

THE POLITICS

ARISTOTLE

from *The U.S. Constitution: A Reader*, p. 23-28

Thomas Jefferson began studying Greek at the age of nine, and later in life employed so many Greek phrases in his letters that John Adams, his frequent correspondent, complained of them. The Founders' interest in classical languages was not academic, but political and philosophical. Among the ancient books that they drew upon was Aristotle's Politics, a catalog of constitutions and a guide to understanding regimes.

C. 335–322 B.C.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I. (1) Since we see that every city is some sort of partnership, and that every partnership is constituted for the sake of some good (for everyone does everything for the sake of what is held to be good), it is clear that all partnerships aim at some good, and that the partnership that is most authoritative of all and embraces all the others does so particularly, and aims at the most authoritative good of all. This is what is called the city or the political partnership....

From these things it is evident, then, that the city belongs among the things that exist by nature, and that man is by nature a political animal. He who is without a city through nature rather than chance is either a mean sort or superior to man; he is “without clan, without law, without hearth,” like the person reproved by Homer; (10) for the one who is such by nature has by this fact a desire for war, as if he were an isolated piece in a game of chess. That man is much more a political animal than any kind of bee or any herd animal is clear. For, as we assert, nature does nothing in vain; and man alone among the animals has speech. (11) The voice indeed indicates the painful or pleasant, and hence is present in other animals as well; for their nature has come this far, that they have a perception of the painful and pleasant and indicate these things to each other. But speech serves to reveal the advantageous and the harmful, and hence also the just and the unjust. (12) For it is peculiar to man as compared to the other animals that he alone has a perception of good and bad and just and unjust and other things [of this sort]; and partnership in these things is what makes a household and a city.

The city is thus prior by nature to the household and to each of us. (13) For the whole must of necessity be prior to the part; for if the whole [body] is destroyed there will not be a foot or a hand, unless in the sense that the term is similar (as when one speaks of a hand made of stone), but the thing itself will be

Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 35–41.

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THE APPLE OF GOLD AND THE FRAME OF SILVER

defective. Everything is defined by its task and its power, and if it is no longer the same in these respects it should not be spoken of in the same way, but only as something similarly termed. (14) That the city is both by nature and prior to each individual, then, is clear. For if the individual when separated [from it] is not self-sufficient, he will be in a condition similar to that of the other parts in relation to the whole. One who is incapable of participating or who is in need of nothing through being self-sufficient is no part of a city, and so is either a beast or a god....