Clifford Angell Bates Jr

The Centrality of the Regime for Political Science

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Introduction

This little book tries to make the case for the centrality of what Aristotle called "the *politeia*" and contemporary political scientists call "the regime" in any attempt to have a science of politics. For the past decade, I have been engaged in an effort to clarify the concept of sovereignty, its origins, and its evolution in the history of political thought. The concept of sovereignty is a modern one that, nevertheless, can trace some of its origins from the nature and character of medieval kingship. Sovereignty plays a central role in how the modern state operates in the world, as well as playing a key role in the relations among nations.

Now many scholars dealing with the issue of sovereignty have not been happy to accept this idea as a product of the medieval era and instead have sought to find its origins in Greek political thought, if not in the politics of the Greek polis. All too often they try to connect it with the concept of the *kryos*, or the *politeuma*. This has been assisted by the trend from the 17th century on to translate polis as "state" or "city-state." I took up this issue in my earlier book, *Aristotle's Best Regime* (Bates 2003, 17-26). And I agreed that it is anachronistic to do this because the very nature of the state, a concept created by Machiavelli and perfected by those following in his footsteps, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, et al., is fundamentally different from the concept of the polis. It is true that both the polis and the state are instruments of political community, but the state is the modern one with the modern philosophical assumptions about nature's defectiveness and the need for man to conquer it, while the polis is the ancient one with the ancient, classical philosophical assumption that nature is the ground that not only sustains the life of man, but also scopes out the potentialities of man's excellences (a.k.a the virtues of man).

But my eureka moment came when I realized that the state's relationship may not be at the level of the political community, i.e, its body, but may instead be in its form; that the state is the tool that gives form to the modern political community; and that those who say that Machia-

velli is silent about Aristotle's *politeia* [a.k.a. regime or constitution] and speaks instead of "new modes and orders" and coins the concept of la stato [a.k.a the state] may be missing what old Nic (that is Machiavelli) might have done. We scholars might have noticed his bait and switch, but we may have missed that which was, in fact, switched. That the concept of the state, *la stato*, might be not the new political body, but in fact that which gives form to and life to that political body. That the state, is Machiavelli's replacement for the Aristotelian concept of the *politeia* [the regime].

So the contrast is not between the polis and the state, but between the *politeia* and the state, between the two tools that give shape to or form to the political community. But we have then a problem with what Hobbes and others do with Machiavelli's state—for they make it the body politic, the collective will of the body politic. What Machiavelli understood to be the tool that would give shape to the political order and give it life, became for Machiavelli's successors the whole of the political order—that is to say it shifts from being an instrument in the creation of the whole to being the whole itself. For these later thinkers the state is the very body politic, itself. Thus the state becomes the form of the political community in modern political thought.

So the conceptual contrast is not between the state and the polis, but between the state and the concept of the *politeia*, the regime. And the point of contention is not then the question of naturalness of the Ancient form (the *polis*) versus the conventionality of the modern form (the State), but rather the difference is the fact that the state—being an act of will and willing of the one who brings it to being and as a willed thing—its form is generally unitary and its whole is united as one (or ought to be, if healthy and strong) versus a whole that emerges out of discrete and even heterogeneous parts which might come together and share a life together but are not truly one united whole. The *politeia* (or the regime) is that which brings together the parts that form the given political community—but those parts remain, in fact, discrete parts. Thus any concept of the "general will" would be alien to the character of the *politeia* (regime) and because of that the *politeia* allows for a much more dynamic understanding of both the nature and the workings of the political community.

This book will first look at the nature of the political community and it then shows the central role that the *politeia* or the regime (as many modern political scientists would today label the term) plays in giving

the political community its form, its shape, and its character. Then after an examination of Aristotle's treatment of the concept, we turn to a how this critical concept is increasingly marginalized in the study of politics. And finally we will turn to the attempt of political scientists in the mid-20th century to re-create a concept or framework that will allow observers of political behavior to capture the dynamic nature of politics and how those attempts all end up falling short of what Aristotle already had given the students of political science with his treatment of the *politeia* or regime.

CHAPTER 1

The Rise of The Political Community

It is clear, at least for Aristotle, that to be fully human, human beings need the political community to fulfill their natures (*Politics* 1.2.1252a25-53a40).[1] The claim made by Aristotle that "human beings are political animals" (*Politics* 1.2.1253a2-6 and 3.6.1278b18-19) has, in the past several years, become a controversial topic in Aristotle scholarship. In many ways, scholars have made the political animal argument to stress the natural sociability of humans, against the view held by Hobbes and other modern political theorists, who argue that human sociability is not *per se* natural. The rejection of human natural sociability culminates in the rejection of Aristotle's claim that the *polis* (city) or the political community is natural (see Hobbes 1991; and Rousseau 1964; also see Strauss 1988, 47-55).[2]

A good portion of the scholarship concerning the political animal question in Aristotle's political thought falls short, however. There are at least four ways this scholarship, in addressing why the political community must be authoritative over all other human associations, fails adequately to address the question: 1. There is a tendency among certain scholars—in their attempt to defend the natural sociability of human beings against the denial of Hobbes *et al*—either to undermine or to ignore the distinction between the political community and the household (see Arnhart 1990; Arnhart 1994; and Arnhart 1995; Masters 1989a; and Wilson 1993). In so doing, these scholars—who claim to be defending Aristotle's understanding of political animals—seem to forget that Aristotle explicitly states that those who fail to note that the difference between the household and the *polis* is a difference in kind and not merely different in number or size "do not argue rightly" (*Politics* 1.1.1252a7-15). 2. Another

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[1] John Ferguson argues that the Aristotelian dictum that man is a political animal is "not far from the center" of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in that "man finds his fulfillment only in ordered society" (Ferguson 1972, 106).

[2] Kullmann's (1980) article once again brought critical attention to this argument in Aristotle. R. G. Mulgan (1974) replies to Kullmann (1980) and begins the current controversy over Aristotle's claim that "man is a political animal."