

QNo: 2 What is the Aristotelian Classification of State?

1. Introduction:

Aristotle is one of the most influential ancient Greek philosophers who made significant contribution to the field of politics and governance. In his seminal work "Politics,"

Aristotle extensively discussed the nature of states and their classification. Aristotle's classification of states is based on permutations of two parameters which are qualitative and quantitative. He explains six forms of governments which are monarchy, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, polity and democracy and delineates the cycle of their political evolution. According to Aristotle, polity is the best form of government.

2. Aristotelian classification of State:

Aristotle classified states into six types based on two principles

a. **Quantitative**: The number of people who exercise supreme political power in a state.

b. **Qualitative**: The objectives to rule i.e. self-interest or benefit of the community.

• When the ruler or rulers seek the good of the community as a whole, the state is called a pure or normal form of state.

• When the ruler or rulers become selfish and self-interested the state is called a perverted or degenerate state.

Ruled By
One person

Normal State
Monarchy

Perverted State
Tyranny

Few
Many

Aristocracy
Polity

Oligarchy
Democracy

a. Ruled by one:

Aristotle states that when a state is ruled by a single person and is run for the welfare and betterment of its subjects it is called a Monarchy. The ruler is considered the most intelligent, dignified and respectable member of society and is honored. He gives priority to national interest over his desires. In all matters, the monarch gives priority to the general interest of his people. When the ruler becomes corrupt and selfish, the state degenerates and monarchy changes into tyranny. In tyranny, there is one dictator who controls the government and implements his goals and agenda. The king defends his interests and is exempt from criticism. Therefore, in the rule of one, if the ruler works according to people's needs, it is Monarchy and its corrupt form is called Tyranny.

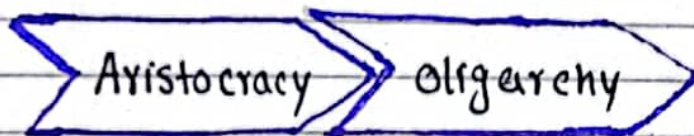


b. Ruled by Few:

When people become alienated from the tyrannical form of government, they rebel against the ruler and overthrow him. A class of nobles takes the authority of the ruling office. The ruling class is thus

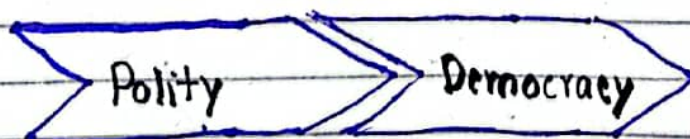
a group of few men of virtue and wealth and they run the state for the welfare of the society. It was called Aristocracy by Aristotle.

They work for the promotion of the general interests of the people and the nation. If this group of rulers become corrupt and ignores the ruled, the system changes in-to oligarchy. In oligarchy the ruling class works for their self-benefits. General interests are discarded and all the state resources are utilized by the rulers for their charm.



c. Ruled by Many:

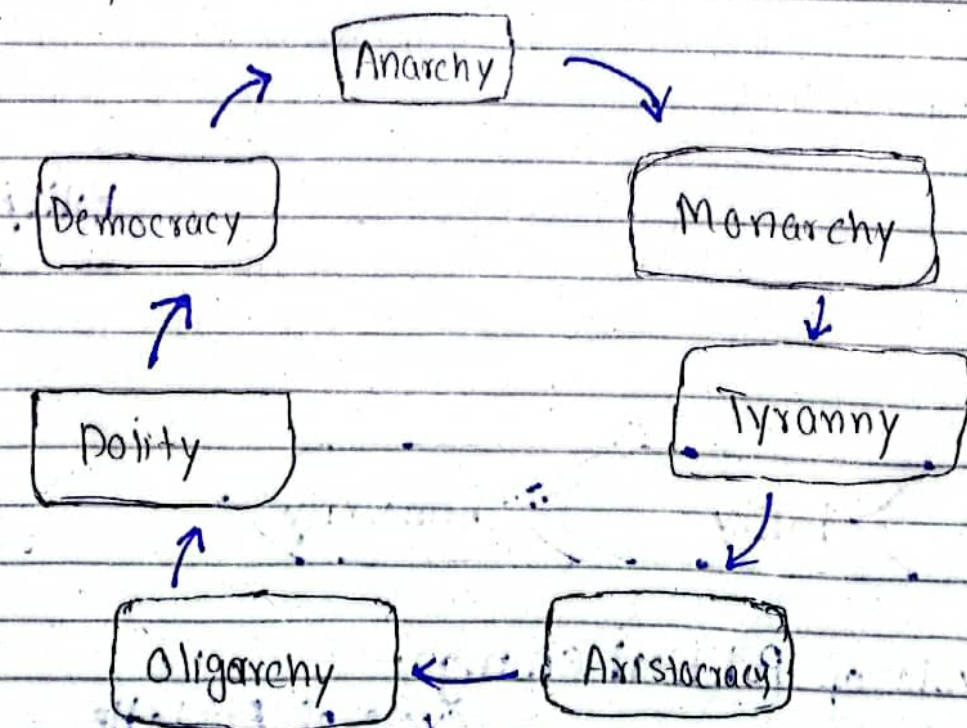
In this form of governance, a considerable number of people control the state operations and a sizable population takes part in the political system. Administrators are chosen representatives of the populace who manage the state's operations per the wishes and will of its people. Aristotle called it Polity. When this ruling class becomes corrupt and selfish, the polity converts into a Democracy.



3. Cycle of Political change:

According to the state cycle of Aristotle

government are not static but dynamic. The first form of government to come into being in history was kingship. The monarch is bound to fall prey to greed, selfishness, and arrogance, and the state gets degenerated into tyranny. Tyranny remains for some time but it also is succeeded by aristocracy. Aristocracy too gets perverted into oligarchy. Oligarchy is overthrown by many patriotic persons who govern for the good of all and so comes polity. Polity too in its turn becomes corrupt. Poor people capture power and rule in the interest of the poor only. The result is democracy or mob rule. A time comes when one perfect benevolent, virtuous person rises, overthrows democracy, establishes monarchy, and starts ruling for the good of all. Thus, Aristotle explained the cycles of government in a cycle.



4 The best form of government - Polity:

According to Aristotle, the best form of government is a polity because it is a state in which rich and poor respect each other's rights and the best-qualified citizens rule with the consent of all. It divides the political power as well as works according to set laws. In modern terminology, polity can be called a Constitutional republic.

5. Critical Analysis:

Critics point out that Aristotle did not make the distinction between the State and government. His classification is of government rather than states. The State remains an entity whatever form of government is present in a society. Secondly the word democracy is used in the sense of mob rule. Modern political scientists do not equate democracy to a perverted form of people's rule.

More-over, this classification does not comply with modern political conditions with governmental organizations which are of mixed nature and combine all the three elements of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. **Forexample**, such a combination of all three elements can be seen in the form of the present-day British Government which is a combination of Monarchy, Aristocracy and democracy. The monarchy is represented by King Charles. The House of Lords represent the

Aristocracy and the House of Commons represents Democracy

6. Conclusion:

The Aristotelian Classification of States provides a systematic analysis of different forms of government, considering their essential features, advantages, and disadvantages. Despite criticism it is agreeable that Aristotle's theory of classification possesses irrefutable importance in Political Philosophy.