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Retrospective on Freedom and Security at the Crossroads of Eras: The Convergence of Aristotle's and Epicurus' Concepts of State, Politics, and Happiness

Brīvība un drošība laikmetu krustcelēs: valsts un laimes politikas mācība Aristoteļa *Valstslietās* un Epikūra filozofijā

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Summary This paper explores how freedom and security intersect in Aristotle's and Epicurus' ethical and political thought, revealing their contrasting yet complementary visions of happiness. Often seen as opposites, Aristotle, champion of civic virtue, and Epicurus, seeker of inner tranquility, both explore what it means to live freely, securely, and well. For Aristotle, the *Polis* is the highest form of human association, enabling virtue and *eudaimonia*. As political animals (*politikon zōon*), humans realize their potential through rational and just community life. Freedom is not unrestrained choice but living by ethical reason, while security stems from stable institutions guiding citizens toward the common good. Epicurus, reacting to post-Alexandrian turmoil, locates happiness in the soul as *ataraxia*, inner calm free from fear and excess desire. Freedom is release from disturbance; security arises through moderation, friendship, and self-sufficiency. The Epicurean *Garden* replaces civic duty with contemplative autonomy. Yet both unite freedom and security in pursuit of happiness. Aristotle's civic order and Epicurus' inner discipline both rely on law, whether external or internal, to shape ethical life. Their synthesis challenges modern extremes: freedom without order breeds chaos, while security without liberty invites tyranny.

Kopsavilkums Raksts pēta, kā brīvības un drošības jēdzieni krustojas Aristoteļa un Epikūra ētiskajās un politiskajās filozofijās, izgaismojot viņu kontrastējošos, bet papildinošos skatījumus uz laimi. Lai gan tradicionāli uzskatīti par pretpoliem, Aristotelis kā pilsoniskās tikumības aizstāvis un Epikūrs kā individuālās mierpilnības piekritējs, abi sniedz atbildes uz jautājumu: ko nozīmē dzīvot brīvi, droši un labi? Aristoteļa izpratnē *polis* ir augstākā cilvēku kopienas forma, kas ļauj attīstīt tikumu un sasniegt eudaimoniju. Cilvēks kā politisks dzīvnieks (*politikon zōon*) īsteno savu potenciālu racionālā un taisnīgā sabiedrībā. Brīvība nav neierobežota izvēle, bet saskaņa ar ētisko likumu, savukārt drošība balstās stabilās institūcijās, kas virza pilsoņus uz kopējo labumu. Epikūrs, dzīvodams pēc-Aleksandra nestabilitātē, pārvieto laimi individuālajā dvēselē, definējot to kā ataraksiju – iekšēju mieru, brīvību no bailēm un liekām vēlmēm. Brīvība ir atbrīvošanās no traucējumiem, drošība rodas caur mērenību, draudzību un pašpietiekamību. Epikūra "Dārzs" iemiesoja alternatīvu pilsoniskajai līdzdalībai, uzsverot kontemplatīvu autonomiju. Abi domātāji redz brīvību un drošību kā savstarpēji saistītus laimes nosacījumus: brīvība bez kārtības rada haosu, drošība bez brīvības autoritārismu. Cilvēka plaukšanai vajadzīgs līdzsvars, autonomija un stabilitāte, rīcība un kontemplācija.

Introduction

To begin with, when examining Aristotle's exposition on the foundations of the state in his work, *Politics* (Bekker pagination), particular attention must be paid to Aristotle's assertion that the state (*polis*) is the most original, supreme, natural, and complete form of human association – and as such, it is more important than the individual (Reeve 1998: 1253a19–20; I.2, 1253a3). Aristotle sees the state as a natural and ethical structure essential for human fulfillment, since man is by nature a *zōon politikon* – a political being. Outside the community, one loses their humanity. The state's aim is not merely security or economic order but the cultivation of virtue and *eudaimonia* – a fulfilled life through moral education and collective flourishing. This contrasts sharply with Epicurus, who links the state to individual well-being, defined by *ataraxia* (inner peace) and *aponia* (absence of pain), prioritizing personal tranquility over shared ethical development. Thus, their visions of the state serve fundamentally different human goals. From his perspective, the state is an instrumental means that exists to prevent mutual harm and to create a safe environment for private life – not to directly cultivate citizens' morality or to define a universal goal of life (on more recent negative conceptualizations of freedom and respective role of state see Eihmanis et al. 2026, this issue).

The aim of this article is to analyze and compare Aristotle's and Epicurus' conceptions of the state, freedom, and happiness within the broader context of ancient political philosophy. The objectives of the study are to examine Aristotle's understanding of the *polis* as a natural and ethical community, to analyze Epicurus' view of the state as a pragmatic arrangement aimed at ensuring security and personal tranquility, and to clarify the philosophical differences between these two approaches to political order and human fulfillment. The research is based on a comparative philosophical analysis of classical sources, particularly Aristotle's Politics and the Epicurean tradition, as well as on the interpretation of their later reception in political thought (Aristotels 2022).

For Aristotle, the state is a natural outgrowth of social evolution, arising from family and village life. It precedes the individual and provides the framework for human fulfillment. Its primary goal is not mere survival, but the citizens' happiness, achieved through moral and practical excellence. This teleological, yet also practical,[1] understanding of the state fundamentally distinguishes Aristotle's political

1 Aristotle often compares political affairs and human behavior in general to processes and phenomena in nature.

philosophy from both utilitarian models – which link the value of the state to its ability to maximize individual pleasure or benefit – and from social contract theories, which reduce the state to an agreement among individuals aimed at ensuring rights to security. Aristotle sees the state as an ethical community aimed at the common good through moral participation. Epicurus, however, views it as a pragmatic tool for ensuring peace and security, enabling personal happiness. The state holds no intrinsic value for him and lacks any morally educative function.

Aristotle views the state as a natural, teleological structure aimed at moral development. It precedes the individual, enabling true fulfillment only within it. Citizenship entails ethical participation, where one both rules and is ruled. Thus, politics becomes a moral practice, and the state its essential arena. In Aristotle's understanding, the rights made possible within the state are not merely tools for organizing daily life or protecting property; rather, they serve a higher purpose – the moral development of the individual and the attainment of the common good. As Aristotle points out (Reeve 1998: III.9, 1280b5–10),[2] the state exists not merely to enable living, but to enable living well (eu zēn). This phrase reveals a fundamental insight: happiness is not solely an individual matter, but the task of a political community, in which laws (nomoi) are not neutral but normative – they guide citizens towards virtue and eudaimonia. Aristotle also makes it clear that the best state is one whose aim is not power or economic prosperity but the happiness of its citizens, which entails a virtuous way of life in accordance with reason (Reeve 1998: VII.1, 1323b35–1324a1).[3] Therefore, in Aristotle's view, law is not a mechanical system of regulation but an ethically grounded instrument that links the development of the individual and the community within a unified, purpose-driven framework. This approach emphasizes that a person only becomes truly human within a community where they live, according to the laws that guide one towards virtue – and thus, towards happiness. Unlike modern liberal theories, where rights serve individual autonomy, for Aristotle, law is a path to the common good (Reeve 1998: VII.13, 1332a7–12).[4] Epicurus sees justice as a mutual agreement not to harm or be harmed, rooted in utility, not universal morality. Justice is valid only if it ensures peace and security; when it fails, it loses relevance. Law, for him, is a pragmatic tool for freedom from fear, not an eternal norm. Thus, as interpreted, or, more precisely, as Epicurean philosophy and Epicureanism are presented by thinkers such as Lorenzo Valla,

2 That living in a community means "to live well."

3 That the goal of the ideal state is the happiness of its citizens.

4 About the ethical function of law and the cultivation of virtue.

Pierre Gassendi, Thomas Hobbes, Michel de Montaigne, and Hugo Grotius,[5] Epicurus could also be regarded as a proto-theorist of the idea of the social contract – an idea later transformed by thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, each assigning a different content and purpose to the concept. Hobbes turns it into a means by which individuals, fearing a "war of all against all" (bellum omnium contra omnes), surrender their freedom to a sovereign in order to ensure order and survival (Hobbes 1996: XIII, p. 88; XVII, p. 120). Locke links the social contract to the protection of natural rights – life, liberty, and property – emphasizing limited government and the citizens' right to resist in the case of tyranny. Rousseau, on the other hand, transforms the idea of the contract by grounding it in the concept of the general will (*volonté générale*), where the legitimacy of the state is ensured through the direct participation of citizens in the formulation of the collective will (Rousseau 2018: 49; 53).[6]

Aristotle's *Politics* is a continuation of his *Ethics* (Bobonich 2006: 17–23), as only within the framework of a political community can a person cultivate virtue and achieve their natural perfection – that is, to become fully human, unlike other living beings, which is also their highest goal. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines happiness as the soul's activity in line with virtue. Moral virtue guides goals, practical wisdom guides means, and the highest happiness comes through (*theōría*) contemplative reasoning as the fullest expression of the soul's rational nature (Rotkale 2025).

Epicurus and Epicureanism Epicurus arrived in Athens at 18, as Aristotle spent his final years in Chalcis. His thought matured amid Alexander the Great's hegemony, which exposed the destructive effects of conquest. Alexander's early death left a vast, unstable empire, shaping Epicurus' turn away from political ambition toward inner peace. Important accounts of Alexander's final days – whose tutor was Aristotle – have been preserved by the biographer, historian, and philosopher Plutarch in his renowned work *Vita Alexandri* (Plutarch 1919: Alexander 75–77). Although Plutarch never wrote a biography of Epicurus, he mentioned him several times in his philosophical treatises, mostly in a critical light. In *Adversus Colotem* and *Non posse suaviter vivi secundum Epicurum* (That Epicurus Actually Makes

5 Kant, the post-Kantian Hegel, and also Marx engaged in extensive polemics surrounding and concerning Epicurus' philosophy.

6 The essence of the contract and the "general will" as the source of legitimacy; state authority and the primacy of the collective will.

a Pleasant Life Impossible), he criticizes Epicurean philosophy; in the latter, he disputes the identification of the good with the escape from evil (Plutarch 1967: 47–49; Non posse 1091B–D). Such polemical works not only provide insight into the debates between ancient philosophical schools but also reveal how Epicurus' ideas were received and interpreted by later generations of thinkers. Moreover, such political and cultural upheavals formed the backdrop against which Epicurus' views on the purpose of human life, social order, and individual peace took shape.

More precisely, when Epicurus arrived in Athens (around 323 BCE), Alexander the Great had already died, but Aristotle was still alive. However, Aristotle was no longer in Athens at that time – he had been forced to leave the city and go to Euboea (Chalcis), as he was accused of impiety and was possibly seen as too closely connected to Alexander's regime. In other words, after the death of Alexander the Great – and in order for the Athenians not to "sin against philosophy a second time", following the sentencing of Socrates – Aristotle, accused of impiety (*asebeia*) in connection with a hymn to Hermias and of loyalty to the fallen ruler (expressed through personal and intellectual ties with Alexander the Great and the court of his grandfather, Amyntas III), fled to Chalcis, where he died shortly thereafter (Rotkale 2025; Zeller 1879: 99–100). He died the following year – in 322 BCE – when Epicurus was 19 years old (DeWitt 1954: 18).

Later, after military service, in around 306 BCE, Epicurus returned to Athens and founded his own school of philosophy, known as the *Garden* (*Kēpos*). Unlike Plato's *Academy* and Aristotle's *Lyceum*, which were closely associated with educating the social elite and often served political structures, Epicurus' *Garden* was located on the outskirts of Athens and was open to women and slaves – a revolutionary stance within the context of Greek social life and culture at the time. Aristotle, too, had established his school – the Lyceum – on the periphery of Athens, near the sports ground of the Lyceum (*Lykeion*) (Berti 2009: 68) in the gymnasium near the Temple of Apollo, establishing the Peripatetic school, so named after the *perípatos*, the walkway where discussions took place (Rotkale 2025), and both philosophers deliberately situated themselves outside the central academic institutions of the city, symbolizing an alternative approach to knowledge and society. Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus lived in Athens within the same century, sharing a cultural and historical context. Despite differing views – idealism, empirical teleology, and materialism – their proximity fostered rich dialogue. This convergence shaped distinct yet interrelated philosophies that deeply influenced Western intellectual tradition.

Several scholars believe that Epicurus was sufficiently well-informed about Aristotle's teachings to engage with them philosophically. For example, he rejected Aristotle's teleology (the purposeful order of the world), criticized the doctrine of the

four causes and opposed the existence of abstract forms (Verde 2016: 45).[7] Other scholars, such as Paul Vander Waerdt (P. A. Vander Waerdt), emphasize that Epicurus deliberately ignored or rejected the authority of Aristotle's works and did not use his texts directly. This view is often based on the polemics of Philodemus and Epicurus' follower Colotes (Colotes of Lampsacus), where Aristotle is mentioned with skepticism or dismissed entirely (Vander 1989: 275–302).[8] In other words, while some scholars believe that Epicurus was familiar with Aristotle's philosophy and Plato's teachings, others emphasize that he deliberately rejected or avoided using their works, considering them incompatible with his materialist and atomist worldview.[9]

Witnesses of the Age of Alexander the Great

Plutarch, who was one of the most important writers and biographers of late ancient Greece, in his work *Vitae Parallelae* (Parallel Lives) attempted to compare prominent Greek and Roman statesmen. His biography, *The Life of Alexander*, is one of the main ancient testimonies regarding the personality, life, and death of Alexander the Great. Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* is a key ancient source on Alexander's final days, paired with Julius Caesar for comparative insight (Plutarhs 2014: 76). Plutarch writes: "For it is not Histories that I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice" (Plutarch 1919: Alexander 1.2).

Plutarch describes Alexander's death at the end of the book (Plutarch 1919: Alexander 75–77). He writes that Alexander fell ill after a banquet in Babylon, possibly following a celebration in which a large amount of undiluted wine was consumed and where Heracles – an important hero for Alexander's self-image and also mentioned in Aristotle's works – was honored. Alexander's fatal illness lasted eleven days, during which he lost speech but stayed conscious. His final act was a silent salute to his soldiers, showing dignity in death. Plutarch dismisses poisoning rumors, attributing his death to natural causes like exhaustion, alcohol, and possible infection. The historian Anthony Brian Bosworth emphasizes that Plutarch was not

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7 "Epicurus clearly knew some of Aristotle's arguments but rejected the fundamental teleological and metaphysical framework."

8 It has become a view among Epicureans to portray Aristotle not as a source to be studied, but as a target to be rejected – or entirely ignored.

9 There is no consensus on this issue, and it remains a topic of ongoing scholarly debate, with academic discussion in this area still open.

a medical historian but a moralist, whose primary goal was the revelation of character rather than a factual diagnosis. In his opinion, in Plutarch's account of Alexander's death, propaganda and rumor play a significant role – particularly regarding the poisoning theory, which Plutarch does mention but also evaluates critically. Bosworth argues that such tales shaped Alexander's heroic legacy. Plutarch focused more on Alexander's noble death than its medical cause (Bosworth 1971: 117). Also, in literary works – but not in scholarly accounts – there is manipulation involving the so-called final four posthumous wishes of the commander, Alexander.

Ancient thinkers often compared historical figures to mythic heroes. Alexander is linked to Heracles, symbolizing courage and service to the common good. Aristotle, his tutor, references Heracles in *Rhetoric* and *Nicomachean Ethics* as a model of virtue. These comparisons shaped Alexander's heroic, morally symbolic legacy (Aristotle 1893: VII.1, 1145a27–29).[10] In the *Rhetoric*, Heracles is mentioned as a guiding motif of *ethos* and serves to explain why certain individuals are held in esteem. Aristotle emphasizes that people are praised not in abstract terms but for specific merits – just as Heracles is honored for his self-sacrifice and service to humanity (Ross 1924: I.9, 1367a34).[11]

Aristotle contrasts state law with natural law. Heracles exemplifies one who, guided by higher principles, may defy laws yet retain moral legitimacy. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where Heracles is compared to the philosopher who lives "according to a higher law" (Aristotle 1893: VII 1, 1145a20–25), there is a clear reference to natural law as superior to social norms. Thus, the example of Heracles is used to demonstrate that there exists a morally higher principle than state law, one that individuals can intuitively grasp and follow. This position introduces the idea that breaking the law may be considered morally justifiable when an individual acts in accordance with a higher, natural justice.

This idea is further developed in *Politics*, where Aristotle states that a being who lives outside the polis is "a beast or a god" (Reeve 1998: I 2, 1253a8–15). Heracles here serves as a liminal figure – he is not merely a common individual, but not entirely a god either. Heracles shows that justice isn't limited to state law. Aristotle's view of man as political is challenged by the idea that moral virtue can exist beyond the state. Meanwhile, the argument in Aristotle's *Rhetoric* regarding the divine honor given to Heracles – "even Heracles was granted a temple..." (Ross 1924: II 23,

10 Just as the legends tell of Heracles, who bore all labors and hardships because it was noble to do so.

11 We honor the gods and heroes such as Heracles and Asclepius because of the benefits they have given to humanity.

1399b5–10) – marks the boundary between state and religious authority. It demonstrates the individual's ability to attain respect and legitimate authority beyond traditionally assigned and state-defined norms and the established public order. Heracles embodies the clash of legal and moral orders.

Epicurus contrasts Aristotle by valuing inner peace over external law. He sees divinity in serene self-sufficiency, not heroic action. The ideal person, living justly and peacefully, mirrors the gods. Thus, Aristotle's active Heracles and Epicurus' contemplative sage represent two complementary paths to ethical fulfillment and freedom (Erler 2002: 181). Heracles and the Epicurean sage show two divine paths: heroic action and peaceful contemplation, reflecting ancient views on human fulfillment.

Affairs of State (*Politics*) Aristotle's *Politics* is his key political work, examining the state, political systems, and ideal governance. Though unfinished and compiled from lectures, it offers rich material for theory and comparison. The Harvard edition introduction highlights its layered structure and significance in political philosophy. In the introduction to *Politica*,[12] which by 1959 had already reached its fourth reprint (Aristotle 1959: 111), Hugh Rackham notes that *Politics* is closely linked to another of Aristotle's treatises – the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In these works, Aristotle explains how the moral development of a human being (ethics) forms the foundation for the governance of society, that is, politics. If ethics explores individual virtue and happiness, politics addresses how social order supports these aims. *Nicomachean Ethics*, likely named after Aristotle's son or father, is his best-known ethical work and outlines the foundations of a virtuous life (Chroust 1972: 415).[13] The introduction to *Politics* is especially notable, where Aristotle is quoted with the famous idea that "man is by nature a political animal". The state is portrayed as the highest form of human partnership, aimed at the greatest good – collective well-being and virtue. This idea forms the basis of Aristotle's view that morality and politics are not separate, but rather closely interconnected.[14] Aristotle's Politics continues his ethics, exploring happiness and virtue in public life. It studies how

12 Edition published in: Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd.

13 "*Medicus aulicus regis Amyntae* III.";"*Nicomachus*, was not only the court physician of King Amyntas III of Macedonia, but also close to the royal family."

14 More extensive editions of *Politics* are available, including: Aristotle (1960). *Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. xii–xiv.

institutions shape the good life. As a "political animal," man fulfills his nature only within a society aimed at collective well-being and justice.

As noted in the introduction to Hugh Rackham's (Aristotle 1959: 350), translation of Aristotle's work, in which Rackham renders *Politics* from Ancient Greek into English, the introduction (p. xiii) points out that Aristotle's extant works, including *Politics*, should be regarded as "lectures" – to be understood as outlines or drafts intended for further discussion, rather than polished literary texts. The *Politics* includes excerpts, outlines, and drafts likely compiled by Aristotle or his students. He stresses education's role, especially music, in shaping the state, emphasizing balance, moderation, and harmony for both individuals and society. He supports the Dorian harmony for the youth, as it reflects moderation and manliness (Aristotle 1959: VIII. 1341a–1342a), but also acknowledges the importance of the more relaxed harmony for older people. This teaching on education serves as a symbolic conclusion to Politics, which, as a whole, was devoted to the search for the ideal state and the good life (Aristotle 1959: VIII. 674–675).[15] Epicurus prioritizes inner peace over state perfection. Education helps distinguish real from false needs. Justice arises from mutual agreements ensuring safety and peace. True fulfillment comes not from status, but from mental clarity, soul harmony, and just social arrangements. The 2022 edition of *Politics* highlights Aristotle's view that man's natural excesses necessitate state regulation. The state evolves naturally from family and village, enabling fulfillment through virtue. Humans reach happiness, life's *telos*, only in a communal, political life where reason governs desire.

The Law of Happiness Though later than Aristotle, Epicurus developed an independent system. Adapting Democritus' atomism, he introduced the *clinamen*, an atomic swerve, to allow moral freedom within determinism, shifting focus to autonomy and inner peace.[16] Unlike Aristotle's teleological view, where existence has a divine purpose, Epicurus sees the world as formed by random atomic movements, without cosmic design. He extends this materialist view to ethics and law, defining justice as a mutual agreement for peace and security. His philosophy thus unites cosmology, ethics, and law.

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15 In the final chapters of the work – Aristotle. Politics – this passage can be found in Book VIII.

16 See Sedley 1983: 11–12; O'Keefe 2014: 73–77

Epicureanism, alongside Cynicism, Skepticism, and Stoicism, was one of the four major Hellenistic schools. These movements focused less on metaphysics and more on practical guidance for living well and achieving personal freedom (Neiders, Sīlis 2018: 237, 238, 243). Epicureanism uniquely retained its founder's doctrine unchanged, reflecting its coherence and Epicurus' authority. Followers avoided changes, preserving its original structure, as Hegel observed it remained static, yet enduring. Hegel notes that the concept of Epicurus' practical philosophy has certainly surpassed all other philosophical doctrines in its "unbroken continuity of doctrine" (Hegel 2006: 266, 270), a continuity which characterizes it as a philosophy that attracts rather than repels; a school one comes to rather than departs from. In other words, there is no known example of anyone leaving Epicureanism for another philosophical system, whereas many have, in fact, joined Epicureanism from elsewhere.

As Students notes, after the rise of major Greek schools, Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Skepticism, no entirely new philosophical systems emerged. Subsequent thought lacked major innovations in epistemology or legal theory, marking a decline in groundbreaking contributions to philosophical knowledge (Students 1927: 187). This insight underscores the structural resilience of ancient philosophy and the enduring impact of its thought paradigms on the Western intellectual tradition.

Neiders and Sīlis note that Plato's Academy at one point aligned with skepticism, and his classification of desires parallels Epicurean thought. Stoicism also absorbed ideas from Plato and Aristotle. Yet only Epicureanism offered a complete system uniting ethics, empiricism, atomism, social theory, and a naturalistic account of human evolution (2018: 237, 238, 243). Aristotle and Epicurus offer two legal-philosophical models: one links law to virtue and the common good, the other to individual peace and non-harm, both influencing modern legal theory. In *Happiness and Law* (2012), philosophers Kurt Bayertz and Thomas Gutmann explore the growing link between legislation and collective well-being. Published in *Ratio Juris*, the article argues that modern policies increasingly aim to promote societal happiness, not just economic growth. They highlight findings from psychology and economics showing that material wealth doesn't always lead to greater happiness. Economist Richard Layard, a key figure in happiness research, shows that in nations like the U.S., Japan, and the U.K., economic gains haven't significantly boosted happiness levels. Layard emphasizes that quality social relationships and mental health are crucial, arguing that happiness is both subjective and measurable and should guide public policy. In the U.K., he has advocated for including happiness indicators in policymaking and stressed mental health as vital for emotional and societal well-

being. This perspective marks a shift from purely economic measures to a more holistic, person-centered approach to governance and law.[17]

Bayertz and Gutmann argue that laws can legitimately aim to promote happiness, redefining state roles and expanding legal discourse to include well-being alongside rights and order. In assessing happiness as a political goal, ancient Greek philosophy, especially Aristotle's idea of the state as a means to happiness, contrasts with modern liberalism, which prioritizes individual freedom over collective well-being (for historical analysis of the role of ideological standpoints in forming Latvian Constitution see: Būmeistere, Zariņš 2026, this issue). The authors, Bayertz and Gutmann, refer to Aristotle's Politics, (Reeve 1998: 1325a7) where the purpose of the state is explicitly formulated as the happiness of its members. Aristotle believed that the state is not merely a means of providing security or regulating the market but rather an ethical community in which a person can cultivate virtue and live in accordance with reason (Bayertz, Gutmann 2012: 155–172). Thus, laws should aim at improving life quality, not just maintaining order unlike later views that see the state's role as protecting freedom, not actively guiding people toward happiness.

The article echoes Aristotle and Kant: happiness can't be imposed. Liberal thought defends autonomy over state-defined well-being. Epicureanism supports this, valuing inner peace (*ataraxia*) and individual judgment. Epicurus' ideas remain relevant in modern debates on law, autonomy, and limits of state power. By contrast, the Platonic notion of the state as an educator of the soul, or the Stoic conception of a cosmopolitan order governed by reason, appears indirectly in the historical context, particularly in discussions of various German Enlightenment authors, such as Christian Wolff,[18] a follower of Gottfried Leibniz, who maintained that the function of the state – including legislation – was to guide citizens towards happiness.

Wolff was convinced that the primary goal of human life is happiness (*felicitas*), which can be achieved by living in accordance with reason and the laws of nature. In this context, he formulated the view that the fundamental task of the state is also to help individuals attain this goal – not only by maintaining order but also by educating citizens on a rational and moral way of life. Wolff viewed happiness as an objective state, achieved through reason and ethical discipline. He saw the state as a moral educator, echoing Plato and the Stoics, and emphasized its role in improving life quality. His ideas influenced enlightened despotism and shaped Kant's and Fichte's moral-political theories (Hettche, Dyck 2024). Epicureanism sees the state as a tool

17 More on this can be found in the following works: Layard 2010; 2006.

18 Hettche, Matt; Dyck, Corey (2024). Christian Wolff. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wolff-christian/ [Accessed 02.06.2025].

for peace, not moral education. Law ensures non-harm, not virtue. Bayertz and Gutmann argue that happiness is too subjective for legal enforcement, warning against paternalism. The state should enable, not prescribe, personal fulfillment.

State and Politics In Aristotle's *Politics* we find the following lines: "Since we see that every state is a certain kind of community, and every community is established for the sake of some good (for everyone does everything for the sake of what appears to them as good), it is clear that, although all communities aim for some good, the community that is the highest of all and embraces all the others aims for the greatest good of all. This is the community called the state, or the political community" (Aristotels 2022). When clarifying what the state is, Aristotle then turns to the question of state governance or administration. He seemingly opposes Plato's work *Statesman* and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*,[19] saying: "Those who think that being a statesman, a king, a household manager, or a master are one and the same, judge erroneously." And it is not the case that, when speaking of the statesman and the king, ".. if power belongs to one alone, then it is said to be kingly power; but if, in accordance with the principles of this science, he is alternately both ruler and ruled, then it is statesman's power."[20] They – apparently Plato and Xenophon – seem to think that the statesman, the king, the household manager, or the master differ only ".. by the greater or smaller number of those governed, and not by their kind."[21] Aristotle illustrates this with the following example: ".. if the number of those governed is small, then it is said to be the master; if large, then the household manager; but if even larger, then the statesman or the king – as though a large household were no different from a small state."

Such a position marks a difference from Plato, who emphasized that a true ruler is not the one who merely governs but the one who governs in accordance with knowledge and the principle of the common good (Plato 1995: 302–304). Xenophon likewise emphasized that the value of a leader does not depend on the number of those governed but on the ability to ensure order and well-being – something that requires moral competence and care for subordinates (Feldhūns 2005: 250–251).

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19 Accordingly, based on "Valstslietu pamati", the commentary by Agnese Gaile and Aija van Hofa (2008). *Epikūrs. Vēstules. Atziņas. Fragmenti.* Rīga: Liepnieks & Rītups, suggests that the reference here is to Statesman 258e–259d and to sections III, 4, 12; 6, 14 of Xenophon's work Memorabilia (*Atmiņas par Sokratu*).

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

Aristotle, by contrast, systematically distinguished household management (*oikonomia*) from political rule (*politikē archē*), pointing out that governing the state is a distinct art, the aim of which is the achievement of the common good, not merely the administration of a larger household (Reeve 1998: I.1252a–1253b; Aristotle 2013: 6–9). This classical perspective can be expanded by turning to Epicurus' position, which, unlike Aristotle's, evaluates political power through its ability to ensure security and mutual non-harm. Epicurus held that laws are the product of mutual agreement among people, gaining legitimacy only insofar as they can practically secure peace and free individuals from fear and suffering (Diogenes 1925: 31–33; Diogenes 1972: 561). While Plato and Aristotle stress virtuous, knowledgeable rulers, Epicurus proposes a minimal state focused on individual autonomy and peace. This highlights the contrast between morally grounded and utilitarian political philosophies in antiquity. In *Politics*, Aristotle sees the state as a natural community aimed at achieving the highest good, not merely survival. Unlike Plato's idealist model, Aristotle views the state as emerging from family and household life, culminating in a structure that enables people to live well and flourish (Lane 2023). In *Politics*, Aristotle argues that the state arises naturally to enable human flourishing, not just survival. He critiques Plato for equating rulers across scales, emphasizing that governance differs not only in number but also in purpose—statesmanship serves the common good, not merely control (Reeve 1998: 1252a–b). Aristotle distinguishes forms of governance by scale and purpose. While Plato and Xenophon idealize rule by virtuous individuals, Aristotle focuses on state structure and balance. He defines just rule as serving the common good and categorizes government into monarchy, aristocracy, and *politeia*, opposing tyranny, oligarchy, and unchecked democracy (Lane 2023; Devereux 2011: 99). Aristotle's *politeia* is a balanced constitution combining oligarchy and democracy, aiming at the common good. Political participation is based on property and competence, ensuring stability, moderation, and ethical governance in a just society (Ober 1996: 147–152).

Unlike Plato's philosopher-king ideal, Aristotle sees justice in alternating roles of ruling and being ruled. Governance is a moral duty for the common good, not personal power. Through empirical analysis of real states, Aristotle becomes the founder of political realism and systematic state theory. When speaking about rule and power in relation to the state, Aristotle points to a sequence he perceives in terms of the "feminine" and the "masculine," which, in biological terminology, could also be described as the polarization between "female" and "male". The two – the "feminine" and the "masculine" – cannot exist without one another, for they possess a natural drive to unite (a miniature state community), and thus, in order to leave behind another like themselves – in other words, to create – they must join together.

As noted in the commentaries on *The Foundations of Politics* by Agnese Irbe and Aija van Hofa, edited by Andris Rītups, this striving "to leave behind one like oneself" (Plato 1997: 721b-c. 418; Plato 1998: 206b – c), when compared with Plato's Laws and Diotima's speech in Plato's *Symposium*, is explained as a longing for immortality, expressed through the desire to leave behind offspring and thereby participate in the perpetuation of life. In another work, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains that the creation of new beings is the initiator of union, but not its ultimate purpose, since people also come together to provide themselves with necessities and to gain mutual benefit by combining their particular virtues (Peters 1893: 1162a17–27). Aristotle argues that natural rulers and those naturally ruled must cooperate for mutual preservation. The ruler, guided by reason and foresight, is by nature a master, while the one who executes orders is by nature a slave. Thus, he concludes that both the slave and master share the same benefit. In Plato's *Laws* (Plato 1997: 690b), one of the seven justifications for rule that concerns the slave is the necessity for the ignorant person to submit to the rational person, so that the latter may guide and govern him (Aristotels 2022).

The idea in Aristotle's *Politics* continues: from these two communities – that of wife and husband, and that of master and slave – "... thus the first household has arisen, and Hesiod has rightly said: 'First of all, a house, then a wife, and an ox for ploughing'" (Aristotels 2022). "Thus, the community that has naturally formed for everyday life is the household" (Aristotels 2022). Its members, according to Aristotle, were called "table companions" by the 6th-century lawgiver Charondas of Catane in Sicily (Aristotels 2022), who was most likely a pupil of Pythagoras. Meanwhile, Epimenides of Knossos – a mythical philosopher, poet, and statesman of the 7th-6th centuries, credited with a work on Cretan laws and state order, as well as with the Cretan "liar paradox" (Diogenes 1925: 109–115), and who, after falling into a chance sleep, was said to have slumbered for 57 years in a cave dedicated to the worship of Zeus, awakening with the gift of prophecy – called them "bowl companions" (Aristotels 2022).

It seems, Aristotle concludes, that the village has naturally arisen as an offshoot of the household – literally a "household away," like a new colony: a community formed when members of a city-state (*polis*) left their motherland and founded a new settlement (Aristotels 2022). Its members were often called "milk-brothers," "sons," and "sons of sons". For this reason, states too were originally formed from the subjects of kings and were governed by kings. This is exactly what Homer refers to, writes Aristotle, when he says: "Each rules over his children and his wives," since the Cyclopes lived scattered apart, and human households also lived, in antiquity, in the same way (Aristotels 2022: I.2, 1252b).

In *Politics* Book I, Aristotle presents the state as the natural culmination of human development, evolving from family and village. Unlike contract theorists, he sees the state as prior to the individual, formed through moral bonds. Using Homer's Cyclopes as an example, he argues that solitary life lacks the shared governance needed for the good life. True political life begins when individuals unite in a law-bound society, as only within the state can virtue and fulfillment be achieved. Legitimacy comes from securing moral ends, not contracts, making the state a natural, hierarchical, and ethical community.

Aristotle explains in *Politics*, as translated from Ancient Greek into Latvian by Agnese Irbe and Aija van Hofa: "The complete community, formed by several villages, is the state. This community has already reached, one could say, the highest degree of self-sufficiency – for although it came into being for the sake of survival, it exists for the sake of living well. "Therefore," writes Aristotle, "since it is the case that the first communities exist by nature, so too does every state exist by nature. The state is the goal of these communities, for nature is its goal." (Aristotels 2022). In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle acknowledges: "No one would choose to have all goods for himself alone, for man is by nature political and created for living together with others"(Peters 1893: IX, 9, 1169b19 – 21). In other words, man is "political" (*politikos*), because he naturally strives to form the state, which is the highest and most complete community (Aristotels: 2022). This thought of Aristotle can also be clearly seen in Politics, where he states: "...it is evident that the state belongs to what exists by nature, and that man is by nature a political being" (Aristotels 2022).

Unlike other beings, man has language as a rational tool to discern the useful from the harmful and the just from the unjust. For Aristotle, this faculty is ethical, enabling humans alone to grasp moral concepts like good and evil. Yet, "...without virtue man is the most ignoble and savage of beings, and also the most unrestrained in the pursuit of intercourse and consumption. But justice is a political virtue, for the court [established by the political community], in adjudicating what is just, introduces order into the political community" (Aristotels 2022). Aristotle sees the state as essential for moral life; only within it do law and justice exist. Outside the state, man loses his ethical nature and descends into a lesser existence.

In History of Animals (*Historia Animalium*), Aristotle explains (Aristotle 1965: 73) why man is more truly a political being than the bee or any other gregarious animal. This idea also appears in Politics, where it is concluded that nature creates nothing in vain and that man is the only living being endowed with language. In History of Animals, Aristotle states: "Among gregarious animals and solitary ones, some are political (*politika*), while others live dispersed (*sporadika*). Those who are political all share one common work (*ergon*). Moreover, among political animals, some are subject

to a leader (*hegemon*), while others are without governance (*anarcha*)" (Aristotels 2022). In *Politics*, Aristotle notes that those outside the state are either subhuman or superhuman. Citing Homer, he portrays them as rootless and warlike. Though endowed with reason and virtue, man can misuse these powers, turning them into tools of armed injustice.

Aristotle further writes in *Politics*: "If nature creates nothing incomplete and does nothing in vain, then, necessarily, nature has created all this for the sake of man. Thus, even warfare, in a certain sense, is a natural art of acquisition, and we must employ it both against beasts and against those men who are by nature made to be ruled but refuse it, for such a war is naturally just" (Aristotels 2022). Here, warfare is also mentioned in another sense – as the acquisition of property, goods, and prey. In *Politics*, Aristotle also refers to the notable Athenian statesman and lawgiver Solon, often regarded as the founder of Athenian democracy, who said in one of his verses: "No limit to wealth have men discovered." In other words, both an excess of possessions and, conversely, their lack, prevent one from living a good and happy life.

Interestingly, as Agnese Irbe and Aija van Hofa point out in their commentary on the translation, *The Foundations of Politics*, a French translator, Aubonnet, remarks that Aristotle seems to have been the first philosopher to see an alternative to the institution of slavery in technological development. Therefore, as Aristotle writes, there are limits to the accumulation of property and other goods. Namely: "In no art are tools unlimited either in number or in size, and wealth is nothing other than the abundance of tools for household management and statesmanship." He concludes, for example, that usury is the most unnatural form of wealth acquisition, since in usury ".. the offspring resemble their parents, and the 'fruit' is money begotten of money" (Aristotels 2022).

It is interesting to contrast this Aristotelian view on the limits of resources and the distinction between "natural" and "unnatural" wealth acquisition with Epicurus' reflections on sufficiency and the boundaries of necessary needs. Epicurus writes: "If you live according to nature, you will never be poor; but if according to empty desires, you will never be rich". He also emphasizes that "natural wealth is easy to attain, but empty wealth is limitless" (Diogenes 1925: 142, 149; Diogenes 1972: 667, 669), thus, he places a moral and practical limitation on the accumulation of wealth. Such insights, similar to Aristotle's warnings against usury, are rooted in the conviction that wealth and property must serve the peace of the human soul, not endless accumulation.

The Right to War Although Aristotle, in his *Politics*, points out that nature does nothing in vain and that everything in nature is directed towards an end (*telos*), including warfare and the accumulation of wealth, which under certain circumstances are regarded as natural and even just, Epicurus takes a different philosophical stance on this issue. Epicurus grounds his ethics in *ataraxia* and *aponia*, rejecting war and wealth as routes to happiness. Rather than promoting "naturalness," his stance warns against threats to social order and moral balance. When considering warfare, Aristotle places it within the context of natural arts – as a means necessary to defend the community against those who, by nature, are made to be ruled but refuse it (Reeve 1998: 1256b). Although this idea contains ethnocentric and slavery-justifying dimensions that would be foreign to Epicurus, in the view of both philosophers, war, violence, and conflict are evils only to be accepted to the minimally necessary extent. Epicurus consistently advocated for peace and held that justice is an agreement not to harm and not to suffer harm (Bailey 1926: 150; Gaile, Hofa 2008: 109), thus approaching Aristotle's view that a "just war" is not an end in itself but an instrument for preserving the common good.

Aristotle sees wealth as a means, not an end, stressing limits to its pursuit. Epicurus is more radical, rejecting excess and societal ambitions as unnatural. Both, however, value moderation and agree that overstepping natural needs leads away from true happiness. Aristotle argues that wealth must be managed with reason (*logos*) and balance (*oikonomia*), avoiding conflict and excess. Similarly, Epicurus sees happiness in modesty and reducing unnecessary desires. Both philosophers stress that true fulfillment lies not in excess, but in living according to nature and virtue.

Epicurus advocates withdrawal from political life into a private community (*kepos*), promoting inner freedom through ethical self-restraint. Aristotle, however, sees fulfillment only within the polis, guided by law and virtue. Both value balance, but differ on whether it stems from personal ethics or civic structures. In the *Vatican Manuscript* (*Sententiae Vaticanae*) we read the following Epicurean sayings: "We must free ourselves from the prison of everyday work and political affairs," and likewise, "In a free life, one cannot acquire much wealth, for without serving the crowd or the ruler, it is not easily gained" (Gaile, Hofa 2008: 180), taken together, and in light of that which is recorded in Stobaeus' *Anthology*, this forms a kind of quintessence – namely, Epicurus reasons: "Laws exist for the sake of the wise – not so that they would refrain from acting unjustly, but so that they might not suffer injustice" (Gaile, Hofa 2008: 180). Aristotle might see Epicurus' ethics as incomplete, lacking the social dimension of the *polis* and the common good. Yet Epicurus' focus on *libera voluntatis* prefigures modern ideas of personal freedom. His system represents a "private virtue" grounded in self-moderation, but detached from civic life.

Both Aristotle and Epicurus link life's purpose to nature and virtue. Aristotle sees happiness through social virtue, Epicurus through seclusion and peace. Yet both reject wealth as an end, valuing it only as a means to inner harmony and ethical living. They see humans as naturally drawn to peace and freedom. Aristotle supports hierarchy for order, while Epicurus values civic life only if it ensures tranquility. Both seek harmony between human nature and action for a fulfilled life. Aristotle's thought that technology might one day replace the labor of slaves appears as a precursor to Epicurus' idea that the greatest good for human beings lies not in governance or warfare, but in knowledge – knowledge that liberates from fear, especially the fear of the gods and death. Aristotle writes that wealth is a means, not an end (Reeve 1998: 1257b), and Epicurus expresses a similar stance: "Poverty, when measured against nature's highest aim (Gaile, Hofa 2008: 261), is great wealth; but wealth, if without limit, is great poverty" (Epicurus 1993: 25; Gaile, Hofa 2008: 117). In both cases, one can discern a clear ethic of naturalness and moderation, centered on human dignity, self-sufficiency, and a purposeful life in harmony with nature. Aristotle and Epicurus both reject excess as life's aim. While Aristotle sees war as a necessary survival tool, not conquest, Epicurus cautions against desire for power or wealth.

Solon's warning about limitless greed, cited by Aristotle, reflects a shared concern with Epicurus: both philosophers reject excess and insatiable desires. Aristotle praises virtue and moderation in governance, while Epicurus advocates a modest, need-based life. For both, true well-being lies in harmony with nature and rational social order.

Conclusions

Although Aristotle and Epicurus are often presented as fundamentally opposed philosophers – one a teleological realist and the other a hedonistic atomist – their ethical and political thought reveals several important conceptual convergences. Both thinkers connect human well-being with moderation, rational order, and the proper understanding of nature. In *Politics*, Aristotle emphasizes that nature creates nothing in vain and that human institutions should follow this natural order (Reeve 1998: 1256b). Likewise, Epicurus in his *Principal Doctrines* and letters argues that what exists in nature is either necessary or naturally useful for human life and happiness (Diogenes 1925: 142–154).

For Aristotle, nature functions as a teleological structure that directs human beings toward rational activity and moral development within the political community. Economic activity and the accumulation of wealth are legitimate only insofar as they remain subordinate to the fulfillment of natural needs and the pursuit

of a virtuous life. Aristotle therefore distinguishes between natural household management (*oikonomikē*) and the unnatural pursuit of unlimited wealth, condemning practices such as usury as contrary to nature (Reeve 1998: 1258b). Epicurus arrives at a similar practical conclusion through a different philosophical framework. While rejecting teleology, he argues that natural needs are limited and easily satisfied, whereas the pursuit of unlimited wealth arises from artificial desires (Long, Sedley 1987: 117).[22] Both philosophers therefore emphasize moderation, self-sufficiency, and the regulation of human desires as necessary conditions for a stable and harmonious life.

Thus, despite their different metaphysical assumptions, Aristotle and Epicurus converge in several essential conclusions. Both reject the unlimited pursuit of wealth and power, emphasize moderation as a principle of human flourishing, and link happiness with living in accordance with nature and reason. Aristotle situates this fulfillment primarily within the political community, while Epicurus locates it in the sphere of individual tranquility and friendship. Nevertheless, both philosophical systems ultimately aim at the same ethical objective – the achievement of a balanced and meaningful human life (Long 1987: 114; Nussbaum 1994: 64).

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