ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF PROPERTY:

A NEW INTERPRETATION

A Thesis

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Though attempts to give some account of Aristotle's theory of property are found in the various types of philosophical literature, I believe it is possible to show that this literature is--in one way or another--inadequate and that there exists a need for another effort in this direction. The literature is in this state because either it is not comprehensive enough or it distorts Aristotle's intended meaning.

Eric Roll's History of Economic Thought, for example, confines its comments on Aristotle's theory of property to Book I of the Politics, disposing of the latter's attack on Plato in Book II to two sentences.[1] And George H. Sabine's A History of Political Theory does not treat Aristotle's reflections on this subject in Book I at all and limits its other comments to a few sentences here and there in the process of describing Plato's system of communism.[2] Many other similar examples could be cited.

Now if there is such a thing as human nature, and if it is possible to discuss certain permanent human characteristics, then there is real significance in attempting to understand the distinctions and insights of the great

thinkers who have reflected upon it. An account of the thought of these men is of obvious value. However, those works which do not suffer from an inadequate treatment in terms of space, do suffer from one in terms of interpretation. This latter situation is due largely to historicism or what Leo Strauss defines as "one form of the attempt to understand the philosophy of the past better than it understood itself . . . It is based on the assumption, wholly alien to the thought of the classics, that each philosophy is essentially related to its time--to the 'spirit' of its time or to the 'material conditions' of its time, or to both."[3] Treatments of this sort are numerous.

A few examples will suffice to illustrate the nature of the problem. Edward Zeller in his Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy makes the following observation:

> He [Aristotle] yields however to the national Greek prejudice and the existing social conditions when he makes an indefensible attempt to justify slavery by the presupposition that there are men who are only capable of manual labour and must on this account be ruled by others; this is in general the relation of the barbarians to the Greeks . . . The same is true of his discussion of acquisition and property . . . in which he asserts that the acquisitions permissible are those which directly serve the satisfaction of our needs. All financial business he treats with distrust and contempt and considers all 'banausic' activities unworthy of the free men.[4]

A truly historical account of Aristotle's thought would, I maintain, avoid an interpretation in terms of "the national Greek prejudice and the existing social conditions." What

is defensible and indefensible must first be established before it can be attributed to "prejudice." This particular passage is a good example of how the historicist "solves" a problem by dismissing it rather than coming to grips with it.

One of the most complete treatments of Aristotle's theory of property from the standpoint of economic theory appears in A. A. Trever's History of Greek Economic Thought. His approach is clearly outlined in the following selection:

> We purpose also to emphasize more than is often done the important fact[5] that Greek theory is essentially a reflection of Greek economic conditions, and that a true interpretation of the thought depends upon a clear understanding of the economic history of Greece.[6]

A "fact"--if it is such--must be proved and not merely asserted. Here the historicist reveals another difficulty in his approach. He makes all thought relative by attaching it to particular historical circumstances. Thus, insight into certain permanent features of the human condition is precluded.

From the field of political theory we might cite a section from W. L. Newman's The Politics of Aristotle:

> So far as he [Aristotle] asserts the principle that commodities are made for man, not man for the multiplication of commodities--that the pursuit of wealth, which so easily masters and moulds society to its purpose, is to be governed by the true interests of civilization ... he is on solid ground; but in his application of this principle, and indeed in his combination of it with others of more doubtful authority, he has been led into error. We may trace, perhaps, in the background the influence of prejudices which he shared with his age and

> nation and which made a dispassionate examination of this subject unusually difficult for him.[7]

Here Aristotle's "error" is explained by reference to the prejudices of his age rather than the shortcomings of his argument. Also, Newman assumes that his understanding, where it differs from Aristotle's is dispassionate.

All these authors beg the question by assuming that what is "prejudice," "fact," or "error" has been ascertained. In place of such historicist accounts, I hope to offer a truly historical view of Aristotle's theory of property; or, as Leo Strauss would state it, an "interpretation . . . that tries to understand the philosophy of the past exactly as that philosophy understood itself."[8]

I will attempt to show that Aristotle's theory of property--so understood--rests on the conviction that nature makes certain provisions and distinctions which define property with respect to man and his primary social units--the household and the polis.

What Aristotle means by nature, however, is best ascertained if we turn to his reflections on this subject in Book II of the Physics. Here the natural is--in the first instance--distinguished from the artificial. Those things constituted by nature have within themselves "a principle of motion and of stationariness (in respect of place, or of growth and decrease, or by way of alteration)."[9] The artificial, on the other hand, does not have within "itself--in

virtue of what it is and not in virtue of a concomitant attribute--the source of its own production."[10] Secondly, the nature of a particular object is understood in terms of a causal analysis. The "causes" number four: "the matter, the form, the mover [and] 'that for the sake of which'"[11] or the material, formal, efficient and final causes. As regards property, though, there is no simple identification between any one of these meanings of nature and the references Aristotle makes to property and nature. Sometimes property is considered with respect to the material aspect of nature. Sometimes it is defined by reference to certain formal distinctions inherent in the natural whole. The particular identification must be determined in each new context.

To return to our main line of argument, Aristotle believes that nature provides for man. She furnishes the means for his sustenance. "Property of this order," says Aristotle, "is evidently given by nature to all living beings, from the instant of their first birth to the days when their growth is finished."[12]

Since nature provides for man's subsistence, the acquisition of property ought to be a secondary concern. Man's function should be to learn how to <u>use</u> well those things which nature provides.

Secondly, Aristotle believes that nature makes certain distinctions. He notes, for example, the attempt by nature to distinguish the freeman from the slave. The latter, lacking the intellectual capacity to rule himself, is naturally marked to be one who should be ruled. Even the slave's physical characteristics often identify his role.

Numerous other instances cited by Aristotle illumine his conception of a differentiated and ordered nature. It is a nature wherein the lower forms exist for the higher. Thus, property is always an "instrument" because it is a means with respect to the highest end for man. And neither its acquisition nor its use can ever be justified for its own sake.

Aristotle's account of nature, also, helps to explain his theoretical attack on Plato's system of communism in property. Since form is conceived to be immanent and inseparable from matter, a Good which exists apart from good things has no reality. In any event such a Good is supranatural and devoid of motion and consequently cannot be a model for the natural, changing world: metaphysics is not a guide for the practical life.

As already indicated, there are two paramount activities associated with property: acquisition and use. The manager of the household and the statesman are concerned with the use of property and only indirectly so with acquisition. The reason for this lies in the fact that the

manager of the household and the statesman are concerned primarily with the moral development of the members of the associations of which they are the ruling members. The use of property provides opportunity for virtuous action and it is this which it is their business to promote.

The subsequent analysis will be divided into a number of parts. The second chapter will consist of some general reflections. The third will deal with Aristotle's attack on Plato's system of communism in the Republic. The fourth will focus on Aristotle's theory of property as it relates to the household--particularly with reference to the slave and the activity of acquisition. The fifth will present Aristotle's views on the amount and distribution of property and its general position with respect to the best polis. The main theme throughout will revolve about the implications for Aristotle's theory of property of his views concerning the provisions and distinctions of nature.

CHAPTER II

SOME GENERAL COMMENTS TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF ARISTOTLE'S THEORY OF PROPERTY

Before we enter our discussion of Aristotle's theory of property, we need to identify the subject matter. Though the inquiry intends to focus on Aristotle's view of the phenomena surrounding man's physical needs and his efforts to satisfy them, how we are to refer to these phenomena presents a problem.

Perhaps it would be best, first, to define some terms. Most modern accounts which deal with this particular aspect of Aristotle's thought tend to describe it in modern terminology. They refer to it as Aristotle's "economic theory" or "economic thought." They divide it into such categories as "value," "exchange," "production," and "distribution." In general, however, these terms carry modern meanings and significations alien to the thinking of Aristotle.[13]

One widely-used, modern dictionary defines economics as "the science that investigates the conditions and laws affecting the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth, or the material means of satisfying human desires . . ."[14] For Aristotle, however, the word is in one

sense not as broad, but in another broader. The Greek word oikonomike[15]--which is the etymological antecedent of our "economy"--is derived from oikia[16] which means household. It refers to that form of practical wisdom[17] which is identified with the household. It is household management.[18] To discuss Aristotle's "economic" thinking in the proper sense of that term would be to focus one's attention on the household. While economics today includes the household, the emphasis is on public economy. There is a marked shift with respect to the object of study.

Thus, the term in Aristotle is in one sense not as broad as ours because it does not include the public sphere which is--in fact--the most important today. On the other hand, since economy is for Aristotle household management, it is broader because the latter includes the regulation of moral relationships, which are not "economic" in the modern sense of that term but are more important--in the sense of having a greater dignity--than any dealing with merely material needs as such.

There is another important word which describes phenomena we would naturally include in the term "economics." It is "acquisition." Aristotle admits this activity within the oikia only to the extent that it serves a natural function. And even this admission relegates the art to a subordinate position with respect to the art of household management. Now, there are two Greek words which are translated

"acquisition." Ktetike[19] is the genus and chrematistike[20] the species.[21] While the former refers to acquisition in general, the latter refers to a particular kind of acquisition: the science or art of obtaining wealth.[22] This word, as we have said, describes phenomena concerning property often beyond oikonomike or household management.

To discuss Aristotle's economic theory is to discuss his theory of the oikia. Since, however, our present efforts call for a broader approach--dealing generally with man's material needs and his efforts to satisfy them--perhaps "property" will be a better concept around which to focus Aristotle's thought on a number of closely related topics.

Even this term, though, requires qualification. Aside from implying some sort of legal system which gives matter this status, it is definitely associated--in Aristotle's mind--with the idea of use--direct as contrasted with indirect use.[23] The definition consequently excludes much of what is considered property today--such as the "means of production."[24]

There are also two other terms closely related to that of property: "wealth"[25] and "riches."[26] Wealth is defined as "everything whose value is measured by money..."[27] and is sometimes used interchangeably with "property."[28] Riches, on the other hand, tends to refer to a large quantity of either property or wealth.[29] Sometimes "goods"[30]--

external goods--are referred to instead. All these terms, however, are related to property in some manner. As one author, Richard McKeon, points out, Aristotle in contrast to Plato limits the scope of property as well as other terms. He also separates the problems of acquisition, possession and use.[31]

Now, let us turn from a consideration of terminology to an examination of the context within which Aristotle discusses property and to an examination of the method which he uses.

One must see as background to all that is said certain fundamental questions to which our author is respoding. Probably the most fundamental of these has to do with whether certain institutions are natural or conventional.[32] The Sophists especially were among the promulgators of the view that the polis was entirely conventional.[33] And Aristotle is reacting in Book I of the Politics to such opinions concerning the origin of the polis and the nature of slavery. A similar pattern is evident in the Ethics.[34]

Awareness of Aristotle's concern with what is according to nature and what is not is essential to understanding his ideas about property and the activities associated with it. He is trying to find a standard in nature which will provide a guide for the ordering of human life and serve as

a basis for determining the propriety of certain activities and the impropriety of others.

First, as we have mentioned earlier, he believes that nature provides for man: "Plants exist to give subsistence to animals, and animals to give it to men."[35] Another way of stating this relationship is to say that property is a form of natural endowment. This makes it--along with habit and rational principle--a means toward the good life.[36] However, while the latter two are susceptible to the influences of man's art, Aristotle excludes from such activities those things--such as property--which lie in the realm of fortune or "the given."[37]

Secondly, Aristotle believes that nature makes certain distinctions which act as guides for man's moral and political life. These distinctions are found in an ordered and differentiated nature. In the Physics, for example, Aristotle states that "action for an end is present in things which come to be and are by nature."[38] And in the Ethics, it is said that "every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or undertaking, seems to aim at some good: hence it has been well said that the Good is That at which all things aim."[39] And, finally, in the Politics it is stated that "this characteristic [i.e. the presence of ruled and ruling elements] is present in animate beings by virtue of the whole constitution of nature,

inanimate as well as animate; for even in things which are inanimate there is a sort of ruling principle . . ."[40]

Another problem concerns nature's role as provider. Though we might agree that nature, in a sense, does provide for us, this unaided provision of "fruits and animals" is often meagre. Also, these things must still be acquired or appropriated before they can be used.

These objections may be countered, though, with the reminder that Aristotle thought in terms of an economy of scarcity and saw in the slave and others instruments marked by nature to provide the material demands of the household and the polis. Since we live in an economy of abundance, it is more difficult for us to conceive of nature being niggardly. A subsistence level of life, however, does not require a highly commercialized society. In such a society it is conceivable that men could live--and some well--without an extensive development of acquisitive skills. And, even in the best polis, Aristotle estimates that over half the population--who are not citizens--will be providing for the material support of themselves and the rest. Since the slave is a natural provider, nature does provide--on this level--through him. Thus, nature "provides" in more than one way.

Understanding Aristotle's way of arriving at the truth in moral and political matters, however, is as important as appreciating the background or context of his

thought. He begins by stating the leading views regarding a particular subject and proceeds by salvaging those aspects of them which are true and discarding those which are false.[41] Thus, he attempts to harmonize conflicting opinions or satisfy the inadequacies of one or more positions. In the realm of human behavior, though, the truth attained can be no more than probable for it lies within the sphere of the contingent--where things may be otherwise.

Another feature of this approach lies in the unequal importance of various arguments. A statement considered sufficient in one context or on one level may be very inadequate elsewhere. This means that everything dealing with a particular subject must be read before it is possible to decide the relative importance of different statements within the larger argument.

At the beginning of the Ethics, for example, Aristotle states that the end of oikonomike or household management is wealth.[42] Taking the arguments of the Politics into consideration, however, one finds that this is not true. Wealth is not the end of oikonomike. The activity which does have wealth as its end--chrematistike--is considered an unnatural activity largely alien to the proper function of the manager of the household.

CHAPTER III

ARISTOTLE'S ATTACK ON PLATO'S SYSTEM OF COMMUNISM

The dialectical starting point for much of Aristotle's reflections on property is found in his attack on Plato's system of communism.[43] In the course of this undertaking he points out both theoretically and practically the shortcomings of such a scheme and in its place advocates one featuring private ownership and common use. At the same time he indicates the natural differences between the household and the polis preparatory to a later definition of property with respect to each of these social units.[44]

The argument, as we have said, is drawn on both the theoretical and practical levels. The theoretical attack is found in the Politics to revolve about the nature of the polis and the nature of the heads of the domestic and political associations. In the Ethics--where the attack is made on yet a higher level--it centers around Plato's Idea of the Good. The practical argument, on the other hand, consists of a number of more mundane--if not less important--objections raised in various parts of the Politics. The thread, however, which ties both levels of the argument together is Aristotle's conception of an ordered and differentiated nature--in which form is immanent.

To begin with the theoretical argument, Aristotle maintains that the cause of the fallacy into which Plato fell was the wrong character of the premiss on which he based his argument. This premiss was "contained in the principle that 'the greatest possible unity of the whole polis is the supreme good....'"[45]

While Aristotle agrees with Plato that unity is important, he disagrees with him concerning its nature and extent. He maintains that Plato's unity is mathematical in nature--the sort of whole characterized by "a single beat" rather than by a "harmony." Or, put another way, "if [the polis] becomes more of a unit, it will first become a household instead of a polis, and then an individual instead of a household...."[46] Why is this wrong? What, according to Aristotle, is the nature of a polis?

It is wrong because the polis is composed of not just a number of men but different kinds of men--for example, freemen and slaves. Thus, <u>quality</u> as well as <u>quantity</u> is involved. While quantity can be expressed mathematically, quality can't. Neither can differences of quality be maintained in a polis conceived on the model of a unit of quantity.

The polis, in Aristotle's view, is an organism composed of a number of different parts. Like the human body, it must maintain the identity of its parts if it is to

maintain its own identity. These parts consist of certain lesser associations like the household and certain relationships such as those of husband and wife and master and slave. While they are all natural like the polis, they differ from one another in their worth and relative dignity. Or, in other words, they differ from one another qualitatively. Thus, a polis is a polis by virtue of its possessing these qualitatively distinct parts and not by virtue of any numerical--or quantative--difference. Ten thousand men--ten thousand individuals does not make a polis. To be a polis, they must be related to one another in certain ways.

This problem is also raised in Book I. Here it takes the form of a confusion of the "statesman" with the "manager of a household." By indicating, however the nature of the politikos and oikonomikos, Aristotle sets them apart and the associations with which they are identified.[47] As an example, he maintains that the authority of the two is different.[48] The statesman exercises authority over men who are naturally free while the manager of a household, as master, rules over men who are by nature slaves.

Again, Aristotle emphasizes qualitative as against quantative differences. These persons differ from one another with a difference of kind not of number.[49] Otherwise there would be no difference between a large household and a small polis. There is an "essential" difference

between the two men. Thus, by destroying the family and failing to distinguish the differences between a manager of a household and a statesman, Plato destroys the parts of which the polis is constituted--and the polis as a result.

True unity comes by education. And education--for Aristotle--seeks to complement nature and not do violence to it. It takes into account individual differences. And it addresses itself to the inculcation of virtue--from which true unity springs. Friendship, for example, achieves a feeling of oneness and belonging which goes beyond the phenomenon of any two persons sharing the same wives and the same property.

The argument, though, in the Ethics dealing with the Idea of the Good[50] represents on yet a higher theoretical level another attack on Plato's system of communism. While this attack does not specifically mention the latter, it nevertheless is relevant. It is relevant because Plato's communistic proposals are related to his entire philosophical system. They are mutually dependent and a flaw in either affects the other.

On the one hand, Plato believes there is one Good--one Form of the Good which is a unity, a Whole. Particular "goods" or good things are related to the Whole through the doctrine of participation. One science--dialectic--deals

with the nature of the Good. And one man--the philosopher--is able to attain the level of this science.

Aristotle, on the other hand, believes the Good to be a generalized term which expresses that which is common to things which are good. It has no independent existence, however, and cannot be itself an object of science. There are many goods. There are many sciences. But while they may be related in a hierarchical structure, they nevertheless retain a certain autonomy of their own within their own sphere. Therefore, one science or one person is not competent with regard to all of the sciences. The effect of Plato's system is not only to have one science and one man order the rest, which is something not too far from Aristotle--providing the one man could be found--but to merge the various ends into one end and destroy the relative autonomy, diversity and variety of the subordinate ends altogether--hence the merging of a polis into a household and finally into an individual and the confusion of the statesman with the manager of a household.

This problem can be stated in yet another way. For Plato there is only one science--dialectic. It is the master science. For Aristotle, however, a distinction exists between theoretical and practical sciences. For the latter politics is not a theoretical science, but rather a practical one. This has important consequences. First, it is

by nature primarily inductive rather than deductive. It draws its distinctions from experience and opinion rather than scientific knowledge of the Good. It finds its distinctions directly in political life, which is naturally characterized by plurality and diversity. The order imposed therefore by political science takes into account this diversity. With Plato things are rather the reverse. The Form of the Good is a metaphysical concept and a category of metaphysics. It is held to have more reality than the changing phenomena of political life. It is study at this level which is pursued by political science for Plato. And since the Form of the Good is characterized by unity, this is set as the goal of political life. The unity and perfection of the Good is contrasted with the diversity and imperfection of men's lives and the eyes of the statesman are to be fixed on the former.

Taking these distinctions into account--the differences in the metaphysical orientation of the two men--the practical consequences as they appear in Book II of the Politics and elsewhere become intelligible.

These arguments--in contrast with the theoretical--deal with means rather than ends. We have already discussed unity as an end. Aristotle, however, contends that, even accepting Plato's conception of unity, his plans for implementing it will not succeed. The following reasons are

given: First, there is a difficulty in the meaning of the terms. Secondly, communism cannot remedy defects of human nature; in fact, it goes against human nature by producing conflict, denying satisfaction of certain natural pleasures and destroying two forms of goodness. Thirdly, it will result in less attention to property. And, finally, it is contradicted by experience.

First, Aristotle states that the criterion of unity set forth by Plato--"All men saying 'Mine' and 'Not Mine' at the same time"--is equivocal. If "all" is taken to mean "each separately"--which he reasons is what Socrates probably meant, it must be considered impracticable. For each citizen to call the same boy his son, the same woman his wife, and so on may be fine from a theoretical standpoint, but it would hardly succeed in practics. On the other hand, if "all" is taken to mean "all collectively"--which is what will probably take place, then the notion of unity becomes diluted. A boy will be one's son in only a fractional sense. This will also be true for wives and property. At best this will result in some weak bond; at worst, it will result in indifference.

Aristotle notes further, in this vein, that there is a proverb which says that among friends goods are common. This seems to be the end which Plato desires. But the friendship necessary for overcoming "mine" and "thine" will

be destroyed by the means which Plato proposes: community of wives and children and community of property. The destruction of the family, for example, will remove an important training ground in friendship. For the intimate relationships of parent and child and brother and brother provide its breeding places. And since the nature of friendship is such that it must be limited in number, one cannot be brother to a thousand other boys without friendship losing its distinctive quality.

But even if community of property were possible among friends, it would not be possible among all the citizens of a polis. There would be too many. The best which can be hoped for in such an extensive association is a system of justice. But even this would be destroyed by Plato because a sense of justice is derived from feelings of friendship. Thus, the destruction of the family will result in the destruction of both friendship and justice.

Secondly, Aristotle maintains that the evils which now exist under ordinary forms of government are not due to the absence of communism, but rather arise from the wickedness of human nature. In other words, the problem of evil lies--on one level at least--in certain rather permanent and universal tendencies within the human being <u>qua</u> human being. Consequently, extreme social reforms may be too demanding for the practical life of the polis. To impose

the regimen of philosophic justice upon the affairs of political life is to deny a difference between metaphysics and politics--a point which would be unacceptable to Aristotle. The latter would argue that only an imperfect sort of justice is realizable in political life.

Aristotle cites, for example, increasing allowances for theatre seats during festivals as an instance of an ever-recurring problem of human nature. It seems that despite frequent increases in these allowances there is always a desire for more increases. The solution, Aristotle would argue, does not lie in endlessly increasing the allowances since this does not meet the basic difficulty. The basic difficulty lies in the fact that some men either do not or cannot control their desires and order their lives. In the first instance, some form of moral training is clearly what is needed; in the second, submission to an authority which is capable of accomplishing what the individual is apparently unable to do for himself.

Aristotle goes on to point out that while communism will not, on the one hand, remedy existing evils, it is, on the other, likely to create many more. This, because it goes against human nature and the natural order.

There will be conflicts--especially in the case where the citizens have to till the soil rather than slaves or serfs. For those who do more work and get proportionally

less for it will be bound to raise complaints against those who do a smaller amount. Indeed, Aristotle continues, it is generally difficult for men to live together in any form of human activity. Both companions on a journey and servants are cited to furnish instances of the conflicts inherent in ordinary, everyday association. However, when each has his own separate sphere of interest, as in a system where property is privately owned, there will not be the same ground for quarrels.

Communism also deprives one of the satisfaction of certain natural pleasures. It hinders the expression of love toward oneself as well as others--for to think of something as your own and to give aid to a friend are both sources of pleasure which are impossible without private property. Love for self, property, and money--it is argued--are more or less universal feelings and rightly censured only when they become excessive.

We must remember that, for Aristotle, virtue consists in a mean which lies somewhere between two extremes. Thus, the proper attitude toward money or property consists in its right use--not in its exaggeration or elimination. Also, Aristotle would argue that a feeling which is universal or nearly so is likely to be one implanted in us by nature. It would be doing violence to our nature if we attempted to completely deny such feelings--as it would be

if these feelings were to completely dominate our character. There is a proper order of rule and subordination in human nature as well as in nature at large. What is required for happiness is the maintenance of this order, not the elimination of one of its elements.

Communism would also diminish the area of goodness by destroying the virtues of liberality and temperance. Since liberality consists in the proper use which is made of property, a liberal act is impossible if private property is not available. Likewise, while temperance might still be exercised in some areas, its activities with regard to wealth would be curtailed.

And restricting the doing of good acts lessens the chances of happiness. For happiness consists in the living of a virtuous life and--omitting the few who realize it in intellectual activity--the majority of men approximate it only through the moral virtues. Thus, to diminish their chances of practicing these virtues is to diminish their opportunities for a good life.

Thirdly, communism will result in less attemtion to property. What is common to the greatest number, Aristotle agrues, will get the least amount of care. On the other hand, men pay most attention to what is their own. While communism will go against this natural disposition, a system of private property will take advantage of it. This is about as close as Aristotle gets to an "economic" argument

as such. But to call it this is perhaps misleading. Here, as elsewhere, Aristotle is concerned with indicating the most efficient, the best way of living. To recognize natural tendencies and to take advantage of them is both efficient and best. Politics is, after all, a branch of practical philosophy and aims at practical solutions to practical problems.

Fourthly, communism is contradicted by experience. Aristotle remarks that we have to pay some regard to history. If proposals such as Plato's were really good, we would have heard of them. Here Aristotle is appealing to the experience of mankind over the years, not just to that of his own day. The reasoning is that a good system--while it may be unrealized in any particular period of history--is unlikely to escape the collective experience of men. Just as the efficient cause of the polis lay in man's action, so would the efficient cause of communism. An appeal to man's action over the years is, therefore, quite necessary to the overall argument.

As we have mentioned above, these latter arguments--besides reflecting theoretical differences--tend to meet Plato on his own terms. Aristotle has argued, accepting for the moment Plato's own premises, that the latter's means for implementing them will fail on a purely practical level.

Let us turn, then, in the next two chapters to some of Aristotle's views on property as they relate to the household and the polis. Though much has already been said on these topics by way of his criticism of Plato, Aristotle adds to this as he keeps in mind the construction of what he believes to be the best polis. It is, after all, with the idea of offering a better political system that he has undertaken to examine and criticize the systems of Plato and others.

CHAPTER IV

PROPERTY AND THE HOUSEHOLD

As mentioned in the conclusion to Chapter III, we have already learned a great deal about the relationship of property to the household in the course of Aristotle's dispute with Plato. The differing views as to the nature of the manager of the household and the statesman have their influence on the position of property. A system of separate families tends naturally toward a system of private property--hence Plato's need to abolish the family in order to make a system of communal ownership possible. Assuming, however, a system of separate families and private property, we may turn now to some further views of Aristotle on the relationship of property to the household or oikia.

Since nature provides for man's basic material needs, the manager of the household is concerned primarily with moral relationships and the proper use of property rather than with its acquisition. And the distinctions found in nature relate this property to the household.

The slave, for example, is a member of the household and a form of property. And his position is indicated by nature. Aristotle makes a point of arguing, in this respect, that while some slavery may be a matter of convention and

unjust, the true slave is such by nature and his condition is just.

Aristotle points out that every art requires the proper tools[51] if it is to perform its function. And articles of property are among the tools available to the manager of a household. Some are instruments of action; others, instruments of production. The slave, for example, is an animate instrument of action while the shuttle is an inanimate instrument of production.

The characteristic of property to be associated with direct use--as mentioned earlier--and more particularly with the life of the household is illustrated by the differences between these two tools. Only instruments of action are considered property. Thus, the slave is a form of property and the shuttle is not. For an article of property[52] is defined as "an instrument for the purpose of action;" that is, an instrument "for the purpose of life" and "separable from its possessor."[53] "Property in general[54] is the sum of such instruments...."[55]

The difference between the two instruments lies in the difference between action and production. Action or praxis is an end in itself[56]--and it is this type of activity which is to be preferred[57]--while production or poiesis aims at an end distinct from the act of making.[58] The slave is used directly--here Aristotle has the household slave in

mind--in the activities of life while the shuttle--which may produce things so used--is employed only indirectly.

This instrumental character of property is no idle distinction. Property is not to be thought of as something apart from that which it is subordinate to; in this case, the household manager and the household. These instruments are limited, both in number and size, by the requirements of the art they serve.

Thus, household economy is not economics in any modern sense of that term. Modern economics abstracts material things from their living environment and studies them as material entities. Abstracted from its instrumental, end-means relationship, the modern subject matter of economics is a quite different phenomenon from the material part of the household as Aristotle understood it.

We have described one form of property--the slave--and have shown how he is related to the household. Another problem raised in Book I has to do with the relationship of acquiring property to the art of household management. While Aristotle holds that the activities are not the same, there is a natural form of acquisition which he considers a part of the household art.[59]

After reviewing the many forms of acquisition which are pursued for subsistence, including farming, the pastoral life, hunting, freebooting, fishing and the life of the

chase, Aristotle concludes that property which is derived from these sources is natural and related to the art of household management since the householder needs to provide for his family and since these forms of provision are derived immediately from nature.

If we were to ask in what sense this is so, Aristotle would probably reply that acquisition is an activity and activities are set in motion in order to satisfy some sort of deprivation. Therefore, to the extent that acquisition is the fulfilling of a natural deprivation, it is a natural activity. Natural needs give rise to natural activities--such as hunting and farming--which immediately satisfy these needs.

But there is another kind of acquisition, Aristotle maintains, that is especially called wealth-getting. How does the confusion come about? In contrast to the function of household management--which is to use--the function of acquisition is to provide. While this art originally provided for the necessities of the household, it came to provide superfluities and consequently terminated its natural function.[60]

One might ask, then, how it was that the art of acquisition--originally a natural activity--came to assume such an unnatural posture. According to Aristotle it has developed in the following way. Every article of property

has two uses: one is for immediate satisfaction; the other is for exchange.[61] The latter began quite naturally from the fact that men had more than enough of some things and less than enough of others. The earliest form of exchange is barter[62] which comes into existence with the fact of several households--for within the household there is no exchange but rather sharing. But barter is not unnatural since it involves the exchanging of commodities to satisfy the natural requirements of sufficiency.

With, however, the development of trade[63] and money,[64] this form of acquisition becomes unnatural. Trade developes as exchange grows to the level of importing and exporting. And to facilitate such activities money comes into existence. And, vice-versa, with the development of money, it becomes easier to trade.

It is with the rise of trade and the development of money that the idea of acquisition--heretofore limited to the needs of the household--comes to be associated with money, and riches and wealth thought of in terms of money. Heretofore they had a definite limit imposed upon them by the art of household management, but once acquisition is no longer subordinated to the household, they come to be pursued for their own sake.

The worst mode of acquisition, however, is usury. The winning of money from the process of exchange--a process originally introduced to facilitate the exchange of commodities necessary for life--is for Aristotle bad enough. An even worse activity, though, is found in the winning of money through the use of money. This is the furthest removed from natural exchange. It is the furthest removed from the purpose and limits observed by the process of exchange in its natural form.

Aristotle objects that such an unlimited pursuit of money--among other things--emphasizes mere existence rather than the good life and employs the various virtues--such as courage--in the wrong way. It encourages the baser passions of men. Anxiety about livelihood rather than concern for well-being predominates. That part of man which he shares in common with the animals rules over that part--reason and its concern for well-being--which makes him most distinctly a human being. Thus, the acquisitive or commercial life elevates "acquisition" to the detriment of "use" when it is clear that the good life requires knowing how to use wealth more than how to acquire it.

Again, the art of acquisition in its advanced form is characterized by the absence of a limit. Yet an activity which is as absorbing as this must have a limit if the good life--instead of mere life--is to be achieved. Happiness,

Aristotle would argue, must have some substantive meaning. It cannot be an endless pursuit.

The acquisitive life not only fails with regard to the end, but with the means as well. The virtues which are a prerequisite for happiness become inverted and distorted. The practical virtues will become dominant because acquisition is a practical activity. Yet it is the intellectual virtues which are most productive of happiness. Even the practical ones, however, will become twisted because they will be used in the wrong way.[65]

Aristotle is arguing that the manager of the household ought to accept the distinctions nature has made. Wisdom lies in acknowledging the provisions of nature and using them well--not in manipulating them for ulterior purposes. When, in fact, man departs from the observance of natural limits, we find that he loses sight of the true end of life. He begins to elevate a subordinate end--the acquisition of wealth--into a final end. In the process he destroys his chances of achieving happiness. By revolting against the order of nature and attempting to create a "better" order, he loses what he seeks.

While the above arguments would suggest an antithesis between commerce and civilization, there is yet another thread which would point to their inseparability. This is suggested by Aristotle's description of the growth

of exchange. The latter is said to be most natural at man's most primitive stages of development--the household and the village. And, it is with the combination of villages and the growth of the polis that exchange becomes more unnatural. Thus, it appears that civil life and commerce go hand in hand.[66]

It might, of course, be argued that this is perfectly reasonable. Why should Aristotle consider exchange most natural in its primitive stage while calling the polis most natural as a result of its being the most final form of association? In reply Aristotle would probably maintain that the end of exchange must subserve and not replace ends which are intrinsicly better. It would be equally unnatural if the art of gymnastics--with its concern for physical well-being--were to develop to such an extent that its end would be pursued to the exclusion of all other ends. The problem, however, of the relationship of commerce and civilization still poses many difficulties.

CHAPTER V

PROPERTY AND THE POLIS

Let us turn next to the relationship of property to the polis. Though property is considered a part of the household, it is only a condition of the polis. The life of the polis is the life of citizens--consequently slaves, who are part of the life of the household and a form of property, are excluded. And while the household consists of members who are unequal, the polis is composed entirely of freemen and equals who rule and are ruled in turn. Property is thus related in a different way to the polis than it is to the household.

In Chapter III we presented Aristotle's criticism of Plato's scheme for a system of communal ownership of property. There it was noted that the former drew a distinction between ownership and use and--while favoring a system of private ownership--advocated common use. This responsibility for encouraging common use is laid on the shoulders of the statesman and legislator. Since nature provides for man's basic material needs, the statesman and legislator--like the manager of the household--are concerned primarily with the use of property rather than its acquisition. Their function in this respect and the form which

this common use is to take can be most readily seen in Aristotle's views on the place of property in the best polis.

As mentioned earlier[67] the means to a good life consist of natural endowment, habit and rational principle. And since property is largely a result of fortune, the legislator and the statesman find that their chief function revolves about the latter two.[68] In the Ethics we find that the good life is a result of virtue and that virtue is a consequence of good laws--and further that the legislator is responsible for framing these laws.[69] Also, as we mentioned above, Aristotle states in the Politics[70] that the implementation of a scheme of common use of property is a function of the legislator. Thus, the legislator acts not within the realm of chance and accident but within that of rational principle and human purpose. Though he must accept "the given" he can with his art attempt to mould it in the interests of the good life.[71]

This brings us to the question of the amount of property and its distribution in the best polis. It must, first of all, be sufficient for a life within the polis of temperance and liberality. A good life requires property as a means to virtuous activity. It is also the basis of citizenship and political action.[72] And as a resource for meeting external dangers, a sufficiency of property is likewise needed. The amount in this respect, Aristotle points out,

should not be so large as to invite aggression nor so small as to be inadequate for the requirements of defense.

Secondly, regarding the distribution of property, Aristotle urges the legislator that the prevailing system of private property be tempered by customs and the enactment of proper laws. The resulting system should combine the merits of a system of community of property (such as Plato advocated) with those of a system of private property.[73] Under such a scheme "moral goodness . . . will ensure that the property of each is made to serve the use of all, in the spirit of the proverb which says 'Friends' goods are goods in common.'"[74] Aristotle found such a system existing in varying degrees in a number of states. Sparta is cited as one example. Here, "men use one another's slaves, and one another's horses and dogs, as if they were their own" and if in need while journeying, they take provisions from the farms in the country-side belonging to other citizens.[75]

Another political institution which Aristotle felt should be adopted was that of common meals. For this he praised Crete. Both it and public worship are to be financed from public property which, along with a part consisting of private property, constitutes the territory of the best polis.[76] In addition Aristotle felt that population should be controlled in order to prevent extreme poverty.[77]

Now there are at least two explanations which could be cited in defense of the above arrangements. First, communal use of property is an outgrowth of virtuous activity. Secondly, it is politically expedient. This can be observed in such an arrangement as that of common meals. While it is a collectively virtuous action, it is also prudent politically. It and other institutions which help to avoid extremes of wealth and conditions of destitution are advocated by Aristotle as a bulwark against civic unrest and revolution.[78]

The citizen body, however, of the best polis--being based on virtue--will be small. And its existence is dependent upon a much larger population furnishing the material necessities of their existence. There is, though, an implicit acknowledgement by Aristotle that its body could be enlarged if there were men who by nature were capable of becoming citizens and nature was less niggardly in its yielding of material support.

Underlying these arguments, however, runs the theme of the provisions and distinctions of nature. Since nature provides, some men are freed for the higher function of the right use of property. And the distinctions of nature indicate that this function is the proper one for man.

FOOTNOTES

Quotations are from Barker's translation of the *Politics* and Rackham's translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* unless otherwise noted.

Chapter I

[1]Eric Roll, *History of Economic Thought*, p. 23.

[2]George H. Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, pp. 56-59.

[3]Leo Strauss, "On Classical Political Philosophy," *Social Research*, 12:99 (February, 1945).

[4]Eduard Zeller, *Outline of the History of Greek Philosophy*, p. 212. Another example is found in the following remarks by A. H. Armstrong in *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*: Commenting on the *Ethics*, he says that it is "sometimes the exposition of a prosperous Greek citizen's philosophy of living at its most narrow-minded and complacent, dominated and limited by the prejudices of his class, civilization and period." Then turning to the *Politics*, which he thinks is "mostly read nowadays as a document of historical interest," he finds that "the narrow-minded Greek citizen's outlook affects Aristotle's thought much more than in the ethical treatises, and the work is therefore of less universal and permanent value in spite of the wisdom and importance of many things in it." (All quotations are from p. 99.)

[5]Underline mine.

[6]A. A. Trever, *History of Greek Economic Thought*, p. 8.

[7]W. L. Newman, *The Politics of Aristotle*, p. 138.

[8]Strauss, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

[9]Richard McKeon (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, *Physics* $192^{b}15$-17.

FOOTNOTES (continued)

[10] Ibid., $192^{b}27-28$.

[11] Ibid., $198^{a}25-26$.

[12] Pol., $1256^{b}7-10$.

Chapter II

[13] A good example is provided by James Bonar's Philosophy and Political Economy. He says, "we must gather Aristotle's views as we gathered Plato's; and we may take them for convenience under the same three heads, the view of Wealth, the view of Production and Distribution, and the view of Society and the State." (p. 32.) While the categories of Wealth and Production may have a certain status as such in Aristotle (N. Eth., $1094^{a}10$, Pol., $1254^{a}6$.), those of Distribution, Society and the State definitely do not. Bonar's treatment is replete with such instances of the importation of modern categories of thinking into Aristotle's thought. Another is provided by Eric Roll's A History of Economic Thought. Here he says that, "according to Aristotle, economy is divided into two parts: economy proper, which was the science of household management; and the science of supply, which was concerned with the art of acquisition." This, of course, is "according to Roll" rather than "according to Aristotle" since only a small part of acquisition comes within the purview of "economy" for Aristotle.

[14] Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition, Unabridged, p. 814.

[15] οἰκονομική.

[16] οἰκία.

[17] φρόνησις.

[18] N. Eth., $1141^{b}28-1142^{a}10$.

[19] κτητική.

[20] χρηματιστική.

[21] Pol., $1256^{b}40-1257^{a}$.

FOOTNOTES (continued)

[22]D. G. Ritchie in Palgrave's Dictionary of Political Economy says that "Aristotle uses χρηματιστικὴ in the widest sense as equivalent to κτητικὴ, the art of acquisition in general; but in a narrower sense it is limited to the art of acquiring that wealth which is only rendered possible by exchange and, on any considerable scale, by money." (p. 54.)

[23]This particular meaning of property may be traced to some extent in its etymology. The Greek words ktema, an article of property, and ktesis, property in general, both come from the verb ktaomai which means "an acquiring or getting." Since it is in the middle voice, it has the further implication of acquiring or getting for oneself--the middle voice indicating action in the subject's interest-- action containing the idea of direct rather than indirect use.

[24]Infra, p. 26.

[25]χρηματα.

[26]πλοῦτος.

[27]N. Eth., 1119[b]20-30.

[28]Pol., 1267[b]11.

[29]Ibid., 1256[b]37-38.

[30]ἀγαθά.

[31]Richard McKeon, "The Development of the Concept of Property in Political Philosophy: A Study of the Background of the Constitution," Ethics, 48: 310 (April, 1938).

"There is . . . but one problem of property in Plato, treated again and again in the course of his dialogues in many dialectical modifications which carry the term "property" through the long list of its possible applications: the problem, which of the many goods men pursue are true goods, and which are only apparent goods, possibly useful if pursued in moderation as means to a true good, probably dangerous either in themselves or in the distraction which they cause from the pursuit of true possessions."

"The dialectic of Plato . . . balanced property--as it did likewise opinion, pleasure and pain, the passions--against dialectic and reason; and property, other than property in the good and the true, assumes, consequently, a relatively unimportant place in a state governed, as in the

FOOTNOTES (continued)

Republic, by philosopher kings or, as in the Laws, by enlightened law-givers. Knowledge is a fundamental term in the dialectic of Plato. With its increase, attachment to other goods than the true good diminishes; the passions are controlled and the state formed, so far as either is in fact accomplished, by knowledge." (pp. 311-12.)

[32] φύσις or νόμος.

[33] Alexander Grant, The Ethics of Aristotle, p. 151.

[34] N. Ethics, $1094^{b}14$-17. "But these conceptions (Moral Nobility and Justice) involve much difference of opinion and uncertainty, so that they are sometimes believed to be mere conventions and to have no real existence in the nature of things."

[35] Pol., $1256^{b}7$-10.

[36] Ibid., $1332^{a}39$-40

[37] Ibid., $1323^{b}26$-30, $1332^{a}28$-33.

[38] Physics, op. cit., $199^{a}6$-9.

[39] N. Eth., $1094^{a}1$-3.

[40] Pol., $1254^{a}32$-34.

[41] N. Eth., $1094^{b}4$, $1095^{a}28$-30.

[42] Ibid., $1094^{a}10$.

Chapter III

[43] Pol., Bk. II.

[44] It is interesting to note that John Locke makes a similar distinction--directed against Robert Filmer--many centuries later: "To this purpose, I think it may not be amiss to set down what I take to be political power; that the power of a magistrate over a subject may be distinguished from that of a father over his children, a master over his servants, a husband over his wife, and a lord over his slave. All which distinct powers happening sometimes together in the same man, if he be considered under these different relations, it may help us to distinguish these powers one from another, and show the difference betwixt a ruler of a commonwealth, a

FOOTNOTES (continued)

father of a family, and a captain of a galley." John Locke, The Second Treatise of Civil Government, Chapter I, part 2.

[45] Pol., 1261[a]15-17.

[46] Ibid., 1261[a]18-20.

[47] McKeon, op. cit., pp. 304-5. Richard McKeon argues that by making a distinction between various social groups--among these the household and the polis--Aristotle is able to associate property with a particular one--the household. He reasons further that doing so excludes property entirely from the problems of political philosophy.

This is, I think, a somewhat extreme position. If one distinguishes, as Aristotle does, between the use and acquisition of property, McKeon is only partly correct. Certainly the statesman--and for that matter the manager of the household--is not to be concerned with the acquisition of property. But both are concerned with its use. This conclusion seems even to follow from another observation of McKeon's. (See pp. 306-308.) Applying the Aristotleian doctrine of causes to the state he says that its material cause is man in his group associations; its final cause, that the citizens be enabled to live as well as possible under the given circumstances; its formal cause, as effective a social organization as possible; and its efficient cause, land and other wealth.

Now, if land and other wealth are the efficient cause--the means at the disposal of the legislator, then the regulation of property is not confined wholly to the manager of the household. In fact, as we shall see later, the legislator in the best polis has certain specific responsibilities regarding the amount and distribution of property.

[48] Pol., 1255[b]16-24.

[49] Ibid., 1252[a]7-24.

[50] N. Eth., Book I, Chapter Six.

Chapter IV

[51] The English words "tool" and "instrument" have only one referent in Greek. This is ὄργανον . Some confusion may arise if the reader attempts a distinction. While Barker translates "an article of property as an instrument for the purpose of life," (p. 9), Rackham translates it as a tool for the purpose of life." (p. 17.) (Underlining mine.)

[52] κτῆμα.

FOOTNOTES (continued)

[53] Pol., 1254[a]17-18.

[54] κτῆσις.

[55] Pol., 1253[b]23-33.

[56] N. Eth., 1140[b] πρᾶξις.

[57] Ibid., 1176[b]1-11

[58] Ibid., ποίησις.

[59] Pol., 1258[a]34. It is not clear whether the natural form of acquisition is a part of the art of household management or subsidiary to it. Aristotle's remarks, at one point, that "in the matter of property, there is a sense in which it is the business of the manager of a household to see to its acquisition; but in another sense that is not his business, and acquisition belongs to an ancillary art."

[60] Evidently the manager of a household qua manager of a household does not concern himself with providing the necessities. This must be the function of the slave.

[61] μεταβλητική.

[62] ἀλλαγή.

[63] καπηλικόν.

[64] νόμισμα. Aristotle had a great deal to say about the development and nature of money which will not be considered here. This material may be found in the following passages: N. Eth., 1133[a]20 - 1133[b]28; Pol., 1257[a]32 - 1257[b]23.

[65] Pol., 1258[a]11-14. "The proper function of courage, for example, is not to produce money but to give confidence. The same is true of military and medical ability: neither has the function of producing money: the one has the function of producing victory, and the other that of producing health."

[66] Cf. Joseph Cropsey, "On the Relation of Political Science and Economics," The American Political Science Review, 44:10 (March, 1960).

FOOTNOTES (continued)

Chapter V

[67]Supra, p. 11.

[68]McKeon, op. cit., p. 306. As McKeon interprets Aristotle, "politics is a science concerned with the actions of men, not with the making or exchange of things. The legislator's interest in property may therefore be stated in terms of two possibilities. To pursue its end the state must have a sufficiency of property: if (1) the territory of the state is self-sufficing and if the state produces all that the citizens require, the problem of the legislator is to enact and enforce such laws as will lead the citizens who happen to inhabit his state 'to live in leisure at once freely and temperately,' if (2) the state is not self-sufficient, either by means of its own produce or by means of commerce, the problem is not one to be solved by political devices, and the solution of it, by whomever undertaken, involves considerations of commerce and business. The problem of the statesman is not that of the acquisition of wealth (that is the problem of the household, the trader, the merchant); it is not the problem of the right use of wealth (that is the problem of the moralist); rather, the problem of the statesman is so to organize social relations, in a situation in which there is a sufficiency of property, that all will have a minimum necessary for subsistence and a maximum possibility of living well."

While I agree with much of what this author says, I don't understand how he is able to divorce the problem of the right use of wealth from the problem of the statesman. Aristotle clearly entrusts certain moral functions to the statesman and legislator. Cf. Pol., $1333^{a}11$-$1333^{b}5$.

[69]N. Eth., $1179^{a}33$-$1181^{b}24$.

[70]Pol., $1263^{a}39$-41.

[71]Cropsey, op. cit., p. 13. This function of the legislator is to be contrasted with that of the modern one: "Legislation, or the act of government, which is the object of political science, is decisively in the service of property, which is the object of economics."

FOOTNOTES (continued)

[72]Pol., 1329[a]1-3. "Leisure is a necessity, both for growth in goodness and for the pursuit of political activities."

Ibid., 1329[a]18-20. "The persons who exercise these powers must also be the owners of property . . . and it is these persons who are citizens--they, and they only."

[73]Ibid., 1263[a]24-26.

[74]Ibid., 1263[a]29-31.

[75]Ibid., 1263[a]35-37.

[76]Ibid., 1330[a]9-14.

[77]Ibid., 1266[b]8-14.

[78]Ibid., 1266[b]11-14. "It is difficult for men who have suffered . . . [the fate of being reduced from comfort to penury] not to be revolutionaries."

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