

## **Aristotle - Philosophy of Politics III**

By G. E. Gorfu

Aristotle said: *'He who does not live in society, or who has no need to, because he is sufficient unto himself, must be either a beast or a god.'* In reality, even beasts do live in communities except when locked up in cages in a zoo, otherwise they would die out. Not only Aristotle but almost all Greek philosophers of the time believed: *'the gods needed nothing, and to want as little as possible was to be like the gods.'* Thus, Diogenes seeing his dog drinking at the river said: *'My dog has taught me an important lesson today!'* and with that he threw his drinking cup away. That was because he wanted to be like the gods who did not need anything; free from acquiring wealth, or any kind of property.

The real struggle and the hardest battles of life are not fought against others people on the outside, but within oneself. It takes a great deal of will power to be a public official and not corrupt. And Aristotle knew it when he said: *"I consider him braver who overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies; for the hardest victory is over oneself."*

Earlier we quoted Proudhon who said: *Property is Theft* but Aristotle said: *'it is best for property to be private, but the use of it common; and the duty of legislators should be to create in their citizens that benevolent disposition.'* It is remarkable how these prophetic words are realized two thousand years later in public transportation, public toilets and rest areas, public parks and recreation, and many similar "public" facilities we come to take for granted today. They have "free" public bicycles in Holland; public rental bicycles for a token of a few cents in France, where one rides a bicycle and leaves it at the bus or train station, so that the next person who needs it can pick it up from there and use it.

Speaking of contentment and living the simple life, no one comes close to Diogenes who, when Alexander the Great came to visit him one morning and asked, *"I am the king and I can give you anything you want. What would you like from me?"* just replied: *"Can you please, move a little? I was warming myself. You're blocking me the sunshine."*

Diogenes was really telling Alexander: *'I am content. I do not need anything. You are a king, but are you content?'* Of course, Alexander was not content. So he went out to fight many wars and conquer the world. What did it profit him? He died thousands of miles away from family and friends, away from hearth and home. We do not even know if he had a decent burial or not, or any burial. And no one to this day knows his grave. Jesus said: *"What would it profit a man if he gains the whole world but loses himself?"*

Self restraint is the power to control oneself and say: "Enough. No more!" and stop. To have the will power to stop especially when one can go on and on, for as long as one may want. Self control is important in everything from eating and drinking to the amassing of wealth and acquiring property. After all, whatever we may have today, it will all be left behind and given away when we die. So, what is the use of greed? Aristotle says: *"It is best to rise up from life as from a banquet, neither thirsty nor drunken."* In Amharic we have somewhat of an equivalent proverb. We say: **አልጠግብ ባይ ሲተፋ ያድራል!**