

Introduction to Western Political Thought
Professor Mithilesh Kumar Jha
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology – Guwahati
Lecture 06
Aristotle I: Intro and Ethics or Virtue

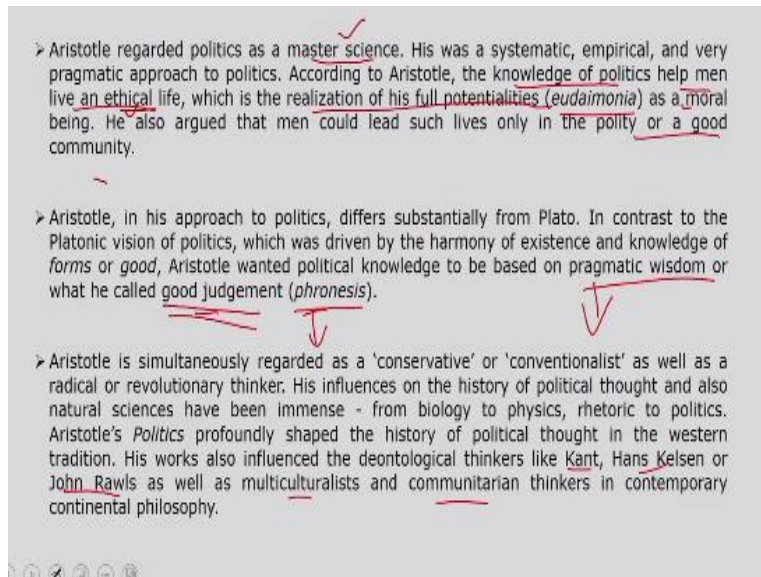
Hello, and welcome, everyone. This is the sixth lecture in this course, and today in this lecture, we will discuss the next and perhaps the most influential thinker in the Western tradition of political thought, Aristotle. On Aristotle, we will have three lectures, and this is part one of those three lectures on Aristotle. In the first lecture, we will discuss his views on ethics or virtue and what it means to lead a good life, and how good life is possible in the community's life. So, focusing on his text on *Nicomachean Ethics*, we are going to understand Aristotle's views on virtue or ethics. In the next lecture, we will discuss his views on *Polis* and his ideal state. How he conceptualizes different kinds of polity or constitution, and argued about a mixed constitution. And in the final lecture or third lecture on Aristotle, we are going to discuss his ideas on citizenship and revolution and how to prevent the revolution, before critically evaluating Aristotle's contributions in thinking about the politics and how it helped or shaped the political thinking of many other thinkers in the Western tradition, including many contemporary thinkers like John Rawls or communitarian and multiculturalists.

Aristotle had profound influence on the thinking and theorization about politics. In today's lecture, we will discuss how Aristotle was extending Plato's argument. What were his views on a good or ethical life? He provides a very influential or pragmatic approach to the study of politics as a systematic or pragmatic science. His notion of politics is very different from the Platonic conception of politics. Although, he is also continuing the Platonic objective or purpose of leading a good life or *Eudaimonia*. He argued that such life is possible in the life of the community. Still, on the question of how to achieve that life or how to create that community there are the substantial differences between Plato and Aristotle, and this we will discuss in today's lecture.

The understanding of politics or political science as a systematic or pragmatic approach to political is attributed to Aristotle. Pragmatism is the defining feature of politics. So, politics, in contrast to philosophy, is a pragmatic science. It helps us understand our society, our community, and how to make that community and society better.

In that sense, politics is a very pragmatic science, and Aristotle is credited with giving this new paradigm to politics and political studies. So, in defining politics, unlike Plato, who was in the realm of the idea or the definite knowledge of forms or good, for Aristotle it is much more pragmatic, or knowledge which is produced through association with others, and that is a substantial shift in Aristotle approach to politics.

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Aristotle regarded politics as a master science, the reason being unlike other disciplines of knowledge such as philosophy or mathematics, politics is a more productive or pragmatic science which gives us not just the knowledge of the society, but also how to lead a good life and that ethical component of politics is what makes it a desirable forms of knowledge or a form of knowledge which is much more productive, much more pragmatic than other disciplines, which is knowledge for the sake of knowledge.

The purpose of knowledge for Aristotle is to help us lead a good life. To lead a good life is to lead a moral and ethical life; and that requires sound knowledge or sound pragmatic wisdom. He is regarded as the father of political science, or someone who regarded politics as a master science which allows us to negotiate between different positions, conflicting opinions. The political judgement requires the knowledge of both the specificities and also the ethical, moral position; and the combination of ethical, moral knowledge and the knowledge of political or specific contexts enables the statesman to harmonize what is best, what is good for that particular time, for that particular society.

Aristotle's approach towards politics, which is a pragmatic or empirical and scientific approach, makes him the founder of political science. As I said, he has a very systematic, empirical, and pragmatic approach to politics. He does not regard politics as merely about philosophical speculation and contemplation; it is a pragmatic science which gives us the knowledge of the world in which we live; and then, it enables us to live a good life, a moral, ethical life in the world as it is, not as it should be or as it ought to be in our philosophical speculation and contemplation. So, according to Aristotle, the knowledge of politics helps man live an ethical life. We are going to discuss what does it mean to lead an ethical life? Here, you can think of ethical life as realizing one's full potentiality, that is, *Eudaimonia*. Often we translate this term *Eudaimonia* as happiness or flourishing life. But *Eudaimonia* is a Greek term, which means realizing the true potentiality and how society helps us realize that true potentiality. So, only a good society or a just society could enable the individual to lead the fullest moral, ethical life that is the true nature of his being.

So, as a moral being, the true realization or the actualization of potentiality requires the knowledge of politics. Here the politics, as we know it in today's term, is not just about power for the sake of power. Politics is an art and science that enables us to lead an ethical and moral life. And to lead a moral and ethical life it is not enough to have just the philosophical contemplation but also a pragmatic knowledge. Thus, in Aristotle, we will discuss how he combines the knowledge with the experience. The judgement, that is required to lead a good life, is based on the percept that the individuals are rational; therefore, they will have judgement, but that judgement should not be based on philosophical speculation or the knowledge of books alone. He or she should also know about the pragmatic living or the experiences. That combination of experience and the knowledge of moral or ethical principles enables the individual to make good judgement or sound judgement.

So, Aristotle did not give us the exact principle to follow, and regarded them as moral or ethical. Individual himself or herself arrive at that moral, ethical judgement when he or she combines the knowledge of ethics or morality with the knowledge of the pragmatic world and that enables the possibility of realizing one's true potentialities that is what Aristotle argues. And for him that ethical or moral life a man can live only in a community or polity. So, there is no question of living an ethical life outside the community. That is very different from our modern understanding of moral and ethical, which is too subjective or individualistic. Modern age, to a great extent, is also the individual's age, individual innovation, individual knowledge,

individual wisdom, and so on. But Aristotle imagined the possibility of an ethical life for the individual only in the community; outside the community, according to Aristotle, only God or the beast lives; men realize his true ethical or moral potentiality only in the community.

So, in his approach to politics, Aristotle differs substantially from Plato. Platonic vision of politics, as we have discussed before, is driven by the harmony of existence. Plato was always looking for certain knowledge or unchangeable forms of goods that will help the philosopher-king ensure a life of harmony where every class will act according to their nature. There will be no need for laws, interference in each other's work. A life of perfect harmony is realizing their true self or true potentiality. In contrast to this kind of Platonic conception, Aristotle wanted political knowledge to be based on pragmatic wisdom. Therefore, politics is a pragmatic science, and this pragmatic wisdom enables the individual who is rational, moral, or ethical being to have good and sound political judgement.

To have good judgement, Aristotle does not give us the definite maxim of good or bad. He provides us with the mechanism to arrive at a good judgement. So, a rational person with practical wisdom will always have the right judgement. It cannot be pre-given. It requires the knowledge of both, ethical and moral which human beings essentially are and also the pragmatic knowledge of his life in the community or the society in which he or she lives. This combination enables the individual to arrive at this good, moral, ethical judgement which is called *Phronesis* in Greek, which is very different from the Platonic conception of the 'theory of forms' or 'theory of good'. In Aristotle, you have the simultaneous presence of both *deontology*, or a kind of, many people will argue, the relative notion of morality and ethics.

He is also seen as a conservative or supporter of status-quo or conventionalist. Many people will regard him as a radical or revolutionary thinker because of his theory on the revolution, which we will discuss later in this course. He had a great influence on the theory of politics or the history of political thought and also natural science. Let us not forget that Aristotle has also influenced many natural scientists. In modern astronomical or physical science, Galileo was deeply influenced by Aristotle's method of explaining the phenomena. So, it is not just to have the intuition and knowledge based on one's speculation. It must be explained and explained in a manner where it is possible to experiment; it should not be subjective or contemplative alone; it has to be explained. And similarly, his notion of morality or ethics or human nature or why to lead a life in the communities are explained in an objective, pragmatic manner not in a philosophical, speculative manner. Thus, Aristotle has influenced or shaped not just political

thinking or theorization but also many other natural sciences such as physics, biology, medicine, and others and particularly in the history of political thought in the western tradition.

If you look at the contribution of Hobbes, who begins his theory by studying the human nature, or Kant, who talks about the categorical imperative or a priori maxim or even to a great extent, Hegel was deeply influenced by the political thinking and theorization of Aristotle, particularly his work *Politics*. And in many modern universities, history of western political thought begins with Aristotle. However, we need to understand that what we have today as Aristotle's writings are not in an orderly manner. Many scholars have argued that access that we have to Aristotle's writings is at the best lectures taken by his disciples and in modern European discourse on the political thought or the history of political thought, it is through the translation of Aristotle's works by Ibn Sina or Ibn Rushd in Arab traditions. Then from Arabic, it was translated to modern English and other European languages.

There are many contradictions or ironies or ordering about *Politics* and other works of Aristotle. We do not have the exact access to the proper ordering of Aristotle's works. However, it has influenced several thinkers, not just the political thinkers and philosophers, but also the natural scientist, as I have said. His works have also influenced the deontological thinkers like Kant, Hans Kelsen and John Rawls particularly who is famous for *A Theory of Justice* and its deontological basis and also multiculturalists and the communitarian thinkers in contemporary continental philosophy who argued that human beings are not, as many liberals argue, self-defining atomistic subjects, but embedded individuals who derive their notion of good, bad, desirable, undesirable from the community in which they live. So, the multiculturalists argument or the communitarian argument that individual self or subjectivity is the embedded subjectivity also has their roots in Aristotelian writings. Aristotle argues that human beings are, by nature, the associational beings that is they realize their true ethical or moral potentialities only in the community.

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Aristotle (384-322 BC): Brief-bio & major works

- Aristotle was born in a remote town in Stagira, Macedonia. His father was a physician in the Macedonian court. His early interest was in the study of biology and medicine. However, in his youth as seventeen years old, he went to Athens to study philosophy in the academy of Plato. He spent most of his productive years there. But he was not a native citizen of Athens and hence could not participate in its active politics.
- He stayed in the academy for twenty years and left after the death of Plato in 347 BC. He taught Alexander for six years. He returned to Athens in 335 BC and established his academy, *Lyceum*. Aristotle followed and promoted scientific, empirical, and pragmatic knowledge of the world. Subjects like biology, theology, metaphysics, astronomy, mathematics, botany, meteorology, ethics, rhetoric, and poetics, as well as art and science of politics, were taught in his *Lyceum*. He was the first to develop the science and art of constitution-making and just state by studying the 158 constitutions prevalent in the Greek city-states.
- It was a time when self-sufficient, autonomous city-states in Greek civilization was gradually giving way to the rise of big empires. King Philip initiated this process, which was taken to the extreme by his son, Alexander the Great. Ultimately Greek city-states and its grandeur were replaced by the rise of the Roman empire, which dominated the politics, thought, and philosophy of Europe throughout the classical and much of the medieval period.

Aristotle was not an Athenian. Yet, he spent most of his productive years in Athens. Aristotle was born in a remote town in Stagira, Macedonia. His father was a physician in Macedonian court, and his early interest was in the study of biology and medicine. However, in his youth as seventeen years old, he went to Athens to study philosophy in Plato's academy. Thus, he came to Athens as seventeen years old to study philosophy under the tutelage of Plato, and he spent most of his productive years there. Still, he was not a native citizen of Athens; and hence could not participate in the active politics of the *Polis*.

Although he has the friends among the oligarchs and also among the democrats, he could not participate in the political life of Athens and yet the political discourse, debates, and the way Athenian society govern itself were something which Aristotle appreciated. Both - Plato and Aristotle, were trying to restore order, morality, and justice in the management of common affairs which was declining. Aristotle stayed in the academy of Plato for twenty years and left after Plato's death in 347 BC.

He also has the distinction of teaching the world conqueror or Alexander the Great for six years. He returned to Athens in 335 BC and established his academy, which is called *Lyceum*. It is different from Plato's academy, where he studied. It was the dominant school for teaching in the art of metaphysics, politics, poetry, and so on. Aristotle, followed and promoted scientific, empirical, and pragmatic knowledge of the world. So, the initial training of Aristotle in biology - and the knowledge of biology requires the knowledge of organisms, the classification of organisms, and understanding the nature of organisms by their function, by their performance, by the realization of their true potentialities, shaped the political thinking or theorization of

Aristotle in the later years. His academy could be truly regarded as the university in the modern sense of the term. The subjects from biology to theology, metaphysics to astronomy, mathematics to botany, meteorology, ethics, rhetoric, and poetics, as well as the art and science of politics, were taught in the *Lyceum* that Aristotle established and he was the first to develop the science and art of constitution-making and just state.

Thus, how to organize or form a just state; and how the constitution should govern that just state; why it should be a mixed constitution; and the nature of just state or the constitution, we will discuss in the next class. Still, this knowledge of just state and constitution-making is not through philosophical speculation alone. But by classifying the existing knowledge, the prevalent opinion and then based on that, developing the correct knowledge or sound judgement about the desirable or undesirable political action for the individual and the society and community. He was the first who developed the science and art of constitution-making and just state by studying the 158 constitutions. This was a remarkable feat considering the constraints of his time. He collected 158 constitutions. By comparing these constitutions, he arrived at the classification of constitution and how to create a just good society, which we will discuss later. Still, the very knowledge of that good society or correct political judgement is based on an empirical, scientific, pragmatic study of existing phenomena, not the Platonic means of knowing what is the true certain unchangeable forms divide from the pragmatic manifestation of those.

If you look at Aristotle's time, it was a time when the self-sufficient, autonomous city-states in Greek civilization was gradually paving the way for the rise of big empires. So, the arts, philosophy, and culture developed in the Greek city-states because of the nature of these city-states, which was self-sufficient, distinct, and autonomous, and most of the productive works were done by the slaves. The male citizens were then left to think about managing the common affairs of the community in a much more ethical, moral, and just manner.

And how to do it? Socrates began to reflect on this. Plato thought about it differently. Aristotle gives a different meaning or connotation to the whole objective of politics and the ideal state. So, in Aristotle's time, these self-sufficient, autonomous city-states were gradually paving the way for the rise of big empires. King Philip, who was the first empire builder, which tried to unite the small or self-sufficient autonomous city-states and to create a major political force or kingdom, initiated this process of empire building, which was taken to the extreme by his son Alexander the Great. Ultimately, Greek city-states and its grandeur were replaced by the rise

of the Roman empire, which dominated Europe's political thought, and philosophy throughout the classical and much of the medieval period. So, Aristotle was thinking or writing about politics or the ideal state in a time of transition from the Greek city-states to the big empires.

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- Aristotle, though revered in Athens, was not welcome in the city as Macedonia, his native state, had defeated Athens twice. Although, he had the support of the Macedonian rulers and later from a tyrant, King Hermias, whom he is said to have taught. After the death of Alexander in 323 BC, resentments in Athens against the Macedonian over-lordship forced Aristotle to flee Athens, and he died in exile, aged 62 in 322 BC.
- Aristotle spent most of his productive years in Athens first as a student and later as the philosopher or teacher in his Lyceum. He wrote and collected materials in all the branches of learning. His Lyceum had a library, and he is also credited with founding the first zoo. His scientific knowledge of a phenomenon was based on the study of the nature of the objects, its classification among the species, and its functions.
- His major works are – Metaphysics, Nichomachean Ethics, Politics, Rhetoric. However, Politics is regarded as his magnum opus, where he illustrates his vision of the ideal polity and the role of politics. Nichomachean Ethics deals with the idea of how to lead a good life, how virtue is central to leading a good life, and how to achieve it in the community. Thus, Nichomachean Ethics could be seen as an introduction to his Politics.

Aristotle was revered in Athens. He had many disciples. But he was not welcome in the city as Macedonia, his native state, had defeated Athens twice. Although he had Macedonian rulers' support and later from a tyrant named King Hermias; he said to have taught him and also married his niece or daughter. Thus, Aristotle has enough royal support to pursue science or knowledge, and the ways to impart them among his disciples. In that pursuits, he had the support of royalty. However, after Alexander's death in 323 BC, resentment in Athens against the Macedonian over-lordship forced Aristotle to flee Athens, and he died in exile, aged 62 in 322 BC. Thus, Aristotle spent most of his productive years in Athens first as a student and later as a philosopher or teacher in his renowned academy – *Lyceum*; and he wrote and collected materials in all the branches of learning, including biology, physics, medicine, geology, botany and also politics. His *Lyceum* had a remarkable library for his time. So knowledge production was not merely the exercise of speculation and contemplation for Aristotle. Although that is a necessary part of it. But it has to be grounded in the real, empirical, pragmatic world. So, he is credited with this library, and also he founded the first zoo. His scientific knowledge of a phenomena was based on studying the nature of objects, its classification among the other species in the world, and its function. So, we will see how he applied this to understanding human nature as well.

His understanding of morality, ethics, and polity is based on his understanding of human nature, which is ethical and moral. The whole purpose of politics is to realize that ethical and moral life. His major works are *Metaphysics*, *Nichomachean Ethics*, *Politics*, and *Rhetoric*. However, *Politics* is regarded as his *magnum opus*, the most celebrated work of Aristotle, where he illustrates his vision of the ideal polity and the role of politics in that polity. *Nichomachean Ethics* deals with the idea of how to lead a good life, how virtue is central to leading a good life, and how to achieve such good life or moral, ethical life in the community. Thus *Nichomachean Ethics* of Aristotle could be seen as an introduction to his *Politics* to which we turn. So, we will discuss Aristotle's ideal state and the constitution's classification in the next lecture. In today's lecture in the remaining part, we will discuss his views on virtue, ethics, or morality.

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Dear is Plato, but dearer still is the truth. (Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas)
- Aristotle

- Aristotle's vision of politics and ethics was profoundly shaped and influenced by the teachings of Plato. Plato adored him and regarded him as the brightest of his disciples. Although it is fashionable to pit Aristotle against Plato. However, both the thinkers did share many common ideas, such as the purpose of life is the realization of full human potentialities (eudaimonia). A happy life is a virtuous life. A virtuous life is possible only in a virtuous and a just polity.
- However, the significant difference between the two was in their understanding of and approach to politics. It is beautifully depicted in a painting - The School of Athens by Raphael, where otherworldly Plato is seen gesturing towards the heaven whereas Aristotle was pointing towards the ground.
- Thus, for Aristotle politics as a pragmatic science should concern with - what is, rather than, what ought to be. However, it should not be construed that Aristotle denied any role of ethics or idealism in politics. The very purpose of politics for Aristotle is to ensure the ethical and moral lives of the individuals.

But before we turn to that, it is also necessary to understand the difference and similarities between Plato and Aristotle. This particular sentence sums up this relationship between Plato and Aristotle, where he writes that 'Dear is Plato, but dearer still is the truth' (*Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas*). Thus, the search after the truth is not restrained by his reverence to Plato. We regard Plato as the philosopher or a teacher who should be respected, which is dear to him, but truth and the search after truth is much dearer than the Plato or reverence to Plato. Aristotle's vision of politics and ethics was profoundly shaped and influenced by the teachings of Plato. Plato adored him and regarded him as the brightest of his disciples, and although in the later period, it is fashionable to pit Plato against Aristotle, or Aristotle against Plato. However, both the thinkers did share many common ideas such as what is the purpose of life?

That purpose, according to them is the realization is full human potentiality, that is *Eudaimonia*, which we translate as happiness or living a flourishing life, but it had a much broader connotation in Greek times than we have it now. If we translate it, say *Eudaimonia* means leading a happy life. Now, how are you going to lead a happy life? Is it through the accumulation of wealth or gratification of many of our sense-desires or what we call self-indulgence? These could not lead us to a good life. A good life requires knowledge of ethics or morality. And this is much more in Kantian philosophy when we will discuss categorical or hypothetical imperatives. So, we do certain things because they help us in the gratification of our desires, of our appetites, but that is not the realization of *Eudaimonia* or the true potentialities of human. To be human, is to be an ethical and moral being, and the whole purpose of politics is to enable the condition where a human being could lead a good, ethical, and moral life.

Both Plato and Aristotle share this idea that life's purpose is to realize true potentialities and happy life is virtuous life, and virtuous life is possible only in a virtuous and just polity. So, here, in Aristotle, what you find is a circular argument, not a clear cut definition or proposition to lead a good life. He argues that a good life is a virtuous life. A virtuous life is possible only in the city. The city should be virtuous and just to enable the condition that will allow the individual to lead a virtuous life. So, there is a kind of circular argumentation in Aristotle rather than giving a more concrete proposition. It allows different interpretations of ethics and morality or virtue in Aristotle's works. So, deontological thinkers will interpret it in the one way; multiculturalists or the communitarian will interpret Aristotle's ethics in a different way.

Let's come back to the significant difference or the similarities between Plato and Aristotle. There are similarities between the two thinkers. Still, the profound difference between the two was in their understanding of, or approach to politics. Raphael beautifully depicts this difference in his painting, which is called *The School of Athens*. You can now think of the Platonic conception of physics or metaphysics or politics taught in his academy and *Lyceum* of Aristotle. If these two schools are compared and the name of this painting is given as *The School of Athens*. Raphael project both Plato and Aristotle by describing or depicting Plato as otherworldly; seen gesturing towards heaven. He is looking-up to have the knowledge of the world, which is the imperfect manifestation of something certain, unchangeable; that is possible through the knowledge of metaphysics, mathematics, or dialectics which only the philosopher could comprehend. For the rest of the population, it is incomprehensible. The

philosopher then enlightens them about the 'theory of the forms' and 'theory of the good'. Therefore, his justification for the philosopher rule or rule by the philosopher. Whereas in this painting, Aristotle is seen pointing towards the ground. To know the good or ethical judgement, one must understand or examine the phenomena in the world we live, not outside of it, not in the heaven. So, this painting beautifully depicts the difference between Plato and Aristotle. Thus for Aristotle, politics as a pragmatic science should concern *what is* rather than *what ought to be*. Now, suppose we understand this difference between Plato and Aristotle's approach to politics. In that case, we should not construe Aristotle denying any role of ethics and morality for ideal forms or the notion of good in politics. Politics, for Aristotle, is the science and art of ethics; it is to ensure the ethical and moral lives of the individuals.

The very purpose of politics, for Aristotle, is to create the condition to enable the human being to have good judgement about how to lead a good life, which requires associational life with others in the community. One cannot be ethical outside the community, living on his or her terms. It is perhaps the contradiction of modern life where we think that being moral is to be something which is individual-centric. So there is the kind of contradiction you will find at one profess something, but practice something differently, and thereby there is a contradiction in the self. So, to lead a moral, ethical life in the true sense of the term is to live with others and that living with others help us realize our true ethical, moral being; not without the community; not without the associational life as many would argue that you have to be truthful or moral or ethical without any regard for what is the prevalent norms of morality and ethics in your society. So, that is something which Aristotle disapproved of.

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Nichomachean Ethics: Ethics and Virtue

Man is, by nature, a social and political animal. The one who does not live in a society/community is either a god or a beast. – Aristotle

- Aristotle's political theory starts with the study of the nature of the man who, according to him, is a *Zoon politikon* (social and political animal). He classifies men as animals among the species. However, he regards men as distinct from other species in terms of being rational and having the language to communicate their ideas. He also argues that man alone is capable of knowing or having a sense of 'good and evil or just and unjust'. And, that makes a man by nature a moral or ethical being.
- The nature of a thing for Aristotle lies in its 'soul' (*psyche*), with its 'purpose' (*telos*), and its 'function' (*ergon*). Thus a good life is to act according to one's nature, performing one's task and thereby realizing one's full potentialities. Good and evil are determined by the action, which helps the object realize its potentialities. Thus, at all times, things are in constant movement from potentialities to realization and beyond to decay and transformation.
- He argued that fully human life is associational life – living together, harmoniously in the community, or polis with others. This polis or community for Aristotle is not merely a political body but also an ethical body based on certain shared values.

What is then ethics and virtue for Aristotle? Man, Aristotle argued, is by nature, a social and political animal. The one who does not live in a society or community is either a God or a beast. That is how he situates human beings in the realm of God, beast, and other species in the world. By nature, man is a social and political animal, and he realizes his true potentialities only when he lives in the community. Outside the community, outside the state, only Gods or beasts can live. Aristotle's political theory starts with the study of the organisms; the basis of the whole argument about the ideal polity or ideal society or moral, ethical life starts with the understanding of the nature of the man – who, according to Aristotle, are *Zoon Politikon*. *Zoon Politikon* means social and political animals. Thus, he classifies man as animals among the many species in the world.

Guided by the zoological or botanical understanding of the world's species, he regarded men as animals. However, he regarded men as distinct from other species in terms of being both rational and having the language to communicate their ideas. And this capacity to be rational and have the language to communicate their own ideas to others, distinguished men from the other species in the world, according to Aristotle. So, he argues that man alone can or have a sense of what is good and evil, just and unjust. He, thus, adds one more characteristic to human nature: he or she is rational, and has a language to communicate his/her ideas to others. Still, he or she also has a sense of justice a sense of morality, and this again is something which is not spelled out and this we can, later on, construe based on the idea that any action that helps the object to realize its true potentiality is good or any action that is not helping the object to realize its true potentiality is bad. For example, a knife has to be sharp; now, the sharpness is the potentiality of a knife or the true nature. So, to perform its action in a manner that helps its

sharpness, which allows it to perform its action, is good, and anything that does not help it realize its potentiality is bad.

We will come back to this question. Aristotle argues that human nature is also essentially moral and ethical. That means a man is by nature a moral and ethical being; and the nature of a thing, for Aristotle, lies in three things - soul (psyche), purpose (which is the *telos*); and its functions (which is *ergon*). So, all things and objects in the world constantly try to realize its full potentiality, and in the pursuit of that realization, it is driven by its purpose or *telos*. So, for a seed, its purpose or *telos* is to become a tree. Thus, the purpose of seeds and its action is to realize the worth of a full grown plant or tree; so is the purpose or *telos* of life for the human beings. All human beings are rational and moral. However, many of them could be insane or behave irrationally. But, that does not undermine the fact that all human beings are by nature capable of leading a moral and ethical life. The ultimate purpose or *Eudaimonia* or living life to the fullest potential of being human is to lead a moral and ethical life. So, any diversions that lead to immoral, unethical, or irrational acts are bad or unethical. That is true in contemporary discourse too. You also know certain actions, certain human beings, certain ideals that you imitate for your one life. Certain things motivate you, and that often is a sense of ethics, a sense of morality guided by reason and rationality. There are also the examples of those who are corrupt – morally and ethically. You tend to distance from that person, those behavior, those actions. So, the nature of any object, including the human beings, for Aristotle, is to be understood based on these three things soul, purpose, and the function of that object. A good life, for Aristotle, is to act according to one's nature, performing one's task, and thereby realizing one's full potential. It is true with plants; it is true with a knife; it is true with a human being; it is true with a horse, and every object on this planet. All the objects will have their nature, and its whole function is to realize that full potentiality or the full realization of his or her nature. So, at all times, things are in the constant movement from potentiality to realization and beyond to decay and transformation that is the movement in any object's life.

A human being from childhood or birth to death constantly tries to perfect himself/herself. Perfection requires living the associational life with others, constantly trying to perfect the moral, ethical understanding of life, thereby living a good, happy moral, and ethical life. So, he argued that the fully human life is associational life living together harmoniously in the community or *polis* with others. This *polis* or community, for Aristotle, is not merely a political

body, but also an ethical body based on certain shared values which we will discuss in a moment.

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- Knowledge of *teleology* or *telos*, according to Aristotle, is necessary to know the nature of the objects. It is to be recognized by identifying the end-result or final-outcome of an object – for example, seed and tree. Similarly, the *telos* of a man is to achieve self-perfection or happiness (*eudaimonia*) by living an ethical and moral life. Moral or ethical life is possible only in the political community. Living in the community requires the knowledge of politics, which in the broadest sense of the term, necessitates the knowledge of ethics. And therefore, at the beginning of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle regards politics as the master science.
- Although he regards politics as a master science. He thought of it as an *inexact* but productive science which is different from the exact or esoteric sciences like mathematics or physics. He also differentiated it from philosophic speculations and intuitions. He argued that the knowledge of politics should be based on the observable phenomenon and the pragmatic wisdom or judgement (*phronesis*) guided by the customs and conventions of a particular society. Thus, good or right judgement is based on the knowledge of general (ethics) as well as the specificities of the context (politics). It is to be acquired not only through the knowledge of books but through experience by living associational lives in the community.
- He argued that the moral or ethical question is a matter of choice and character that applies to human lives and their community alone. Its application is dependent upon the fact that it could improve the things for better or more just. Such situation is unimaginable for other species or natural phenomena.

The knowledge of *teleology* or *telos*, according to Aristotle, is necessary to know the nature of the objects. It is to be recognized by identifying the final result or outcome of an object. For example, the seed and the tree, so the tree is in the seed's *telos*. So, the ultimate function and purpose of seed are to become a tree, so is true with the human being. The ultimate objective is to lead an ethical life. It starts with the household or in the community. Finally, according to Aristotle, the full realization of the ethical or moral life is possible only in the polity or state. So, a man's *telos* is to achieve self-perfection or happiness – *Eudaimonia*, by living an ethical and moral life. Moral or ethical life is possible only in the political community. Hence, outside the political community, the life possible only for the beasts or Gods; human beings are neither beast nor God. As a human being, then to realize or perfect one moral and ethical life is to live harmoniously in the community with others. So, living in the community requires the knowledge of politics, which necessitates the knowledge of ethics in the broadest sense of the term. So, there is a kind of Greek integration of ethics with politics.

Now in contemporary understanding, we often associate politics as the knowledge of power and how to acquire power for its own sake. But in the Greek understanding of politics or the knowledge of politics requires the knowledge of ethics. According to Aristotle, it teaches us how to realize that ethics in a given circumstance, in a given society by knowing its convention and customs and the pursuit of ethics or virtue. Therefore, at the beginning of *Nicomachean ethics*, Aristotle regards politics as a master science. It is not just the knowledge about the world as it is in the other academic subjects; but, it is a form of knowledge, unlike other subjects, that helps us lead a good life. So, one can be happy with contemplating or thinking about

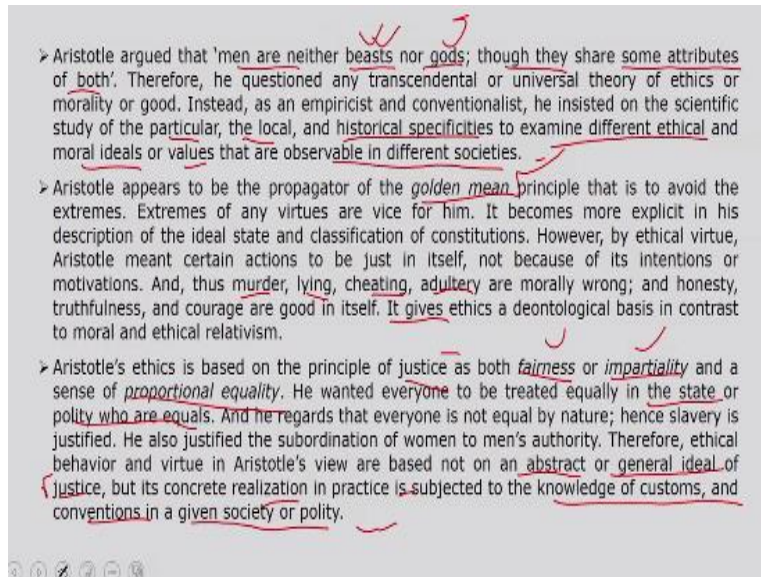
knowledge, which is in itself sufficient. Still, here in the political knowledge, you have the potentiality or the scope of living a good, moral, ethical life as well, and that is the whole objective of politics.

Aristotle regarded politics as a master science. However, he thought of it as an *inexact* – that is not precise, not a fixed science. Although it is a productive science, it is inexact in the sense that it is different from the exact or the esoteric science like mathematics or physics. He also differentiated it from philosophical speculation and intuition, which he regarded as knowledge for the sake of knowledge – somebody may enjoy that knowledge. But to lead a moral, ethical life, one needs to know politics which requires the knowledge of ethics and being rational. He argued that knowledge of politics should be based on observable phenomena and pragmatic wisdom or judgement (*phronesis*). Now, as I said that this knowledge of practical wisdom is unique, where there is no *given* proposition as to how to arrive at a moral judgement. He believes that a human being as a rational, ethical being when they combine the knowledge of ethics with the pragmatic knowledge of the world in which he lives, they would arrive at correct knowledge and sound political judgement. The combination of these two allows a person to arrive at a good moral judgement at any given point of time. Thus good or right judgement is based on the knowledge of general ethics or the universal and the specificities of the context, the politics. It is to be acquired through the knowledge of books and through the experience that is through associational living with others in the community. So, he argues that the moral and ethical question is a matter of choice and character, which applies to human lives and their community alone.

He was also arguing about the moral and ethical dilemmas. Whether to pursue it or not; and why, there is a need to think about the moral and ethical dilemmas. And in the politics, it is always present. How you combine and balance between the competing moral or ethical positions, require the knowledge of the specific customs and conventions in society and the knowledge of a general or universal ethics. And this applies only to human society or human community. Why do we need ethics and morality? He argued that because it helps us to live a better life, to live a happier life, and that is why morality and ethics apply only to the humans and human society and not to the other species like beasts in the jungle or other phenomena or natural phenomena like mountains or rivers. The question of ethics and morality applies only to the human being. Why? Because it helps the human being to live a better life or more just

life, and that is the role of ethics and politics. Although morality and ethics help lead a fully human life, however, man's condition is different.

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Aristotle argues that 'men are neither beasts nor Gods'. We are not animals that we will gratify only our sense desires - hunger, sex, and accumulation of wealth and power, or assertion of our dominance. We are not beast in that sense; but we are also not God who knows everything, who has the transcendental understanding – what is correct in all situations. So, human beings are placed in a position where they are partly beast or driven by the appetite, which is characteristic of a beast or animals. But we are also moral and ethical beings, which enables us to distinguish between good and bad, desirable and undesirable, just and unjust. This idea that men are neither beast nor God, but they share some attributes of both, gives us a unique position and requires us to strive for arriving at a correct moral and political judgement. Thus, Aristotle questioned any transcendental or universal theory of ethics or morality. There could be one principle applicable to all contexts without any distinction; he refutes any such understanding of morality and ethics. Instead, as an empiricist and conventionalist, he insisted on the scientific study of the particular, the local, and historical specificities to examine different ethical or moral ideas or values that are observable in different societies. Aristotle appears to be the propagator of the golden mean principle – to avoid the extremes. Aristotle's approach to ethics is about, we will discuss later how he applied this in his description of ideal polity or ideal life, avoiding the extremes. Suppose what is it to be courageous. For Aristotle, courage has to be a mean point between recklessness and the cowardice. What is truth? Is it to be ruthless in what you say or to be obscure. There has to be a balance, there has to be a mean point, and that mean

point is virtuous. That he calls the golden mean principle. It avoids the extremes. Extreme of anything, for Aristotle, is a vice. To arrive at this mean point or the golden point requires the combination of ethical knowledge with the practical experience in the world or in a given society. This golden mean principle becomes more explicit in his description of the ideal state and classification of the constitution, which will discuss in the next class.

However, by ethical value, Aristotle also meant certain actions to be just in itself; that is, the moral or ethical action is not justified based on its outcomes or consequences. It is morally just or unjust in itself. For instance, murder, lying, cheating, or adultery is morally corrupt or morally wrong; and honesty, truthfulness, courage are good in itself. It gives ethics a kind of generality or universality, which is applicable in all contexts. However, the realization of it requires the knowledge of the particular, the knowledge of the specificities. Thus the idea of ethical and moral norms for Aristotle is not just having a *deontological*, universal, or general understanding of ethics, but the knowledge of the specificities or the particularities and that he makes in his description of the ideal polity as well.

Aristotle's ethics is based on the principle of justice as both fairness or impartiality, and a sense of proportional equality. You do not discriminate against, you reasonably treat individuals in the polity. That is the hallmark of Aristotelian ethics. He wanted everyone to be treated equally in the state or polity who are equals. The proportional equality or fairness or impartiality, for Aristotle, is based on the moral laws that lead to the physical laws or constitution, if you like. The basis of the constitution and the laws are the moral, ethical principles or the shared values in any society. So, justice for Aristotle is fairness or impartiality, nondiscrimination, and a sense of proportional equality. Here, one has to be a bit cautious about Aristotelian ethics, where he argues that everyone should be treated equally in the state. We will discuss in the next class that he differentiated individual's life from a household life to a life in the society or community and finally in the polity or the ideal state. There are different positions of individuals in the household - there are slaves, women, and men. Man's position, according to Aristotle, is superior to women, and women's position is superior to slaves. Still, in the life of the polity, when we will discuss his views on citizens, we will find how he has the absolute notion of equality there.

His approach to justice is the combination of both fairness and impartiality with a sense of proportional equality which treats everyone equally, who are equals; and unequally who are unequals. This is the foundation of mathematical reasoning that is if two things are same and

equal to a third thing they are equal to each other. Now on that position, you have similar arguments in Aristotle's approach to proportional equality also. He wanted males, unlike slaves, free from productive laborers, to be treated equally. but he did not want men and women, or male or slaves to be treated equally, because they are, according to Aristotle, by nature created unequally. Therefore, he regards that everyone is not equal by nature; hence slavery is justified, and he justified the slave and master relations. He also justified women's subordination to men's authorities, which is morally repugnant to our sensibilities. However, in his conception, the natural talents of women's skills were inferior to males, but superior to the slaves. And similarly slaves have inferior qualities than the males, and therefore the unequal treatment of them is morally justified. He justified the subordination of women and slaves to the male. Therefore the ethical behavior and virtue in Aristotle's view are based not only on an abstract or the general ideal of justice - that is a moral position which would be applicable historically in all contexts without any deviations.

He wanted the concrete realization of ethics and morality in practice is subjected to the knowledge of customs and conventions in a given society or polity. That is the hallmark of Aristotelian ethics or leading a moral and ethical life for the individuals. Individuals are rational, although they are animals; or animals who live in the community or society, and beyond that, there is the life of beast or Gods, which human beings are not. This human being is also an animal, but a rational animal having a language to communicate his ideas to others. They have the potential to realize their full potentialities in the community's life. In community they live the associational life with others. So, there is a kind of merger of prophecy and the practices. Actual moral and ethical living requires the knowledge of ethics, general or the abstract, and universal; but also the practical specificities of the societies' customs and traditions. And the merger of these two leads to the practical judgement or the moral judgement which is the result of relentless pursuit of the individuals for leading a moral, ethical and virtuous life which is possible only in the city-states. That's all on Aristotle views on virtue and ethics. We will discuss his views on ideal polity and the constitution's classification in the next class.

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You can refer to some of these books on the topics that we have covered in today's lecture, which are part of other lectures as well like David, Boucher, and Paul Kelly's *Political Thinkers from Socrates to Present*. Will Durant, you can refer to. Murray Forsyth, and Maurice Keens-Soper is an excellent introduction to Aristotle's thought, particularly his views on teleology or telos, ethics, and morality.

Shefali Jha is a good introduction to Aristotle's thought; and also Alan James Ryan's *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present*. These are the texts you should refer to understand Aristotle's views on ethics and politics. Do share your comments and feedback; we will be happy to respond to them. Thanks for listening. Thank you all.