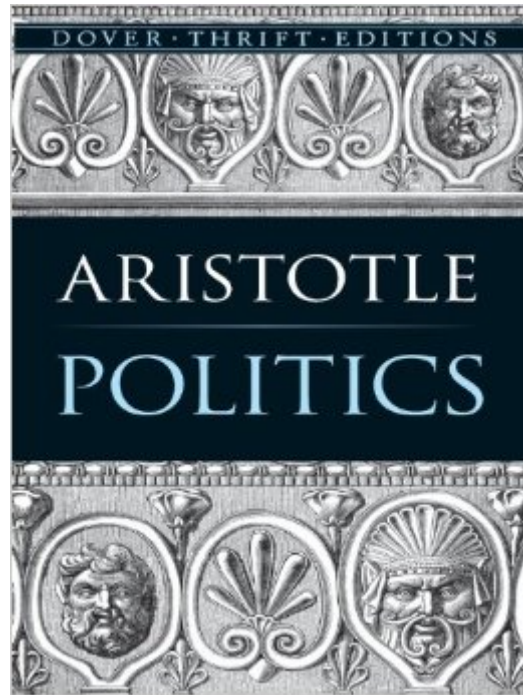


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Politics (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

What is the relationship of the individual to the state? What is the ideal state, and how can it bring about the most desirable life for its citizens? What sort of education should it provide? What is the purpose of amassing wealth? These are some of the questions Aristotle attempts to answer in one of the most intellectually stimulating works. Both heavily influenced by and critical of Plato's Republic and Laws, Politics represents the distillation of a lifetime of thought and observation. "Encyclopaedic knowledge has never, before or since, gone hand in hand with a logic so masculine or with speculation so profound," says H. W. C. Davis in his introduction. Students, teachers, and scholars will welcome this inexpensive new edition of the Benjamin Jowett translation, as will all readers interested in Greek thought, political theory, and depictions of the ideal state.

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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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