

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* & *Politics*

GREAT BOOKS, BIG IDEAS

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Aristotle

- 384 BCE Born in Stageira
- 367–347 Studies & works at Plato's Academy in Athens
- 347–343 Travels to Assos (Asia Minor) & Mytilene (Lesbos)
- 343–340 Resides in Macedon, tutors Alexander III of Macedon
- 340–335 Resides in Stageira
- 335–323 Teaches at the Lyceum
- 323–322 Retires to Chalcis
- 322 BCE Died in Chalcis on Euboea



Political Background to the Life of Aristotle

- 431–404 Peloponnesian War (Sparta vs. Athens)
- 404–371 Spartan attempts at hegemony
- 395–387 Corinthian War (Sparta vs. Corinth)
- 384 Aristotle is born**
- 378–371 Boeotian War (Sparta vs. Thebes)
- 371–362 Theban Hegemony (from Leuctra to Mantinea)
- 359–338 Philipp II of Macedon conquers Greece
- 334–323 Alexander III of Macedon conquers Persia
- 323–322 Greek poleis attempt independence, but fail
- 322 Aristotle dies**
- 322–30 Large Greek kingdoms rule Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East

Aristotle's Œuvre & Thought

- Polymath, wrote on pretty much everything from metaphysics to natural philosophy to politics to ethics (c. 200 texts)
- Synthesises previous knowledge

Nicomachean Ethics

- Dedicated to father or son
- 10 books
- How should one live?
 - εὐδαιμονία (*Eudaimonia*)
- Discusses virtue in different forms
- inquiry into ethics necessarily follows into politics

Politics

- Πολιτικά (*Politica*) literally means "the things concerning the polis"
- Teleology and naturality of polis
- Different types of constitutions
- The best constitution (mixed polity, with both democratic and oligarchic elements), and how to raise and educate its citizens

Discussion I. Nicomachean Ethics

Discuss in small groups and identify key passages addressing the following questions and issues:

1. The nature of human beings as political animals.
2. The difference between “the many” and “the wise”.
3. What does Aristotle mean by “happiness”?
4. What does Aristotle mean by “virtue”?

Plenary discussion:

- What is the relationship between happiness and virtue?

Discussion II. Politics

Discuss in small groups and identify key passages addressing the following questions and issues:

1. What's the relationship between family / household and the city?
2. How are the relationships within the household conceptualised?
 - a) Between masters and slaves?
 - b) Between husbands and wives?
 - c) Between parents and children?

Plenary discussion:

- Given Aristotle's defence of (natural) slavery and his patriarchal claims, (how) can we salvage and defend other ideas of his?