

Politics as compromise and consensus

Politics is seen as a particular means of resolving conflict: that is, by compromise, conciliation and negotiation, rather than through force and power. This is what is implied when politics is portrayed as 'the art of the possible'. Such a definition is inherent in the everyday use of the term. This view of politics has been traced back to the writings of Aristotle and, in particular, to his belief that what he called 'polity' is the ideal system of government, as it is 'mixed' in the sense that it combines both aristocratic and democratic features. The key to politics is therefore a wide dispersal of power. Accepting that conflict is inevitable.

Such a view of politics reflects a deep commitment to liberal-rationalist principles. It is based on resolute faith in the efficacy of debate and discussion, as well as on the belief that society is characterised by consensus rather than by conflict. This view of politics has an unmistakably positive character.