

# **The Politics of Aristotle Study Guide**

## **The Politics of Aristotle by Aristotle**

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# Plot Summary

Aristotle, the author of this classic work on politics, was a Macedonian, living under a monarchy. During his lifetime, the monarch of his native land changed three times. The second time it was a man who was a private student of his, Alexander the Great, who effectively furthered a plan for conquest set forth by his father.

The book has only survived in its current form through numerous translations. It is only a part of the author's work. Within the context of his era, the philosopher Aristotle developed into a prominent educator, writer and lecturer. His career was unquestionably advanced by friends of great local political might and wealth. Despite Aristotle being a foreigner and not a citizen of it, the city-state of Athens was the host of Aristotle's educational and research institute, The Lyceum. Athens was a city of ancient Greece, and the Lyceum became one of the most famous schools of the Greek world.

The book is a work of political science. It is described as being more like a work of monographs rather than one book. In it Aristotle reviews a variety of forms of political systems that were active in the world as he knew it in his era and location. Due to the Greek political scene, Aristotle has in common with contemporary American readers a direct experience with a form of democracy.

The book covers numerous aspects of politics, including what types of changes occur at different levels of societal organization. He opens with the observation that it is vital readers recognize there are very significant changes that go along with the levels of organization of a society. Since Aristotle is so thorough, by the end of the book a reader should have a very healthy grasp of multiple forms of functional governments, albeit from a particular perspective.

There is no way of discerning whether Aristotle harbored any hopes that his works would become internationally famous centuries after his death. He was reasonably, but regionally, well known during the end of his life. The work continues to be useful today as an introductory work of political science and a classical reading in Mediterranean culture and the world of 'antiquity'.



# Book 1: Politics, Chapter 1, Introductions

## Book 1: Chapter 1, Introductions Summary and Analysis

There are several introductions to this book. Part of the reason is the nature of the subject. Political science is as relevant today as at every other time throughout the history of humanity. Another reason is that this work is a much treasured remnant of ancient knowledge. It has managed to survive for over two millenia. Preserving and passing on this knowledge and these writing 'samples' has not been the easiest of tasks. The vast majority of writings by Aristotle were lost long ago and, as far as we know, permanently.

The journey of this particular work appears to have been as follows. There is an unconfirmed story that the monographs were unpublished at the time of his death. They were somehow preserved privately for over a century, and then at some point later the words made it into the hands of scholarly Arabs who conscientiously and lovingly translated the work into Arabic. They shared this wisdom amongst people of the culture who were interested and willing.

Sometime after the Arabs had it, other scholars received the Arabic versions and translated them into Latin and also newer forms of the Greek. Through such means, Aristotle's Politics were preserved through time. St. Thomas Aquinas, a Catholic scholar, made Aristotle more famous in a more modern world. Partially thanks to this and the enduring power of both Plato and Aristotle as philosophers, Aristotle's work continued to be disseminated via modern universities. At this point in time, they have been laboriously and lovingly translated into numerous languages where they have "religiously" been used as part of the educational canon of higher education for centuries now.

Aristotle's work on politics comes to today's readers as an introduction to the ancient world, to history, to political theory and practice, and as a testament to the protection of precious knowledge as a lengthy and ongoing process.

Due to the nature of the entire text, the summary is divided in a modified manner. The text itself contains 'books' and 'chapters'. However, in this case, each sub-book will be summarized as a 'chapter'.

During the first introduction, the translator, TA Sinclair explains the author's life to readers and then provides a lengthier form (nearly 30 pages) of the history of the book as shown above.

The second introduction is written by the 'reviser' who is also a British scholar of the 20th century. This introduction is much more dedicated to preparing contemporary readers to face the actual writings of Aristotle and involves some acclimation. Some aspects of the work include subject matter presently viewed with hostility: assumptions that slavery is an avoidable part of the life, the majority of a populace cannot vote, and women can be controlled or control a society to a greater or lesser degree are all part and parcel of the Politics.



# Book 1: Chapter 2, Preface through vii inclusive

## Book 1: Chapter 2, Preface through vii inclusive Summary and Analysis

Here is where the text of the Politics begins. The author takes over through the translators. The discussion of the topic begins with communication about the basic political structures that occur at the various levels of organization within society. There are the state, the village, the family and the pair. Aristotle describes the pair and the family in relation to the household and then brings up a very sensitive subject: slavery.

Slavery was a standard component of the cultures in which Aristotle lived. Although Macedon was a monarchy, Athens was a free and independent democratic city-state at the time of Aristotle's writing. However, many of the adult residents of the city-state were not citizens, and amongst these were the numerous slaves.

Household slaves held the places in society that would later be filled by modern machine-appliances and the paid servants. They were people who were legally owned, to be provided for by their owners and used however they saw fit. Aristotle explains to readers that the proper relationship involves belonging but that while the slaves belong to their masters and the two belong together, the masters do not belong to the slaves. He explains that slaves are tools because they live for others and have a separate existence and are meant for action. In the best cases, Aristotle argues that it is in the slaves' best interests to be ruled. Whether free citizens or slaves, wherever there is hierarchy, the difference is that the ones who are the Masters make the decisions as to how the others will be put to use. In this regard, to use or to make useful can be viewed as bad or good. Education for productive labor can be described as "being taught the ways of slaves" or it can be termed "empowerment." For many, this would be in conflict with the type of efforts that one should make and the economic and social class that the labors would fit into. Wives, especially in the absence of their husbands, were often put into the position of being the Mistress over the slaves of the household. For those who had slaves who felt that such supervision was unpalatable, overseers were used to provide supervision without usurping the authority of the Masters & Mistresses. Nowadays we see this as management, or middle management.

Aristotle informs readers that monarchies are purely hierarchical in nature. He explains that this is the form of government found in families and at least implies that this is also the obvious nature of the relationship between slaves and their Masters. Aristotle points up the fact that age yields rank, and therefore the oldest is in fact the top of the hierarchy.

Aristotle also addresses two other main points during this section of the book. He writes about property and about the rational in contrast to the irrational. It is worth noting that



the rational is not anti-emotional, but is best seen as an emotionally integrated view where the emotions do not govern the individual's behavior nor are those feelings ignored.

Within the realm of the rational versus the irrational, Aristotle also touches upon the use of force as it relates to justice and the right to govern. There are two arguments relating to this. This first is that might is in fact right. This is based upon the idea that physical dominance is the natural mode of expressing natural justice which is rule of the strong. The second argument is that might is not necessarily right.

Aristotle covers a great deal of material in these sections. The other main task that he fulfills is that he provides a basic description of and terms representing the main levels of sociological organization. The pair is the first, and here he means the adult pair of a man and a woman. The next level is the household. Greater than this grouping is the village. It is beyond the village that the state emerges as a form of government. For contemporary Americans there is a vast distinction between the rule of a state and a city, but the Greeks worked the two forms as one. Even so, everyone was aware that there was more than one city-state within a particular area of Greece. The extent to which they fought for control and also supported one another intimates notions of federated civilization. The philosopher explains that the form of political government often but not universally changes the moment the level of organization goes from that of the household into the entire village.





# Book 1: Chapter 3, Acquiring Goods, Money-Lending

## Book 1: Chapter 3, Acquiring Goods, Money-Lending Summary and Analysis

Aristotle divides the process of the acquisition of goods into natural and unnatural means.

He claims that acquiring what is needed is natural but that striving to accumulate more than what is needed is unnatural. He then takes an overview of how this is done in the greater world and society.

The philosopher notes the differences between the use of currency and methods of trading that do not rely upon this. He makes the accurate observation that it is possible for people to have plenty of food and to still be "cash poor" but that under pressure this is a superior position to being food poor but cash rich. "Many who have coin have still starved," he explains. Aristotle states the case both in favor of and against currency and shows a clear grasp of the limitations and benefits of it.

He observes that the "non-Greeks" of his era have not developed the widespread use of currency during his lifetime. Aristotle defines the economic practices they use as exchange: a chicken for 3 barrels of wine when the chicken's eggs are of the best quality, but only a half a barrel of wine when the chicken is going to be killed and no future egg supply is forthcoming.

Aristotle lists the methods of acquisition. Stock rearing is the accumulation of livestock animals. Tillage is plant-based farming. Bee-keeping for honey and the harboring of birds and fishes are forms of the husbandry of animals that produce something valuable. Commerce is distribution and retail of merchandise. Money-lending is its own category. Working for pay includes all jobs and careers—whenever a person trades labor for pay. Resource development includes such activities as logging, gathering fruits, and finding and using minerals and mining related behaviors.

Aristotle states that if an individual can get a monopoly on a good or service, they secure a great way to make money. The philosopher explains the famous money-making story of a philosophical predecessor, Thales of Miletus in some detail. The man managed to save up a bit of money and happened to know how to foresee a good year of grape crop. The timing was right, and so he spent much of the money he had on securing control of the grape presses in his area. Since it was off-season this was cheap and there was no competition. Later in the year, during the actual season, everyone wanted these and they all had to go to him in order to be able to do their business. He made a good profit. The same philosopher also shows how easily others become disenchanted with monopolies when he recounts how a Sicilian who came up



with a monopoly on iron, had a great year and was then forced out of Syracuse by its ruler Dionysius.

During the rest of the sections in this longer discourse, Aristotle switches his topic over into the governance of the household. Within this context, he gets into types of leadership again and then discusses morality and virtue and again delineates the type of work and the sort of person. First of all, he explains that the father-son relationship is intended to epitomize the king-subject type of relationship. Since age yields authority, until or unless something disables the father this will not ever change. He expresses clearly that because of this, when there is a problem with the father's leadership then there will be trouble for the son throughout life, as he will be forced into an unnatural relationship: usurpment or subterfuge or he will suffer as a direct consequence of the leader's shortcomings throughout his entire life. Such is the case with any monarchy, at least this is what Aristotle claims. What makes this relationship so particular, he explains is the combination of affection with control. He tells readers that this is why Zeus is referred to as the father of the gods: there is love there, and he is dominant.

The philosopher again differentiates between the manner of rule of statesmen. This type of governance is designed for rulership over equals. He informs readers that unlike the monarchic parent-child relationship, the marital relationship is one of the statesman. While he asserts that the man should be the ruler, but he is also acknowledging that the husband is ruling an equal in his wife, not an inferior, or at least not 'so much' an inferior.

The rule of the household over the servants and slaves is meant to be more monarchic in manner. He then proceeds to enter into a discussion about the "Master and the slave" mentality, responsibility and ethical situations. He claims that the higher up on the hierarchy, the greater the need for and responsibility for virtue. He also specifies that roles determine the quality of virtues required and that people should really understand this. He likens slaves and craftsman as having a similar very limited need for certain forms of virtue. Mainly, their duties are to do their work and the virtue of sticking to a task and doing it well are about all they need. Obedience for these people is a great virtue.

Parents and Masters and political heads are meant to be the most virtuous and have the greatest of a different degree of duty to fulfill. The quality and manner of their virtues are directly related to what they do. here ruling is a virtue rather than obedience.

Aristotle refers briefly to the role of education within the city-state system. He strongly advocates the use of education to make superior citizens and other free members of the society. He states with certainty that women and children should be educated in their local constitution. The reason for teaching women, he claims, is because half of the free adults in the city-state are women. The reason for teaching the children is in order to better enable them to make good decisions as adults.



# Book 2: Chapter 1, Property, States & Plato's Laws

## Book 2: Chapter 1, Property, States & Plato's Laws Summary and Analysis

In these sections Aristotle addresses a number of very important political basics. This chapter shows how some issues have remained constant for millenia.

One of the first of these issues is the distribution of property within a politically organized body of people. This is criticized based upon observations of Aristotle's era and previous eras. One thinker famed for bringing this into a forum was Phaleas of Chalcedon. Here it was proposed that property be distributed rather evenly. A secondary suggestion is that each city-state or nation should ensure that there is no more than a fivefold disparity in property and land possession between the richest and poorest within the system. This permits variety but it is intended to help ensure that everyone gets something and that there is an upper limit to what anyone may have. This idea has entered into society in many ways including capitalistic democracies, socialistic ideas, socialist states, communist countries and other ideologies designed to sustain or effect economic stability within a political system. While there are other types of government, all of these methods have at their root the matter of the regulation and distribution of property. These different forms of government show that Phaleas, Plato and Aristotle have had lasting influence and groups of humans are in fact working to figure out what will work best and how to implement it with the greatest success.

A major difficulty cited by Aristotle is the reality that the regulation of property within a state necessitates a regulation of the population. Aristotle does not enter into detailed discussion of how, but notes that even in his time and culture there is great disparity amongst the people not only of wealth but also of reproduction. One couple may have no children whereas another has a few whilst yet another has dozens of offspring.

Constitutions are another main topic of discussion in this chapter. Part of this involves a critical look at parts of Plato's work entitled Laws. Plato was very highly regarded and, as Aristotle was one of Plato's long-term students, the references to Laws are numerous and significant. During this part of the discourse, Aristotle refers to a few types of governance. One is oligarchic, one monarchic, with democratic and tyrannic forms also included.

Physical property and land are both focal points in the creation of any constitution. Another focal point is the understanding of the human population.

Aristotle describes the basic subdivisions of social class:

- 1) the Guardians: these are both fighters and legislators;



- 2) farmers: this includes both crops and livestock;
- 3) other free workers;
- 4) women & children ( these may be connected due to the nature of dependencies caused by the juvenile stage of life and the dependency caused by rearing children);
- 5) slaves.

There is some assessment of gender differences and disparate views are revealed. While Plato felt that women should also be warriors and have a large set of armed personnel, Aristotle did not agree. Plato felt that wives amongst the top two social classes should be held as common—if they be categorized as property then make them the common property of the men of those classes. Aristotle disagreed for the same reason that he objected to nonliving property being held in common. He said that the communal status too often leads to the neglect of that which is held as communal.

Aristotle indicates to readers that there are certain things they need to take care of. One of these is their territory. Another is the populace within their territory. Finally, Aristotle points out that neighboring territories need to be accurately assessed by law makers when creating their constitutions as well as when they generate and implement new laws during their time of governance.

The author strongly advocates permanent rulership. Aristotle states that it is best for the rulers of the city-state who are of high quality to stay in power where the increase in their experience can serve as an added point of stability. There is the implication that since the city-state is a democracy, any time the leader is a real problem he should be removed from office.

Through the subsections of this portion of the book, Aristotle educates readers quite well. For those already well versed in political theory, some of the material will be familiar and there may be few truly 'new' ideas. Likewise, readers may find themselves impressed that over two millenia ago there was clarity and insight into life and politics to such an extent that today's reader will be able to look at his or her direct experience of the world and recognize much of what is written of in these sections. There will also be some relief that some policies have been entirely or mostly eradicated.



# Book 2 : Chapter 2, Constitutions and Leaders

## Book 2: Chapter 2, Constitutions and Leaders Summary and Analysis

The vast majority of these sections are devoted to a more in depth study of constitutions. Here, Aristotle uses his personal experience in relation to the city-state of Athens and elsewhere. Unlike most, this philosopher had a direct hand in the creation of numerous constitutions, making these items an area of specialized knowledge. In some respect, a constitution is akin to the hub of a spoke wheel. Far from being the only laws to govern a land, its structure is crucial to the whole body of laws. Those who write constitutions are, writes Aristotle, statesmen, philosophers, and laymen.

The discourse begins with the introduction of an important predecessor. The man in question is Phaleas of Chalcedon. He is the one referred to as sending forth the idea of equal distribution of property. There is no guarantee that this thought originated with him, but he did something with it that had not been done before. There is a great deal of this which follows closely upon what was covered in the previous chapter.

The top cause of crime is poverty. The primary solution for this is employment. Other programs which provide a safety net for members of the society are also valuable but are not meant to serve as an alternative. Naturally, the distribution of opportunities throughout the economy and the nature of the division of wealth within the system will influence how both are needed or used by members of the community.

The second greatest cause of crime, according to Aristotle, are desires that reach beyond not so much means but needs. Any reader can look around today's society and see that this cause is pervasive and spreading globally. The cure for this, Aristotle claims is the cultivation of self-control and limiting desires, but also accumulation of wealth. The laws that he refers to, that would put an accumulation cap on property of 5 times that of the poorest member of society, are designed to facilitate this. The third most prominent cause of crime in the world is the behaviors which seek the satiation and fulfillment of the desires that go far beyond needs. The treatment that the author proposes for this condition is actually the pursuit, study and practice of philosophy.

Civil strife is also mentioned. The issues most closely connected with it are educational opportunities and preparation for adulthood, and the distribution of property and honors within the city-state or other state. Those who perform wonders or work very hard typically get upset with those who do not, especially when those who do are not recognized for having done so. In truth, economic and social classes and the virtues may also be involved in interpretations of this. While a farmer or craftsman may jibe a law-maker, the philosopher would argue that there are different virtues involved. Further, given the opportunity or duty of working out the laws of the land, many a craftsman



would soon be crying to be released and allowed to resume the less tortuous efforts involved with working his craft. Of course there may be exceptions. Aristotle makes no objection to this. Education should be equal, the philosopher says, but one must understand that this does not mean uniform. The course of study best suited, to use the previous example, for a craftsman is not apt to be of much value to the law-maker nor vice versa. When this is not well handled it can be a source of civil strife. Another challenge lies in distributions of wealth and in the results that ensue when people of wealth are cast into poverty. This last, Aristotle warns, is a breeding ground for revolutionaries.



# Book 2: Chapter 2, Comparative Constitutions

## Book 2: Chapter 2, Comparative Constitutions Summary and Analysis

This chapter is composed of the entire second half of Book II. The author describes several constitutions in the context of his world.

Aristotle refers to efforts to devise model constitutions for utopian states. The greatest number of people used in the exercises as shown in Aristotle's book is 10,000. For current readers, this is a large village or small town. Therefore there are many political organizational challenges today that no one in Aristotle's era ever faced, due to their smaller population concentrations. Some of these difficulties may have been addressed by the Romans during their Empire.

The Constitutions surveyed are those of Hippodamus, the Spartan Constitution, and those of the Isle of Crete and the people of Carthage. Within this context, Aristotle explains bare essentials of politics. There are categories of members of the populace and segments of the governing structure of the society.

The 3 main types of governance are:

1) Oligarchic: This is when a small group of people share in rulership. A city might recognize these as "the most powerful families" of the city-state. There is a great deal implied by this, but except when new governments are founded, people will find themselves discovering the oligarchs that are already present.

2) Aristocratic: Not as one might expect, this reflects elected leaders as much as leaders who achieve positions via birthright. Established lines of rulers are meant to reflect the combined affect of qualities of leadership that people prefer, along with the proper familial and social culture to develop successors. Individual authority is aristocratic.

3) Democratic: This is a court system that includes the use of judges and juries. These were initially established as being free, that is, having no fees associated with the dispensation of justice.

Aristotle explains that the best of those constitutions, in both ideal and actual use, contain mixtures of these three forms of rulership within one system. By way of analogy, this might be likened to metal alloys in contrast to pure metals. Often an alloy is better for obtaining the desired results. He shows how this has been achieved in Grecian city-states as shown below.





1) Board of Elders: People over 60 years of age are required for this. Typically they have to be chosen from amongst people who served in other capacities when they were younger. This combines forms of rulership as these were appointed or elected. As a group they are oligarchic, but individually as representatives they wield aristocratic types of power. There is always an element of this within representative government.

2) Kings: These are often an inherited lineage but there is customarily an element of consent of the people for kings to rule. Aristotle explains that the relationship of a King to his subject is to be as Father to son, one of highly affectionate dominance.

3) Other councils or courts or both: There is often at least one additional organizational structure within a city-state. In some cases this is another council that is found in Grecian city-states by various names, depending upon where they occur. One such council is named Ephors.

There are other features of these ancient bases of law within this chapter. One historical note is that the Spartan Constitution was founded by a man Lycurgus. However, virtually nothing else remains known of him. In contrast, Hippodamus has been immortalized not only for some of what he achieved but also for what he was like. This intentional nonconformist had a unique fashion style. With long hair and bejeweled, he was known for wearing the same type of basic clothing year round despite the ornate accessories. He was a proponent of new ideas and felt passionately that when someone came up with a good, new one that it should be accepted and implemented so as to ensure progress and prevent societal stagnation. In his case, readers today will find that one of his ideas has become part of the ordinary city organization. The precinct, as a subdivision of a city-state was one of this forward thinking man's ideas. Lastly, this eccentric also recommended street maps and some pre-planning of road layout. This was an idea that the Romans made famous and proved practical.

Women and the constitutions is another relevant topic. During the time period in which Aristotle wrote, the conditions for women were somewhat different. In some cases, they were viewed as having somehow "taken over" in that they often were living lives of relative ease and luxury in contrast to the men who were working to supply the very underpinnings and products of the culture. Plato felt that women should also share in military force as well as common meals. This came from the assumption that free citizens always have a militia and that normal "free citizens" do in fact keep weaponry and quite possibly have some training in their use for the protection of their rights as individuals, families, and the city-state. He was simply saying that women should adopt the same behavior. The common meal was a political tradition within the city-states of Greece. When "women having common meals" was advocated this meant that an open political public assembly of women at which there is a meal should become standard practice amongst the women rather than this practice only occurring amongst the adult, free, male population.

There were more matters that directly pertained to the adult female populace in relation to the creation and function of constitutions. Apparently, Lycurgus attempted to bring women under the law of Sparta but he could not get sufficient cooperation from them





and so gave up. A great deal later, Plato wrote that he felt that amongst the upper two classes the women and children should be legally interpreted as common property. This would those women relative freedom, while protecting them as it would keep them contained within that social class. This might have been a compromise between granting a higher status, closer to citizen for the women of some social class, while also facing the changes in a women's status due to whether or not they were married or single. In the latter cases they were legally very much like property. In other cases the influence of the women had more to do with the amount of property and land that they held and in fact how this changed hands with respect to their marital status.

The author claims that there were devastating effects in the Spartan society due to the relationship of land held by women and the location of military personnel. The majority of land holdings of women were held in the form of dowries, which obviously pertained to their marital status. The main problem was that the military could not station soldiers on these lands. As an unfortunate consequence, some strategically important areas were left unmanned and thus, the city-state was weakened. From this perspective, one can make better sense of Plato's suggestions that the women should have their own fighting forces and/or that their lands, like themselves could be held in common which would make proper military protection of their land holdings as part of the city-state much more manageable. All of these authors proposed legal and cultural views about women that were mixed. In one case there is a genuine show of respect, in the next something that might be perceived by modern readers as offensive. The question was also proposed: will the women self-organize en masse and then make suggestions to the city-state or will they only integrate through other means? In many nations over the centuries a great deal of organizational development amongst women as a group has been one necessary part of the advancement and participation within the sometimes separate and other times same political bodies as men of the same culture.

Finally, another social ill is addressed. This is the difficulty known as factionalization within a city-state. Aristotle makes some effort to show how civil strife can be prevented or remedied by the constitution. Simply, he tells readers that a high quality constitution will keep the system balanced in such a way that there will not be cause for creating factions. He is able to provide one strong example but it is not quite as he or readers might have hoped. He notes that in Carthage there were no troubles with political factions. However, he claims that upon analysis this was not due to the constitution of Carthage. Instead, he shows readers that when some members of Carthage became wealthy in certain ways or to certain extents that they would simply leave Carthage and go live someplace else.

After he has provided a survey of these constitutions, Aristotle then reviews some law makers that have served the Grecian city-states. He notes the distinction between those who devise constitutions and those who create legislation within city-states that already have constitutions and other laws. In summary: Solon advised that minimal power be actually given to or left to the people, Zaleucus formulated laws for at least as many places as Aristotle assisted in setting forth their constitutions, including Italy and Sicily. A man named Philolaus managed to pass and enact a law in the city-state of Thebes that

actually did unite the control of land and population as Aristotle explained is ultimately necessary to preserve a sustainable state.



# Book 3: Chapter 1, Citizens & Constitutions

## Book 3: Chapter 1, Citizens & Constitutions Summary and Analysis

Aristotle begins the several sections covered by this heading with a pair of definitions. For the first time in the text he specifies that a constitution is a clarification of the organized system of relationships within a state, along with those relationships between the governing body and the citizens. Citizens he defines as people within the society who participate in giving judgment and in holding political office.

From this, the author unfolds more of a discussion of citizenship. At this time, qualifications for this status and the duties associated with it are not identical everywhere. Aristotle himself was not a citizen of the city-state of Athens nor of Greece, but was in reality a Macedonian.

He describes the relationship of birth and parentage to citizenship. He also observes that regulations regarding this may vary in direct relationship to the conditions surrounding local population and economy. In some cases the rule is that citizens can only come from parents who have been citizens of a given state for 1,2 or 3 generations prior to the arrival. Obviously, in order to receive the full load of privileges and obligations related to the status of citizen, people must also grow into full adulthood. In other cases, particularly where an increase in free populace is needed, and/or the state is new, there is a greater need for new citizens and therefore the rules for acquiring citizenship are less strict. The roles of property and of wealth in relation to what grants this status are also recognized by the author.

Aristotle then addresses the basics for what makes a state. After some consideration he provides the following: territory, population, constitution, and name. When one views the world now, or at any other time it becomes clear that the populations within a given territory have often shifted, but even so, there has also been some consistency. There continue to be clusters of humanity that have kept primarily to one region of the globe. Although the matters of territory were far more detailed and pertained solely to the Mediterranean region, Aristotle has still hit upon a well known factor of great importance. Likewise, those born at the right times in history, or exposed to sufficient knowledge will have discerned that some locations have had the same name for millenia whereas other places have changed names many times over a thousand years. Self-evidently, the constitution of a location is of great relevance. Hippodamus was one to put forth the question of whether a changed constitution does or does not indicate a 'change of state'.

Aristotle moves his discourse to an entirely different point. He begins to look into the matter of virtues in reference to leaders and to citizens. According to this philosopher,



the virtues required of a ruler are unquestionably and necessarily distinct from those of the ruled. He shows that it is here where the nature of the government and the social class have the greatest of influences upon the virtues. Slaves, for example, should only ever cultivate the virtues of obedience and performing well. Aristotle repeatedly lumps skilled craftsman in with slaves because of the nature of their duties and the relevant virtues. They simply need to know how to do their jobs and to do them well: to be competent and obedient to those over them in order to be virtuous, explains Aristotle. A political leader, on the other hand, requires an additional set of qualities and virtues. One of these is to look for, and to find what is in the best interests of the state and its people on the whole. Another is to learn how to create the desired results: good conditions for the entire state. Next, of course, is how to engage the political process and how to serve—how to find, draft and implement the regulations and policies that will in fact have a direct affect upon the personal lives of large segments of the state's population. These are some of the tasks that the Aristotelean citizen must embrace with the same sense and vigor that a conscientious shoemaker will apply to making shoes.

Here Aristotle makes a few more meaningful distinctions. Masters over slaves may be fit to one sort of rule: that is the ability to see how to put others to work or to use. However, this manner of leadership changes from valuable and functional to useless or even troublesome within the context of a public office in a state. The statesmen, remember, must rule their peers who are other citizens and free people. The other greatest difference, Aristotle explains, is that the slave master in relation to the slave has at heart his [or her] own interests whereas the statesman has at heart the common good of the entire state. The matter is of the utmost significance when viewed towards its implications—the only exception being "symbiosis," wherein the pure self-interest of each correctly corresponds to and serves the purposes of the other. The governance of aristocrats and monarchs is either personal will along with focus upon the common good which itself is molded by or represented in part by the constitution combined with strong affection. The will of the subjects is taken into account; in fact, such styles of rulership rely upon the support of those under them for their very legitimacy.

For this last reason, Aristotle was in general opposed to rule by inheritance. This is a tricky issue since there are simple strong arguments both for and against. Just because a man is well suited to leadership does not mean that an offspring will be equally capable. However, the breeding of the one is apt to be conducive to creating offspring who can, with either similar conditions to the parent or proper training, become equally or more adept than the ruling parent. In some cases, the difference in the child rearing will have the strongest effect, whereas in other situations it is the personality individual. Nothing may be done to stop someone from being himself or herself. Likewise, nothing can be done to make an individual function outside of their own limitations: if someone does not have the capacity for something, including offspring to be the next king, then nothing can be done about that.

When these sections come to an end, Aristotle provides a review of what he calls 'correct forms' of government. The top priority for these is the intention of the common good of the state and its members and the categories into which they are subdivided. This is possible, Aristotle explains, whether the head of the government is monarchic,

aristocratic or polity, polity being what current day Americans normally mean when they say 'democracy'.



## Book 3: Chapter 2, Kingship

### Book 3: Chapter 2, Kingship Summary and Analysis

Although the majority of writings in these sections focus upon kingship, Aristotle actually begins the second half of the third book with an inspection of justice. In this earliest work Aristotle stands in agreement with his teacher and predecessor Plato. He first addresses justice in relation to constitution. Below is a brief schema of how this works.

A correct constitution is conducive to the creation and implementation of just laws.

- a) the creation of just laws
- +b) just laws put into writing &/or implemented
- +c) just judicial system
- +d) just constitution
- +e) proper virtues
- +f) people behaving within the sphere of those virtues

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= Justice in action within a just society

Next, the philosopher tackles one of the thornier issues. Given that it is only in corrupt governments that there will be too many who view themselves as outside of or above the law, are there ever times when it is acceptable for any member of the society to operate "above the law"? In this case, the focus is upon the leaders of the highest offices of the state. Plato and Aristotle agree that it is acceptable for 1 or 2 of the state's highest ranking officials to be "above the law." However, it must be understood that the only tolerable motivation for doing so is the best interests of that state, for the common good once again. Plato and Aristotle differ in terms of their justifications. Plato believes that the particular metaphysical insight can create the kind of virtue the task required. Aristotle, on the other hand, feels that no profound metaphysical insight is needed to make such a circumstance acceptable.

After this, the discussion shifts to types of kings. It is pertinent to address the attitude of hegemony of the Greeks during the time of Aristotle's writing. Aristotle, himself a foreigner, bowed before this and viewed all non-Greeks as one group and as inferiors. Whether the successful conquests of Alexander, Aristotle's former student and the ruler of Aristotle's home kingdom of Macedon changed his views is not clear during this portion of the work. Even so, he does make a cursory interpretation. Their kings, he tells readers, are all tyrants but their subjects do not mind because they are of an inferior



and more slavish quality. If nothing else, this shows how common the attitude of superiority is within a state that is dominant and that one lives in and loves.

Aristotle goes on to explain the difference between tyrants and the more popular kings. He informs readers that whilst popular kings are protected by their own subjects, tyrants require foreigners for their protection. Bear in mind that Aristotle's native king was at times so out of favor with the Greeks, that the Athenians forced him to return to his native Macedonia. He is not described as ever having had trouble in Macedon but it is clear that he spent as much of his life in Athens as possible. One gets the impression that he preferred this politically but it might be closer to the truth to say that he was dedicated to his own development and therefore took the opportunity to attend Plato's Academy, despite its being in Athens.

Spartan kings were Generals and religious leaders. Sparta was far from the only people for whom this was a truth. Many people had elected monarchs. These were often relatively temporary but some line of clear succession could be established just as it often was in other atmospheres. The author also refers to what he later describes as absolute monarchs; these are individuals whose rule really is very much like that of a parent. Such people are invested with full authority. Their governance is according to their will and they are trusted completely by their subjects until or unless something occurs which changes how their followers feel.

The philosopher declares that anyone, especially any full grown man, found to be exceptionally high in virtue will often be, and rightly so, encouraged to be the king. The proper education for a monarch is similar to that of a sound man within a state governed by a polity.

Despite what appears to be a preference for the polity of the city-states, Aristotle clearly believes that it is possible for a good state to be governed by a just monarch. He details various aspects of what makes a King good or a tyrant. He differentiates between those who are absolute authorities and those who are themselves controlled by the laws of their land, often through a constitution.



# Book 4: Chapter 1, Parts of the State & their Forms of Government

## Book 4: Chapter 1, Parts of the State & their Forms of Government Summary and Analysis

In these sections, Aristotle conducts a more detailed survey of the main types of government in the region. He clarifies that there is a strong tradition of using legal structures known as constitutions as starting points for the sets of laws that govern a particular state. He has shown that these have in fact been crafted by men; the implication is that they have been generated by committees.

Perhaps most importantly, Aristotle has explained that at least in the Hellenic Greek city-states, it has been necessary to know and to use more than one form of government.

In the previous chapters, the philosopher has provided elucidation of monarchy, aristocracy and polity. He has also described "deviations" from these, which give rise to governments generally perceived as corrupt. He explains these further at a later point, but here he begins with another look at constitutions from a slightly different perspective.

There are 4 types of constitutions, the author explains. These are briefly set out below.

- 1) Ideal: these are not limited by actual conditions and are not required to function in practice.
- 2) Best-fit for the facts: this is the very best possible constitution that can be applied within a real, live city-state or other state.
- 3) Ones that are inferior in quality to either 1 & 2, but unlike either of those can actually survive and function within an existing society.
- 4) One that is universal, meaning that it can function anywhere effectively

The philosopher briefly reviews some qualities that he feels are needed for a state, particularly amongst the ruling classes of a society. He points out that people should be trained for what they are best suited to do. Similarly, people need to be provided with training that will work well for everyone.

Aristotle briefly discusses polity in contrast to democracy and then goes on to discuss oligarchies in greater detail. Democracy is a corruption of polity. Instead of the common good being the end, the end is the best interests of the poor. In either case, the poor are often able to dominate through the simple truth that in most societies the free poor are numerically superior to the wealthy.





Oligarchies are governments that have a pool from which to draw their officials but it is a very limited one. Sometimes Aristotle calls these power-groups, particularly because he defines oligarchy as a corruption of aristocracy. He provides a classification of oligarchies as shown below. The quality that determines the voting right is given:

- 1) property qualification;
- 2) very high property qualification;
- 3) hereditary but law ruled;
- 4) hereditary but without control by laws of the land—the rulers of such a system are a power-group.

Aristotle explicates that oligarchies can come into being over the course of a few generations and under certain conditions can progress to the point of being able to establish an aristocracy. Such a group will not ever have to turn into an aristocracy, but this shows one way that a state can turn from one kind into another.

Regarding the laws in relation to the rulers, Aristotle has a few good points during this chapter. A society in which the members choose to obey just laws will be a good one. The membership in this example includes the rulers regardless of whether they are monarch, aristocracy or statesmen. If a bad leader succumbs to strong and good laws while in office this will help limit the damage of his time in office. High quality leadership with sound laws and obedient citizens and residents are best a state can achieve in practice. Even an excellent leader or set of leaders will have difficulty in making a state a good place for its people if the laws and constitution are bad.

Aristotle completes this portion of the work on politics with a reminder about virtues.



# Book 4: Chapter 2, Oligarchy, Tyranny & Deceit in Politics

## Book 4: Chapter 2, Oligarchy, Tyranny & Deceit in Politics Summary and Analysis

Once again, Aristotle brings up the Lacedaemonians for the purposes of instructive criticism. He explains that their constitution is mediocre and that they have many democratic qualities in their culture including public education, which is form of communal care of the young along with elected members of a Council of Elders and an Ephorate.

Later in the chapter Aristotle provides greater details regarding three of the most prevalent forms of tyranny. First he explains that both kings and tyrants are monarchs who rely upon personal power frequently combined with law. In tyranny, personal power and individuality hold sway, often irrespective of the law. When there is an absolute monarch, there is no underpinning of a law of the land, such a constitution and other laws. A good monarch is not above the law—there is law which provides the basis for the monarch's decisions rather than the land being at the mercy of the personal will of whoever their monarch might be. One form of tyranny is when the monarch subverts or oversteps the bounds of the constitution of laws of the land—unless it turns out doing so has been for the common good. If that is the case, then the move was unpopular and tyrannical but still right. Only in the very worst sort of tyranny does a monarchy have at its head a supposed ruler who is powered purely by self-interest and personal power. Such a character will behave in the manner of an absolute monarch even when this is against the state's regulation or best interests. In this sense, such people are said to only have the type of mastery that fits the master-slave relationship rather than having the mastery of a monarch, aristocrat or statesmen.

Aristotle devotes much of the chapter as sections, to segments of society. The challenge for readers is to understand that although there are some commonalities between the ancient views and our own, there are other areas of radical disconnect. It is imperative to understand that Aristotle's mindset did not think in terms of 'social class' in the same way as Americans might today. However, he has spoken of various classes, as did his predecessor Plato. When Aristotle addresses this issue he is mainly concerned with segments of the population. Naturally, this is because the constitution and other laws designed to meet and to fulfill the common good must take into account all portions of the state's membership. Simply put, there are the rulers, skilled laborers, farmers, women, children, miscellaneous, and any slaves. There are the wealthy, the poor, and those who are in between.

He discusses how the wealthy and middle-class people are apt to be forced to serve as government officials whereas the poor are more commonly left out by virtue of not being threatened with fines for lack of participation. Those in the middle and the poor are more



effectively included in working as part of the government when they fill paid positions. It is these, he informs readers, that serve to deceive the populace about the true nature of the governance of their state. While it may seem an effort to ensure that the poor do not get financially assaulted by the wealthy, in reality it forces the rich to serve as the state's leaders and makes it all too easy for the poor to choose to evade this responsibility or be left out by the rest. Aristotle has already written that whenever one of great virtue is found he should be forced to govern.

He completes this chapter with some discourse regarding the judicial system. Deliberation is one arm of the government of every state. With respect to the laws of a state, the author presents the following questions:

- 1) from where do they- courts and juries for example, get their members;
- 2) over what do they have jurisdiction;
- 3) how do they appoint people;

Lastly, he sweepingly elaborates upon differentiations within the homicide courts and concludes by referring to courts set up specifically for foreigners.



# Book 5: Chapter 1, Constitutional Change & Overthrow

## Book 5: Chapter 1, Constitutional Change & Overthrow Summary and Analysis

In this chapter Aristotle explores and explains more about what events may cause a state's constitutions to change. He also delineates what the effects of such alterations may be. He also explains how it is that political factions develop within a state as well as how to remedy this.

Initially he is challenged to address questions of equality and inequality within a given society. He tells readers that the difficulty with many believers in democracies is that they mistakenly assume equality in one area indicates universal equality. He contrasts this to oligarchic systems with their belief that inequalities of wealth are indicative of universal inequalities, such as "The rich are better than the middle classes and poor in every way." Aristotle explains that this does not actually follow from, "The rich are financially superior and may be superior and/or inferior to other members of the state from other classes due to other qualities." This is especially the case with respect to virtue. The greatest in virtues, Aristotle has explained, should always rule.

Aristotle informs readers that political factions typically emerge from a desire for equality in some respect or another within a state. Discontent is the greatest threat within any state. Naturally, citizens are affected by the behavior of the state's leaders. Should officials abuse power, they are nurturing the emergence of factions within that society. A discernible excess of profits or evidence of mistreatment of systems within the state both constitute just causes for opposition that can lead to factions. Another, closely related cause is the distribution of honors within a state. When people are granted deserved honors, the majority of people like and accept this. Trouble arises when people who do deserve to receive honors within a state are denied them. The instinctive reaction to unfairness lends itself towards the development of political factions. Another cause of the development of political factions is sourced in attitudes. Contemptuous attitudes, Aristotle explains are a sign of trouble and further nurture any seeds planted towards factions. This last problem is most common in cases where a portion of the people feel that they are not being represented by the government.

Aristotle very briefly discusses an issue related to times of war. He says that the source of the soldiery has a significant influence upon the populace over all and upon the future of the state. Whenever there is a particular social class that is serving as the source of the bulk of the fighting forces, the entire state will be effected by this choice. Aristotle refers not to the poorer as some may have expected, but to cases where a higher social class provides a great deal of the military power.



Aristotle continues the discussion with the intention of describing how constitutions can change with the implication that readers may be better prepared to be vigilant in the protection of their rights and in the form of their state. He begins by warning that the lack of vigilance is the primary source of changes within a state's constitution. This he claims, is followed up by soliciting votes whereas the last source of change is less fiscally motivated and may even be gradual in nature.

Aristotle cites the importance of changes in the rulers, indicating that there may be minor or astonishing implications of such an event. In the book, the philosopher refers to the Heracleatorus under whose leaders an oligarchy was overthrown and replaced by a polity. At Syracuse, tyranny was overthrown by "the people" but then turned into factionalized warring rather than settling rapidly into a new stable form. In some cases, newfound stability emerged when many of the factions re-formulated their own smaller states. The philosopher explains that there have been numerous cases where patterns clearly show in political transformations.

On a radically different note, the philosopher turns to the politics of romance. For anyone who still wondered whether or not marriages amongst the socially prominent need to take politics into account, Aristotle explains why. He uses one case from the city of Syracuse, when there was some rivalry between a boy or very young grown man, two older men and a woman. The one man who may have had the prevailing influence upon a beloved lad went away for some time. During his absence, the other man grew prominent in relation to that same boy or young man. When the other man returned, however, he found the unwanted consequences of his prolonged absence. Jealous, the returning man sought for some means to emotionally reconcile himself. So, he seduced the other man's wife. Although not the boy, she was relevant to his rival. In the case that Aristotle cites, this love situation became public knowledge and the people on the whole were divided because they most definitely took sides. Thereby, the entire culture was influenced. So, a strong marriage across certain political boundaries can ease international tensions, form otherwise impossible alliances, upset a power balance or greatly strengthen an already existing unity.

The philosopher then provides an example of how strife between economic classes can lead to changes in style of government. He specifically states that there are times in states when the group being mistreated is actually the wealthiest. Often enough the poor and lower middle classes dislike any suggestion of this since there is so much generalized hostility from the poor to the rich. This may be based partially in jealousy but most often stems from a combination of lack of understanding, perceptions about greed and the truth that while the employed poor often benefit from the rich, they also frequently suffer as a direct consequence of the greed amongst the wealthy—sometimes in ways the rich themselves are oblivious to or think is actually funny. Any time that one group, especially if it is the most populous one, is suffering at the hands of the others, political change to correct this becomes a promising idea. Any leader from the offended group who is able to get into office has great power and in many cases around the world throughout history, such an individual is also dangerous because in repeated instances such an entity will have the potential to become a tyrant. This is less



the case where the leadership is spread amongst more people. The example that Aristotle uses is Dionysius.

Aristotle continues to suggest that most state constitutions, to be their best, will have elements of aristocracy, oligarchy and polity in order to function. All three of these are highly valuable and offer stable, legitimate forms of government in their own right.

Aristotle completes this chapter by explaining how an oligarchy can greatly influence its own security by how it treats its potential soldiery. It is unquestionably wisest to treat those who will fight for the state with enough respect to keep them loyal. As such, even the rich can keep some of its poorer populace on its team by treating them in a way that will allow them to serve as reliable warriors of the state. Whenever a state's leaders do not trust their own subjects, then they will be apt to choose mercenaries to supply its guard and military forces.



## Book 5: Chapter 2, Aristocracies

### Book 5: Chapter 2, Aristocracies Summary and Analysis

Here the author focuses upon the more special challenges of aristocracies. Clearly, this discourse could make no headway if the philosopher did not accept aristocracy as a legitimate form of government. First, bear in mind the difference between a monarchy and an aristocracy. Monarchies can be or seem to be most vulnerable to tyranny but Aristotle has shown that being a monarchy is not as influential a factor as the political and economic climates are. The example to which Aristotle most often refers is Dionysius of Syracuse on the isle of Sicily. His marriage only further fueled those forces which turned the oligarchic leader into a popular tyrant.

During these sections Aristotle begins to provide advice to prevent or to cure problems within an aristocracy. The number one factor of importance is that the culture supports the style of government. Every type of government has certain requirements and the society needs to reflect and express this. The system of education is intended to do this. He harbors no doubts regarding the importance of training the young in the mentality and culture as well as trades of the state of which they are a part.

The philosopher provides additional insight to readers regarding politics in the region with respect to the poor. In democracies, where the more numerous poor provide the governance, the rich need to be treated with restraint and some guarding so as to protect rather than destroy who they are and what their wealth enables the state to do. In oligarchies, where the small group of leaders often but is not always made up of the rich, the poor are the group that requires special protection. In order to secure the ability to find representation and service in the government from throughout the economic classes, provision must be made to enable the poor and middle class politicians to be paid for their work. He goes on to address another issue, and that is, how to remove people from poverty. He reports to readers a public policy that ensured the division and inheritance of estates in such a way that controlled wealth and population. This assured the long-term well being of the state.

Aristotle makes it clear that in every healthy state there will be one readily apparent condition. That is that each individual within the society will be able to recognize that it is in his or her own best interests to work in league with their state. Being self-serving within its proper bounds is healthy, and the evil of selfishness is simply self-service taken beyond sensible limitations. He advocates a "middle way" as a reasonable political reality that best suits the common good. Oligarchy and democracy, Aristotle explains, are both beneficial, but either in excess is dreadful.

In order to address issues relating to aristocracy, Aristotle has to provide some further clarification about monarchy, which is the sovereign rule of 1, and aristocracy which is very much a form of oligarchy. He urges that kingship is based upon those merits



granted by the combination of virtue, birth and service. Kings can be relied upon to keep the common good in view and to protect their people. This is contrasted to governance by tyrants who are in themselves governed too much by their own self-interests. The latter tend to seek wealth whilst the former, whilst financially aware, are more moved by the pursuit of honor and the good. A good kingship will last longer than a tyranny. Aristotle shows, from the history available to him, that the Sicyonian's had the longest lasting tyranny, and it went on for one century. The author educates readers when he cites the cause for this long enduring reign as pleasurable consequence of acts of kindness by the king for his people. He then admits, that this characteristic was accompanied by the ruler's warlike nature, the tendency to submit to the land's laws and the methodologies associated with moderation.

The sharing of proper honors and privileges and their bestowal upon the proper individuals will strengthen every government. Any other righteous organization will abide by this same principle and will enjoy the lasting effects of doing so. In a kingship the reality is that there may be a large number of people who are near to the same level as the king in power and authority. However, the monarch may be rightly viewed as the one who has the final word. The most effective and longest lasting kings are ones whose authority is categorically tightly restricted. Perhaps his rule is limited to deciding whether or not the state will go to war or whether or not to accept a particular currency. Finally, in this matter, the philosopher explains that real kings are only in power because their followers want them to be, or the majority of the people want them to be. This is a fundamental distinction between a king and a tyrant.

Aristotle shares with readers how certain activities encourage or discourage tyranny. Most monarchies and aristocracies are destroyed from within. A primary aspect of the rule of tyrants is their choice to lead irrespective of their popularity. For this reason, there is a significant listing of methods designed to preserve tyranny. Destruction of intellectual centers and higher educational systems are part of this plan. Discouragement from public meetings is also helpful.

Here Aristotle educates readers in certain aspects of monarchy and aristocracy. He exhibits how they can be preserved and what tends to destroy them. He has been able to educate readers in how to be better citizens, what to look for that might be an indication of success within their own state, and what other concerns to observe as potentially dangerous to the future welfare of the state as a whole.





# Book 6: Chapter 1, Principles within Governments

## Book 6: Chapter 1, Principles within Governments Summary and Analysis

This chapter contains the first 4 sections within the total book. The author looks into what makes constitutions function best once they evolve from being abstract matters on paper to being implemented within a given society. He focuses mainly upon democracies, which is rule by the poor and mainly for the masses of the poor. He shares with readers wisdom relating to how certain forms of equality are developed and guarded within society.

So far in the book, Aristotle has taught readers about the basics of the political documents known as constitutions. He has shown essential qualities that are required for three distinctive forms of government. He has explained how the predominantly functional constitutions within a given state will often be made up of characteristics from more than one form of government. The overall nature of the state will then be observably of one type but with balancing factors brought in as qualities from the other types shown to be most effective.

The philosopher mentions some of the differences between populations and how those dissimilarities affect the constitution and form of the state. In this case he notes the requirements for agrarian cultures, those who manufacture and distribute mechanical devices and tasks, and those societies that are made of up people who produce for the state as a labor force. Each of these characteristics unquestionably creates the identity of the state. As such, this identity can be altered in more than one way. When a state changes over from having relied upon agriculture to being dependent on manufactured goods for its productivity and income, this will influence and reflect changing needs of that state.

Aristotle gives examples of symptoms, not of illness, but of health within a state. He does this by showing marks of equality and of liberty. One of the strongest signs of social and political liberty is taking turns at ruling. This means that one's fellow citizens can be relied upon to rule and will also respect and respond to your very own power to guide and to govern. The other main symptom is that of living in the manner of one's own choosing. This is assumed to mean within the bounds of the laws and duties of the citizens of the land, and is intended to represent a life involving some order and discipline in contrast to the life of absolute whimsy or the joyful despot. In this regard, the discourse is referring only to those who are in fact citizens. Aristotle then covers symptoms of equality. He claims that just laws with sensible enforcement provide reasonable and equitable circumstances within a state. There are moral underpinnings to the city-state which are able to function in practice. The laws and systems in place intimately support one another. It is important to accept the truth that even in Greece

there have been successful efforts made by financially poor people to politically organize and to maintain governments.



# Book 6: Chapter 2, Preservation of Oligarchies

## Book 6: Chapter 2, Preservation of Oligarchies Summary and Analysis

Aristotle effectively continues the discussion from the previous sections. The four subsections are covered by this chapter heading. These and the previous four form book 6, which according to the translators constitutes one of the monographs in this series.

Herein, Aristotle covers the grounds of the sorts of people within a given community and shows how they relate to the state. In terms of type of government, in this case he is working mainly with oligarchy—this is rule by the few but not by a group of aristocrats. There are typically regulations both tacit and explicit about where the oligarchs come from. In many cases, they are forced to come from the wealthy, because they can afford to do the work for free or very cheaply without it causing them to be cast into poverty. In other cases, certain virtues may have been discovered, such as wisdom, intelligence and unselfishness. Huge portions of the populace are far too selfish, lazy or simply hedonistic and too undisciplined to dedicate themselves to full or even part time service directing the functions of the state's government.

The philosopher Aristotle lists some attributes of the people. He acknowledges that problems may be caused when the majority of the populace is far more interested in and attracted to profit than to honor. Aristotle explains that when a populace functions in this manner, tyrannical governments are often tolerated. It can be said that outside of the citizenry, women are often taught to both tolerate some tyranny from the men and children in their own lives, and to dish out their own lesser forms of tyrannical behavior with their lovers and within their families and amongst themselves as women. It could be argued that this reflects the prevailing societal conditions or that it plays into the overall cultural climate. When honor is more highly valued than money, the culture and situation will be quite different, according to Aristotle.

The philosopher then goes on to discuss the inclusion of citizens from amongst the population. He resumes his remarks about rule and social customs within democracies at this juncture. Both legitimate and illegitimate offspring are included by the state as citizens. In this case legitimate means within the bounds of legal marriage, whereas the illegitimate come into the world without their parents being bound to one another within the legal contract of marriage. Another means of acquiring citizenship in a democratic state is to have one parent who is a citizen of the state in question.

Aristotle reverts back to his discourse about oligarchy. In this form of government, there are normally property-requirements on citizenship privileges. The author explains that the amount of property a citizen must own in order to function in a particular government



office may be set in a manner that reflects the demands of that office. Though there is a greater wealth requirement, there is also a more demanding ethical requirement for this position. The virtues associated with the top positions of government are directly related to dedication, diligence and also a willingness for self-sacrifice and a drive to constant improvement and an interest in peak performance. The ability to make long term gains and to stabilize these are also significant. In a modern example, just as top level executives look out for the well being of the entire company and all of the employees with a view to the outside regarding competitors, supporters and how the business fits into the local society, government officials take a similar attitude, only they have an all embracing outlook towards the entire state. Meanwhile, even a dedicated employee, much like a craftsman, will be predominantly focused upon doing his or her job with only a vague sense or interest in how the company fits into the local society. The relevance of the individual's job within the corporation may even be a matter not considered by the worker. This is the attitude that Aristotle refers to be as being little different from that of the slave, from whom labor and obedience are all that is required in terms of virtue. Many in modern culture would complain that this is actually a negative side effect of working against one's will or because the position was taken up from need rather than from desire. Those motivated by personal interest in the work and the organization are far more inclined to harbor interest in how it fits into the local state and so forth. Assuming such an individual is competent, then he or she will function at what Aristotle would describe as a higher level of virtue, let alone productivity.

Aristotle covers a great deal of material in these sections. He goes on to provide a description of four types of functional members in a given culture and the same number for how they function in war. The former group consist of farmers, traders, mechanics/builders, hired employees. The latter group is made up of cavalry, heavy armed infantry, light armed infantry, naval forces. Unarmed and lightly armed combat is typically the preserve of the poor. In the city-states that Aristotle was aware of the system for the state's having a trained military force was to have members of each eschelon of the society develop its own 'level' and type of military force. Then, the city-state could simply call upon those of whatever class of personnel harbored the type of military prowess and equipment necessary to defend in the particular situation.

Aristotle finishes this chapter by pointing out a number of categories of the state. These provide a listing of some relevant societal functions and needs:

- 1) control of the marketplace—trading goods & services;
- 2) public & private property—their construction, destruction, maintenance, and boundaries,
- 3) supervision of criminals—everything from rehabilitation to crime prevention and deterrence through the presence of enforcers, the court system, forms of support that reduce crime [poverty being the greatest cause of crime according to Aristotle], and record keeping within the city-state;



4) accounts & finances—this includes everything from taxation and educational service funds to property assessments to the receipt and distribution of funding for local bridge & road building;

5) religion—this includes all aspects of religion, including the properties and the supervision of public rituals.

Aristotle completes this chapter with the same consistent tone. His style is objective and clear. The information he provides could be shared informally or could readily be used as part of a formal lecture. He contextualizes the information quite well and in such a way that allows readers to extract the 'principles' he has described.



# Book 7: Chapter 1, Additional Characteristics of the State & the Role of the Philosopher in the State

## Book 7: Chapter 1, Additional Characteristics of the State & the Role of the Philosopher in the State Summary and Analysis

Aristotle starts this chapter by discussing the relationship between virtue and prosperity. The translator provides some notes at the very beginning of the chapter, prior to the bulk of the text. He does this consistently throughout the entire compilation, so that every section has at least a paragraph of notes provided by the translator. These are set apart through the use of a different font.

The translator acknowledges that there is original Greek material that cannot be translated into English effectively at all. Amongst what can be translated is a popular question among the ancient Greeks, especially the intellectuals, "what is the ideal state?" Closely related popular questions of the time were "what is the ideal constitution of a state?" and "what is the recipe for happiness and how shall it best be pursued?"

Aristotle posits that happiness rests upon virtue for its manifestation within the human life. Prosperity, he claims, is greatest amongst those superior in intellect and in character. The soul, he tells readers, is greater in value than either the physical body and is also more valuable than any possessions that one might have. The soul that Aristotle refers to is in some respects similar to the contemporary perception rooted in monotheism but it is wise to realize that there may be some error or tendency to misjudge what the philosopher really means by this.

The philosopher informs readers that the minds of men do well to consider—is there ever any disadvantage to nurturing spiritual gifts? Unlike the desires for things and for wealth, which, if they go unchecked wreak havoc, it seems that the cultivation of virtues is strictly advantageous both within individual personages and within any given state. This being so, Aristotle advocates the development of spiritual character virtues within every individual as a means towards furthering the state.

Then he goes on to inquire into a matter concerning lifestyle. Which is best—the active life or the contemplative one? To some degree these are the life of the statesman or the philosopher. However, he admits that philosophers are not really restricted to an inactive life, but that they are more apt to choose it. He follows a sequence of thoughts that lead to a reasonable conclusion: the good life, and happiness involve the union of action with virtue.



Aristotle reiterates that in every city-state or nation treating the unequal as though they are equals gives rise to resentment.

During this chapter, Aristotle for the first time makes a distinction between the city-state and the nation. He simply and clearly explicates that a constitution's effectiveness is actually limited by the population. Too great of a populace will cause the constitution to suffer whilst an insufficient population will force the state's members to struggle and all too often fumble in their efforts to meet their needs. When a society overgrows its state government, Aristotle explains, the next level is the nation. He does not at length define the difference, but remarks that national governments can create and sustain functions that defy the capacities of any given state. Transportation and infrastructure are examples of this. Everyone wants to be able to move goods within their city-state and must be alert to connections at the neighboring areas. However, the rest of the nation needs to be engaged in order to orchestrate transportation beyond one's own borders. Funding, timing, resources and the like are all matters worth convening over with partnering states.

At this point Aristotle goes on to define a state further. The land itself is one entirely relevant facet of the state. How the land does and does not facilitate the self-sufficiency of the entire state plays into the politics and lifestyle of the state's inhabitants. The entire state needs to embody its own form of self-sufficiency. The land is also relevant in how defense is best managed.

There is another reason for why Aristotle recommends that the size of states remain small enough. He truly believes that the political organization will work much better when the people know one another well and this requires a limited number of people. The reverse of this is that Aristotle declares that a divine power like that which holds the very cosmos together would be necessary to

unite and keep together political organizations the size of what readers will observe all around them today. There were no such gigantic populations living under single constitutions in his era.

Finally, Aristotle delivers a summary of what best serves the state in terms of organization. He shows that the state's populace can be divided into a few categories. He explains that there is one method of division that creates two simple categories: fighters and deliberators. Less formally and distinctly, civilians can be divided into farmers, skilled workers, and hired laborers.



# Book 7: Chapter 2, Territory, Defence & Leisure

## Book 7: Chapter 2, Territory, Defence & Leisure Summary and Analysis

The author continues along the same general topic. The sections that combine to make this second chapter include multiple subtopics as indicated above. He addresses issues by virtue of their primacy and potential impact upon the surrounding environment.

He covers the matter by looking at defense of the city itself. The lay of the land and the type of government actually have a direct influence of the way that the terrain needs to be defended. Aristotle explains that while open flat lands are best for democracy, a citadel suits an oligarchy whereas an aristocratic type of governance requires what the philosopher calls a multiplicity of strongholds or other secured locations designed to support the strength of the others. This is another point that readers will find either fascinating and enlightening or simply a reminder of simple knowledge already acquired.

He goes on at some length about the value of city walls and fortified garrisons. He argues that it is foolhardy to leave a city-state without walls. He specifically indicates that the location of resources, especially those of water: divided into that used for drinking and the rest used for cleaning and other purposes is incredibly important to the location, protection and defense of the city.

He touches upon the topic of the communal meals. He advocates these as they are a public ritual designed to nurture a sense of comradery and is about the local political situation. Through participation, people grow in their awareness of what might be most relevant to those living in a given area of town. Citizens who will participate in government are strongly encouraged to attend.

He goes on to advice people towards a certain layout of the city center. Provision for an attractive market place is made, with the significance of how it relates to distribution routes being noted. It is very beneficial for the shipping to be convenient to the selling location. Aristotle also denotes the significance of the differing age groups and goes into a little detail on this matter. Age groups in some ways should be separated he explains, but positioned so as to be able to observe the kinds of activities the others are engaged in. He specifically mentions the tremendous benefit of young men being exposed to and protected by the presence of older men. When of good character especially, the younger men will benefit directly from and develop deference to the presence of benevolent male authority. Obviously, there is some risk of men of bad character and therefore the dynamics amongst the more mature men and their behavior is also of great significance. He completes this section by observing that when one does think





about it, it is not particularly difficult to determine what is needed, but coming up with that which is needed in reality is the more challenging part.

When Aristotle has finished that, he turns again to a discussion of happiness and to discourse about "the sound man." Here the importance of virtue returns to the individual and to the community. Reason, habituation, and listening, for example, together form a triplicity of forces accessible to every man. Each can affect the other in some way. The philosopher tells readers that a man can behave in a manner that is contrary to nature and to habit if his ethical judgment and reason have the better of him and when he has determined that this is the right thing to do. He also writes about "absolute" in contrast with the "conditional" within this context and clearly differentiates between the two. The former he explains means the ethical and moral whereas the latter is that which is not governed by this principle. This clarifies matters and serves as a reminder of the importance of ethics within the context of life in the polis. The sound man is one who is morally well developed and virtuous. He will find good in all things, but will endeavor towards those conditions most prone to yielding the good life and happiness. This attitude will benefit all, including himself as it facilitates happiness and wisdom. Aristotle explains it is helpful for people to learn to benefit through growth in wisdom from even bad experiences. Ultimately, Aristotle asserts that the cultivation of 'soundness' in every man, meaning every potential citizen and each citizen, is in the best interests of the state, the community and in fact the individuals themselves. This makes people better fit for both being governed by the statesman and more reliable for leadership. The elements of education and lifestyle needed to maintain this are those mentioned earlier: the absolute, ethical standpoint, reason (the active use of the mind), habits (the cultivation of healthy ones and the destruction of any that are counter-productive), and nature, which offers every individual a supply of impulses and suggestions, some helpful to rational community and others that undercut that.

The philosopher then covers the subtopic of education of the population for the role of citizens. He argues straightforwardly that this depends upon the quality of the people. If there is one group which is superior in virtue, intelligence, reason, health and perhaps wealth, then they should always rule as this will benefit the whole far more than having the inferior providing lower quality leadership. However, when the bulk of the populace is closer to equal, which Aristotle states that it most certainly is in Greece, then the education must be designed so that the ruled can develop into rulers. The community must be fostered to ensure that leaders can emerge from within. He directly expresses, however, that the young must be ruled, and the mature shall rule. Each citizen will be more apt to rule at the right time but will be prevented from even attempting to do so until the proper stage of life for doing so has been reached. Recall that earlier he says that the young men make fighters who are full of energy and require a tremendous amount of externally imposed discipline and order. The middle aged man, or older men may rule. Likewise, one and the same citizen may govern at the proper time. Due to the changes in the age, the philosopher explains that this is in some sense the "same man" but in another manner "a different one from the one who was ruled."

After that, the philosopher goes on to discourse regarding both leisure and also the family. Here, the Greek mind might well confound or disturb the contemporary reader's



psyche based upon our own education and cultural bias. He encourages the cultivation of philosophy as a form of leisure. He remarks that men require special handling in order to proceed from the warrior's life to the working life and to leisure or legislating and this transition must not be left to chance. He carries on to explain how it is that the state should legislate family life. Here, he insists that rulers must bear in mind what qualities they are seeking to create in their state and how this pertains to the unions. Aristotle puts forth that women should always be united with men 19 years older than themselves. Parenting may continue until age 50 for women and age 70 for the men. He argues strongly against women giving birth when young as he says too many women die as a result. When young people breed, he claims, it weakens the race.

In these subsections, Aristotle covers a great deal more that is entirely relevant to the well being of the state. This includes topics ranging from the building of city walls, the lay of land in relation to the best form of government to matters such as the separation of age groups and the methods and best matches for marriages and proper times for child rearing.



# Book 8: Chapter 1, Education and Leisure

## Book 8: Chapter 1, Education and Leisure Summary and Analysis

This book is shorter than many of the others. Scholars have ascertained that it is incomplete and the translators have graciously and properly provided us with this information. Nevertheless, what has been preserved is shared in as coherent a form as possible.

The philosopher delves even more deeply into the nature of education within the city-state. He asserts in the simplest of terms that the formative educational years are of great importance not only to the formation of the individual child, but in the interests of the common good and their relevance to the individual character that is most desirable for a given state. The curriculum selected is intentionally designed to enhance the state. This enculturation is needed to maintain the state through psychological and behavioral means. This does include certain forms of censorship and special ways of coloring the truth. Children must reach a particular level of maturity before they become more adept at reading through interpretations and the like. The degree of intelligence also influences the child, but is not the sole factor. Interpretations of the truth "should be" made in accordance with the perspective of the state as initially described by the constitution. When mature enough, it will not be confusing to the students, but even so, the messages delivered with the lessons are meant to support the state and this is not an error. Curriculum, in addition to meeting political agendas is also designed to meet the needs of the society and its economy. The reason for it being organized on the greater scale is so that the young can be prepared in ways their own parents may not foresee the need of, due to the limits of their own perspective and the rather small amount of time dedicated to awareness of the city-state's future economic and social trends.

Aristotle touches briefly upon the effects of a particular type of educational process. He alludes also to its purposes. For some the aim is utilitarian, in other cases to create virtuous citizens is the highest end, whereas others view the greatest aim of education to be the conduct or creation of profound achievements. The philosopher argues that each of these purposes is valid, but he does not explicitly state that many states can devise systems that contain at least some of each quality, thereby facilitating results in all areas for every student. However, he also warns against a counter-productive effect of some education as having a tendency to have made students less independent—which in a polity is not really good, but more slavish or compliant. This is, for free men and citizens, a genuine error except when it encourages compliance to the order of the state's political and economic method. Over all, the problem is that virtue has been reduced rather than increased.



The philosopher differentiates between play and leisure. Play, he tells readers, is for rest and relaxation but does not make a good end in itself. Leisure, however, is more closely related to the development of virtues and culture—for art and music are to be created during these times as well as enjoyed. Play, the philosopher says, has a closer relation to work, perhaps since exploration and discovery lead often to order and to the discovery and development of skill whether self-directed or controlled by others.

He then goes on to describe physical training, "gymnastics," and its role. The Greeks were known to be extremely fond of their athletes, an understandable obsession: the capabilities of the human body, the beauty of health and of skill in movement are all worth admiring. Aristotle criticizes a few of the different methods and attitudes taken towards this. Excessive training is counter productive and weakens those who might otherwise grow up to be the very strongest. Insufficient conditioning will also be bad as it will hamper the natural vitality and development of the body. He defends the idea that the proper amount of physical training at the right time, which for men is the 3 years after they reach puberty will yield peak performance.

Finally, Aristotle claims that intellectual education and physical training should not be emphasized at the same time. The reason for this, he claims, is that one undercuts the other. This is a realistic and meaningful point that has been debated both before and since. There continue to be schools of thought that the two must coincide in balanced amounts, which is what Plato urged. It is also possible that some people are simply more limited in one arena than in the other and that internal difference is what makes pursuing both together such a challenge. In such a case there would need to be systems to divide students into abilities so that each can make the best of himself.



# Book 8: Chapter 2, Music & Cultural Refinement

## Book 8: Chapter 2, Music & Cultural Refinement Summary and Analysis

Music is introduced as one of the arts which leisure time is intended to produce. Aristotle discusses cultivating the ability to create structured music and the extent to which it has an important social role. He shows the need for people to learn the skills for making music and then making it during leisure time. While initially he does not stress this, it rapidly grows apparent that he means to strongly encourage the discipline required to play instruments and to write music and for this reason he argues that making music is not "playing" even though it is also not working.

That is one reason the philosopher reviews the role of musical education within the city-state. Soon thereafter, he follows into a discussion of whether or not music can contribute to the development of character or not. It would be difficult to argue against the virtue of discipline that is involved with learning such tasks, and modern research corroborates Aristotle's suggestion that the proper sounds are literally good for the the body and soul of the person who makes the sounds and for those who hear them.

Aristotle's political perspective has great significance at this juncture. The reason is that the bulk of the citizens that function within Aristotle's society are not what he refers to as "mechanics and hirelings," laborers who, while he calls them free men. he generally refers to them as more slavish and not conditioned in their virtues to be the best citizens. He provides no explanation of how being an academic or instructor is superior. However, he does set forth a specific system for how people can acquire the greatest virtue from their study of music. He tells readers that one ought to learn to play an instrument but not to the extent of a professional, since their level of expertise turns them into "mechanics" by which he means "skilled laborer." Their learning should only be extended to the point of improving their capacities as citizens. While young, he posits, they should learn to play and then do so. When they are much older, they should give this up and only then purely listen. Less in need of activity in later years they can now listen with the healthy underpinnings of their experience with the art.

In the final sections, Aristotle discusses forms of music—odes, melodies and their implications. He reveals criticisms that have been made by others to show that these are matters still open to some debate. Ultimately, he is strongly in favor of what he refers to as the Dorian method. Also, he relates some personal characteristics in conjunction with this. He says that melodies are either: 1) educational, conducive to ethical development; 2) cathartic, emotionally intense & purifying; 3) relaxing, to relieve tensions often associated with the concentration required for productive labor.

With this discourse on music, Aristotle's work *Politics* comes to a close. Again, the translators and other scholars who have worked with this now ancient text have found that this section is incomplete.



# Characters

## Plato

Plato was an aristocratic Greek philosopher of the city-state of Athens in the 4th and 3rd centuries BC. He came from a wealthy and reputable family within the city. He founded an educational institution, the Academy, in Athens. The courses offered included both intellectually rigorous activities such as philosophy and the more physical rigors of wrestling. Plato understood the need for the entire person to be trained.

Plato is honored because he was one of the first to write works of philosophy. He is known for having made a local Athenian philosopher famous through his writings. He wrote about Socrates who practiced the art of philosophy but did not write. Plato also had numerous theories and beliefs of his own.

Plato's higher educational institute only allowed male students. The cultural atmosphere was democratic but within a society that had slavery as an ordinary and long standing social practice. Also, many of the free men were not citizens. Therefore, although Athens was a democratic city, far from everyone had the right to vote.

One of Plato's students was Aristotle. Aristotle was prominent but ultimately lost his bid for succession as the head of Plato's Academy. Aristotle was much more open to women, allowing women students admission to the Lyceum which he later founded there in Athens. Plato's most famed philosophy is Idealism. This is rooted in discerning the principle or identifying nature of an item or object in the mind with the awareness that this can be talked about. It involves recognition and discussion of the difference or sameness of an object of consciousness and an object of sense perception that is distinct from the object of consciousness.

## Aristotle

This is the author of the book. He lived for 62 years during the 3rd and 4th centuries BC. He was a Macedonian, but spent much of his life living in one of the Greek city-states.

His family must have harbored a good reputation and he came into the advantage of some powerful friends. Due to these factors, and his own very real great skills and talents, he prospered at least part of the time. One of his jobs was humble enough in itself, yet respectable: he was a private tutor. His student, however, was the top of the upper class: Alexander, Prince of Macedon. Aristotle worked with this young man for two years. Alexander was able to follow in the footsteps of his father. When he did so, he became the King of Macedonia and then followed through on conquest plans at least partially worked out for him by his father. When he did so he earned the reputation that we still know him by: Alexander the Great.



Aristotle spent 20 years in the Grecian city-state of Athens studying. How he made ends meet during this great span of time is not entirely certain, but somehow he did. Much of this time he was able to attend Plato's Academy in Athens where he learned a tremendous amount. He did well enough that he was known or suspected of having of being appointed by Plato as Plato's successor as leader of the Academy.

Aristotle's failure to win this bid for the Academy's leadership later turned him to found Athen's second institute of higher education: the Lyceum. His own organization prospered. The advantage of this was that none of his very strong differences of opinion, thought and views between he and Plato caused problems under these conditions.

Aristotle lived to be 62. He is famous for advancing science through the development of taxonomical nomenclature and the simple but important task of cataloguing things and their names and descriptions, whether fish of the sea or plants grown as crops.

## **King Phillip of Macedon**

King Phillip was one of a stable line of rulers by inheritance in the kingdom of Macedon, also known as Macedonia. He was a good leader and adept at planning. He in fact prepared his kingdom and his son, Alexander the Great, to enact a great expansion by warring conquest. Alexander followed in his father's footsteps and carried forward a plan at least partially prepared by his father, thus furthering the kingdom's political and economic goals.

King Phillip faced the usual hazards of being a monarch and was assassinated in 336 BC.

## **T.A. Sinclair**

This man is the translator of this edition of Aristotle's Politics. During his lifetime he served students and faculty members as a lecturer, Dean and quite possibly also researcher. He taught in England at three universities. He was a Fellow at Cambridge, from which he graduated. He also taught at Southampton and Birbeck, and at the well reputed Queen's College in Belfast, Ireland. There he was a professor of Greek. He is the author of one of the introductions in this edition of the book. He died in 1961.

## **Trevor Saunders**

Saunders is another British scholar. He taught at the University at Newcastle-upon-Tyne in England from 1965 to 1999, when he passed away prematurely. He wrote an introduction to the text of Aristotle's Politics in order to help people to put it into context. The main purpose of this is to enable people, especially women, to read it without becoming enraged by some of its less politically correct material.





## Socrates

This was a man whom Plato wrote a great deal about. He was one of Plato's teachers although the role was informal. Socrates was both famous and infamous within the city-state of Athens. He made great headway against sophists, who were rhetoricians of the era, but his ability to question and to threaten the security of others by undermining their knowledge of the definitions of the words and concepts they used led to his bad reputation. He became so unpopular with some of the city-state's leaders that he was offered the choice between banishment from Athens or the death penalty by ingesting poison. He selected the death sentence, declaring to the very end that Athens was his home, and beloved city-state.

## Thales of Miletus

This is an even more ancient philosopher than Plato. Aristotle referred to a story about how Thales made a pile of money even though he was a philosopher, and philosophers have a longstanding tradition of not being motivated by profit. This comes up in one of the earlier monographs when he is discussing the acquisition of goods.

## Hippodamus

This was a Grecian eccentric. Despite the distance of over two millenia, something of his style has been preserved along with two major contributions to the running of a state. He introduced the idea of precincts and foresight with respect to street planning into the city-state.

He liked to wear his hair long and kept to inexpensive and consistent garments year round. Although others noticed that he wore "cheap clothes" they also observed that he was enthusiastic about bodily adornment and accessories. He was from Miletus, the same city-state as Thales "of the wine press monopoly."

His attitude was that of a hard line nonconformist. This was in part in regards to fashion but also exhibited in some profound and innovative ideas that required a certain acceptance of eccentricities to find their way into law and society.

He comes up in the second half of 'Book 2' when his work is used to begin Aristotle's discussion of city-state constitutions.

## serfs

Serfs are defined as a special class of people. While world-reknowned for being of low class, these people were above slavery. They represent the middle ground amongst the ancient Greeks between slaves and freemen. They are referenced in Book 2.



## Women

Women come up as a group repeatedly during the text. There are various ways in which the relation of women to the body politic has in fact differed from that of men. The author takes up different aspects of this group, and discusses what others have found and reported.

Both problems and solutions are mentioned and there are both elements of the active control of women by men but also suggestions and recommendations that show how much the need has repeatedly been for women to do more amongst themselves as a group. Successful efforts by women to politically organize throughout the centuries have moved forward the project of political and social integration with men.

Social and political separation was intertwined with sexual behavior and reproductive activities within Grecian culture. Male homosexuality was often but not universally suggested as an alternative to pure abstinence or finding a means of increasing heterosexual activity. This work having been authored by a man, there is no discussion of women's practices. Lesbianism may have been as much of an effective coping strategem as male homosexual behavior was known to be.

Social and political separation stemmed from these and other reasons, only one of which are the myriad of differences in how the genders think. For these reasons, the relationship of women to the constitution and to the laws has been an important matter for millenia. References are made early in the discourse of women reacting as being outside of or above the laws that govern the men as much as under them and "subservient within the rule of man."

## Philolaus

This was a man of Thebes. He was sufficiently involved with the law-making process to have come up with a regulation that passed and went into affect. It was designed to maintain the exact same number of estates that were present in Thebes. As such, it involved population control measures. He is introduced in the second section of Book 2 during the comparison of constitutions.

## Zaleucus

This was a law-maker but not a creator of constitutions. He is famed for having contributed to the laws of four separate political bodies. These were: Locrian, Catana, Italy and the island of Sicily. Aristotle refers to him in Book 2, during the second half.



## Dionysius

This was the name of a ruler of the Sicilian city of Syracuse circa 350 BC. He comes up more than once in Aristotle's *Politics*. It is not entirely clear whether he was more of a statesman or more of a monarch. However, he is referred to in both Book 2 and again in Book 5. He is named after a god known for drunken revelry, the life force and other more instinctive and primal manifestations of human behavior and life. Whether this was because of relatively unruly and uninhibited behaviors associated with drunkenness is unclear.

## Lycurgus

This name is the sole remains of a personage assumed to have been a male human being. While he lived he wrought one amazing work: he is named as the founder and author of the original Spartan constitution. He is mentioned when Aristotle discourses on comparative constitutions amongst the Greek city-states.

## Oxylus

This man is named as the author of a financial law. It is implied that he came long before Aristotle. The regulation that he came up with was that limits should be placed on lending and borrowing in relation to owned property. In other words, one should only borrow against a portion of the land one owns—this portion was set by Oxylus. He is referred to by Aristotle in Book 6.

## Cleisthenes

This man is also mentioned in connection with cultivating democracy. It is important to increase the segment of the population who are capable of obtaining citizenship rights within a democracy but there must be a limit or it will become intolerable to the higher economic classes of people. The level of population relative to what the state can provide for economically is also highly relevant in this regard. Cleisthenes was one of those policy makers who predated Aristotle, but who shared with Aristotle the knowledge that such a policy was intended to bring a democracy into a healthy balance. Such a public policy can fluctuate depending upon the needs of the people. This man is referred to in Book 6, during Aristotle's discussion of how to maintain certain forms of government, namely democracies and oligarchies.

## Orthagoras

This man is named by Aristotle in Book 5 as the sire of the family group of father & sons who secured the longest running tyranny of which Aristotle is aware. Orthagoras the tyrant ruled the Sicyonians. He was able to pass on rule to his sons, possibly in group



succession. Their combined reign lasted 100 years. This comes up as part of Aristotle's argument to show readers that on a purely practical level, tyranny is not the best way to go for a stable, enduring form of government.

## Thrasybulus

This is a man who intentionally established himself in an influential relationship with another man for the purposes of securing political standing. He made an effort to turn Gelon's son, into a sensualist. Apparently, Thrasybulus believed that if he could control Gelon's lifestyle in this manner then he would also be able to lead him in politics or secure for himself a heightened degree of power.

What happened was that Gelon's other relatives noticed this, and countered with a conspiracy. The conspiracy was aimed strictly at getting rid of Thrasybulus. It is not clear whether or not Gelon was himself innocent in the whole matter, meaning that his relationship to Thrasybulus was not part of a plot of any kind.

The conspiracy to thwart Thrasybulus, however, ultimately caused the downfall of the entire tyranny. This is described in Book 6.

## Dionysius the younger

This is the son of Dionysius, ruler of Syracuse, Sicily prior to or overlapping with the time of Aristotle. He was known for being his father's son, but unfortunately he developed a reputation for excessive drunkenness.

## Minos

Minos of Crete is mentioned by Aristotle as having been famed for having been a law maker. Although people may often take this power for granted today, it began as an innovation and major means of social progress.

Minos' power was so great that after his death his reputation continued, not only for what he did during his life but as an underworld figure, where the living so honored him as to claim that they felt he could be honored and entrusted with the judging of souls.



# Objects/Places

## Macedon

This is a location in Southern Europe. It has often been a kingdom. It exists as a geographic entity to this day and by the same name, but the nation's politics have changed throughout the millenia.

## The Academy

This was a 'university' located in Athens, Greece when it was one of a group of free city-states. It was founded with the philosopher Plato in the 4th century BC.

Extensive education was provided. Programs were available that could last or require decades of instruction. In this case only adult men could gain entry. Whether citizens or free men only were permitted is less clear. One of the students, Aristotle, was a foreign student.

## Delphic Knife

This is an item referred to by Aristotle in the first sections of the first book of the politics.

## Athens

This is one of the most famous of the Grecian cities. While still in existence today as part of the nation of Greece, over two millenia ago it flourished as one of the greater powers among the Greek city-states. During some centuries, Athens was the most prominent city-state.

This is the region of the world specified as 'the birthplace of the Western tradition of thought and scientific culture'. The names of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle continue to live on through the preservation of a tradition begun there. It was also the home of the great mathematician and musician Pythagoras.

## Miletus

This is a city near, to the Mediterranean, between the Grecian and Italian peninsulas. It was ultimately famed for a few of its philosophers, including a man named Thales. There was an already longstanding joke and jibe that philosophers were not so good at making money. The normal defense of the philosophers was that they were not so much interested in such activities as they were in philosophy but that this did not mean that they could not be financially successful. Miletus had vineyards and a wine making and



grape juice industry during the time of Thales. Thales got rich from a deal he made, apparently intentionally proving to the non-philosophers that philosophers can in fact make money quite well.

## Syracuse

Syracuse is the name of a city on the island of Sicily, one of the multiple islands off the Southern coast of what is now known as Italy. The city comes up early in the book during an era when it was ruled by a man named Dionysius. It comes up because there was a man who made a monopoly in the iron industry. Although the man made good money, Dionysius was responsible for the ending of the monopoly and the removal of that man from the city of Syracuse due to the understandable unpopularity of the monopoly.

## Constitution

This is one set of regulations intended to provide a legal foundation for a city-state or other form of state. While in many cases it will take on a physical form as a document, its social function is of the greatest importance.

Aristotle had significant experience with these and while they come up in Book 1, in the second half of Book 2 they are the main focus of the discussion.

## Crete & Sicily

These had two separate governments. What they have in common is that both are Mediterranean island nations. Crete has always been closely associated with the Grecian peninsula whereas the island of Sicily continues to be associated with the Italian peninsula.

## Sicyon

The home of the longest running tyranny known by the philosopher Aristotle. It comes up in Books 5 & 6.

## Stageira

This is the home town of the philosopher Aristotle. It was located within a greater territory known as Chalcidice, within a region known to this very day as Macedon, or Macedonia.



## Newcastle upon Tyne

This is a city in England, on the main isle of Great Britain. Newcastle is the home of one of the translators who worked on the Aristotelean text.

## Oxford

This is a city in England reknowned for having one of the oldest and best higher educational institutions in the world, Oxford university. It is strongly associated with both wealth and prestige. It is relevant to Aristotle's Politics because one of the translators received extensive training at Oxford and there are numerous references to Oxford in footnotes attached to Aristotle's original text and the translation work of others.

## Belfast

This is the name of a city in Ireland. It harbors a high quality university that has been involved in the training or other preparation of this version of Aristotle's text.

## Miletus

This place is near the Mediterranean and is brought up in this book due to its being the home of a man named Thales. Thales was a pre-Socratic philosopher within the Grecian tradition. The reputation of philosophers to not be the best money-makers was already longstanding by the time that Aristotle appeared on the scene.

Thales, in the city of Miletus, championed the argument that philosophers are capable of accumulating wealth if only they are interested in doing so. Thales secured a temporary monopoly on the wine-presses of Miletus. The short-sightedness of his competitors in the vineyard and wine manufacturing business was taken fully advantage of by the philosopher. In one season Thales was wealthy.

He might suggest that this was one of those indicators of why, as Plato wrote, that philosophers make the best of kings.

## Sparta

This was a Grecian city-state. It was often viewed as and felt to be the counter weight to Athens. Sparta and Athens wrestled for superiority over each other for generations. Aristotle mentions Sparta more than once throughout the book.



# Themes

## An Overview of Politics

Politics is something that all human beings in societies encounter. Aristotle seeks to understand it and to share this knowledge and these insights with readers. During the time that he wrote the book he was able to gain a rather direct view of more than one political structure that was functioning within his region of the world. This simply means that he has been able to write about it in ways that might not have been possible otherwise.

The philosopher provides an extensive and in depth analysis of this topic. He takes the levels of social organization in parts so that readers can look at the issue from multiple locations within civilization. For this reason some discussion of the home life is involved, including a description and explanation of why the political structures within families at least in his context are typically monarchical even when the over all political structure of the society is of an entirely different form.

Aristotle also explains different types of leadership and leaders and how these fit into politics. For example, the rulership of what Aristotle calls the Statesman is the governance of peers, of equal citizens ruling their fellows. This is unlike the monarchic style wherein the leaders are "above those they lead." This is just one sample of how much more complex the facets of political knowledge and understanding are one might have thought.

## Types of Governments

Aristotle covers different types of governments in this book. He focuses on those that include a constitution as a root source of the laws of their land. The philosopher discusses some variances, all of which fall within the range of forms of politics accessible to his mind and often practiced within the region of the Mediterranean.

For those well versed in political science and law much of what the author writes may be simplistic and introductory. However, for those new to the topic, describing the forms of rulership and how they have often functioned as a mixture within constitutions is enlightening.

Aristotle's main concern is the state form of government. It is worth noting that in some cases this is the same as either a city or as a nation, but in other situations is not. In order to do this he describes the aristocrat and the statesman. He also explains the slave master as a type of ruler. He differentiates between monarchy: the rule of one, and what often occurred as oligarchic aristocracy: this is when there are ruling families, who have royal titles.





A key point is that the statesman governs over their equals. While it is admitted that people experience a great deal of disparity and inequalities, the foundation is that in a polity, peers govern and ideally take turns at ruling. He also admits that proper education and citizenship are required for this. Even so, the author explains that when held to its higher standards, the real citizens will in fact serve the populace in at least one, if not more than one, official government role. The responsibility for running the state is shared. There are limitations on who can do this, mostly imposed by funding and time restrictions. It is mainly for this reason that such people have to come from the wealthier classes of society or be otherwise financially well enough supported to devote the time and energy needed to conduct political service correctly.

The author writes that in the forms of government that he covers, the absolute monarchy is the only one that does not have a constitution. This is when an entire nation falls under one individual's leadership and it is implied that this occurs with the willingness or even encouragement of the people.

The over all project is to determine what the best state is, the nature and content of the best constitution to create and run the highest quality state—one that will serve the common good the best. There is the need to attune a type of government to the kind of the constitution because of the authority and the other laws that will stem from it. For this reason, one should expect to find certain types of distinctions within constitutions that accurately reflect those differences.

## **Utopian / Theoretical & Actual / Practical Government**

The book includes discussions of both hypothetical states and actual ones. There is a reason for this. Even by the time that Aristotle wrote thousands of years ago from the current day, there was already a history of politics and those who were learned had more than just the experience of their own generation's knowledge to go on. At the same time, there were those who were forward thinking and innovative and hoped for the possibility of making improvements, advances and changes in how civilization was. Part of this effort was shown through the recurring exercise of creating an ideal or model state, and a constitution for it.

Many of these exercises in politics had uniformity of features. People who participated in them chose a select number of residents for their realistic, imaginary state.

The radical developments in human population during the intervening centuries has caused much of Aristotle's work to have been belittled through the limits of its applicability. The reason is that the ideal state exercises typically topped out at 10,000 people.

Given its limitations, the practice of seeking to create the best possible state was quite a good one. This way one could nurture ideals in terms of values, quite possibly seek and find new ways to solve old problems. Naturally, the contrast provided by examining the constitutions that were currently in effect would sometimes support the models but in

other respects would prove to be sources of conflict when old ways clashed with new ideas.

Aristotle provides an examination of multiple constitutions for good reason. He intends to show that the constitutions of states should not all be identical in their content but are apt to have many similarities of form and some overlap of content. The purpose for readers is ultimately twofold. One is simply to garner historical knowledge. The other is that, as outdated as it is, this ancient Grecian work is still able to function as a legitimate primer to political science.

# Style

## Perspective

This book is written in an predominantly objective manner. The author writes about the world closest to where he lives and, as a result, the work has a touch of the journalistic sense about it. He writes in the third person. The author of the book had decades of experience living as a foreigner in the city-state of Athens. The author recognized that the city-states were a somewhat loose association of independent and interdependent set within Grecian culture. The author's own homeland was similarly divided early on in his life. That is, while Macedon had some regional and cultural features that united it, there were multiple kings operating within that region. As such, the area was not united under a higher political order.

The author wrote this during his middle years after he had spent decades acquiring an education. He had attended the Academy in Athens, headed up by the philosopher and local high-born citizen Plato. He did well but was not the right fit for the job of succeeding Plato as head of the Academy. The failure was transformed when Aristotle was funded to found and open another of these educational institutions within Athens: the Lyceum.

The author was a highly educated man. He was rather worldly within his region. He seemed most interested in the political nature of the place where he lived, although he lived there as a foreigner. He was forced to retreat from his adopted land due to the strength of the animosity against the people of his homeland. For approximately a decade he was unable to dwell in Athens because he was Macedonian. However, he loved Athens so much that as soon as he would be tolerated there, he returned.

## Tone

The tone is a blend of instructional and expository for peers or any interested readers. The other scholars who have provided information to the readers explain that the complete body of the work is somewhat artificial. The assembled parts were found together and do all fit within this topic. However, even the kindest critic realistically concludes that what is presented as one book is actually a series of monographs. This being the case, there is some discontinuity in the progress of the material.

The overall tone is twofold. On the one hand, this an erudite man espousing his views objectively and in an orderly manner. As an encyclopedist, Aristotle was likely wishing to contribute to the knowledge of of humanity. Naturally he was also sharing what he knew probably to both help establish his interpretation of the facts as well as to put his knowledge before peers so that it could be reviewed, understood, judged and criticized. This would, in turn, hopefully improve the quality of awareness and knowledge regarding this issue.



The author presents this entire text in a wonderfully realistic manner. The information is consistently contextualized within the city-states and nations of the world of which he himself was most aware. For readers this makes it clear that the same process of observation and application can be followed for the city, village or town in which he or she presently lives and then can be pursued up to the state level. One can take it much further or look at it from the federal level first, but Aristotle was working with city-states and as such provides a valuable educational insight for people whose interest in this topic or in how to participate sensibly in local politics deepened as a consequence of reading this book.

## Structure

The Structure of Aristotle's Politics is complex. Scholars have determined that the contents were written up as what are called 'monographs'. This means that they are far longer than a normal essay or article but still shorter than a book or novella. In this respect, some monographs are akin to research papers.

Because Aristotle worked in the higher education system of Athens it makes sense that he would produce some works in this style. These have then been arranged as subtopics.

The entire work is subdivided into books, and every book has one of these monographs. It is likely that these were used in conjunction with teaching.

Most of the material presented comes across as information for introductory coursework in what we now call political science. People already well versed in the subject may find the work to be relatively simple and dull except as a work of history. As a description of ancient Grecian culture it could then still be fascinating.

For readers not familiar with political science, the situation is different. Some of the topics may seem strange until after the fact. Aristotle lays out various factors that contribute to the over all understanding of each subtopic. Here is an example of how this can be confusing for modern readers: 'common meals' would generally be misinterpreted. However, put into proper context readers understand that this is a reference to a public political practice in the city-states of Greece. When Aristotle told readers that women should have common meals; he is essentially advocating for a 'league of women voters' of the city-states.

The entire Politics provides an overview of this topic for the region and era in which Aristotle lived and wrote. As already mentioned, it is divided into 'books'. Each of these 'books' includes a number of monographs that can be interpreted as chapters.

Over all the work is expansive while remaining firmly rooted in reality. Aristotle covers the main factors involved in politics: the individual people, the form of the constitution, what citizenship is, different forms of government and how they work. This gives readers a good grounding in the basics of the subject.

## Quotes

"This is because they have nothing which is by nature fitted to rule," p. 57.

"The ox is the poor man's slave," p. 59.

"Others say that it is contrary to nature to rule as master over slave, because the distinction between slave and free is one of convention only, and in nature there is no difference, so that this form of rule is based on force and therefore unjust," p. 63.

"Similarly, there are among humans many varieties of life," p. 78.

"Their mistrust of each other would make it impossible for them to accept alternation in office. But in all cases the mediator is best trusted by the parties, and the one in the middle is the mediator," p. 272.

"...and even the poor, being able to have time off, take part in the administration of the constitution, receiving pay for doing so," p. 255.

"Hence, law is intelligence without appetite," p. 226.

"Virtue is the definitive principle of aristocracy, as wealth is of oligarchy and freedom of democracy," p. 260.

"...because education and good birth belong more to the better off," p. 259.

"In every kind of knowledge and skill the end that is aimed at is a good," p. 207.

"It is clear then, that all men aim at happiness and the good life, but some men have an opportunity to get it, others have not," p. 428.

"But it is not Fortune's business to make a state sound; that is a task for knowledge and a deliberate choice," p. 429.

"The first essential responsibility is control of the market-place," p. 380.

"An oligarchy which is of one mind in itself is not easily destroyed from within," p. 316.

# Topics for Discussion

Do you think that slavery is ever natural? Defend your answer.

Do you think that the Master-Slave dynamic has any representations in contemporary American society? Discuss this with the understanding that incarceration is the one form of legal slavery presently occurring in the USA, but that informally, 'wage slavery' is a commonly recognized form of bondage.

Do you think that this ancient Greek thinker has relevance today? In other words, is his work actually important or is *The Politics* better suited to being a museum piece with no other value in our time and culture?

Do you think that Thales of Miletus made a statement for all philosophers or just about himself when he made a lot of money from a wine-press monopoly?

Please describe the difference between the rule of statesmen and the rule of monarchs.

Define 3 advantages and 3 limitations of currency.

Name 5 attributes of city-state constitutions, and provide a brief description of the function of each one.

Describe the main social classes in the text. Provide your interpretation of the main social classes in your present cultural context.

Briefly discuss the implications for interpreting Aristotle in the fact that the human population has increased exponentially, and was found to have been greater when separate groups of humans discovered one another, since the time that Aristotle wrote the *Politics*.

Distinguish between what Aristotle called 'good constitutional governments' including:

- 1) monarchy (possibly a constitutional monarchy);
- 2) aristocracy;
- 3) polity.

Contrast these with what Aristotle calls the evil or corrupt deviations:

- 1) tyranny;
- 2) oligarchy;
- 3) democracy.



Do you think that the contemporary American federal government is a genuine Polity or is it a 'democracy' in the derogatory sense? Explain your answer.

Distinguish between a monarch who is not a tyrant and a tyrant. Explain your answer based upon Aristotle's definitions combined with your own observations.

Do you think that the USA and other nations such as Canada and Mexico have or could have what Aristotle called "polities" rather than "democracy" as the main form of government? Explain your answer.

Do you see your own city, or county and state, and their constitution if applicable, with new eyes now that you have read this ancient work? Defend your answer.