

17.03. Introduction to Political Thought
Lecture Outline: Aristotle's *Politics* Bk 3 (entire), Bk 4 (chs. 1-14)

I. Plato and Aristotle

- A. Unity v. heterogeneity/diversity
- B. Philosophical virtue/knowledge v. practical virtue/practical wisdom
- C. Method: perfect forms v. experience and opinions about the good

II. The state

- A. The form of the state (constitution)
- B. The matter of the state (citizens)
- C. Good citizen v. good man: goodness of citizen relative to regime
- D. Who is a citizen?

III. Forms of government

- A. True forms of government and their perversions

Rule by the...	True Forms	Perversions
One	monarchy/kingship	tyranny
Few	aristocracy	oligarchy
Many	polity/constitutional govt	democracy

- B. Principles upon which each regime is based—how distribute political power?
- C. What is the best regime? (depends on composition of citizenry)
- D. Polity/constitutional government

IV. Purpose of politics

- A. Managing conflict
 - 1. Class-based political conflict
 - 2. Distributive justice: competing claims about the distribution of goods and honor
 - 3. Aristotle's proposal for managing conflict
 - a. All regimes should draw on all relevant conceptions of justice, especially those of rich and poor, to bring about stability and justice
 - b. Give all groups an interest in preserving the constitution
- B. Community that seeks the highest good together
 - 1. Best or happy life (*eudaimonia*) is a life of virtue or excellence (*arête*)
 - 2. Laws aim at happiness and excellence of citizens
 - 3. Just regime is not necessarily a perfect or virtuous regime

V. Political science as the science of the possible

- A. Political science should say something useful and attainable, not just describe the best in the abstract
- B. Statesmen should seek remedies for existing constitutions: how to make them more stable and just