

Aristocracy

Aristocracy (from [Ancient Greek](#) ἀριστοκρατιᾶ (*aristokratíā*), from ἄριστος (*áristos*) 'best', and κράτος (*krátos*) 'power, strength') is a [form of government](#) that places strength in the hands of a small, privileged [ruling class](#), the [aristocrats](#).^[1] The term derives from the [Greek](#) *aristokratíā*, meaning 'rule of the best'.^[2]

At the time of the word's origins in [ancient Greece](#), the Greeks conceived it as rule by the best-qualified citizens—and often contrasted it favorably with [monarchy](#), rule by an individual. The term was first used by such ancient Greeks as [Aristotle](#) and [Plato](#), who used it to describe a system where only the best of the citizens, chosen through a careful process of selection, would become rulers, and hereditary rule would actually have been forbidden, unless the rulers' children performed best and were better endowed with the attributes that make a person fit to rule compared with every other citizen in the polity.^{[3][4][5]} Hereditary rule in this understanding is more related to [Oligarchy](#), a corrupted form of Aristocracy where there is rule by a few, but not by the best. [Plato](#), [Socrates](#), [Aristotle](#), [Xenophon](#) and the [Spartans](#) considered Aristocracy (the ideal form of rule by the few) to be inherently better than the ideal form of rule by the many ([Democracy](#)), but they also considered the corrupted form of Aristocracy ([Oligarchy](#)) to be worse than the corrupted form of [Democracy](#) ([Mob Rule](#)).^{[3][4][5][6][7]} This belief was rooted in the assumption that the masses could only produce average policy, while the best of men could produce the best policy, if they were indeed the best of men.^[5] Later [Polybius](#) in his analysis of the [Roman Constitution](#) used the concept of aristocracy to describe his conception of a [republic](#) as a [mixed form of government](#), along with democracy and monarchy in their conception from then, as a system of [checks and balances](#), where each element checks the excesses of the

other.^[8] In practice, aristocracy often leads to [hereditary government](#), after which the hereditary monarch appoints officers as they see fit.

In [modern times](#), aristocracy was usually seen as rule by a privileged group, the [aristocratic class](#), and has since been contrasted with [democracy](#).^[1]

Concept

The concept evolved in Ancient Greece, whereby a council of leading citizens was commonly empowered and contrasted with [representative democracy](#), in which a council of citizens was appointed as the "senate" of a [city state](#) or other political unit. The Greeks did not like the concept of monarchy, and as their democratic system fell, aristocracy was upheld.^[1] In the 1651 book *Leviathan*, [Thomas Hobbes](#) describes an aristocracy as a commonwealth in which the representative of the citizens is an assembly by part only. It is a system in which only a small part of the population represents the government; "certain men distinguished from the rest".^[9] Modern depictions of aristocracy tend to regard it not as the ancient Greek concept of rule by the best, but more as an [oligarchy](#) or [plutocracy](#)—rule by the few or the wealthy.

The concept of aristocracy per [Plato](#), has an ideal state ruled by the philosopher king. Plato describes these "philosopher kings" as "those who love the sight of truth" ([Republic](#) 475c) and supports the idea with the analogy of a captain and his ship or a doctor and his medicine. According to him, sailing and health are not things that everyone is qualified to practice by nature. A large part of the Republic then addresses how the educational system should be set up to produce these philosopher kings.

Differentiation

In contrast to its original conceptual drawing in [classical antiquity](#), aristocracy has been associated in the [modern era](#) with its more general and degenerated form of [oligarchy](#), specifically an [aristocracy class](#) based oligarchy, with entitled [nobility](#) as in [monarchies](#) or aristocratic [merchant republics](#). Its original [classical](#) understanding has been taken up by the modern concepts that can be loosely equivalent to [meritocracy](#) or [technocracy](#).

History

Aristocracies dominated political and economic power for most of the medieval and modern periods almost everywhere in Europe, using their wealth and land-ownership to form a powerful political force. The [English Civil War](#) involved the first sustained, organised effort to reduce aristocratic power in Europe.

In the 18th century, the rising [merchant class](#) attempted to use money to buy into the aristocracy, with some success. However, the [French Revolution](#) in the 1790s forced many French aristocrats into exile and caused consternation and shock in the aristocratic families of neighbouring countries. After the defeat of [Napoleon](#) in 1814, some surviving exiles returned but their position within French society was not recovered.

Beginning with Great Britain, industrialization in the 19th century brought urbanization, with wealth increasingly concentrated in the cities, which absorbed political power. However, as late as 1900, aristocrats maintained political dominance in Britain, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Austria and Russia, but it was an increasingly precarious dominion. World War I had the effect of dramatically reducing the power of aristocrats in all major countries. In Russia they were [imprisoned and murdered](#) by the communists. After 1900, Liberal and socialist governments levied heavy taxes on landowners, spelling their loss of economic power.^{[10][11]}

See also

- [Elitism](#)
- [Gentry](#)
- [Nobility](#)
- [Old money](#)
- [Timocracy](#)
- [Tyranny](#)

References

1. "Aristocracy" (https://web.archive.org/web/20110629022358/http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50011987?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=aristocracy&first=1&max_to_show=10) . *Oxford English Dictionary*. December 1989. Archived from the original (http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50011987?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=aristocracy&first=1&max_to_show=10) on June 29, 2011. Retrieved December 22, 2009.

2. A Greek–English Lexicon, Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, Roderick McKenzie (editors). "ἀριστο-κρατία, ἡ, A, rule of the best, aristocracy, ἀ. σώφρων Th.3.82, cf. Henoch.5.17, Isyll.1, etc.; the rule of the rich, Pl.Plit.301a. II ideal constitution, rule of the best, Artist. Pol.1293b1 sqq., EN1160a33, Pl.Mx.238c, 238d, Plb.6.4.3."
<http://logeion.uchicago.edu/%E1%BC%80%CF%81%CE%B9%CF%83%CF%84%CE%BF%CE%BA%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%AF%CE%B1>
3. Aristotle. *Politics* (<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/politics.html>) .
4. Plato. *The Republic* (<http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>) .
5. Plato. *The Statesman* (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1738/1738-h/1738-h.htm>) .
6. Xenophon. *The Polity of the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians* (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1178/1178-h/1178-h.htm>) .
7. Plutarch. "The Life of Lycurgus" (<http://classics.mit.edu/Plutarch/lycurgus.html>) . The Parallel Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans.
8. Polybius. "The Roman Republic Compared with Others, Book VI, Section 43" (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/44125/44125-h/44125-h.htm>) . The Histories.
9. Thomas Hobbes (1 January 2010). *Leviathan* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=FKLPStfcjjoC&pg=PA81>) . Digireads.com Publishing. p. 81. ISBN 978-1-4209-3699-5.
10. Barrington Moore, *The social origins of dictatorship and democracy* (1966)
11. David Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy* (1990)

Further reading

External links

Retrieved from

["https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Aristocracy&oldid=1098033796"](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Aristocracy&oldid=1098033796)

Last edited 1 month ago by 66.158.150.2

WIKIPEDIA
