

**Sølvmedalje NM filosofi for vgs, 2. runde 5.5.2020;
Kristina Røstad Rosenvold, Kristiansand katedralskole Gimle**

NM I filosofi for VGS 2. runde

“For man, when perfected, is the best of animals; but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all.”

Aristotle: *Politics I*: 1253a31

Today, the law is still a topic of debate. Who should create the law? Should we follow the law? Is the law just? These are just a few examples of questions against the law. However, this topic is not new. It was widely discussed even back when Aristotle lived. The citation above states a part of his view on this topic, and this is what we will discuss.

To discuss this statement, we first need to break it down. Aristotle starts with the term “man”. In modern times, this is widely used to include all humans. However, this may not be the case here. Aristotle has made several claims in his philosophy that puts men above women. He argued that women are not creatures of reason unlike men. This way of thinking is not relevant in today’s society as we now work towards equality between the genders. To discuss the statement today, we should exclude the sexist language, but still acknowledge the terms used.

Aristotle then tackles the subject of perfection. Perfection is a difficult subject that has been discussed all throughout history, and is still a topic of discussion today. Aristotle used the term virtue to explain this. Virtues show the best sides of humans. An example could be courage. It is still important to not overdo this. The person would then become arrogant. It is therefore important to keep a balance between arrogance and fear. This balance can be found by each person by using logic and reason to find the best virtue.

Aristotle calls man the best of animals when perfected. This anthropocentric world view clearly puts humans above other animals. Aristotle explains this by defining a human as an animal of reason. We are logically able to conclude the best action to take in different situations. Other animals, however, act on instinct. They only want to have enough food and be able to reproduce, and therefore cannot reasonably conclude the best course of actions. Today, we may view animals in this light as well. However, as having a pet dog or cat becomes normal, it is often believed that animals show more thought and feelings than what Aristotle states.

Next, Aristotle states that man is the worst of all when separated from law and justice. This statement entails that the law is fierce and just. It is still important to remember that the laws

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are made by humans, and they might make mistakes. Laws differ from state to state, and are always evolving. This makes it difficult to conclude a perfect law that everyone should follow. Having slaves used to be legal, and Aristotle agreed to this legality. Fortunately, slavery has been abolished in our society, and few think slavery is just. This is just one example of how the law changed to the better. As the law always changes, questions about our current law arise. If we discuss the legal drinking age for example, it is difficult for everyone to agree on one specific age. Some want to lower this age, others want to raise it, and others want to make alcohol completely illegal altogether. Even though it is a widely discussed law, the government decided on an age they thought was appropriate, and the people must follow.

Stating that man is the worst of all indicates that they are lower than animals. Animals do not have a set of laws to go by, and can therefore not break it. As humans are reasonable creatures, we know right from wrong. If you then still break the law while knowing that you are defying it, you are worse than an animal who does not know right from wrong.

This statement as a whole is quite problematic. It excludes women, regards animals as thoughtless, and praises the law. Virtues that men praise are not always the same as women praise. Aristotle only considered men's perfection in this statement. As women were not allowed to vote in his time, the laws could go against women and not listen to their views. The perfect man is therefore debatable.

The biggest problem lies with how he regards the law. Laws are used by states to give the inhabitants a set of rules to go by to create peace. This creates a sense of community where everyone has the same guidelines. If anyone goes against the laws, it creates fear and insecurity within the community. It is therefore understandable to think that the perfect society involves people who follow the law. However, the problem does not lie with the idea of a perfect society, but with the law itself. Aristotle states that the law is supposed to be just because we are creatures of reason, and know what is right and wrong. Those who create the laws are therefore to be trusted. However, the law is, as stated, fluid and decided on by other possibly flawed humans.

To be a creature of reason, you need to think for yourself and not just follow what others tell you. It is therefore difficult to be both a perfect human and blindly follow the law. Even though the law might be wrong, it is still important to remember that your actions should be backed up by reason. Defying the law for no reason is therefore a bad idea. It will only cause

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chaos for no reason. If you disagree with the law, you need to back it up by logical arguments and stand by what you think is right. Follow the rules if you can, but find a reason if you go against them.