



Abstract from Article

INFLUENTIAL MODELS OF POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS IN THE WESTERN TRADITION

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Abstract

Although modern science tends to classify man as a social being, Aristotle's concept of man as a political animal appears to have been more accurate. Situated between the beasts and the gods, man is a novelty, a self-conscious being only partially and ambiguously bound to the givenness of instinctual and divine orders. Without a given and authoritative mode of sociality, humans must select their environment, make choices about their companions, deliberate upon their associations, and construct authoritative orders not only to live, according to Aristotle, but to live well. Although there have been many historic political orders, there may be only a limited number of basic conceptual models through which people can construct particular political associations. In the West, at least, five models, which will be examined in the article, appear to have been especially influential. These might be termed the organic order, the covenant community, the mixed polis, the contractual society, and the collectivist universal. These models, however, are rooted in larger constructions of reality which locate man, nature, and the divine within some comprehensive scheme. Humans must, in effect, construct reality because, even though there may be innate principles and instincts which, in very general ways, shape the form and interpretation of the human situation, at base, reality lacks a self-evident order, intrinsic meaning, and ultimate purpose for humankind. Moreover, since the nature of humanity cannot be understood apart from the beasts and the gods, the conceptions and vocabulary of the ordinary politics are integrally linked to extraordinary constructions of reality. The mechanically based principles of the Hobbesian polity, for example, were partially derived by Hobbes from his conception of the physics of the universe. The Bible employs the idea of the covenant, not only as a theological concept, but also an ecological, political, social, economic, and interpersonal concept – thereby linking man, nature, and the divine in a common framework. Similarly, where biblical prophets saw covenant love (*hesed*) as the effective principle underlying the just governance of the universe, many Greek philosophers saw friendship (*philia*). "Wise men," wrote Plato, "say that the heavens and the earth, gods and men, are bound together by fellowship and friendship, and order and temperance and justice, and for this reason they call the sum of things the 'ordered' universe...not the world of disorder and riot." In so constructing reality, one may take one's bearings from the beast or the gods through reason or revelation. Some compound or mixture may also be attempted as in the appeal of the American Declaration of Independence to "the laws of Nature and of Nature's God." Since humans have historically constructed realities along these lines, they may be said to constitute the basic raw materials of political association. As such, these two general orientations might be termed primordial and civil.