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Plato, Aristotle, and the Purpose of Politics

In this book, Kevin M. Cherry compares the views of Plato and Aristotle about the practice, study, and, above all, the purpose of politics. The first scholar to place Aristotle's *Politics* in sustained dialogue with Plato's *Statesman*, Cherry argues that Aristotle rejects the view of politics advanced by Plato's Eleatic Stranger, contrasting them on topics such as the proper categorization of regimes, the usefulness and limitations of the rule of law, and the proper understanding of *phronēsis*. The various differences between their respective political philosophies, however, reflect a more fundamental difference in how they view the relationship of human beings to the natural world around them. Reading the *Politics* in light of the *Statesman* sheds new light on Aristotle's political theory and provides a better understanding of Aristotle's criticism of Socrates. Most important, it highlights an enduring and important question: Should politics have as its primary purpose the preservation of life, or should it pursue the higher good of living well?

Kevin M. Cherry is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Richmond. His research has appeared in the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, and *History of Political Thought*.

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To Lindzie

καὶ τοῖς φίλοις αἰρετώτατόν ἐστι τὸ συζῆν
Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics 1171b32

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

| | |
|--|---------|
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | page ix |
| <i>Note on the Translations</i> | xiii |
| Introduction | 1 |
| 1 A Place for Politics: The Household and the City | 14 |
| The Search for the Statesman | 15 |
| The First Definition of the Statesman | 23 |
| Household Rule, Despotism, Kingship, and Politics in the <i>Politics</i> | 29 |
| 2 The Beginnings and Ends of Political Life | 37 |
| The Eleatic Stranger's Cosmology | 38 |
| Consequences of the Eleatic's Cosmology | 42 |
| The Purpose of Politics in the <i>Statesman</i> | 48 |
| Aristotle's Understanding of Nature | 57 |
| Aristotle's Political Teleology and the Beginning of the <i>Politics</i> | 69 |
| 3 Political Knowledge and Political Power | 74 |
| A New Beginning in the Search for the Statesman | 75 |
| The Eleatic Stranger's Division of Regimes | 78 |
| The Eleatic Stranger on Lawful Democracy | 87 |
| Aristotle's Rejection of the Eleatic's Typology | 92 |
| Political Communities and Political Knowledge | 100 |
| Aristotle on the Best Regime | 107 |
| 4 Political Inquiry According to Aristotle and the Eleatic Stranger | 117 |
| The Eleatic's Digression on Measure | 118 |
| <i>Phronēsis</i> and the Mean | 121 |

| | | |
|---|---|-----|
| | Aristotle and the Eleatic Stranger on Innovation | 126 |
| | Aristotle and the Eleatic Stranger on the Purposes of Political Inquiry | 135 |
| 5 | Philosophy and Politics in the Eleatic Stranger, Socrates, and Aristotle | 144 |
| | The Eleatic Stranger and Socrates on Philosophy | 145 |
| | Socrates and Statesmanship | 155 |
| | Aristotle's Critique of Socrates in Light of the <i>Statesman</i> | 162 |
| | Plato, Socrates, and the Eleatic Stranger | 172 |
| 6 | Modern Politics, the Eleatic Stranger, and Aristotle | 177 |
| | The Origins and Ends of Politics in Modern Political Thought | 179 |
| | The Endless Aristotelian Revival | 183 |
| | Aristotle's Teleology Today | 190 |
| | The Good Life for Human Beings | 194 |
| | Conclusion | 204 |
| | <i>Bibliography</i> | 215 |
| | <i>Index</i> | 227 |

Acknowledgments

As solitary a process as writing may be, few political theorists – and I am not one of them – could write a book on their own. Instead, most of us depend on conversations with our teachers, our friends, and our colleagues to spark our thinking. I have benefited from many such conversations, and this book is the fruit of some of them.

My first exposure to the world of Plato and Aristotle was at The Catholic University of America in a philosophy course taught by Rev. Brian Shanley, O.P., who has remained a valuable mentor to this day. My knowledge and appreciation of their works deepened under the guidance of Jean DeGroot, Thérèse-Anne Druart, John McCarthy, Stephen Schneck, Msgr. Robert Sokolowski, Richard Velkley, David Walsh, and the late Rev. Kurt Pritzl, O.P. I doubt that all of these teachers will agree fully with what is written here, but I hope each can take a little pride in having passed on to me an interest in taking these books, and the arguments therein, seriously. I am particularly indebted to Brad Lewis, who was so impressive as a scholar and teacher that I decided to follow his example and attend graduate school where he did.

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I have generally relied on the translations of Carnes Lord for Aristotle's *Politics* (1984), Joseph Sachs for Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (2002), and Seth Benardete for Plato's *Statesman* (1984), checking them against those of Peter Simpson (1997), Terence Irwin (1999), and Christopher Rowe (1995), respectively, as well as the Oxford Classical Texts, and occasionally modifying them accordingly.

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