? Yet surely, virtue is not the ruin of those who possess her, nor is justice destructive  
25 of a state; and therefore this law of confiscation clearly cannot be just. If it were, all the acts  
of a tyrant must of necessity be just; for he only coerces other men by superior power, just as  
the multitude coerce the rich. But is it just then that the few and the wealthy should be the  
rulers? And what if they, in like manner, rob and plunder the people—is this just? if so, the  
other case will likewise be just. But there can be no doubt that all these things are wrong and  
30 unjust.

Then ought the good to rule and have supreme power? But in that case everybody else, being  
excluded from power, will be dishonored. For the offices of a state are posts of honor; and if  
one set of men always holds them, the rest must be deprived of them. Then will it be well  
35 that the one best man should rule? Nay, that is still more oligarchical, for the number of  
those who are dishonored is thereby increased. Some one may say that it is bad in any case

1 for a man, subject as he is to all the accidents of human passion, to have the supreme power,  
rather than the law. But what if the law itself be democratical or oligarchical, how will that  
help us out of our difficulties? Not at all; the same consequences will follow.

## 5 XI

Most of these questions may be reserved for another occasion. The principle that the  
multitude ought to be supreme rather than the few best is one that is maintained, and,  
though not free from difficulty, yet seems to contain an element of truth. For the many, of  
whom each individual is but an ordinary person, when they meet together may very likely be  
10 better than the few good, if regarded not individually but collectively, just as a feast to which  
many contribute is better than a dinner provided out of a single purse. For each individual  
among the many has a share of virtue and prudence, and when they meet together, they  
become in a manner one man, who has many feet, and hands, and senses; that is a figure of  
their mind and disposition. Hence the many are better judges than a single man of music  
15 and poetry; for some understand one part, and some another, and among them they  
understand the whole. There is a similar combination of qualities in good men, who differ  
from any individual of the many, as the beautiful are said to differ from those who are not  
beautiful, and works of art from realities, because in them the scattered elements are  
combined, although, if taken separately, the eye of one person or some other feature in  
20 another person would be fairer than in the picture. Whether this principle can apply to every  
democracy, and to all bodies of men, is not clear. Or rather, by heaven, in some cases it is  
impossible of application; for the argument would equally hold about brutes; and wherein, it  
will be asked, do some men differ from brutes? But there may be bodies of men about whom  
our statement is nevertheless true. And if so, the difficulty which has been already raised, and  
25 also another which is akin to it —viz., what power should be assigned to the mass of freemen  
and citizens, who are not rich and have no personal merit—are both solved. There is still a  
danger in allowing them to share the great offices of state, for their folly will lead them into  
error, and their dishonesty into crime. But there is a danger also in not letting them share,  
for a state in which many poor men are excluded from office will necessarily be full of  
30 enemies. The only way of escape is to assign to them some deliberative and judicial  
functions. For this reason Solon and certain other legislators give them the power of electing  
to offices, and of calling the magistrates to account, but they do not allow them to hold  
office singly. When they meet together their perceptions are quite good enough, and  
combined with the better class they are useful to the state (just as impure food when mixed  
35 with what is pure sometimes makes the entire mass more wholesome than a small quantity of

1 the pure would be), but each individual, left to himself, forms an imperfect judgment. On  
the other hand, the popular form of government involves certain difficulties. In the first  
place, it might be objected that he who can judge of the healing of a sick man would be one  
who could himself heal his disease, and make him whole—that is, in other words, the  
5 physician; and so in all professions and arts. As, then, the physician ought to be called to  
account by physicians, so ought men in general to be called to account by their peers. But  
physicians are of three kinds: there is the ordinary practitioner, and there is the physician of  
the higher class, and thirdly the intelligent man who has studied the art: in all arts there is  
such a class; and we attribute the power of judging to them quite as much as to professors of  
10 the art. Secondly, does not the same principle apply to elections? For a right election can  
only be made by those who have knowledge; those who know geometry, for example, will  
choose a geometrician rightly, and those who know how to steer, a pilot; and, even if there  
be some occupations and arts in which private persons share in the ability to choose, they  
certainly cannot choose better than those who know. So that, according to this argument,  
15 neither the election of magistrates, nor the calling of them to account, should be entrusted to  
the many. Yet possibly these objections are to a great extent met by our old answer, that if  
the people are not utterly degraded, although individually they may be worse judges than  
those who have special knowledge—as a body they are as good or better. Moreover, there are  
some arts whose products are not judged of solely, or best, by the artists themselves, namely  
20 those arts whose products are recognized even by those who do not possess the art; for  
example, the knowledge of the house is not limited to the builder only; the user, or, in other  
words, the master, of the house will be even a better judge than the builder, just as the pilot  
will judge better of a rudder than the carpenter, and the guest will judge better of a feast than  
the cook.

25 This difficulty seems now to be sufficiently answered, but there is another akin to it. That  
inferior persons should have authority in greater matters than the good would appear to be a  
strange thing, yet the election and calling to account of the magistrates is the greatest of all.  
And these, as I was saying, are functions which in some states are assigned to the people, for  
the assembly is supreme in all such matters. Yet persons of any age, and having but a small  
30 property qualification, sit in the assembly and deliberate and judge, although for the great  
officers of state, such as treasurers and generals, a high qualification is required. This  
difficulty may be solved in the same manner as the preceding, and the present practice of  
democracies may be really defensible. For the power does not reside in the dicast, or senator,  
or ecclesiast, but in the court, and the senate, and the assembly, of which individual senators,  
35 or ecclesiasts, or dicasts, are only parts or members. And for this reason the many may claim

1 to have a higher authority than the few; for the people, and the senate, and the courts consist  
of many persons, and their property collectively is greater than the property of one or of a  
few individuals holding great offices. But enough of this.

5 The discussion of the first question shows nothing so clearly as that laws, when good, should  
be supreme; and that the magistrate or magistrates should regulate those matters only on  
which the laws are unable to speak with precision owing to the difficulty of any general  
principle embracing all particulars. But what are good laws has not yet been clearly  
explained; the old difficulty remains. The goodness or badness, justice or injustice, of laws  
10 varies of necessity with the constitutions of states. This, however, is clear, that the laws must  
be adapted to the constitutions. But if so, true forms of government will of necessity have  
just laws, and perverted forms of government will have unjust laws.

## XII

15 In all sciences and arts the end is a good, and the greatest good and in the highest degree a  
good in the most authoritative of all—this is the political science of which the good is justice,  
in other words, the common interest. All men think justice to be a sort of equality; and to a  
certain extent they agree in the philosophical distinctions which have been laid down by us  
about Ethics. For they admit that justice is a thing and has a relation to persons, and that  
20 equals ought to have equality. But there still remains a question: equality or inequality of  
what? Here is a difficulty which calls for political speculation. For very likely some persons  
will say that offices of state ought to be unequally distributed according to superior  
excellence, in whatever respect, of the citizen, although there is no other difference between  
him and the rest of the community; for that those who differ in any one respect have  
25 different rights and claims. But, surely, if this is true, the complexion or height of a man, or  
any other advantage, will be a reason for his obtaining a greater share of political rights. The  
error here lies upon the surface, and may be illustrated from the other arts and sciences.  
When a number of flute players are equal in their art, there is no reason why those of them  
who are better born should have better flutes given to them; for they will not play any better  
30 on the flute, and the superior instrument should be reserved for him who is the superior  
artist. If what I am saying is still obscure, it will be made clearer as we proceed. For if there  
were a superior flute-player who was far inferior in birth and beauty, although either of these  
may be a greater good than the art of flute-playing, and may excel flute-playing in a greater  
ratio than he excels the others in his art, still he ought to have the best flutes given to him,  
35 unless the advantages of wealth and birth contribute to excellence in flute-playing, which

1 they do not. Moreover, upon this principle any good may be compared with any other. For  
if a given height may be measured wealth and against freedom, height in general may be so  
measured. Thus if A excels in height more than B in virtue, even if virtue in general excels  
height still more, all goods will be commensurable; for if a certain amount is better than  
5 some other, it is clear that some other will be equal. But since no such comparison can be  
made, it is evident that there is good reason why in politics men do not ground their claim to  
office on every sort of inequality any more than in the arts. For if some be slow, and others  
swift, that is no reason why the one should have little and the others much; it is in  
gymnastics contests that such excellence is rewarded. Whereas the rival claims of candidates  
10 for office can only be based on the possession of elements which enter into the composition  
of a state. And therefore the noble, or free-born, or rich, may with good reason claim office;  
for holders of offices must be freemen and taxpayers: a state can be no more composed  
entirely of poor men than entirely of slaves. But if wealth and freedom are necessary  
elements, justice and valor are equally so; for without the former qualities a state cannot exist  
15 at all, without the latter not well.

### XIII

If the existence of the state is alone to be considered, then it would seem that all, or some at  
least, of these claims are just; but, if we take into account a good life, then, as I have already  
20 said, education and virtue have superior claims. As, however, those who are equal in one  
thing ought not to have an equal share in all, nor those who are unequal in one thing to have  
an unequal share in all, it is certain that all forms of government which rest on either of these  
principles are perversions. All men have a claim in a certain sense, as I have already admitted,  
but all have not an absolute claim. The rich claim because they have a greater share in the  
25 land, and land is the common element of the state; also they are generally more trustworthy  
in contracts. The free claim under the same tide as the noble; for they are nearly akin. For  
the noble are citizens in a truer sense than the ignoble, and good birth is always valued in a  
man's own home and country. Another reason is, that those who are sprung from better  
ancestors are likely to be better men, for nobility is excellence of race. Virtue, too, may be  
30 truly said to have a claim, for justice has been acknowledged by us to be a social virtue, and it  
implies all others. Again, the many may urge their claim against the few; for, when taken  
collectively, and compared with the few, they are stronger and richer and better. But, what if  
the good, the rich, the noble, and the other classes who make up a state, are all living  
together in the same city, Will there, or will there not, be any doubt who shall rule? No  
35 doubt at all in determining who ought to rule in each of the above-mentioned forms of

1 government. For states are characterized by differences in their governing bodies—one of them  
has a government of the rich, another of the virtuous, and so on. But a difficulty arises when  
all these elements co-exist. How are we to decide? Suppose the virtuous to be very few in  
number: may we consider their numbers in relation to their duties, and ask whether they are  
5 enough to administer the state, or so many as will make up a state? Objections may be urged  
against all the aspirants to political power. For those who found their claims on wealth or  
family might be thought to have no basis of justice; on this principle, if any one person were  
richer than all the rest, it is clear that he ought to be ruler of them. In like manner he who is  
very distinguished by his birth ought to have the superiority over all those who claim on the  
10 ground that they are freeborn. In an aristocracy, or government of the best, a like difficulty  
occurs about virtue; for if one citizen be better than the other members of the government,  
however good they may be, he too, upon the same principle of justice, should rule over  
them. And if the people are to be supreme because they are stronger than the few, then if one  
man, or more than one, but not a majority, is stronger than the many, they ought to rule,  
15 and not the many.

All these considerations appear to show that none of the principles on which men claim to  
rule and to hold all other men in subjection to them are strictly right. To those who claim to  
be masters of the government on the ground of their virtue or their wealth, the many might  
fairly answer that they themselves are often better and richer than the few—I do not say  
20 individually, but collectively. And another ingenious objection which is sometimes put  
forward may be met in a similar manner. Some persons doubt whether the legislator who  
desires to make the justest laws ought to legislate with a view to the good of the higher classes  
or of the many, when the case which we have mentioned occurs. Now what is just or right is  
to be interpreted in the sense of ‘what is equal’; and that which is right in the sense of being  
25 equal is to be considered with reference to the advantage of the state, and the common good  
of the citizens. And a citizen is one who shares in governing and being governed. He differs  
under different forms of government, but in the best state he is one who is able and willing  
to be governed and to govern with a view to the life of virtue.

30 If, however, there be some one person, or more than one, although not enough to make up  
the full complement of a state, whose virtue is so pre-eminent that the virtues or the political  
capacity of all the rest admit of no comparison with his or theirs, he or they can be no longer  
regarded as part of a state; for justice will not be done to the superior, if he is reckoned only  
as the equal of those who are so far inferior to him in virtue and in political capacity. Such an  
35 one may truly be deemed a God among men. Hence we see that legislation is necessarily

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concerned only with those who are equal in birth and in capacity; and that for men of pre-  
eminent virtue there is no law—they are themselves a law. Any would be ridiculous who  
attempted to make laws for them: they would probably retort what, in the fable of  
Antisthenes, the lions said to the hares, when in the council of the beasts the latter began  
haranguing and claiming equality for all. And for this reason democratic states have  
instituted ostracism; equality is above all things their aim, and therefore they ostracized and  
banished from the city for a time those who seemed to predominate too much through their  
wealth, or the number of their friends, or through any other political influence. Mythology  
tells us that the Argonauts left Heracles behind for a similar reason; the ship Argo would not  
take him because she feared that he would have been too much for the rest of the crew.  
Wherefore those who denounce tyranny and blame the counsel which Periander gave to  
Thrasybulus cannot be held altogether just in their censure. The story is that Periander,  
when the herald was sent to ask counsel of him, said nothing, but only cut off the tallest ears  
of corn till he had brought the field to a level. The herald did not know the meaning of the  
action, but came and reported what he had seen to Thrasybulus, who understood that he was  
to cut off the principal men in the state; and this is a policy not only expedient for tyrants or  
in practice confined to them, but equally necessary in oligarchies and democracies. Ostracism  
is a measure of the same kind, which acts by disabling and banishing the most prominent  
citizens. Great powers do the same to whole cities and nations, as the Athenians did to the  
Samians, Chians, and Lesbians; no sooner had they obtained a firm grasp of the empire, than  
they humbled their allies contrary to treaty; and the Persian king has repeatedly crushed the  
Medes, Babylonians, and other nations, when their spirit has been stirred by the recollection  
of their former greatness.

The problem is a universal one, and equally concerns all forms of government, true as well as  
false; for, although perverted forms with a view to their own interests may adopt this policy,  
those which seek the common interest do so likewise. The same thing may be observed in  
the arts and sciences; for the painter will not allow the figure to have a foot which, however  
beautiful, is not in proportion, nor will the shipbuilder allow the stem or any other part of  
the vessel to be unduly large, any more than the chorus-master will allow any one who sings  
louder or better than all the rest to sing in the choir. Monarchs, too, may practice  
compulsion and still live in harmony with their cities, if their own government is for the  
interest of the state. Hence where there is an acknowledged superiority the argument in favor  
of ostracism is based upon a kind of political justice. It would certainly be better that the  
legislator should from the first so order his state as to have no need of such a remedy. But if  
the need arises, the next best thing is that he should endeavor to correct the evil by this or

1 some similar measure. The principle, however, has not been fairly applied in states; for,  
instead of looking to the good of their own constitution, they have used ostracism for  
factious purposes. It is true that under perverted forms of government, and from their special  
point of view, such a measure is just and expedient, but it is also clear that it is not absolutely  
5 just. In the perfect state there would be great doubts about the use of it, not when applied to  
excess in strength, wealth, popularity, or the like, but when used against some one who is  
pre-eminent in virtue—what is to be done with him? Mankind will not say that such an one  
is to be expelled and exiled; on the other hand, he ought not to be a subject—that would be  
as if mankind should claim to rule over Zeus, dividing his offices among them. The only  
10 alternative is that all should joyfully obey such a ruler, according to what seems to be the  
order of nature, and that men like him should be kings in their state for life.

#### XIV

15 The preceding discussion, by a natural transition, leads to the consideration of royalty, which  
we admit to be one of the true forms of government. Let us see whether in order to be well  
governed a state or country should be under the rule of a king or under some other form of  
government; and whether monarchy, although good for some, may not be bad for others.  
But first we must determine whether there is one species of royalty or many. It is easy to see  
that there are many, and that the manner of government is not the same in all of them.

20 Of royalties according to law, (1) the Lacedaemonian is thought to answer best to the true  
pattern; but there the royal power is not absolute, except when the kings go on an  
expedition, and then they take the command. Matters of religion are likewise committed to  
them. The kingly office is in truth a kind of generalship, irresponsible and perpetual. The  
25 king has not the power of life and death, except in a specified case, as for instance, in ancient  
times, he had it when upon a campaign, by right of force. This custom is described in  
Homer. For Agamemnon is patient when he is attacked in the assembly, but when the army  
goes out to battle he has the power even of life and death. Does he not say—‘When I find a  
man skulking apart from the battle, nothing shall save him from the dogs and vultures, for in  
30 my hands is death’?

This, then, is one form of royalty—a generalship for life: and of such royalties some are  
hereditary and others elective.

35 (2) There is another sort of monarchy not uncommon among the barbarians, which nearly  
resembles tyranny. But this is both legal and hereditary. For barbarians, being more servile in



1 character than Hellenes, and Asiatics than Europeans, do not rebel against a despotic  
government. Such royalties have the nature of tyrannies because the people are by nature  
slaves; but there is no danger of their being overthrown, for they are hereditary and legal.  
Wherefore also their guards are such as a king and not such as a tyrant would employ, that is  
5 to say, they are composed of citizens, whereas the guards of tyrants are mercenaries. For  
kings rule according to law over voluntary subjects, but tyrants over involuntary; and the one  
are guarded by their fellow-citizens the others are guarded against them.

10 These are two forms of monarchy, and there was a third (3) which existed in ancient Hellas,  
called an Aesymnetia or dictatorship. This may be defined generally as an elective tyranny,  
which, like the barbarian monarchy, is legal, but differs from it in not being hereditary.  
Sometimes the office was held for life, sometimes for a term of years, or until certain duties  
had been performed. For example, the Mytilenaeans elected Pittacus leader against the exiles,  
who were headed by Antimenides and Alcaeus the poet. And Alcaeus himself shows in one of  
15 his banquet odes that they chose Pittacus tyrant, for he reproaches his fellow-citizens for  
'having made the low-born Pittacus tyrant of the spiritless and ill-fated city, with one voice  
shouting his praises.'

20 These forms of government have always had the character of tyrannies, because they possess  
despotic power; but inasmuch as they are elective and acquiesced in by their subjects, they  
are kingly.

(4) There is a fourth species of kingly rule—that of the heroic times—which was hereditary  
and legal, and was exercised over willing subjects. For the first chiefs were benefactors of the  
people in arts or arms; they either gathered them into a community, or procured land for  
25 them; and thus they became kings of voluntary subjects, and their power was inherited by  
their descendants. They took the command in war and presided over the sacrifices, except  
those which required a priest. They also decided causes either with or without an oath; and  
when they swore, the form of the oath was the stretching out of their sceptre. In ancient  
times their power extended continuously to all things whatsoever, in city and country, as well  
30 as in foreign parts; but at a later date they relinquished several of these privileges, and others  
the people took from them, until in some states nothing was left to them but the sacrifices;  
and where they retained more of the reality they had only the right of leadership in war  
beyond the border.

35

1 These, then, are the four kinds of royalty. First the monarchy of the heroic ages; this was  
exercised over voluntary subjects, but limited to certain functions; the king was a general and  
a judge, and had the control of religion The second is that of the barbarians, which is a  
5 hereditary despotic government in accordance with law. A third is the power of the so-called  
Aesynmete or Dictator; this is an elective tyranny. The fourth is the Lacedaemonian, which  
is in fact a generalship, hereditary and perpetual. These four forms differ from one another in  
the manner which I have described.

10 (5) There is a fifth form of kingly rule in which one has the disposal of all, just as each nation  
or each state has the disposal of public matters; this form corresponds to the control of a  
household. For as household management is the kingly rule of a house, so kingly rule is the  
household management of a city, or of a nation, or of many nations.

## XV

15 Of these forms we need only consider two, the Lacedaemonian and the absolute royalty; for  
most of the others he in a region between them, having less power than the last, and more  
than the first. Thus the inquiry is reduced to two points: first, is it advantageous to the state  
that there should be a perpetual general, and if so, should the office be confined to one  
family, or open to the citizens in turn? Secondly, is it well that a single man should have the  
20 supreme power in all things? The first question falls under the head of laws rather than of  
constitutions; for perpetual generalship might equally exist under any form of government,  
so that this matter may be dismissed for the present. The other kind of royalty is a sort of  
constitution; this we have now to consider, and briefly to run over the difficulties involved in  
it. We will begin by inquiring whether it is more advantageous to be ruled by the best man  
25 or by the best laws.

The advocates of royalty maintain that the laws speak only in general terms, and cannot  
provide for circumstances; and that for any science to abide by written rules is absurd. In  
Egypt the physician is allowed to alter his treatment after the fourth day, but if sooner, he  
30 takes the risk. Hence it is clear that a government acting according to written laws is plainly  
not the best. Yet surely the ruler cannot dispense with the general principle which exists in  
law; and this is a better ruler which is free from passion than that in which it is innate.  
Whereas the law is passionless, passion must ever sway the heart of man. Yes, it may be  
replied, but then on the other hand an individual will be better able to deliberate in  
35 particular cases.

1 The best man, then, must legislate, and laws must be passed, but these laws will have no  
authority when they miss the mark, though in all other cases retaining their authority. But  
when the law cannot determine a point at all, or not well, should the one best man or should  
all decide? According to our present practice assemblies meet, sit in judgment, deliberate,  
5 and decide, and their judgments an relate to individual cases. Now any member of the  
assembly, taken separately, is certainly inferior to the wise man. But the state is made up of  
many individuals. And as a feast to which all the guests contribute is better than a banquet  
furnished by a single man, so a multitude is a better judge of many things than any  
individual.

10 Again, the many are more incorruptible than the few; they are like the greater quantity of  
water which is less easily corrupted than a little. The individual is liable to be overcome by  
anger or by some other passion, and then his judgment is necessarily perverted; but it is  
hardly to be supposed that a great number of persons would all get into a passion and go  
15 wrong at the same moment. Let us assume that they are the freemen, and that they never act  
in violation of the law, but fill up the gaps which the law is obliged to leave. Or, if such  
virtue is scarcely attainable by the multitude, we need only suppose that the majority are  
good men and good citizens, and ask which will be the more incorruptible, the one good  
ruler, or the many who are all good? Will not the many? But, you will say, there may be  
20 parties among them, whereas the one man is not divided against himself. To which we may  
answer that their character is as good as his. If we call the rule of many men, who are all of  
them good, aristocracy, and the rule of one man royalty, then aristocracy will be better for  
states than royalty, whether the government is supported by force or not, provided only that  
a number of men equal in virtue can be found.

25 The first governments were kingships, probably for this reason, because of old, when cities  
were small, men of eminent virtue were few. Further, they were made kings because they  
were benefactors, and benefits can only be bestowed by good men. But when many persons  
equal in merit arose, no longer enduring the pre-eminence of one, they desired to have a  
commonwealth, and set up a constitution. The ruling class soon deteriorated and enriched  
30 themselves out of the public treasury; riches became the path to honor, and so oligarchies  
naturally grew up. These passed into tyrannies and tyrannies into democracies; for love of  
gain in the ruling classes was always tending to diminish their number, and so to strengthen  
the masses, who in the end set upon their masters and established democracies. Since cities  
have increased in size, no other form of government appears to be any longer even easy to  
35 establish.

1 Even supposing the principle to be maintained that kingly power is the best thing for states,  
how about the family of the king? Are his children to succeed him? If they are no better than  
anybody else, that will be mischievous. But, says the lover of royalty, the king, though he  
might, will not hand on his power to his children. That, however, is hardly to be expected,  
5 and is too much to ask of human nature. There is also a difficulty about the force which he is  
to employ; should a king have guards about him by whose aid he may be able to coerce the  
refractory? If not, how will he administer his kingdom? Even if he be the lawful sovereign  
who does nothing arbitrarily or contrary to law, still he must have some force wherewith to  
maintain the law. In the case of a limited monarchy there is not much difficulty in answering  
10 this question; the king must have such force as will be more than a match for one or more  
individuals, but not so great as that of the people. The ancients observe this principle when  
they have guards to any one whom they appointed dictator or tyrant. Thus, when Dionysius  
asked the Syracusans to allow him guards, somebody advised that they should give him only  
such a number.

## 15 XVI

At this place in the discussion there impends the inquiry respecting the king who acts solely  
according to his own will he has now to be considered. The so-called limited monarchy, or  
kingship according to law, as I have already remarked, is not a distinct form of government,  
20 for under all governments, as, for example, in a democracy or aristocracy, there may be a  
general holding office for life, and one person is often made supreme over the administration  
of a state. A magistracy of this kind exists at Epidamnus, and also at Opus, but in the latter  
city has a more limited power. Now, absolute monarchy, or the arbitrary rule of a sovereign  
over an the citizens, in a city which consists of equals, is thought by some to be quite  
25 contrary to nature; it is argued that those who are by nature equals must have the same  
natural right and worth, and that for unequals to have an equal share, or for equals to have  
an uneven share, in the offices of state, is as bad as for different bodily constitutions to have  
the same food and clothing. Wherefore it is thought to be just that among equals every one  
be ruled as well as rule, and therefore that an should have their turn. We thus arrive at law;  
30 for an order of succession implies law. And the rule of the law, it is argued, is preferable to  
that of any individual. On the same principle, even if it be better for certain individuals to  
govern, they should be made only guardians and ministers of the law. For magistrates there  
must be—this is admitted; but then men say that to give authority to any one man when all  
are equal is unjust. Nay, there may indeed be cases which the law seems unable to determine,  
35 but in such cases can a man? Nay, it will be replied, the law trains officers for this express

1 purpose, and appoints them to determine matters which are left undecided by it, to the best  
of their judgment. Further, it permits them to make any amendment of the existing laws  
which experience suggests. Therefore he who bids the law rule may be deemed to bid God  
and Reason alone rule, but he who bids man rule adds an element of the beast; for desire is a  
5 wild beast, and passion perverts the minds of rulers, even when they are the best of men. The  
law is reason unaffected by desire. We are told that a patient should call in a physician; he  
will not get better if he is doctored out of a book. But the parallel of the arts is clearly not in  
point; for the physician does nothing contrary to rule from motives of friendship; he only  
cures a patient and takes a fee; whereas magistrates do many things from spite and partiality.  
10 And, indeed, if a man suspected the physician of being in league with his enemies to destroy  
him for a bribe, he would rather have recourse to the book. But certainly physicians, when  
they are sick, call in other physicians, and training-masters, when they are in training, other  
training-masters, as if they could not judge judge truly about their own case and might be  
influenced by their feelings. Hence it is evident that in seeking for justice men seek for the  
15 mean or neutral, for the law is the mean. Again, customary laws have more weight, and relate  
to more important matters, than written laws, and a man may be a safer ruler than the  
written law, but not safer than the customary law.

Again, it is by no means easy for one man to superintend many things; he will have to  
20 appoint a number of subordinates, and what difference does it make whether these  
subordinates always existed or were appointed by him because he needed them? If, as I said  
before, the good man has a right to rule because he is better, still two good men are better  
than one: this is the old saying, two going together, and the prayer of Agamemnon,

25 Would that I had ten such councillors!

And at this day there are magistrates, for example judges, who have authority to decide some  
matters which the law is unable to determine, since no one doubts that the law would  
command and decide in the best manner whatever it could. But some things can, and other  
things cannot, be comprehended under the law, and this is the origin of the nexted question  
30 whether the best law or the best man should rule. For matters of detail about which men  
deliberate cannot be included in legislation. Nor does any one deny that the decision of such  
matters must be left to man, but it is argued that there should be many judges, and not one  
only. For every ruler who has been trained by the law judges well; and it would surely seem  
strange that a person should see better with two eyes, or hear better with two ears, or act  
35 better with two hands or feet, than many with many; indeed, it is already the practice of

1 kings to make to themselves many eyes and ears and hands and feet. For they make  
colleagues of those who are the friends of themselves and their governments. They must be  
friends of the monarch and of his government; if not his friends, they will not do what he  
wants; but friendship implies likeness and equality; and, therefore, if he thinks that his  
5 friends ought to rule, he must think that those who are equal to himself and like himself  
ought to rule equally with himself. These are the principal controversies relating to  
monarchy.

## XVII

10 But may not all this be true in some cases and not in others? for there is by nature both a  
justice and an advantage appropriate to the rule of a master, another to kingly rule, another  
to constitutional rule; but there is none naturally appropriate to tyranny, or to any other  
perverted form of government; for these come into being contrary to nature. Now, to judge  
at least from what has been said, it is manifest that, where men are alike and equal, it is  
15 neither expedient nor just that one man should be lord of all, whether there are laws, or  
whether there are no laws, but he himself is in the place of law. Neither should a good man  
be lord over good men, nor a bad man over bad; nor, even if he excels in virtue, should he  
have a right to rule, unless in a particular case, at which I have already hinted, and to which I  
will once more recur. But first of all, I must determine what natures are suited for  
20 government by a king, and what for an aristocracy, and what for a constitutional  
government.

A people who are by nature capable of producing a race superior in the virtue needed for  
political rule are fitted for kingly government; and a people submitting to be ruled as  
25 freemen by men whose virtue renders them capable of political command are adapted for an  
aristocracy; while the people who are suited for constitutional freedom are those among  
whom there naturally exists a warlike multitude able to rule and to obey in turn by a law  
which gives office to the well-to-do according to their desert. But when a whole family or  
some individual, happens to be so pre-eminent in virtue as to surpass all others, then it is just  
30 that they should be the royal family and supreme over all, or that this one citizen should be  
king of the whole nation. For, as I said before, to give them authority is not only agreeable to  
that ground of right which the founders of all states, whether aristocratical, or oligarchical, or  
again democratical, are accustomed to put forward (for these all recognize the claim of  
excellence, although not the same excellence), but accords with the principle already laid  
35 down. For surely it would not be right to kill, or ostracize, or exile such a person, or require

1 that he should take his turn in being governed. The whole is naturally superior to the part,  
and he who has this pre-eminence is in the relation of a whole to a part. But if so, the only  
alternative is that he should have the supreme power, and that mankind should obey him,  
not in turn, but always. These are the conclusions at which we arrive respecting royalty and  
5 its various forms, and this is the answer to the question, whether it is or is not advantageous  
to states, and to which, and how.

## XVIII

10 We maintain that the true forms of government are three, and that the best must be that  
which is administered by the best, and in which there is one man, or a whole family, or many  
persons, excelling all the others together in virtue, and both rulers and subjects are fitted, the  
one to rule, the others to be ruled, in such a manner as to attain the most eligible life. We  
showed at the commencement of our inquiry that the virtue of the good man is necessarily  
15 the same as the virtue of the citizen of the perfect state. Clearly then in the same manner,  
and by the same means through which a man becomes truly good, he will frame a state that  
is to be ruled by an aristocracy or by a king, and the same education and the same habits will  
be found to make a good man and a man fit to be a statesman or a king.

20 Having arrived at these conclusions, we must proceed to speak of the perfect state, and  
describe how it comes into being and is established.