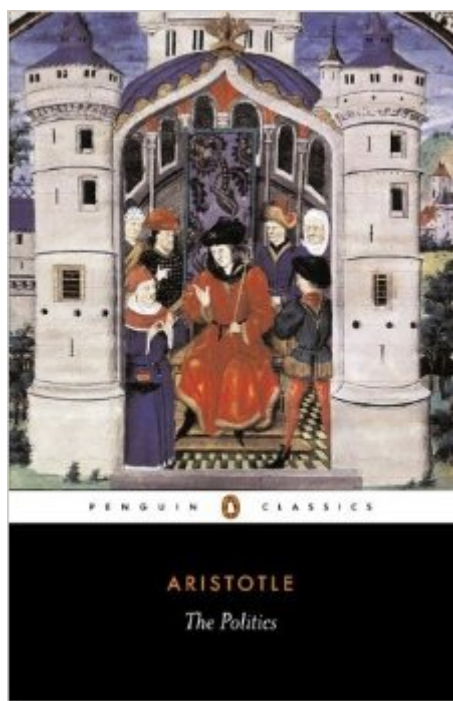


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# The Politics (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

"Man is by nature a political animal" In *The Politics* Aristotle addresses the questions that lie at the heart of political science. How should society be ordered to ensure the happiness of the individual? Which forms of government are best and how should they be maintained? By analysing a range of city constitutions – oligarchies, democracies and tyrannies – he seeks to establish the strengths and weaknesses of each system to decide which are the most effective, in theory and in practice. A hugely significant work, which has influenced thinkers as diverse as Aquinas and Machiavelli, *The Politics* remains an outstanding commentary on fundamental political issues and concerns, and provides fascinating insights into the workings and attitudes of the Greek city-state. The introductions by T. A. Sinclair and Trevor J. Saunders discuss the influence of *The Politics* on philosophers, its modern relevance and Aristotle's political beliefs. This edition contains Greek and English glossaries, and a bibliography for further reading. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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## Customer Reviews

Just as in most of his other books, in "The Politics", Aristotle becomes the founder of organized,

ordered, and systematic thought. Of course, he was not the first philosopher to think about the organization and governance of societies, but his work is the first classification and comparison of different possible systems. As I said in a recent review of Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics", his greatest originality is the stripping off of myth, legend, metaphor and poetics from his exposition of the subject. This is his main difference with his predecessor and teacher, Plato. This makes for a drier reading, but also for a clearer and better organized rendering of his clear thought. It can be said, moreover, that Plato and Aristotle constitute the founding pillars of the two main currents in Western thought: idealism (Plato) vs. realism (Aristotle). Although any tragedies deriving from these sources is, of course, not a responsibility of these great thinkers, it can be said, in general, the following: The idealist tradition inaugurated by Plato led to the rise of universal, all-encompassing theories. That is, those which assert that there is a single unifying principle tying up together economics, politics, ethics, and social organization, and that this principle (whichever it may be) is suitable for any society at any time and place. Hence, Rousseauianism, Socialism, Communism. The "realist" tradition springing from Aristotle simply says that human problems can not be resolved by magical formulas or recipes. Social situations can not be severed from their immediate environment. Aristotle, then, classifies possible types of systems and defines their advantages and disadvantages for different types of societies.

Aristotle was an important thinker, born in 384 BCE at Stagirus (a Greek colony), who is considered by many the founder of the realist tradition in Philosophy. He wrote many noteworthy books, among which "The Politics" stands out. "The Politics" is one of the first books I read at university, and even though it took me a lot of time to read it, I ended up being grateful to the professor that included it as obligatory reading material for History of Political Ideas I :) In "The Politics", the author begins by analyzing the human being, that is in his opinion a political animal by nature. Afterwards, he explains what are, for him, the origins of the polis: family, small village and then, polis. Aristotle says that even though the polis is the last chronologically, it is all the same the most important, because it is autarchic. The polis (not exactly like our states, but similar to them in some aspects) is a natural community, because it answers to something that human beings need. Only in the polis will men find perfection, only there will they be completely human. Aristotle distinguishes between citizens and non-citizens (the vast majority), and points out that only citizens have political rights. The author delves in many other themes, for example the causes of revolution, the good and bad forms of government, and the "ideal" form of government. What is more, he also considers several constitutions, and talks about the adequate education that forms good citizens for the polis. Now,

why should you read a book that was written many centuries ago and that on top of that isn't especially easy to read?. The answer is quite simple: "The Politics" is worth it.

Aristotle's Politics is the first serious analytic investigation of various organized states and an excellent exposition in all the basics of political science. While this book does show Aristotle's immense breadth of knowledge about the various constitutions of the Greek-city states, he is not content just to offer basic factual information about their forms of government, but digs deep to try and explain the "how" and "why" of the political order. In doing so, this book is both rich in its theoretical and empirical aspects. Aristotle was pre-eminent in two virtues that allowed him to make pioneering advances in every field of endeavor; first his minute and rigorous attention to detail (the empirical world) combined with a masterful ability to systematize separate spheres of knowledge. Both these virtues shine through in Politics. Moreover, any careful reading of this book shows that the issues that Aristotle dealt with are still relevant and contentious to this day. This book should not be treated as an historical curiosity, but one that can continue to challenge and inspire. Political science must start with an understanding and knowledge of human nature. What makes men form communities anyway? Aristotle's story is simple, but useful: first, there must a union of those who can not exist without each other, the male and female, who come together not of deliberate purpose, but out of the instinctive urge to make life continue. The family then comes into existence for the supply of men's everyday wants, and when families organize the village comes into existence and when villages come together society has reached its zenith -- the creation of the city-state.

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