

The political philosophy essay sample

[Politics](#)



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Political philosophy proper began with the Greeks. It was Greeks of the 5th century and 4th century B. C created the terminology of politics, taking the words from everyday usage and applied thought to political action. Politics was inseparable from life in the polis, a city possessing common habits, military strength, and a myth of its origin, its own god and religion and citizens.

The Greeks had a lot of different kinds of governments, because there were many different city-states in ancient Greece, and they each had their own government. In addition, people's ideas about what made a good government change. Aristotle and Plato are notable people in Greece who have contributed in early development of politics. It may be true that all succeeding on political philosophy is a footnote to and a commentary on Plato and Aristotle.

Plato was born in Athens in May or December in 428 or 427 BC (like all the other early western philosophers, his birth date is not exactly known). He was raised in a moderately well-to-do aristocratic family. His father was named Ariston, and his mother Perictione. His family claimed descent from the ancient Athenian kings, and he was related – though there is disagreement as to exactly how – to the prominent politician Critias.

According to a late Hellenistic account by Diogenes Laertius, Plato's given name was Aristocles, whereas his wrestling coach, Ariston of Argos, dubbed him "Platon", meaning "broad" on account of his robust figure.

Diogenes mentions alternative accounts that Plato derived his name from the breadth (platutês) of his eloquence, or else because he was very wide

(platus) across the forehead. According to Dicaearchus, Plato wrestled at the isthmian games. Such was his learning and ability that the ancient Greeks declared him to be the son of Apollo and told how, in his infancy, bees had settled on his lips, as prophecy of the honeyed words which were to flow from them.

Plato became a pupil of Socrates in his youth, and – at least according to his own account – he attended his master’s trial and execution. He was deeply affected by the city’s treatment of Socrates, and much of his early work records his memories of his teacher. It is suggested that much of his ethical writing is in pursuit of a society where similar injustices could not occur.

During the twelve years following the death of Socrates, he traveled extensively in Italy, Sicily, Egypt, and Cyrene in a quest for knowledge.

After his return to Athens at the age of forty, Plato founded one of the earliest known organized schools in Western civilization on a plot of land in the Grove of Academe. The Academy was “ a large enclosure of ground which was once the property of a citizen at Athens named Academus... some, however, say that it received its name from an ancient hero” and it operated until 529 AD, when it was closed by Justinian I of Byzantium, who saw it as a threat to the propagation of Christianity. Many intellectuals were schooled in the Academy, the most prominent one being Aristotle.

His political philosophies were written down on his book Republic. According to Gordon, Plato’s republic is not a description or analysis of the government of Athens in his time or an account of its historical development. Its purpose is to describe in general terms, the main characteristic of a perfect system of

government. One would serve for the welfare of the citizens, create civic unity and suppress conflict provide a just social order and once established, require no future alteration.

Plato's plan for perfect government rest upon the merit the occupied the merits of division of labors. He argued that governing is necessarily, a specialized activity which must be performed by the person who has both the special talents and rigorous training requires.

In Plato's ideal society, the right and responsibilities of political power belong to the class of " guardian" consisting of a very small number of persons who have been selected in youth and subjected to many years of rigorous training. Their selection and training are not designed to create a class of persons who are skilled in the arts of public administration. Youths are selected who display those mental qualities that are necessary if one is to become a philosopher and a long training is necessary to realize this potentiality. In order to understand Plato's political philosophy we must note what he had in mind when he argued that, in the ideal society, the guardian must be philosopher.

Moreover the guardians are to have unlimited power. Plato specifies that they must share their property, wives, and children in common order to eliminate personal ambitions and conflict among themselves but beyond this, no restraints are necessary. Since they are philosophers, their understanding of the needs of the society is flawless, and the decrees they issue will, necessarily, serve the general welfare. Plato contented that guardian should not be guarded, if they are properly selected and trained.

In addition Plato's ideal society is not a one-man dictatorship, but he makes it quite plain that the number of guardians will be small. The welfare of the people is best served by such an arrangement, but Plato recognizes that the other citizen, not being philosophers cannot be expected to welcome exclusion from the governance of the state. An ideal state, if it were established, would not be maintained unless the mass of the people were persuaded to allow themselves to be ruled by the few.

The stability and permanence of the political order therefore require something more than the selection of those who understand the "pure form of the good". It requires the creation of a myth of falsehood to justify the power of the guardians. Through the guardian are in fact ordinary humans, the people must view them as belonging to a categorically different species of being, who have been fashioned and trained under the earth which is their mother by a special process of creation that has given them souls of gold. This myth, says Plato must be promoted so assiduously that the citizens will believe it without question, perhaps the guardian themselves will believe it as well.

The Republic deserve the attention that it still receives today because it raises many of the important issues of political theory: The organization of power, the qualities of those should wield it, justification of authority, the role of ideology, and the political use of falsehood and propaganda.

In another of his book, the Laws, Plato puts forward an interesting proposition concerning international relationship. He argues that a treaty arrangement between sovereign states is more stable if three states are

involved rather than a bilateral agreement any of them. A bilateral agreement is likely to be broken whenever one of the parties considers itself to be more powerful than the other; but when there are three states involved, any one of them would be faced by the combined power of the other two if it should break the treaty. The “balance of power” doctrine in international relations, which was widely held by modern political scientists quite recently, and adopted in practice by many states as the way to prevent war.

Aristotle was born in Stagira, on the peninsula of Chalcidice in 384 BC. His father, Poomus, was court physician to King Amyntas III of Macedon. It is believed that Aristotle’s ancestors held this position under various kings of the Macedon. He did not go to school, instead he was taught by his father. His father’s medical knowledge was perhaps the inspiration for Aristotle’s later interest in natural phenomena.

A lot is known about his mother, Phaestis, who died early in Aristotle’s life. His father Nicomachus died when Aristotle was ten, making him an orphan. Then he was placed under the guardianship of his uncle, Proxenus of Atarneus, who also took over his education. He gave Aristotle significant instruction in Greek, rhetoric, and poetry (O’Connor et al., 2004). Aristotle went to Athens at the age of 18, and attended Plato’s school for young Greek aristocracy (the Academy). Aristotle quickly became Plato’s favorite student.

Plato’s most famous student, Aristotle contented that the study of politics can be scientific, and it must be based on the empirical examination of real system of government. No detailed description of actual state is presented in

the Politics, but Aristotle's argument is guided by what he conceives to be the lessons that have been supplied by political experience. The chief of these, in his view is that no system of government is perfect.

All systems have essential properties which include defects as well as virtues, and even the best government is only comparatively better than others. Moreover, even in comparative terms, cannot say that one system particular system of government is best, for, though it may be argued to be so abstract, another system might be better in particular circumstances of a specific society. It is evident says Aristotle, that the form of government is the best in which every man, whoever he is, can act for the best and happily, but unlike Plato he does not undertake to present a design for a government that will, always perfect, serve these objectives.

Aristotle also agreed with Plato in the great importance of division of labor and the application of this to political organization. According to Aristotle, a state is composed of functionally differentiated elements – farmers, mechanics, warriors and traders, etc.- who must keep to their task if the whole is to be healthy. Magistrates, law-makers and other state officials are similarly specialized; the welfare of the whole requires that they, like the others, should continue in their roles and not move from one occupation to another. This differentiation of the governing class is ordained by nature: that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing, not only necessary but expedient from the hour of their birth, some marked out for subjection and others for rule.

Curtis added that Aristotle was one of the great originators of the holistic view of the society and its application to political theory. A good polity, in his view, is one in which everyone participates, in various ways, in the formation of public policy. But this does not mean farmers may become magistrates and traders become legislators. Everyone should keep his place in an established constitutional order. Those who wield the power of the state should be the guardians and administrators of the laws, not ruling the citizens arbitrarily as a master does his slaves or a parent does his children. Commentators of his book *Politics* view it as advancing the notion of the rule of law and the concept of a government is bound by a constitutional order.

Aristotle's *Politics* is devoted to the essential properties of three types of states: monarchies, aristocracies, and democracies or the state in which political power resides the one, the few, or the many. Aristotle divided Greek governments into monarchies, oligarchies, tyrannies and democracies, and most historians still use these same divisions. For the most part, Greece began by having monarchies, then oligarchies, then tyrannies and then democracies, but at each period there were plenty of city-states using a different system, and there were many which never did become democracies or tyrannies at all.

This mode of analysis and Aristotle's specific categories, were most influential features of *Politics*. From the time it began to be studied intensively in the thirteenth century, down almost to the present day, the notion there are the three basic forms of government dominated a great deal of the literature of political science, many writers devoting their efforts to arguing that one superior to others, others contending that the best

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government is a mixture of the three and more empirically oriented ones trying to classify real states as belonging to one or other of the classes in the triad. The idea that monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy are the three basic forms of government and the argument that the best government is a mixture of them was a common place in Aristotle's day. He does accept the triadic classification and uses it. But he does not argue that a mixed government is best.

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