The state of research on Aristotle’s Politics¹
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Introduction
Aristotle’s Politics is a study of the political and social institutions of the 4th C. BCE Mediterranean world, including both Greek communities (like Athens and Sparta) and non-Greek communities (like Persia and Carthage). In some ways it is the first work of political science in the western tradition, one which treats rigorously of the common good, systematic kinds of political institutions, the causes of their stability and instability, and a vision of their ideal types, namely a “best constitution” in which all citizens “do best and live a blessedly happy life” (7.2.1324a2).²

The work has influenced political thought since its rediscovery in the 13th C. up through the modern day. The work’s extensive references, descriptions, and analysis of ancient Greek and non-Greek political institutions are also a major resource for classicists and ancient historians.

Contemporary scholarship on Aristotle’s Politics has been quite robust: from 2015 until 2021 scholars have produced on average, every year, 4.8 book-length studies (including monographs and edited volumes) and 25.4 journal articles or book chapters.³ This report reviews

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² All citations within the chapter refer to Aristotle’s Politics unless otherwise noted. Aristotle’s works are abbreviated as follows: Nicomachean Ethics (EN), Eudemian Ethics (EE), Magna Moralia (MM), Art of Rhetoric (Rhet.), Poetics (Poet.).
scholarship on the *Politics*, focusing on work produced since 2010. The report first reviews general introductions, editions, and interpretative strategies for understanding the *Politics*. It then reviews major subsections or conceptual issues within the *Politics*. The report concludes with a review of major trends in scholarship and suggestions for future scholarly directions in understanding Aristotle’s *Politics*.

1: General treatments of the *Politics*

Readers of Aristotle’s *Politics* have a number of general scholarly introductions to pick from, including both chapter-length and monograph-length studies. In the former category, perhaps the best work is Miller (2022), an online encyclopedia article, which provides an overview of the *Politics*, surveys major scholarly problems of the work, and includes a regularly updated bibliography. Pangle (2011), Devereux (2011), Kamtekar (2012), Pellegrin (2012), and Hatzistavrou (2014), and Pangle (2020) are chapter and article-length introductory treatments of the *Politics*. The *Politics* was written during the 4th C. BCE, a period of rapid change due to the Macedonian conquests of Philipp II and his son Alexander. Cartledge (2000) is a chapter-length introduction to the “polis world” of classical Greece and Hansen (1991) and (2006) are monograph-length studies of its 4th C. political institutions; Dietz (2012) surveys major changes to the polis world brought about by the Macedonian conquests during Aristotle’s life.

Perhaps the most influential monograph on the *Politics* in the last 50 years is Miller (1995), a work that provides an exhaustive account of Aristotle’s theory of justice and (more controversially) a defense of the claim that Aristotle embraced a qualified theory of natural rights. Kraut (2002) is a more general introduction that includes extensive discussion of the place

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2: Editions of the Politics
There exist numerous editions of Aristotle’s Politics, including critical Greek texts and translations into modern European languages. Ross (1957) and Dreizehnter (1970) are standard Greek critical texts. Over the last decade, Italian scholars have produced a six-volume edition of the Politics...

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3: Interpretative Strategies for Reading the Politics

In Anglophone scholarship, the Politics has been explored by a plurality of disciplinary perspectives, some of which have significant and even controversial methodological presuppositions. Broadly construed (and with significant potential for overlap), four interpretative perspectives dominate 20th- and 21st-century Anglophone scholarship: historically contextualized readings, developmental readings, analytical reconstructions and/or expositions, and philosophical readings influenced by the hermeneutical ideas of Leo Strauss. Historically contextualized approaches seek to understand the Politics in a historical-critical fashion sensitive to the philological and historical context of 4th-century Greece; less important to such an approach is determining the philosophical truth of Aristotle’s claims or their relevance for contemporary debates (good examples of this methodology include Cartlidge (2009) or Dietz...
Although currently somewhat out of favor, developmental readings seek to explain discontinuities within the text as the result of its composition at different times in Aristotle’s life; thus, sections of the Politics could be the result of an “early” Aristotle but other sections may reflect his “late” or more mature thinking (a good example of this methodology is Jaeger (1948)). Analytical reconstructions seek to extract a coherent philosophical position which is sensitive to Aristotle’s text but is oriented toward contemporary concerns (good examples of this methodology include Duke (2020) or Brill (2020)). Straussian readings begin from the principle that although political philosophy concerns perennial questions, its articulation needs to be sensitive to its audience; thus, astute political philosophers may speak to multiple audiences simultaneously (and perhaps inconsistently on purpose) within the same text (good examples of this methodology include Strauss (1978) or Pangle (2013)). At the risk of disciplinary overgeneralization, historically contextualized and developmental approaches predominate in the disciplines of classics and ancient history, analytical reconstructions predominate within the discipline of philosophy, and Straussian readings predominate within the disciplines of political science or government.

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4: The relationship between Aristotle’s Politics and Nicomachean Ethics

Clearly, Aristotle believes there is a close relationship between his Nicomachean Ethics (EN) and the Politics: the final chapter of the EN explicitly states that the two works are a kind of diptych or two-volume study of the “philosophy of human things” (EN 10.9.1181b15). Furthermore, the Politics explicitly refers to the “ethical treatises” in numerous places4 and the introduction of the EN explicitly notes that the contents of that work are a “kind of political science” (EN 1.2.1094b10–11). As Bodéüs (1993) noted long ago, EN appears to have as its audience statesmen and legislators who are responsible for crafting laws and fashioning education in their political communities. (For discussion of the significance of Bodéüs’ work, see Lockwood (2020)). But Vander Waerdt (1985) and (1991) also pointed out long ago that, whereas EN abstracts almost entirely from the different kinds of constitutions described in the Politics, nonetheless the Politics explicitly states that laws and education must be tailored to specific constitution types (3.11.1282b10, 4.1.1289a11–17). Thus, the relationship between the Politics and the Nicomachean Ethics is an important, but somewhat perplexing one.

In his magisterial commentary on the Politics, Newman (1887) includes an extended essay that identifies a number of different ways of characterizing the relationship between the Politics

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4 The Politics refers to the “ethical logoi” a half dozen times. Several passages rather clearly refer to book 5 of the Nicomachean Ethics, but that book is common to both the Nicomachean and Eudemian treatises (see 2.2.126aa31, 3.9.1280a18, 3.12.1282b19). But other references may fit better with the Eudemian treatise, which is pluralistic about the highest good (see, e.g., 7.13.1332a8, 7.13.1332a21; cf. 4.11.1295a36).

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5: Nature and biology in the Politics

Aristotle claims that the polis (that is, the “city-state” or the predominant political organization of classical Greece) exists by nature and that humans are “political animals” (1.2.1252b30, 1253a3); subsequent passages speak about natural subordination, like that of the “slave by nature” and women and children more generally (1.4.1254a15–18, 1.13.1260a9–14). Schofield (1999a) and Deslauriers (2006) show unequivocally that the main argument of Politics 1 is the refutation of an apparently Socratic claim (found in Plato’s Statesman and Xenophon’s Memorabilia, on which see Cherry (2012) and Depew (2019)) that rule over slaves is qualitatively
the same as rule over a city; rather, *Politics* I shows that rule takes different forms in the household (for instance, between husband and wife, between parents and children, between master and slave) and in the political community (see further Riesbeck (2015)). What scholars sometimes call “Aristotle’s naturalism” needs to be understood within the context of that refutation; that the polis exists by nature is not an independent thesis which Aristotle seeks to demonstrate. Nor does Aristotle ever articulate a doctrine by that name; “naturalism” is the name of a doctrine ascribed to Aristotle (unlike, say, his account of the best constitution, which is an object of inquiry that Aristotle repeatedly refers to). Nonetheless, literature on “Aristotelian naturalism” is massive. Chappell (2013), Pellegrin (2015) and (2017), Berryman (2019), Berrón (2020) and several of the chapters in Adamson and Rapp (2021) are recent studies that explore the claim that the city-state exists by nature (which are listed individually below); Ober (2015), Pellegrin (2015), Depew (2019), Chen (2018), Leunissen (2017a), Hu (2020), and Rapp (2021) are articles and chapters that examine the same. Güremen and Jaulin (2017) is an edited volume on the claim that humans are political animals (individual chapters of which are listed below); Ober (2013b), Abbate (2016), Labarrière (2016), Vegetti (2016), Labarrière (2017), Kirkland (2017), Güremen (2018), Karbowski (2019), Langmeier (2019), and Simon (2020) are articles that explore the same.

Although Aristotle scholars have appreciated that humans are not the only political animals, a challenge is that Aristotle uses the term “political animals” to mean different things both within and outside of the *Politics*. Being “political” may consist in exhibiting sociability and cooperation and/or sharing in common goals and communication. Over the last decade,
scholarship on the intersection between the Politics and Aristotle’s writings on nature has grown robustly. Leunissen (2017b) is a landmark work in this framework because it seeks to understand ethical and political concepts on the basis of principles of natural causation and teleology described in Aristotle’s natural scientific works. Trott (2013) and Brill (2020) explore Aristotle’s Politics drawing upon the similarities between humans and other non-human animals and Cagnoli Fiecconi (2021) provides a chapter-length overview of politics and biology. Weber (2015) examines notions of authority and rulership in the household and the political community. The question of Aristotle’s view of natural sexual subordination has received an especially robust examination that draws upon Aristotle’s biology of sexual difference: Connell (2021) and Deslauriers (2022) are recent book-length studies of sexual inequality; Karbowski (2012), Veloso (2013), Karbowski (2014), Nielsen (2015), Yates (2015), Fortenbaugh (2015), Samaras (2016), Sissa (2018) and Lienemann (2021) are article-length studies of the same.

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6: Slavery, the economy, and the household in the Politics
Although Aristotle wrote extensively on the subject of oikonomica (including a whole separate treatise, on which see Valente (2011) and Helmer (2021)), at least since Polanyi (1957) and Finley (1970), scholars have debated whether he has a notion of “economy” (for further historical discussion, see Miller (2011)). The paradox stems from the fact that oikonomica means “the objects of the science of household management,” namely how a citizen-farmer should best improve the members of his household (such as his wife, children, and slaves) and utilize his household property (such as arable land and raw materials for clothing and food production). Aristotle devotes most of Politics 1—including discussions of money-making, charging interest, and slavery—to the discussion of household management and its relationship to the city-state. But for Aristotle, “economic concepts” are normative: The Politics presents an extended argument against “unnatural forms of acquisition,” namely making money through charging interest in lending. Thus, how those concepts relate to what today we call “the economy” (the societal domain concerned with the production and consumption of goods and the supply of money) is hard to answer and potentially anachronistic. Meikle (1995) is a landmark book-length study of economics in Aristotle’s thought; Nagle (2006) Helmer (2021) are the equivalent for the household. Crespo (2014) and Gallagher (2018) are more recent monographs on economics; recent article-length studies include Mei (2009), Inamura (2011), Nielsen (2013), Dinneen (2015),
Recent discussions of family relations within the household include Veloso (2011), Wilgaux (2011), and Schmitz (2017).

One of Aristotle’s most controversial claims is that there exist humans who are “slaves by nature” for whom slavery is ultimately beneficial. At the same time, Aristotle’s defense of the “slave by nature” seems to imply that he is critical of the majority of slave-holding practices in classical Greece (since few of the slaves at that time fit the characteristics of Aristotle’s “slave by nature”). Scholars have wondered whether Aristotle’s account of slavery is either an internally coherent philosophy or an incoherent ideology that seeks to justify the slave-holding practices of Aristotle’s time (including, apparently, his own slaves). Schofield (1999) (followed by Lockwood (2007)) sought to clear Aristotle of criticisms of ideology and incoherence, but not of repugnant moral inequality and Aristotle’s failure to recognize the moral personhood of all humans. The subject continues to generate a robust discussion, including Karbowski (2012), Karbowski (2013), Pellegrin (2013), Kamtekar (2016), Trott (2017), Christiaens (2018), Nah (2018), Fritsche (2019), and Bhorat (2022). Cherry (2014), Monteils-Laeng (2019), and Lockwood (2021) explore the subject of slavery insofar as it intersects with Aristotle’s views on non-Greeks (namely, “barbarians” or non-Greek speaking peoples).

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7: The Definition and Virtue of a Citizen

*Politics* I begins by claiming that the polis is composed of households; *Politics* III begins by claiming the polis is composed of citizens; Hansen (2013) considers the difference between the two claims and whether they involve different notions of a polis. *Politics* III presents at least two different definitions of a citizen and defining citizenship is complicated because different constitutions embody different notions of citizenship. The participatory capacities of a citizen in a democracy or polity will be quite different from those living under a monarchy. The question receives solid discussion in book-length studies such as Miller (1995) and Riesbeck (2016). There is also a substantial line of scholarship devoted to these conceptual problems in journal articles and chapters, beginning with Morrison (1999), and continuing on to Khan (2005), Woods (2014), Samaras (2015), White (2019), Bermon (2017), and Natali (2020). Another line of inquiry concerns the relationship between the civic virtue of a citizen relative to one constitution and the ethical virtue of a good person: recent discussions include Rosler (2013), Keyt (2017), and Pellegrin (2017). Aristotle’s account of citizenship, with its emphasis on inclusive and robust civic
participation, inspires comparisons and contrasts with contemporary notions of citizenship: see further Frede (2005), Collins (2006), and Boyd (2013).

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8: The constitutional theory in the Politics
The central concept of the Politics is politeia, which I will define as “constitution” (although Mulhern (2015) amply shows why that is far from the only meaning of the term). Aristotle uses the term to describe the internal structure (usually unwritten) of a political community, including (but not limited to) the determination of who may participate in its offices and what are their powers. Thus, Aristotle’s “constitutional theory” identifies six fundamental types of political organization (all of which admit of further subdivisions and even mixtures): kingship, aristocracy, and polity or republic are “right” constitutions in which those in power rule in the interest of the ruled and tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy are “deviant” constitutions in which those in power rule in their own interest. Miller (1995), Johnson (2015), Riesbeck (2016), and Duke (2020) are book-length studies that examine the most fundamental (and often contested) concepts in the theory, for instance the nature of the common good or what Aristotle means by rule of law. Pezzoli and Poddighe (2022) is a journal issue devoted to Aristotle’s constitutional theory. Horn (2013), Morrison (2013), Collins (2017) and Bertelli (2020) are chapter-length surveys of the major issues in Aristotle’s account of law and constitutions.

Aristotle claims that different kinds of constitutions embody different views about who can share in the constitution, which modern scholars often refer to as Aristotle’s theory of “distributive justice” (on which see Keyt (1991) and Schofield (1999)). For instance, in an oligarchy like Corinth, property qualifications limit who can participate in various offices because oligarchy assumes that people who possess more property or wealth deserve to participate—for instance because their property makes them more like shareholders in the political system or
because their property provides them with opportunities for education and leisure that are simply unavailable to wage-laborers. By contrast, in a democracy like Athens, native born citizenship includes all male Athenians because democracy assumes that one’s bonds to one’s native land qualify one to participate in its political administration, regardless of one’s socio-economic status. Nonetheless, Athenian democracy, for instance, was profoundly exclusive insofar as it limited citizenship to those born of two Athenian parents; “mixed” families (i.e., those with only one Athenian parent) and non-Athenian persons (metics or what we call “resident aliens”) were largely excluded from all forms of political participation. From Aristotle’s perspective, this is both descriptively correct—different constitutions embody different views about inclusion and exclusion—and normatively incorrect or unjust, since participation is determined by arbitrary criteria such as wealth or parental lineage. *Politics* 3.6–18, is complicated and extended analysis that seeks to establish and evaluate heterogenous claims of justice within a single community. Schofield (1999b) is the clearest statement of Aristotle’s view that justice is not a matter of “rights” but rather a notion of merit or desert, relative to different political organizations. In addition to the monographs mentioned above, Kraut (2002), Frank (2005), and Inamura (2015) are monograph-length studies that include discussion of the major details in Aristotle’s theory of distributive justice; article-length studies include Knoll (2010) and Bodéüs (2017). By contrast, Schütrumpf (2015), (2016), and (2019) challenge the notion that distributive justice plays an important role in the *Politics*. Insofar as injustice is one of the main causes of faction and revolution, see section 9 in this report below which connects the discussion of *Politics* 3 with that of *Politics* 5.
Hansen (2013) argues that Aristotle’s six-fold taxonomy undergoes change between Politics 3 (where it is first articulated) and Politics 4–6 (where it is invoked repeatedly); Riesbeck (2015) is a thorough critique of the claim. Duke (2022) claims that the constitution should be understood within the framework of Aristotle’s four causes as the “formal cause” of a political organization. Inamura (2019) and (2022) argue that we should understand the taxonomic analysis of constitutions (which makes up a good part of Politics 4–6) as forms of craft or science, contra the claim of Sebell (2016), which likens Aristotle’s political science to non-scientific practical wisdom. Pellegrin (2011), (2015), and (2017), and Inamura (2019) explore the relationship between taxonomy in Aristotle’s natural science and the Politics.

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9: Analysis of specific constitutional forms and the nature of stasis


Aristotle’s constitutional theory also includes substantial discussion of both the causes of constitutional factionalism and revolution (or what classical Greeks called stasis) in Politics 5.1–7, which is then followed by an analysis of the causes by means of which different kinds of constitution are preserved in Politics 5.8–11, including an infamous discussion of how to preserve unjust constitutions, such as tyranny (on which see Buekenhout (2021)). Debate has circulated around what sort of model Aristotle uses to understand both the instability and the stability of individual constitutions, for instance whether it derives from psychological models of conflict or from models that derive from Aristotle’s natural scientific writings. Recent analyses include the
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10: Collective Deliberation (*Politics* 3.11) and the Rule of Law (*Politics* 3.15–16)

Aristotle’s examination of justice in relationship to different constitutional forms includes two important and surprisingly timely analyses, namely those of collective deliberation and the rule of law. In the former case, legal theorist Jeremy Waldron notes that *Politics* 3.11 provides a novel defense of the superiority of collective deliberation (for instance, in an assembly or legislative body) over the deliberative ability of any single wise individual (*Waldron* (1992)), one which justifies inclusive political institutions not only on the basis of their fairness, but also because of their epistemic superiority. Nonetheless, Aristotle’s account falls within the complex dialogical account of distributive justice in a political community that ranges over *Politics* 3.8–18 (mentioned above in subsection 8). Some of Aristotle’s basic examples defy clear application of his theory. The text has received enormous scrutiny over the last decade. Narbonne (2019) is a book-length study of the text. Ober (2013), Garsten (2013), and Schwartzberg (2016) explore 3.11 from the perspective of political theory; Bouchard (2011), Cammack (2013), Bobonich (2015), Lane (2013) and (2016), Horn (2016), Girard (2019), Tsouni (2019), Anagnostopoulos (2021), and Hatzistavrou (2021) focus on exegetical aspects of the text.

In the later case, Aristotle’s discussion of the constitution of kingship (a “right” form of constitution, distinct from the “deviant” form of monarchy, namely tyranny) takes up the question of whether it is more beneficial to be ruled by the best laws or the best men (3.15.1286a7–9). The question arises because Aristotle identifies one form of kingship as “absolute kingship” (*pambasileia*), namely that political organization in which a superlatively virtuous individual rules absolutely, based on the individual’s godlike epistemic superiority.
Aristotle inherited the conceptual dilemma from Plato’s *Statesman*; more controversially, as Cartledge (2009) suggests, Aristotle may be motivated by the Macedonian kingships of Phillip II or even Alexander the Great. But the very question of the normative superiority of absolute kingship seems to be at odds with the notion of participatory government and even collective deliberation (a tension noted by Buekenhout (2018); a tension examined at length by Riesbeck (2016)). Further, the question goes to the heart of executive priority within political organizations, a question familiar not only familiar to medieval political theorists like Dante and Marsilius of Padua, but also contemporary political theorists examining autocracy. The various arguments that Aristotle presents in *Politics* 3.15–16 for and against absolutely kingship (the former which Aristotle ultimately appears to endorse) have been echoed for millennia.

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11: Best constitution and education
The Politics includes substantial discussion of what contemporary theorists call “ideal theory,” offering both critiques of the theories of Aristotle’s predecessors and his own account of what he calls “the best constitution.” Politics 2 surveys those predecessors, which includes both “theorists” of best constitutions (Plato’s Republic and Laws receive extended scrutiny, more so than any other ancient source) and political organizations that are reputed to be best (he has in mind both the Greek political communities of Crete and Sparta, but also the non-Greek Northern African political community of Carthage, which in the 4th C. BCE formed a commercial empire that controlled most of the eastern Mediterranean basin). As Alexander (2000) notes, an initial challenge is that Aristotle uses the phrase “best constitution” to characterize a number of
different political organizations in the *Politics*; Mittiga (2021) is a recent treatment of the same puzzle. Samaras (2007) offers the clearest and most persuasive account that the term is best applied the constitution described in *Politics* 7 and 8, which he also argues was a model for 4\(^{th}\) C. colonists in western Anatolia rather than any sort of regulative ideal for evaluating other constitutions.

*Politics* 2 surveys what Aristotle’s predecessors described as the best constitution. He includes both “theorists” of best constitutions (Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws* receive extended scrutiny, more so than any other ancient source) and political organizations that are reputed to be best (he has in mind both the Greek political communities of Crete and Sparta, but also the non-Greek community of Carthage. Lockwood (2015) provides an overview of Aristotle’s critiques of his predecessors in *Politics* 2. Müller (2016), Segev (2018), and Santoro (2019) are recent examinations of his critique of Plato (on which there is substantial literature over the last 40 years). Rubin (2011), Hitz (2012), Lockwood (2017) and (2018), and Schofield (2018) examine Aristotle’s critique of Sparta. Jaïdi (2014), Lockwood (2021), and Pezzoli (2022) examine his critique (and praise) of Carthage.

Aristotle’s examination of the constitutional proposals of Hippodamus of Miletus, a 5\(^{th}\) C. urban planner who designed the quasi-geometric street plan of Athens’ main port-city, the Peiraeus, occasions a fascinating debate about progressivism and conservativism in political reform. Hippodamus proposed incentivizing institutional change by honoring individuals who innovate new policies, something Aristotle describes as “sweet to hear, but not safe” (2.8.1268b24). What follows are BOTH all the reasons that statesmen should innovate and
change institutions (on the assumption that statesmanship is an art—like medicine—that improves progressively over time) AND all the reasons that statesmen should not innovate and change institutions (on the assumption that the binding force of law depends upon habit). Some scholars like Nussbaum (1988) take Aristotle to be endorsing the former progressive view; others take Aristotle to be endorsing a quasi-Burkean conservative view. But as Pangle (2013) and Lockwood (2015) note, Aristotle fails to resolve the conceptual dilemma, even though the question of radical innovation and ideal theory is precisely the issue under examination in Politics 2 (see also Duke (2020)).

The last two books of the Politics contain a description of Aristotle’s “best constitution,” an aristocratic political organization in which all citizens are provided with the education and leisure necessary to live truly happy lives. Leunissen (2017) and Jimenez (2021) engages with the ample literature on ethical education in both the Politics and Aristotle’s ethical treatises (additional recent studies of education in the Politics include Gauthier (2019)). Bourbon et al. (2019) is a journal issue devoted to Politics 7 that includes articles on the structure, material basis, and foreign policy of the best constitution. Segev (2017) is a book-length study of Aristotle’s view of religion, including in the best constitution. Lefebvre (2011), Natali (2016), Jaulin (2017), Lockwood (2019), Segev (2019), and Ishino (2022) examine aspects of ideal “city-planning” in Politics 7. Although much of Politics 7 and 8 is concerned with public education, the text that survives focuses primarily on musical education. Bénatouïl (2011), Destrée (2013), Weinman (2014), Kidd (2016), Aygün (2017), Simpson (2017), Snyder (2018), and Lockwood (2020) explain the goals of such education and Jones (2012), Brüllman (2013), Cagnoli Fiecon (2016), and
Destrée (2018) are recent examinations of Aristotle’s musical theory (subjects on which there are substantial discussions over the last 40 years).

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12: Contemporary appropriations of Aristotelian justice
Aristotle’s *Politics* has been a significant launching pad for contemporary neo-Aristotelian theories of justice. In a series of works in the 1980s and 1990s, the social and political philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre embraced Aristotle, both historically and in the context of neo-Thomistic philosophy, as a foundational communitarian thinker, one who emphasized the flourishing of the community in contradistinction to the allegedly atomistic and egoistic social philosophy of liberalism (see especially MacIntyre (1981) and (1988)). Within that context, Miller (1995) argued that Aristotle provides a novel account of natural rights that ignores the perils of modern social contract theories. Within Miller’s view, individuals are ultimately subordinate to the community, but they nonetheless bear rights or claims within that community (rather than against other rights bearers in a community), an interpretation that Miller elaborated further in Miller (1996), (2000), (2003), and (2009). Somewhat earlier, in a series of landmark articles that include Nussbaum (1988), (1990), (1992) and (2000), Martha Nussbaum attributed to Aristotle a “social democratic” vision of justice that was compatible with her own capabilities approach, which grounded justice in the claims that human beings generate in order to flourish. The accounts of Miller and Nussbaum have generated their own substantial literatures, including an issue of the *Review of Metaphysics* (1996, issue 49.4) devoted to critiques of Miller’s account of natural rights.
in Aristotle and an issue of *Ethics* (2000, issue 111.1), Inamura (2012) and Knoll (2015) and (2022) to critiques of Nussbaum’s account of Aristotelian social democracy.


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My report on the state of research on Aristotle’s *Politics* shows that there is a robust body of scholarship on the work and that two current trends stand out. First, Aristotle scholars have increasingly recognized the advantages of inter-disciplinary research within his body of writing.

As noted above in section 5, the work of Leunissen (2017) and other scholars who bring to bear
insights from Aristotle’s zoological works to the *Politics* is a welcome trend. No doubt, the trend did not begin with Leunissen; Aristotle scholars have discussed the notion of political animals in the *Historia Animalium* since the 1970s. Nonetheless, as a matter of emphasis, Aristotle scholars appear to be drawing from those sources for interpreting the *Politics* far more than was the case in the 1990s. One hopes that such inter-disciplinary approaches to Aristotle will draw not only on Aristotle’s biological works, but also his *Rhetorica* and his *Constitution of Athens*, two other works that bear upon the *Politics* without explicitly being works in political science. Second, interpreting *politeia* or “constitution” remains the key challenge for understanding the *Politics*. Insofar as there is a trend in the scholarship, it consists in the recognition that the account of *politeia* in *Politics* 4–6 is much more nuanced and complicated than the simple six-fold constitutional taxonomy of *Politics* 3. As noted above in section 8, Riesbeck (2015) presents compelling arguments that Aristotle’s account of constitution is consistent throughout the *Politics*; but as Riesbeck himself acknowledges, such consistency sits alongside complexity.

From my personal vantage point as a scholar of Aristotle’s *Politics*, I would like to suggest two future directions that motivate my own work and which I would commend to scholars working on the *Politics*. First, although scholars have shown greater appreciation of the interdisciplinary nature of Aristotle’s works—including the relevance of zoological and biological treatise to elucidate aspects of the *Politics*—I also think that it is time to move away from what is sometimes monolithically called “Aristotle’s naturalism,” perhaps especially the claims made in *Politics* 1.2 that the primordial polis exists by nature and that humans are political animals by nature. As Frede (2019) makes clear, Aristotle is obviously committed to the claim that humans
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exhibit a form of natural sociability. But Aristotle is not a natural law philosopher and outside of *Politics* 1, the “city by nature” does little to no argumentative work in the subsequent seven books in the *Politics*. Indeed, one can count on one hand the number of times that Aristotle invokes the concepts of “naturalism” outside of *Politics* 1. The “city by nature” in *Politics* 1.2 does very important work in showing that the notion of “ruling” is pluralistic and qualitatively differentiated: ruling a slave differs fundamentally from ruling a child or ruling a fellow citizen. But I do not think Aristotle’s “city by nature” is supposed to present some sort of naturalistic alternative to say a Hobbesian state of nature (even though there are quasi-social contract thinkers in ancient Greek political thought, such as Lycophron or Epicurus). I believe Aristotle scholars will produce exegetically superior interpretations if they recognize that ultimately, Aristotle rejects an antithesis between “nature” and “convention” (or *nomos* and *phasis*).

A second direction at which my own research aims and which I hope will be embraced by other scholars of Aristotle’s *Politics* is the appreciation that Aristotle’s *Politics* as a work of the 4th C. Mediterranean world that demands accurate historical contextualization. By means of example, consider the case of Sparta. Sometimes, 4th C. authors like Plato and Xenophon invoke the Sparta of the 5th C., namely the city-state that exercised de facto hegemony over mainland Greece and which was integral to defeating the Persian invasion of mainland Greece in 480 BCE. But as I show in Lockwood (2018), for Aristotle Sparta is the 4th C. failed hegemonic state that, although victorious over Athens in the Peloponnesian Wars, was crushed by Thebes and its Boeotian allies at the battle of Leuctra (371 BCE). Indeed, Aristotle explicitly chides his ahistorical contemporaries who praise Sparta. He claims that such scholars
praise the Spartan constitution and express admiration for the aim of its legislator [i.e., Lycurgus], because his entire legislation was intended to promote conquest and war. What they say is easy to refute by argument, and has now been refuted by facts too....They admire the Spartan legislator because by training the Spartans to face danger he enabled them to rule over many. And yet it is clear, now that their empire is no longer in their hands at any rate, that the Spartans are not a happy people, and that their legislator is not a good one. (7.14.1333b12–16, 18–23)

I repeat: Aristotle himself has little patience for the “Spartan Image” because the “geopolitical” events of the early 4th C. have completely undermined claims about Lycurgus’ legendary educational and societal reforms. Whatever virtues some Lycurgus inculcated in the 8th C. BCE are largely indecisive in the 4th C. BCE. Historical accuracy and contextualization are the foundation of Aristotle’s own methodology in the Politics; one should expect no less from modern-day scholars who study the same work.

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