

# ARISTOTLE

**Team:** Classical Greek United

**Position:** Square leg

**Status:** Quite dead

Although he was Plato's student, Aristotle (384–322 BC) was more of a realist, and—unlike our students—was highly critical of his mentor. Aristotle neither believed that one should strive for a perfect world nor did he assume that there is a perfect world of forms hidden in the shadows. Instead, he thought that we could learn far more by observing the world and drawing conclusions from what we see. He believed that we should study how things actually work and how people actually behave. As for states, he observed their functions and categorized them according to the type of rule exercised within each one. Thus, compared to Plato, Aristotle was pragmatic. Aristotle believed that people should do the best they can within the limits of the world, as it exists around them.

Also, according to Aristotle, everything works toward a specific end, or *telos*. The *telos* for an apple seed is the eventual apple tree. The *telos* for a baby gorilla is a full-grown gorilla. The *telos* for human beings is happiness; therefore, people should create governing institutions with this human end in mind. Furthermore, Aristotle believed that it is natural for people to form associations because human beings are inherently social—that is, “man is a political animal.” The *polis*, or state, is but an extension of these individual associations and is, consequently, something natural. This is a key point. To argue that the state is natural means to argue that people form states because human beings are innately inclined to do so. In fact, Aristotle would argue, people move toward their *telos* through participation in the state.

Aristotle proceeded to demonstrate how some types of government are better than others at helping people achieve the goal of happiness. He also pointed out that it is possible to take a bad form of government and improve it. Therefore, we must be concerned not only with the ideal world but also with making improvements to the flawed world that we know. Aristotle was clearly more of a realist than Plato, but Aristotle is still considered to be an idealist because he believed that there is a goal toward which people should strive—happiness. The primary aim of government, in his theory, is to create happiness for the people; thus happiness is still the ideal.



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