

U.S. Government Readings: Unit One

From the *Republic* of Plato: First Principles  
of Social Organization (1.1)

From the *Politics* of Aristotle: Aristotle's  
View of the State (1.4)

## **1.1: First Principles of Social Organization**

From the *Republic* of Plato, Books II and III, ca. 375 B.C. (Trans. Benjamin Jowett)

[A dialogue between Socrates and *Adeimantus*.]

Justice, which is the subject of our enquiry, is, as you know, sometimes spoken of as the virtue of an individual, and sometimes as the virtue of a State.

*True*, he replied.

And is not a State larger than an individual?

*It is*.

Then in the larger the quantity of justice is likely to be larger and more easily discernible. I propose therefore that we enquire into the nature of justice and injustice, first as they appear in the State, and secondly in the individual, proceeding from the greater to the lesser and comparing them.

*That*, he said, *is an excellent proposal*.

And if we imagine the State in process of creation, we shall see the justice and injustice of the State in process of creation also.

*I dare say*.

When the State is completed there may be a hope that the object of our search will be more easily discovered.

*Yes, far more easily*.

But ought we to attempt to construct one? I said; for to do so, as I am inclined to think, will be a very serious task. Reflect therefore.

*I have reflected*, said *Adeimantus*, *and am anxious that you should proceed*.

A State, I said, arises, as I conceive, out of the needs of mankind; no one is self-sufficing, but all of us have many wants. Can any other origin of a State be imagined?

*There can I be no other*.

Then, as we have many wants, and many persons are needed to supply them, one takes a helper for one purpose and another for another; and when these

partners and helpers are gathered together in one habitation the body of inhabitants is termed a State.

*True*, he said.

And they exchange with one another, and one gives, and another receives, under the idea that the exchange will be for their good.

*Very true*.

Then, I said, let us begin and create in idea a State; and yet the true creator is necessity, who is the mother of our invention.

*Of course*, he replied.

Now the first and greatest of necessities is food, which is the condition of life and existence.

*Certainly*.

The second is a dwelling, and the third clothing and the like.

*True*.

And now let us see how our city will be able to supply this great demand: We may suppose that one man is a husbandman, another a builder, some one else a weaver --shall we add to them a shoemaker, or perhaps some other purveyor to our bodily wants?

*Quite right*.

The barest notion of a State must include four or five men.

*Clearly*.

And how will they proceed? Will each bring the result of his labors into a common stock? --the individual husbandman, for example, producing for four, and laboring four times as long and as much as he need in the provision of food with which he supplies others as well as himself; or will he have nothing to do with others and not be at the trouble of producing for them, but provide for himself alone a fourth of the food in a fourth of the time, and in the remaining three-fourths of his time be employed in making a house or a coat or a pair of shoes, having no partnership with others, but supplying himself all his own wants?

Adeimantus thought that he should aim at producing food only and not at producing everything.

Probably, I replied, that would be the better way; and when I hear you say this, I am myself reminded that we are not all alike; there are diversities of natures among us which are adapted to different occupations.

*Very true.*

And will you have a work better done when the workman has many occupations, or when he has only one?

*When he has only one.*

Further, there can be no doubt that a work is spoilt when not done at the right time?

*No doubt.*

For business is not disposed to wait until the doer of the business is at leisure; but the doer must follow up what he is doing, and make the business his first object.

*He must.*

And if so, we must infer that all things are produced more plentifully and easily and of a better quality when one man does one thing which is natural to him and does it at the right time, and leaves other things.

*Undoubtedly.*

Then more than four citizens will be required; for the husbandman will not make his own plough or mattock, or other implements of agriculture, if they are to be good for anything. Neither will the builder make his tools --and he too needs many; and in like manner the weaver and shoemaker.

*True.*

Then carpenters, and smiths, and many other artisans, will be sharers in our little State, which is already beginning to grow?

*True.*

Yet even if we add [cowherds], shepherds, and other herdsmen, in order that our husbandmen may have oxen to plough with, and builders as well as husbandmen may have draught cattle, and curriers and weavers fleeces and hides, --still our State will not be very large.

*That is true; yet neither will it be a very small State which contains all these.*

Then, again, there is the situation of the city --to find a place where nothing need be imported is well-nigh impossible.

*Impossible.*

Then there must be another class of citizens who will bring the required supply from another city?

*There must.*

But if the trader goes empty-handed, having nothing which they require who would supply his need, he will come back empty-handed.

*That is certain.*

And therefore what they produce at home must be not only enough for themselves, but such both in quantity and quality as to accommodate those from whom their wants are supplied.

*Very true.*

Then more husbandmen and more artisans will be required?

*They will.*

Not to mention the importers and exporters, who are called merchants?

*Yes.*

Then we shall want merchants?

*We shall.*

And if merchandise is to be carried over the sea, skilful sailors will also be needed, and in considerable numbers?

*Yes, in considerable numbers.*

Then, again, within the city, how will they exchange their productions? To secure such an exchange was, as you will remember, one of our principal objects when we formed them into a society and constituted a State.

*Clearly they will buy and sell.*

Then they will need a market-place, and a money-token for purposes of exchange.

*Certainly.*

Suppose now that a husbandman, or an artisan, brings some production to market, and he comes at a time when there is no one to exchange with him, -

-is he to leave his calling and sit idle in the market-place?

*Not at all; he will find people there who, seeing the want, undertake the office of salesmen. In well-ordered States they are commonly those who are the weakest in bodily strength, and therefore of little use for any other purpose; their duty is to be in the market, and to give money in exchange for goods to those who desire to sell and to take money from those who desire to buy.*

This want, then, creates a class of retail-traders in our State. Is not 'retailer' the term which is applied to those who sit in the market-place engaged in buying and selling, while those who wander from one city to another are called merchants?

Yes, he said.

And there is another class of servants, who are intellectually hardly on the level of companionship; still they have plenty of bodily strength for labor, which accordingly they sell, and are called, if I do not mistake, hirelings, hire being the name which is given to the price of their labor.

*True.*

Then hirelings will help to make up our population?

Yes.

And now, Adeimantus, is our State matured and perfected?

*I think so.*

Where, then, is justice, and where is injustice, and in what part of the State did they spring up?

*Probably in the dealings of these citizens with one another. I cannot imagine that they are more likely to be found anywhere else.*

I dare say that you are right in your suggestion, I said; we had better think the matter out, and not shrink from the enquiry.

Let us then consider, first of all, what will be their way of life, now that we have thus established them. Will they not produce corn, and wine, and clothes, and shoes, and build houses for themselves? And when they are housed, they will work, in summer, commonly, stripped and barefoot, but in winter substantially clothed and shod. They will feed on barley-meal and flour of wheat, baking and kneading them, making noble cakes and loaves;

these they will serve up on a mat of reeds or on clean leaves, themselves reclining the while upon beds strewn with yew or myrtle. And they and their children will feast, drinking of the wine which they have made, wearing garlands on their heads, and hymning the praises of the gods, in happy converse with one another. And they will take care that their families do not exceed their means; having an eye to poverty or war.

[Socrates and *Glaucon*]

*But*, said Glaucon, interposing, *you have not given them a relish to their meal.*

True, I replied, I had forgotten; of course they must have a relish-salt, and olives, and cheese, and they will boil roots and herbs such as country people prepare; for a dessert we shall give them figs, and peas, and beans; and they will roast myrtle-berries and acorns at the fire, drinking in moderation. And with such a diet they may be expected to live in peace and health to a good old age, and bequeath a similar life to their children after them.

*Yes, Socrates*, he said, *and if you were providing for a city of pigs, how else would you feed the beasts?*

But what would you have, Glaucon? I replied.

*Why*, he said, *you should give them the ordinary conveniences of life. People who are to be comfortable are accustomed to lie on sofas, and dine off tables, and they should have sauces and sweets in the modern style.*

Yes, I said, now I understand: the question which you would have me consider is, not only how a State, but how a luxurious State is created; and possibly there is no harm in this, for in such a State we shall be more likely to see how justice and injustice originate. In my opinion the true and healthy constitution of the State is the one which I have described. But if you wish also to see a State at fever heat, I have no objection. For I suspect that many will not be satisfied with the simpler way of life. They will be for adding sofas, and tables, and other furniture; also dainties, and perfumes, and incense, and courtesans, and cakes, all these not of one sort only, but in every variety; we must go beyond the necessaries of which I was at first speaking, such as houses, and clothes, and shoes: the arts of the painter and the embroiderer will have to be set in motion, and gold and ivory and all sorts of materials must be procured.

*True*, he said.

Then we must enlarge our borders; for the original healthy State is no longer sufficient. Now will the city have to fill and swell with a multitude of callings which are not required by any natural want; such as the whole tribe of hunters and actors, of whom one large class have to do with forms and colors; another will be the votaries of music --poets and their attendant train of rhapsodists, players, dancers, contractors; also makers of divers kinds of articles, including women's dresses. And we shall want more servants. Will not tutors be also in request, and nurses wet and dry, [cosmetologists] and barbers, as well as confectioners and cooks; and swineherds, too, who were not needed and therefore had no place in the former edition of our State, but are needed now? They must not be forgotten: and there will be animals of many other kinds, if people eat them.

*Certainly.*

And living in this way we shall have much greater need of physicians than before?

*Much greater.*

And the country which was enough to support the original inhabitants will be too small now, and not enough?

*Quite true.*

Then a slice of our neighbors' land will be wanted by us for pasture and tillage, and they will want a slice of ours, if, like ourselves, they exceed the limit of necessity, and give themselves up to the unlimited accumulation of wealth?

*That, Socrates, will be inevitable.*

And so we shall go to war, Glaucon. Shall we not?

*Most certainly*, he replied.

Then without determining as yet whether war does good or harm, thus much we may affirm, that now we have discovered war to be derived from causes which are also the causes of almost all the evils in States, private as well as public.

*Undoubtedly.*

And our State must once more enlarge; and this time there will be nothing short of a whole army, which will have to go out and fight with the invaders for all that we have, as well as for the things and persons whom we were describing above.

*Why, he said, are they not capable of defending themselves?*

No, I said; not if we were right in the principle which was acknowledged by all of us when we were framing the State: the principle, as you will remember, was that one man cannot practice many arts with success.

*Very true, he said.*

But is not war an art?

*Certainly.*

And an art requiring as much attention as shoemaking?

*Quite true.*

And the shoemaker was not allowed by us to be husbandman, or a weaver, a builder --in order that we might have our shoes well made; but to him and to every other worker was assigned one work for which he was by nature fitted, and at that he was to continue working all his life long and at no other; he was not to let opportunities slip, and then he would become a good workman. Now nothing can be more important than that the work of a soldier should be well done. But is war an art so easily acquired that a man may be a warrior who is also a husbandman, or shoemaker, or other artisan; although no one in the world would be a good dice or draught player who merely took up the game as a recreation, and had not from his earliest years devoted himself to this and nothing else?

No tools will make a man a skilled workman, or master of defense, nor be of any use to him who has not learned how to handle them, and has never bestowed any attention upon them. How then will he who takes up a shield or other implement of war become a good fighter all in a day, whether with heavy-armed or any other kind of troops?

*Yes, he said, the tools which would teach men their own use would be beyond price.*

And the higher the duties of the guardian, I said, the more time, and skill, and art, and application will be needed by him?

*No doubt, he replied.*

Will he not also require natural aptitude for his calling?

*Certainly.*

Then it will be our duty to select, if we can, natures which are fitted for the task of guarding the city?

*It will.*

And the selection will be no easy matter, I said; but we must be brave and do our best.

*We must.*

Is not the noble youth very like a well-bred dog in respect of guarding and watching?

*What do you mean?*

I mean that both of them ought to be quick to see, and swift to overtake the enemy when they see him; and strong too if, when they have caught him, they have to fight with him.

*All these qualities, he replied, will certainly be required by them.*

Well, and your guardian must be brave if he is to fight well?

*Certainly.*

And is he likely to be brave who has no spirit, whether horse or dog or any other animal? Have you never observed how invincible and unconquerable is spirit and how the presence of it makes the soul of any creature to be absolutely fearless and indomitable?

*I have.*

Then now we have a clear notion of the bodily qualities which are required in the guardian.

*True.*

And also of the mental ones; his soul is to be full of spirit?

*Yes.*

But are not these spirited natures apt to be savage with one another, and with everybody else?

*A difficulty by no means easy to overcome, he replied.*

Whereas, I said, they ought to be dangerous to their enemies, and gentle to their friends; if not, they will destroy themselves without waiting for their enemies to destroy them.

*True, he said.*

What is to be done then? I said; how shall we find a gentle nature which has also a great spirit, for the one is the contradiction of the other?

*True.*

He will not be a good guardian who is wanting in either of these two qualities; and yet the combination of them appears to be impossible; and hence we must infer that to be a good guardian is impossible.

*I am afraid that what you say is true, he replied.*

Here feeling perplexed I began to think over what had preceded. My friend, I said, no wonder that we are in a perplexity; for we have lost sight of the image which we had before us.

*What do you mean? he said.*

I mean to say that there do exist natures gifted with those opposite qualities. *And where do you find them?*

Many animals, I replied, furnish examples of them; our friend the dog is a very good one: you know that well-bred dogs are perfectly gentle to their familiars and acquaintances, and the reverse to strangers.

*Yes, I know.*

Then there is nothing impossible or out of the order of nature in our finding a guardian who has a similar combination of qualities?

*Certainly not.*

Would not he who is fitted to be a guardian, besides the spirited nature, need to have the qualities of a philosopher?

*I do not apprehend your meaning.*

The trait of which I am speaking, I replied, may be also seen in the dog, and is remarkable in the animal.

*What trait?*

Why, a dog, whenever he sees a stranger, is angry; when an acquaintance, he welcomes him, although the one has never done him any harm, nor the other any good. Did this never strike you as curious?

*The matter never struck me before; but I quite recognize the truth of your remark.*

And surely this instinct of the dog is very charming; --your dog is a true philosopher.

*Why?*

Why, because he distinguishes the face of a friend and of an enemy only by the criterion of knowing and not knowing. And must not an animal be a lover of learning who determines what he likes and dislikes by the test of knowledge and ignorance?

*Most assuredly.*

And is not the love of learning the love of wisdom, which is philosophy?

*They are the same, he replied.*

And may we not say confidently of man also, that he who is likely to be gentle to his friends and acquaintances, must by nature be a lover of wisdom and knowledge?

*That we may safely affirm.*

Then he who is to be a really good and noble guardian of the State will require to unite in himself philosophy and spirit and swiftness and strength?

*Undoubtedly.*

Then we have found the desired natures; and now that we have found them, how are they to be reared and educated? Is not this enquiry which may be expected to throw light on the greater enquiry which is our final end --How do justice and injustice grow up in States? for we do not want either to omit what is to the point or to draw out the argument to an inconvenient length.

### From Book III

[The group discusses the education of the Guardian class, as well as general censorship of music and literature; then Socrates asserts that a “noble lie” or

“needful falsehood” is necessary for the perpetuation of the State. Glaucon begins the dialogue.]

*How your words seem to hesitate on your lips!*

You will not wonder, I replied, at my hesitation when you have heard. *Speak, he said, and fear not.*

Well then, I will speak, although I really know not how to look you in the face, or in what words to utter the audacious fiction, which I propose to communicate gradually, first to the rulers, then to the soldiers, and lastly to the people. They are to be told that their youth was a dream, and the education and training which they received from us, an appearance only; in reality during all that time they were being formed and fed in the womb of the earth, where they themselves and their arms and appurtenances were manufactured; when they were completed, the earth, their mother, sent them up; and so, their country being their mother and also their nurse, they are bound to advise for her good, and to defend her against attacks, and her citizens they are to regard as children of the earth and their own brothers. *You had good reason, he said, to be ashamed of the lie which you were going to tell.*

True, I replied, but there is more coming; I have only told you half. Citizens, we shall say to them in our tale, you are brothers, yet God has framed you differently. Some of you have the power of command, and in the composition of these he has mingled gold, wherefore also they have the greatest honor; others he has made of silver, to be auxiliaries; others again who are to be husbandmen and craftsmen he has composed of brass and iron; and the species will generally be preserved in the children. But as all are of the same original stock, a golden parent will sometimes have a silver son, or a silver parent a golden son. And God proclaims as a first principle to the rulers, and above all else, that there is nothing which should so anxiously guard, or of which they are to be such good guardians, as of the purity of the race. They should observe what elements mingle in their offspring; for if the son of a golden or silver parent has an admixture of brass and iron, then nature orders a transposition of ranks, and the eye of the ruler must not be pitiful towards the child because he has to descend in the scale and become a husbandman or artisan, just as there may be sons of artisans who having an admixture of gold or silver in them are raised to honor, and become

guardians or auxiliaries. For an oracle says that when a man of brass or iron guards the State, it will be destroyed.

Such is the tale; is there any possibility of making our citizens believe in it?

*Not in the present generation, he replied; there is no way of accomplishing this; but their sons may be made to believe in the tale, and their sons' sons, and posterity after them.*

I see the difficulty, I replied; yet the fostering of such a belief will make them care more for the city and for one another.

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## **1.4: Aristotle's View of the State**

From the *Politics* of Aristotle, Book III, Parts 6 and 7 (Trans. Benjamin Jowett)

We have next to consider whether there is only one form 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 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 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 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.

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.

*From Part 7*

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, 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 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 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 interest of the wealthy; democracy, of the needy: none of them the common good of all.