

Aristotle's viewpoint on Political Thinking

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Abstract

We will discuss about the great philosopher Aristotle. First we will see his bibliography. Then we will focus on his works. Then we will discuss about the thinking of Aristotle. His political views and contributions are to be focused in this article. Aristotle (b. 384 – d. 322 BCE), was a Greek philosopher, logician, and scientist. Along with his teacher Plato, Aristotle is generally regarded as one of the most influential ancient thinkers in a number of philosophical fields, including political theory.

Keywords: Origin; State; History; Revolution.

1. Introduction

Aristotle was born in Stagira in northern Greece, and his father was a court physician to the king of Macedon. As a young man he studied in Plato's Academy in Athens. After Plato's death he left Athens to conduct philosophical and biological research in Asia Minor and Lesbos, and he was then invited by King Philip II of Macedon to tutor his young son, Alexander the Great. Soon after Alexander succeeded his father, consolidated the conquest of the Greek city-states, and launched the invasion of the Persian Empire. Aristotle returned as a resident alien to Athens, and was a close friend of Antipater, the Macedonian viceroy. At this time (335–323 BCE) he wrote, or at least worked on, some of his major treatises, including the *Politics*. When Alexander died suddenly, Aristotle had to flee from Athens because of his Macedonian connections, and he died soon after. Aristotle's life seems to have influenced his political thought in various ways: his interest in biology seems to be expressed in the naturalism of his politics; his interest in comparative politics and his sympathies for democracy as well as monarchy may have been encouraged by his travels and experience of diverse political systems; he criticizes harshly, while borrowing extensively, from Plato's *Republic*, *Statesman*, and *Laws*; and his own *Politics* is intended to guide rulers and statesmen, reflecting the high political circles in which he moved. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) describes the happy life intended for man by nature as one lived in accordance with virtue, and, in his *Politics*, he describes the role that politics and the political community must play in bringing about the virtuous life in the citizenry. The *Politics* also provides analysis of the kinds of political community that existed in his time and shows where and how these cities fall short of the ideal community of virtuous citizens. Although in some ways we have clearly moved beyond his thought (for example, his belief in the inferiority of women and his approval of slavery in at least some circumstances), there remains much in Aristotle's philosophy that is valuable today.

2. Biography and History

Aristotle's life was primarily that of a scholar. However, like the other ancient philosophers, it was not the stereotypical ivory tower existence. His father was court physician to Amyntas III of Macedon, so Aristotle grew up in a royal household. Aristotle also knew Philip of Macedon (son of Amyntas III) and there is a tradition that says Aristotle tutored Philip's son Alexander, who would later be called "the Great" after expanding the Macedonian Empire all the way to what is now India. Clearly, Aristotle had significant firsthand experience with politics, though scholars disagree about how much influence, if any, this experience had on Aristotle's thought. There is certainly no evidence that Alexander's subsequent career was much influenced by Aristotle's teaching, which is uniformly critical of war and conquest as goals for human beings and which praises the intellectual, contemplative lifestyle. It is noteworthy that although Aristotle praises the politically active life, he spent most of his own life in Athens, where he was not a citizen and would not have been allowed

to participate directly in politics (although of course anyone who wrote as extensively and well about politics as Aristotle did was likely to be politically influential).

Aristotle studied under Plato at Plato's Academy in Athens, and eventually opened a school of his own (the Lyceum) there. As a scholar, Aristotle had a wide range of interests. He wrote about meteorology, biology, physics, poetry, logic, rhetoric, and politics and ethics, among other subjects. His writings on many of these interests remained definitive for almost two millennia. They remained, and remain, so valuable in part because of the comprehensiveness of his efforts. For example, in order to understand political phenomena, he had his students collect information on the political organization and history of 158 different cities. The Politics makes frequent reference to political events and institutions from many of these cities, drawing on his students' research. Aristotle's theories about the best ethical and political life are drawn from substantial amounts of empirical research. These studies, and in particular the Constitution of Athens, will be discussed in more detail below (Who Should Rule?). The question of how these writings should be unified into a consistent whole (if that is even possible) is an open one and beyond the scope of this article. This article will not attempt to organize all of Aristotle's work into a coherent whole, but will draw on different texts as they are necessary to complete one version of Aristotle's view of politics.

3. Discuss Aristotle's Ideas about State's Origin

There is a similarity between the idea of Aristotle's state's origin and the concept of Plato. However, it is basically criticism of Aristotle Sophist's theories about the state. "Aristotle begins his book on ideal state with a survey of what other writers have written on this subject. The point of greatest interest here is the criticism of Plato, since one would expect to find the key to the differences of which he was conscious between himself and his master."

Below is the concept of Aristotle on the state's origin:

- a) State's productive efforts to meet the personal needs of men: People live with expectations and expectations. These needs are only possible from the state. These needs are fulfilled only through living in the state. We see from Gettel's book, "The origin of the state Aristotle finds in the efforts of men to satisfy their individual needs and desires."
- b) State is an ordinary institution
Aristotle criticized the idea Sophists' about state. They considered state as a artificial institution and it doesn't have any natural base. But according to Aristotle, state has been originated naturally. It is the element of nature. State is the natural society.
- c) Resulted from evolution
Aristotle thinks that, state is as like a tree. A tree basically grows and becomes developed step by step. It

is not artificial. It becomes developed because of its own characteristics. Just like a tree, a state becomes developed by its own characteristics. A tree has the nature of evolution. Just like a tree a state becomes bigger or developed or from the evolution.

d) It is emerged from logic

According to Aristotle, State is not made aimlessly. It is made logically. Whenever human's logic, intuition, consciousness turned into high then state became made. When human understood the idea of good or bad, idea of morality then they made state. Thus we can say that, state has been made logically. State is based on logic. There are some causes, logics and aims behind the creation of a state.

e) Resulted from the expansion of family

We all know about the theory of household of Aristotle. It has made well established the naturalism of state. From the rule of nature man makes a family. Family is the main source of state. But when the expectation of human became increased then they made village for themselves. Thus many families became united. Then their expectations became increased again. Then they made state. Thus a state is now a combination of some villages. "The association of male and female for the perpetuation of the race, and of master and slave for the production of substances gave rise to the family or Household."

f) Resulted from the emotion of developed lifestyle

Developed life is the expectation of all people. Every man desires for having a nice, developed life. But it can be possible through the help of each other of a state. When there will be created a state, then a man will be able to get help from other.

g) Resulted from social agreement

For making mutual happiness man gets the emotion of making state. They make some agreements between some families. They make some agreements between some nations. They make some agreements between many societies. Then a state becomes created.

h) Resulted from the emotion of unity

A man cannot live lonely. A man has so many needs. To fulfill his needs, he has to live in a family. He has to live in a social life. According to Aristotle, the nature of unity of human can be seen firstly in making a family. A human wants for some basic needs. Being united he becomes possible to fulfill that needs. Thus a state becomes resulted.

i) Man is the social and political creation

According to Aristotle man has the emotion of political and social life. He is fond of being political and social. Without state a man cannot be social or political. According to Aristotle, the man who doesn't live in a society he is God or animal.

j) “This is the perfect form of association; and man, naturally a political animal, can attain the true end for which he is intended only in the life of state. Without social life man would be a brute.”

k) Need of security

A man has the innate motivation of saving his life. A man cannot ensure his security without state. For saving his life and security he starts to live in a society.

l) State makes a man civilized

A man becomes a member of a society for the welfare of himself. Becoming isolated means becoming isolated from morality, ideals, justice etc. Without a state a man becomes unsocial. Even for achieving self-reliance a man is needed to live in a state.

4. Aristotle’s Theory of Revolution: Causes and Methods to Prevent Revolution

Aristotle explained in great detail the theory of revolution. In his work “Politics” he discussed at length all about revolutions. Based on his study, Aristotle gave a scientific analysis and expert treatment to the subject of revolutions. He gave a very broad meaning to the term ‘revolution’ which meant two things to him. Generally, revolution means a sudden, complete or marked change in something.

5. Different kinds of Revolution

Aristotle discussed about the different kinds of revolution. We will discuss about four kinds of them.

Firstly, it implies any major or minor change in the constitution such as a change in monarchy or oligarchy and so on.

Secondly, it implies a change in the ruling power even though it did not lead to a change in the government or the constitution.

Thirdly, it implies not to change the government or constitution but to change the dimension or the nature of the government or constitution.

Fourthly, He further stated that a revolution could be either direct or indirect, thereby affecting a particular institution.

6. Causes of Revolution

According to Aristotle, the two categories of causes of revolution are general and particular.

6.1. General Causes

According to Aristotle, revolutions take place when the political order fails to correspond to the distribution of property and hence tensions arise in the class structure, eventually leading to revolutions. Arguments over justice are at the heart of the revolution.

Generally speaking, the cause of revolution is a desire on the part of those who are devoid of virtue and who are motivated by an urge to possess property, which is in the name of their opponents. In other words, the cause of upheaval is inequality.

The subject justice is different in different constitutions. Justice is distinct in this different constitutions. But when this loses its distinction, then the people choose the way of revolution. Equality is a great need for the people. But when they lose it then they think about revolution.

They are as follows

- a) Profit means that the officers of the state try to make illicit gains at the expense of the individual or of the public. It puts the latter to an undeserved loss and creates a mood of discontent.
- b) Revolutions occur when men are dishonored rightly or wrongly and when they see others obtaining honors that they do not deserve. If like-minded people join the movement when the government fails to redress their grievances.
- c) Revolutions occur when insolence or disrespect is displayed by the other members. A revolutionary climate would be soon created, especially when the state officials become haughty, arrogant and drunk with power, or pay no attention to the genuine problems of the people.
- d) This leads to a deep divide in the society, especially between the state and the people. Over a period of time, people's complaints against corrupt officials increase which culminate into revolutions.
- e) Fear is a genuine and a worst enemy of man and human institutions. It disturbs peace of mind and other emotions. Revolutions can occur either out of fear of punishment for a wrong actually committed or a fear of an expected wrong to be inflicted on the person who is afraid.
- f) Contempt is closely related to revolution. This contempt can be towards rules, laws, political and economic situations, social and economic order. The contempt is also due to inequalities, injustices, lack of certain privileges and the like.
- g) Finally, revolutions are also the result of imbalances in the disproportionate increase in the power of the state that creates a gap between the constitution and the society. In the end, the constitution reflects social realities, the balances of social and economic forces.

If this balance is disturbed, the constitution is shaken and it will either get modified or will perish. For instance, if the number of poor people increases, the polity may be destroyed. Similarly, if there are more numbers of rich

in the government, it may lead to an oligarchical set-up. Thus, any sharp differences in the polity would result in revolutions.

As regards the political factors, issues such as elections intrigues, carelessness, neglecting small changes, growth in reputation and power of some office, or even balance of parties lead to deadlock and finally foreign influence.

6.2. Particular Causes

Apart from the general causes of revolution, Aristotle also gave certain specific causes in various types of states. For instance, in democracies, discontentment is bred by the demagogues who attack the rich either individually or collectively and build hatred among the people who become revengeful and violent and this situation leads to conflicts.

The first particular cause is the psychological motives of the people. There are some people always wants the equality. This is their main expectation. When they lose this then they want for revolution.

Secondly, people make interest and respect as a great expectation, then they wants to fill up this expectation. But when they fail, they want revolution.

Thirdly, some current incidents grows intentions for revolutions. People get anger, hate, fear and many emotions for these incidents. Thus these incidents make people to People become more curious for revolution.

Fourthly, if some people gets so many advantages then they may get the chances for making revolution.

7. Methods to Prevent Revolutions

Aristotle in order to ensure that there are lesser chances of revolutions suggested the following methods to prevent them:

- a) Aristotle called upon the kings to believe in one principle maxim that 'prevention is better than cure'. He wanted the rulers to obey laws even in smallest matters. He believed that transgression, of even in small amounts, would sooner or later result in total disrespect and violation. Further taking cue from the rulers, if people start breaking the laws, the entire social order would be at stake.
- b) The three must be a good relation between ruler and people. But if there remains isolation, then there must be present disorders. Then people will want revolution.
- c) There are some aristocratic families in the society. It should be noticed that there must not be presented dissatisfaction in them. They can lead revolution.
- d) Fifthly, particularly a person or some people should not be respected so much. Because that makes other peoples unhappy. This can be a cause of revolution. Aristotle also stated that the rulers must provide due

care to all those people in their domain. They should not discriminate between the officer and commoner, between governing and non-governing and the like. The principle of democratic equality must be followed.

- e) There must be presented stability in the society. People will be bound to show loyalty to the government. Democracy and aristocracy would be combined to produce a stable polity. The retiring officer should hand over the charge of public funds to another in public, and the officers whose performance was good must be respected.
- f) Aristotle further stated that public offices must not be made lucrative. By doing this, the poor would not be attracted and the rich might occupy them without any additional advantage. There has to be a balance.
- g) Every citizen must be given a chance to express their opinions about the government and that the tenure of the officials must be short-term. By this method, oligarchies and aristocracies would not fall into the hands of the families.
- h) Finally, Aristotle argues that a correct system of education is the most effective instrument for curbing the revolutionary instinct and preserves social order.

8. Aristotle's View on Slavery

Slavery is an important addition in the philosophy of Aristotle. Meanwhile he supported slavery. So many philosophers criticized this. Cause Aristotle gave some wrong logics while supporting the theory of slavery. Even he considered that if any state's basic is not created on the theory of slavery then it is by own slave. Sophist's, Stoics and many other philosophers told against this slavery. I am going to discuss about slavery and mostly the view of Aristotle about slavery. Basically Aristotle described in the first part of his book "Politics" about slavery. We will discuss that while describing about slavery.

8.1. Introducing Slave According to Aristotle

While introducing man's real identity Aristotle's discussed about the difference of man between physical and mental. He considered that some people are powerful in mentally and majority are physically powerful. So the people who are powerful mentally, they are master. On the other hand the people who are physically powerful, they are slave. If we think about body and soul, then soul gets priority. Thus the people, who are mentally powerful they are considered as master.

8.2. Aristotle's Discussion about Slavery

Aristotle identifies the three kinds of relationships that make up the household: master-slave; husband-wife; and parent-child. Aristotle views slaves as the means by which the master secures his livelihood. He defends slavery by noting that nature generally consists of ruling and ruled elements: some people are slaves by nature, while others are masters by nature. Though being suited to mastery or slavery is generally inherited, slavery is just only when the rule of master over slave is beneficial for both parties.

Aristotle likens the relationship between master and slave to that between soul and body: the master possesses rational, commanding powers, while the slave, lacking these, is fit only to carry out menial duties.

8.3. Aristotle Justified the Institution of Slavery on the Following Grounds

8.3.1. Natural

Slavery is a natural phenomenon. The superior would rule over the inferior just as the soul rules over the body. In other words, people with superior reasoning powers would rule over those inferior in reasoning. The masters are stated to be mentally stronger than the slaves. So, this set-up naturally makes the mentally powerful people the masters, and the physically powerful people the slaves.

8.3.2. Necessary

Slaves are considered necessary because they provide physical power that was most essential for the welfare of the state. Aristotle stated that slavery benefited the slaves as well. Because by being a slave, he would be able to share the virtues of the master and elevate himself.

8.4. Expediency

Aristotle was of the opinion that slaves have sustained the Greek social and economic system, and they helped Greece against social disorder and chaos. He stated that slavery is a social necessity. It was complementary to the slaves as well as the masters and that it aids in perfection. Aristotle approved slavery only under certain conditions, as follows:

- a) Only those who were mentally deficient and virtuously not superior should be enslaved. Aristotle, however, never agreed to the enslavement of prisoners of war because victory in the war does not necessarily mean intellectual superiority of the victor or the mental deficiency of the vanquished. He was against the idea of slavery by force.
- b) Aristotle insisted that masters must treat their slaves properly, and strongly propagated that cruel masters must be subjected to legal punishments.
- c) He advocated the liberation of only those slaves whose conduct was good and who developed capacity for reasoning and virtue.

- d) Slavery was essential for the all-round development but the master has no right to misuse his power. Slaves are only assistants but not subordinates.

8.4. Criticisms

- a) Classification of individuals on the basis of capacities is wrong and Aristotle never provided any logical method to be adopted to classify individuals.
- b) He rejected historical origin of slavery and justified it on philosophical rationalization.
- c) His views on slavery reflect his conservatism and primitive outlook towards life.
- d) His theory is highly prejudicial and contradictory to the human dignity and niceties of life. It is prejudicial, in the sense it presupposed that Greeks were fit to rule the world and they could not be enslaved even if they were defeated by the barbarians.

9. Conclusion

Aristotle's theory of evolution has a great importance in the field of political philosophy. He described nicely this theory. Basically, revolution means disorder in regular life. He made inequality as an important cause for revolution. This is the ultimate cause of revolution according to Aristotle. Discrimination among the people is also a great cause for revolution. He told about isolation while discussing about revolution. He was realistic while describing about revolution. But he didn't discuss about the nature of discrimination, isolation. But his theory didn't lose importance till now.

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