



**ARISTOTLE'S DETERMINATION OF THE SKILL OF  
HOUSEHOLD MANAGEMENT IN THE *POLIS* – ABOUT THE  
ORIGINAL DISPUTE BETWEEN ECONOMICS AND POLITICS**

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**Abstract:** The first systematic definition of economics in Western culture takes place in Aristotle's *Politics*. In the first chapter of this writing, Aristotle analyzes in detail the skill of household management (economics). When he tries to see the same skill not only within the household, but also in the context of the political community (polis), Aristotle notices problems that arise with the development of the skill of acquiring property (κτητική) and the skill of acquiring wealth (χρηματιστική). The application of the principle of household management to the political community leads to fundamental problems, fundamentally unsolvable, due to which the economy and politics in the political community (polis) remain in permanent tension.

**Keywords:** economy, household, politics, dispute, management, wealth.

**JEL classification:** N00, B30, D1

## 1. Introduction

Although during history, and especially after World War II, economics developed into one of the most complex sciences, its beginning in ancient times was actually unexpectedly simple. Aristotle gives us the first systematic problematization of economic problems in the first chapter of *Politics*, one of his most famous writings. Since, among researchers of Aristotle's philosophy, the authorship of his work *Economics* is disputable, here we will exclusively deal with Aristotle's reliable

statements about economic problems in *Politics*.<sup>1</sup> First, we will analyze the way in which Aristotle introduces economic problems in the original context of *Politics*. Second, we will analyze his consideration of two key skills relevant to the economy – household management skills and wealth acquisition skills.

## 2. Household management

Aristotle opens his reflections on economics in the context of illuminating the internal structure of the household, its function, goals and task. In this place, he also analyzes the members of the household and their specific interrelationships – the relationship between wife and husband, master and slave, father and children. In short, we can define a household as a community for the sake of daily survival, whose goal is to keep all its members alive on a daily basis. How does the household accomplish this task? Answering this question, Aristotle *de facto* begins his consideration of economics. At the beginning of the chapter, dealing with the household, he points out: „... we must first speak of the management of the household (οικονομία), because every polis consists of households“ (Pol. 1253b 1-3).<sup>2</sup> Although the *polis* represents a qualitative leap in relation to the previous forms of association, it simultaneously contains them organically and carries within itself all the positive and negative things it inherits from them.

First of all, we only notice that the household, the skill of managing it and the polis stand in a specific relationship. To clearly understand the meaning of the Greek term οικονομία, which Aristotle uses here, we should not translate it with „economy“ (as usually translated), but with its original meaning „household management“. Our current understanding of „economy“ has different connotations than those Aristotle had in mind. The term „economy“ and its original meaning „household management“ originally refers to the way a household is managed, in the same sense as we understand it today, in the context of economic management of a company or state. However, what does this have to do with household management that makes it so important, even so significant, that Aristotle especially emphasizes it as an important factor in the *polis*? The importance of household management is reinforced by Aristotle's following remark. When he lists three types of relationships that make up the household (husband-wife, master-

<sup>1</sup> The authorship of the *Economics*, which is attributed to Aristotle, is disputed among numerous researchers. Although the content of the *Economics* is in many ways linguistically and substantively reminiscent of Aristotle's style of writing and expression, most researchers still believe that its author was probably Theophrastus, or someone else from Aristotle's students. See in more detail: Pomeroy, S.B. (1994). *Xenophon, Oeconomicus: A Social and Historical Commentary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Politics* is commonly cited on the basis of Becker's paginations, according to the bilingual, ancient Greek-English edition: Aristotle. (1932). *Politics*. Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press. (with an English translation by H. Rackham). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of the citations are by the author.

slave, father-children), he adds: „There is another factor that some equate with household management, while others think it is actually its biggest element. So, I mean the so-called skill of acquiring property (κτητική)“ (Pol. 1253b 14). Although we cannot reconstruct exactly what Aristotle means here when he says „some“ and „others“, this dilemma is encouraging in itself. It is obvious that „the skill of acquiring property“ is an extremely important part of household management, regardless of whether we are inclined to give it more or less importance. In this way, the relationship between the household and the *polis*, as a political community in the most direct way, includes the economy, i.e., its two central themes – the management of the parts of the household and the skill of acquiring wealth.

Aristotle begins the discussion of economics directly by considering the relationship between master and slave, wife and husband, and finally father and children, since these relations are woven into the management of the household and the process of acquiring property. The master and the slaves, the wife and the husband, the father and the children, and also all the domesticated animals in their household, are actually the bearers of the economy whose task is to fulfill the basic goal of the household – maintaining life on a daily basis. At the very beginning of this analysis, we can say that the economy represents a deliberate means by which the household achieves its goal, given that the maintenance of life in the household is not achieved instinctively, as is the case with, for example, wildlife, but planned and purposeful. Since the degree of organization of the economy within the household among the ancient Greeks, but also among many other ancient peoples, implied a clear division of labor, over time, it led not only to a clear relaxation of all household members from stressful wandering life in the Paleolithic Age, but also to the direct release of individual household members from daily chores aimed at maintaining life.

### 3. Carriers of the household economy

Consideration of the household necessarily binds us to the economy, its bearers and their elaboration of the skill of acquiring property, by which they strive to keep all their members alive on a daily basis and to take care of their safety and security at the same time. However, in the *polis*, the economy took on a different meaning, since the goal of the political community was not the same as the one set by the household. But first, let's start with a closer look at the household economy.

Aristotle simply linked the skill of acquiring property with the household: „As property is part of the household, so is the skill of acquiring property part of managing the household (because one cannot live without necessary things, and, especially, one cannot live well)“ (Pol. 1253b 23). Without adequate possessions, which include food, but also other material tools and goods, together with land, property and all tame animals and plants, it is impossible to achieve the goal of this community. Since the Neolithic Revolution enabled man to acquire more property

than he can take with him, now that he has found a permanent place to live, the formation of a permanent household now allows him a radical change in dealing with food shortages and struggles for it, and also, the lack of shelter from wild animals or natural disasters. Possession of permanent property, which consists mainly of land, a roof over one's head, modest furniture, but also, above all, food supplies and various tools for work, enabled a relief from Paleolithic stress related to the hunting and gathering way of life. If we add that even a primitive place to live was a serious protection from wild animals and natural disasters, it is clear why this major change in the life of our ancestors is referred to as the „Neolithic Revolution“.<sup>3</sup>

The primary goal of a household economist is to „get the job done“. His job is not such that he can procrastinate or leave for another and more favorable opportunity. However, most of the work that people do is such that it is not urgent, i.e., it is not strictly related to certain necessary needs or circumstances. I can write these lines now, but I can also postpone them until tomorrow, so that I can write all this in some other circumstances. Also, a teacher at school, an employee at an institution, is free to use their time and choose when to do a certain job. However, the household economist does not have that luxury. He must produce enough food and resources in the household every day, without delay, in order to maintain the life of all members of the household, day after day. In that sense, we should understand the sentence that for a household economist, every piece of property is actually a tool „for life“. So, the master of the household acts out of necessity – he has to do the work on a daily basis, day in and day out, because that's the only way he works for a living.

The household economist, i.e., the manager of the household, has the obligation to do the work that does not suffer delays, and at the end of each day he must draw the line whether the planned work has been done or not. At his disposal are other members of the household, bearers of the economy, as well as subjects who serve the common goal, but there are also tools that are part of the household property, of which some are inanimate (ἄψυχα), and others alive (ἔμψυχα). Since other members of the household, but also helpers and slaves, for the head of the household are really just workforce that serves to „get the job done“, the way he addresses the workforce is ordering (κελευσθῆν): „Because if every tool could only do its job, whether it was ordered to or it could foresee in advance what needed to be done ... neither the builders needed helpers, nor the masters needed slaves“ (Pol. 1253b 34).

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<sup>3</sup> For more details on this phrase, see for example: Childe, V.G. (1936). *Man Makes Himself*. London: Watts & Co.; Hole, F.A. (1984). Reassessment of the Neolithic Revolution. *Paléorient*, 10 (2); Bocquet-Apel, J.P. (2011). When the World's Population Took Off: The Springboard of the Neolithic Demographic Transition. *Science*, 333 (6042); Braudel, F. (2001). *Memory and the Mediterranean*. New York: Vintage Books.

Since the manager is also the master (δεσπότης) of all members of the household, and bearing in mind that he actually makes all key decisions vital to this community, the survival of the household is based on the orders issued by the master which others put into action. Hence Aristotle's almost prophetic lament over some imagined situation in which an inanimate tool, such as, for example, a modern robot, could do the job on its own, anticipating the master's order or desire. It is important to note that Aristotle does not mention any other way here in which the manager treats other members of the household than ordering. Ordering is, therefore, the way the manager communicates with other members of the household regarding the common goal of their community; and the outcome of the work they do together depends on the manager's good assessments and decisions, and the implementation of his orders.

Based on everything that has been said so far, it is clear what is the basic content of managing household members, i.e., the bearers of the economy – daily maintenance of life. At the place where we have the opportunity to unequivocally see the essence of household management, at the same time we gain the opportunity to understand even more clearly all the specifics of the *polis* and political community as a completely new type of community, significantly different from everything that emerged as a form of human association.

Although today we would probably be inclined to equate the position of master in the household with the place occupied by the husband, Aristotle clearly indicates to us that this is not necessarily the case. Since the central topics of his time are the household and the economy, when he talks about economic power, he does not focus on the holder who exercises that power, but on the specific skills and knowledge that the holder possesses. Since this is a kind of not very pleasant job, Aristotle says the following: „Therefore, those who are rich enough not to have to worry about unpleasant jobs, leave those jobs to the supervisor (ἐπίτροπος), and deal with politics or philosophy themselves“ (Pol. 1255b 35). With his specific approach to researching each problem, Aristotle allows us to view the phenomenon of economic power from all angles. Although it seems to be a job that would undoubtedly be desirable, since it does not involve subordination and obedience, but rather the position of power and domination, in his description he includes things that still lead some people to avoid it. First of all, although most people who have never done this type of work usually think that this type of management work is easy to do, it does not seem to be the case. Aristotle clearly indicates that the position of the economist in the household implies certain, as we would say today, competencies. However, at the same time, he emphasizes very clearly that this is not about knowledge: „Therefore, one does not call oneself a master due to the knowledge (ἐπιστήμην) he possesses, but because he is such ...“ (Pol. 1255b 20).

#### 4. The skill of acquiring property – about the original dispute between economics and politics

While Aristotle expresses himself very clearly when talking about the bearers of the economy in the household and the skill of managing it, addressing his analysis precisely, in the section on the skill of acquiring property (κτητική), he expresses somewhat confusing views. Namely, the skill of household management has a clear and unambiguous goal related to the daily life of all members of such a community. Therefore, based on Aristotle's analysis, we can define the household as a community for daily living; we would accordingly define the economy, as a household management skill, as a set of practical knowledge and skills aimed at maintaining the life of members of this community on a daily basis. However, analyzing the economy of the household, Aristotle notes that in the economic processes in such community, there exist phenomena that are not easy to classify. This is exactly what confuses him, so he constantly emphasizes the dilemma that it is not clear „whether the skill of acquiring property is the same as the skill of running a household or is it just one of its branches, or maybe it is a skill that only helps running a household“ (Pol. 1256a 2). Although we cannot accurately reconstruct all the arguments used by the proponents of this or that view from his analysis of this dilemma, Aristotle is clearly of the opinion that the skill of acquiring property is not the same as the skill of managing a household, for it is „the task of the former to obtain, and the latter to use“ (Pol. 1256a 12). However, in principle, he remains in the dilemma of whether the skill of acquiring property is part of the skill of running a household or is it something separate. This is perhaps best seen in the example of agriculture and food production. Namely, if we agree that the skill of acquiring property concerns knowledge and skills on how to acquire property and wealth, then the question arises whether in that case agriculture and food production are part of the skill of acquiring, or are they something completely different? However, it should be emphasized that in the first book of *Politics*, in the analysis of the skill of acquiring property, Aristotle gives a kind of report on how he sees the importance of different ways of obtaining food (agriculture, fishing, hunting, looting, war, etc.), in the context of property acquisition skill and household management skill.<sup>4</sup> Since this is not our specific topic, we cannot deal with this issue in more detail, but it should be emphasized that new researches in the field of early history of human development indicate the importance of obtaining and especially food processing for overall human development at the transition from Paleolithic to Neolithic.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See details: Pol. 1256b 18 – 1256b 30.

<sup>5</sup> See in more detail: Bocquet-Apel, J.P. (2011). When the World's Population Took Off: The Springboard of the Neolithic Demographic Transition. *Science*, 333 (6042). Regarding a recent study that also applies to the Balkans and Southeast Europe, see also: Mathieson, I., et al. (2018). The Genomic History of Southeastern Europe. *Nature*, March 08, 555 (7695): 197-203.

In the context of the household community and the goals it sets for itself, when Aristotle analyzes the skill of acquisition and the skill of management, his interpretation seems quite clear. However, at the end of the reconstruction of the different ways of obtaining food, he utters a sentence which introduces us to a dispute due to which the entire presentation ceases to be so understandable and precise. The dispute arises exactly where the political community and the *polis* begin. The sentence reads: „One type of this property acquisition skill is by nature a part of the household management skill, insofar as a man needs to find and acquire stocks of goods that can be kept, and which are useful to the *polis* or household community (κοινωνίαν πόλεως ἢ οἰκίας)“ (Pol. 1256b 26).

In the entire course of *Politics*, this place represents the first moment when Aristotle brings the skill of household management in connection with the *polis* and the political community. However, at first glance, that sentence seems strange. As the ancient Greek equivalent of household management (οἰκονομία) clearly suggests, this skill is originally related to the household (οἰκία). So, when Aristotle previously talks about the skill of economics, it is always implied to mean the skill of managing the household. How can we then understand a sentence in which the term οἰκονομία no longer refers to the household but to the *polis*, that is, to a completely different kind of community? How to understand the meaning of household management skill when it comes to the political community? How to finally understand the strange phrase „*polis* household management skill“? Apart from being syntactically and semantically unclear, it actually initiates a dispute. As we will see later, this is a matter of disagreement, conflict, which from the very beginning marks the relationship between the skill of household management and the *polis*, i.e., the relationship between economics and politics.

If we accept that something like „*polis* household management skills“, or, in other words, „*polis* economics“, can have a meaningful meaning of some economic management skill of *polis* as a political community, what will be addressed by the politics that also directly aspires to be the same – a specific skill with which this community will be guided in the direction of well-being and personal happiness for all its members? Or, in other words, if politics pretends to determine the ways of governing the political community, then what will the economy do? If, for example, certain members of one *polis*, following the principles of economics, publicly propose at the assembly that food supplies should be obtained through agriculture and animal husbandry, and other members of the same *polis* advocate the proposal that it is better to do so by looting and war, because these will remove security hazard from members of the other *polis*, which principles should be followed in leading that community, i.e., which principles should be given priority – economic or political? Thus, from the very beginning of the application of the principle of household management skill to the *polis*, numerous disputes have been generated.

Even without going into the immediate content of the original dispute between economics and politics, it is already clear from the spirit of the previous quote what characterizes the process in which the principles of household management are applied to the political community. Namely, as Aristotle clearly points out, that every household is in essence a monarchy, because it is unequivocally ruled by one man versus a multitude of subjects, in the *polis* in the ruling position, those who rule with those who are governed alternate. Since the economy is originally a „household management skill“ that aims to maintain one household on a daily basis, each member of the *polis* who participates in the work of institutions, applying economic principles, will take care of successfully running their own household. However, since the *polis* consists of many households, it remains unclear whether this will also be good for members of other households. It is relatively easy for the monarch of the household, i.e., the household economist and the master, to decide how he will lead the community he heads, since his goal and the goal of all other members of the household are completely consistent. However, if the rulers and those who are governed in the *polis* take turns in the position of „monarch“, they will, following economic principles, make political decisions every time they are in power that will be successfully run by their own households, but certainly it does not mean that it will also be good for the members of the household of those who are subordinate to them.

This original dispute between economics and politics seems insoluble in principle, since the principles of housekeeping skill, which aim at the well-being of one household, and the principles of politics, which aim at the general well-being of members of one political community, are irreducible. Namely, considering that power is not inherited in the *polis* on the basis of biological principle, i.e. contrary to the household and the village, citizens change positions in power, for the first time it (*polis*) constitutes the idea of an abstract subject exercising power. Since rulers and subjects take turns in positions of power, both are included in the idea of „power“. So, just the opposite of a situation in which the master rules over members with whom he shares the same household, the one who rules in the *polis* must in his management anticipate those he rules – their needs, feelings, hopes, fears, etc. His anticipation of „others“ is precisely the reason why in politics (*polis* management) something is constituted that is not in the household – the common good and the public interest. However, since the same subjects are in the capacity of wife, husband, master, slave and child, the first members of the household and then members of the *polis* in the capacity of a man, there is constant tension and dispute between their role in the household and the *polis*. For each member of the household, the private and public spheres are determined, whose relationship is in principle marked by clearly visible tension.

Aristotle's confusing analysis of the skill of acquiring property is the best evidence of the original dispute between economics and politics. If the acquisition of property refers to various goods and tools necessary for the functioning of



household and *polis*, then it seems that Aristotle tends to understand this skill as something positive and very desirable: „It is clear that there is one natural skill of acquiring property (κτητική), which should be known to household economists (οικονόμοις) and politicians (πολιτικοῖς)” (Pol. 1256b 38).<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the skill of acquiring property is equally important for household economists and politicians, both for the good functioning of the household and for the successful management of the *polis*. However, the problem arises because people in the realization of this skill find it difficult to determine the limit (τέρμα). Due to the inability of people to establish a limit in acquisition, within the household or the *polis*, Aristotle, actually, speaks of two types of this skill: the skill of acquiring property (κτητική), which he sees as something natural and desirable, and the skill of acquiring wealth (χρηματιστικήν), which he considers „unnatural“ and very often useless and harmful. Due to the inability of a man to determine the limit in acquiring and getting rich, it seems unclear whether these are two different but related skills, or two forms of the same skill. Aristotle is closer to understanding them, despite being seemingly similar, as significantly different from each other.

What is it really about? We could rightly say that Aristotle almost pioneeringly developed the first known theory of money as a means of payment, discovering the double (φωφότεροι) use value that everyday goods have in our world. The shoe is used for wearing and walking, but also for trade. It is not created for trade, but to make walking easier. However, over time, both of these uses become legitimate. This second value, for which Aristotle has no special name, arises as a consequence of an imbalance in the things that man possesses – some of them we have more than we need, and some we do not have enough. From this imbalance arose the need to exchange goods for goods. Since people in this way acquire the necessary goods for everyday life, Aristotle sees the exchange as something very useful for the household. In the transition from the household to the village, i.e., from the smaller to the larger community, there are surpluses and shortages of certain goods, and hence the need for exchange. Thus, according to Aristotle's interpretation, the first needs for exchange arise with the occurrence of the village. He sees this whole activity as natural and necessary for the maintenance of life, because it enables „natural self-sufficiency“ (κατὰ φύσιν αὐταρκείας), and therefore, he does not classify it as the skill of acquiring wealth, but the skill of acquiring property.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> When he says „politician“ here, Aristotle clearly means a free citizen who takes part in the work of institutions and the decision-making process. Our translator translates this term as „statesman“. See in more detail: Aristotel. (1984). *Politika*. Beograd: BIGZ, p. 13. Since we are losing touch with the etymological original (*polis*) with this translation, we believe that it is still better to translate this place with „politician“, despite the fact that this term today evokes different associations. Another possibility would be „citizen“, since „polis“ can be translated as „city“.

<sup>7</sup> See in more detail: Pol. 1257a 31.

As the exchange expanded to more distant places, where one kind of goods were transported and another kind was brought, it became increasingly difficult to obtain certain necessities by pure exchange, since certain goods were extremely difficult to physically transport to such distant places. So, the need for something that will facilitate the exchange, make it simpler, and which will also be easy to handle in everyday life, arose. At first, those were simple pieces of iron, silver or gold, and over time, they gained a uniform size and weight, and later a stamp as a guarantee of value. It is this moment of the appearance of money, as a means of simplifying exchange, that is of key importance for the emergence of another type of skill of acquiring wealth. Namely, from the original exchange of goods, trade (καπηλικόν) was later born with the help of money. As its medium of exchange became more and more money, trade became more and more complex over time with increasing experience, focusing more and more on how much and what kind of exchange yields the greatest profit. For this reason, it seems that the main goal of the skill of acquiring wealth is actually money, and in that sense, its basic task is actually – how to acquire the most money. Over time, wealth began to be measured not only on the basis of appropriate property, but predominantly on the basis of money. Money gained an increasing role over time.

However, Aristotle far-sightedly realizes that money is a matter of convention, a mere object that in itself has no value. By changing the convention, it loses its use value, which can often be tragic for those who own it. It also often leads to the fact that even those who own it in large quantities cannot meet basic needs. At the end of this meticulous analysis of money, Aristotle writes an important sentence in which he very effectively expresses the mentioned dispute between economics and politics: „Wealth whose owner can die of hunger is meaningless“ (Pol. 1257b 13). Wanting to portray this absurdity even more plastically, Aristotle remembers the story of King Midas, who turns into gold everything he touches, thus becoming a victim of his own insatiable desire for it. So, the place where wealth is most piled up (acquired through trade and money) is the *polis*, whose squares become the main place where trade is done. However, due to various political turbulences and wars, or due to economic crises, all the value and importance of money would suddenly be lost. This would lead to the paradox that wealth in money, which arises from the exchange between members of households and villages, and which culminates in the *polis*, no longer serves the basic goal that these communities set for themselves, because it is no longer able to keep members alive (household and village), nor to provide them with a happy life (*polis*). Due to the fact that money and its accumulation become a goal in itself over time, and that they do not necessarily have to be in line with the goals of the household, village and *polis*, Aristotle builds a negative attitude towards money and trade, which is its key source. So, although it brings us many benefits and creates the illusion that it can meet all our needs, it should be emphasized that money does not necessarily allow self-sustainability.

Allowing trade and money to become a goal in itself means exactly what Aristotle points out above, as a problem in the skill of acquiring property and the skill of acquiring wealth – establishing a border. Namely, both of these skills, according to his understanding, only make sense if they serve the authentic goals of the household and the *polis* – successfully maintaining the lives of all household members on a daily basis and achieving a happy life. From the moment when the mentioned two skills no longer serve these goals, but only the mere accumulation of money acquired through trade, the accumulated wealth turns against the goals of members of the household and the *polis*. That is why Aristotle says that the unlimited acquisition of wealth in money is „not natural“ because it simply does not serve the natural tendency of people to sustain life and make it happy. In this way, Aristotle clearly emphasizes the difference between the skill of running a household and the skill of acquiring wealth. The former has a clear goal and it directly and vitally concerns the interest of household members to maintain their existence. The goal of getting rich in money often becomes a goal in itself, and in that sense, the excess of such wealth does not mean, at the same time, improving the way of life in the household, or later the *polis*, but unfortunately very often the opposite – misfortune and tragedy brought about by the impossibility of man to establish a limit in enriching money.

To make things completely clear, Aristotle emphasizes that the problem arises precisely due to the fact that people who do not know how to establish a limit in enrichment, in fact do not know how to do it in the case of the importance of bodily goods for a happy life. That is why they understand happiness over time, above all, as physical enjoyment. The tendency towards bodily enjoyment drives us to have everything in abundance, especially what brings us pleasure and without which there would be no enjoyment. Therefore, such people constantly tend to have money in abundance, because in that way they can afford everything else that is the matter of bodily enjoyment. From the inability of people to establish a limit in the skill of acquiring wealth, many life problems arise that come into conflict with the goals of the common life of members of the household and the *polis*. In this way, the goals of monetary enrichment directly conflict with their personal and general goals of life in the household, village or *polis*. We could also conclude, accordingly, that the purpose of many other skills, such as pottery, medical or military skill, is not to make money, but to provide the necessary means for daily life, the safety of community members, and their health. Due to the frequent occurrence that people are not able to establish a limit in the skill of acquiring wealth, Aristotle maintains an ambivalent attitude towards the skill of acquiring in general. Namely, on the one hand, he has no dilemma about the fact that managing and taking care of property is the job of the householder, but on the other hand, he has a reserve when it comes to the uncontrolled manifestation of the skill of acquiring: „It is clear that there is one natural skill of acquiring property (κτητικῆ) that household economists and politicians should know“. Since it is difficult to establish a limit in the acquisition of wealth, Aristotle sees the job of household

economist or politician more in the skill of management and leadership, and not in the skill of acquisition. At the same time, if we keep in mind the jobs that the household economist takes care of – obtaining food and everyday necessities (clothes, tools, etc.), it is difficult for us to understand how the skill of acquiring would not be a part of the skill of household management. So, if we demand clear coherence and consistency in attitudes from Aristotle in these issues, then we will not find it. However, this is exactly what convinces us once again of the original dispute between economics and politics, which Aristotle often testifies to by giving many examples, but does not articulate it explicitly.

An additional confirmation of this principled dispute is found in Aristotle's few sentences on the essence of economic monopoly, which he presents at the very end of his analysis of household management skill. Reminding us of the famous story about Thales, according to which, based on his scientific knowledge of astronomy, he enriched himself by renting all presses for the production of olive oil, predicting a good harvest that year, Aristotle points out that he is not interested in proving that philosophers also can be wise in the realm of practice, but something else entirely. The reason for citing the example of Thales is not sublime at all, as one might think, but to point out that „the general rule of enrichment is to be able to obtain a monopoly (μονοπώλιαν)“ (Pol. 1259b 24). Namely, as Aristotle himself says, this is a general method of obtaining large sums of money, which politicians often use in order to obtain money for their *polis*. By the way he talks about this phenomenon here, we can guess that in his time it was a very common way of securing wealth in money. However, the example he gives us below makes this plot even more interesting. Namely, Aristotle cites an event from Sicily, according to which a rich man became even richer by buying all the iron from foundries, and then when the great merchants came, he sold it and, as a monopolist, earned twice the purchase price. From an economic point of view and based on existing economic practice, this was legitimate.

It should be emphasized that Aristotle cites this example in the context of the analysis of practical advices for running a household and acquiring wealth.<sup>8</sup> Although he cites this case as a positive way of acquiring financial wealth, and, therefore, does not criticize it, the further course of this story from Sicily seems extremely important for our main thesis about the original discrepancy between economics and politics. Namely, according to the report that Aristotle brings us here, the mentioned rich man came into conflict with Dionysius, the local ruler. Having in mind that their interests were in political conflict, we can assume that the reason is that by acquiring a large sum of money, the mentioned man could also gain a certain political power. Therefore, Dionysius ordered him to leave Syracuse, but he allowed him to keep the money. This decision seems to us to be extremely indicative for the argument in favor of our thesis. So, Dionysius had nothing against the man in question earning a lot of money and gaining great wealth, or, in

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on practical advices, see: Pol. 1258b 9 – 1259a 35.

other words, he had nothing against him developing and improving the skill of gaining wealth in his *polis*, but he was obviously annoyed that the mentioned practice could negatively affect Dionysius' political position. Therefore, Dionysius would like the economic circumstances, if at all possible, not to cause political consequences. However, since the *polis* is already defined as a community of „free and equal“,<sup>9</sup> such a thing is not possible.

## 5. Conclusion

This last example is an almost school case of a fundamental conflict between economics and politics, for which, as we have seen, there is no solution. Namely, it is a conflict after which it is impossible to preserve both the economics and the politics. Getting out of such a controversial situation always means that one of these two skills is temporarily suspended in it.<sup>10</sup> The interests of a particular economic or political decision-maker decide whether economic principles will abolish political ones, or whether political principles will annul economic ones. Namely, if the interest of a specific politician or citizen dictates that political interests abolish economic ones, that will also determine a specific decision. But, the opposite is also true, if the same interests dictate that economic principles abolish political ones, the final decision will be harmonized in that way. Since the political community does not abolish earlier forms of association, the same applies to previous ways of making decisions. Thus, they continue to be practiced in the *polis* in parallel with political forms. This directly means that politicians in power, since they do not cease to be members of their households, make decisions in accordance with the main economic interest, neglecting those who originally belong to the political community. Decisions made by politicians and citizens in the *polis* are never determined by the purely political interests of individuals or communities, but are always the result of a series of specific political and economic interests, in which the public is constantly intertwined with private and personal. This is a direct consequence of the fact that by entering the *polis*, the man who arises and develops in it does not cease to be a husband, wife, master, slave and child. In accordance with that, previous forms of communities „live“ in the *polis* – village, household, community of wife and husband, and master and slave, and in them are practiced appropriate and independent forms of decision-making and specific associative practices. This once again assures us of the fateful tension that rules the *polis*, from which numerous disputes are constantly generated, some of which are in principle unresolved, such as the one between economics and politics.

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<sup>9</sup> See more about it: Pol. 1255b 20.

<sup>10</sup> This type of dispute, for example, is called *le différend* (split, schism) by J.F. Lyotard. According to his interpretation, the schism is a dispute that cannot be resolved „fairly, because the rule of reasoning applicable to both arguments is missing“. If we applied only one rule of reason in such cases, then we would certainly do injustice to one side. See more about that: Liotar, Ž.F. (1991). *Raskol*. Sremski Karlovci: Izdavačka knjižarnica Zorana Stojanovća, p. 5. For a broader elaboration of this idea in connection with Aristotle's philosophy, see a separate chapter: p. 80-94.

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### ARISTOTELOVO ODREĐENJE VEŠTINE UPRAVLJANJA DOMAĆINSTVOM U *POLISU* – O IZVORNOM SPORU EKONOMIJE I POLITIKE

**Rezime:** Prvo sistematsko određenje ekonomije u zapadnoj kulturi zbiva se u Aristotelovoj *Politici*. U prvoj glavi ovog spisa, Aristotel detaljno analizira veštinu upravljanja domaćinstvom (ekonomija). Kada istu veštinu pokušava da sagleda, ne samo u okviru domaćinstva, već i u kontekstu političke zajednice (*polis*), Aristotel uočava probleme koji nastaju sa razvijanjem veštine sticanja imetka (κτητική) i veštine sticanja bogatstva (χρηματιστική). Primena principa upravljanja domaćinstvom na političku zajednicu, dovodi do načelnih problema, principijelno nerazrešivih, zbog kojih ekonomija i politika u političkoj zajednici (*polisu*) ostaju u permanentnoj tenziji.

**Ključne reči:** ekonomija, domaćinstvo, politika, spor, upravljanje, bogatstvo.

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