

Critically analyse the salient features of Plato's republic. Do you think some of its features are valid, even today?

1 - Introduction

Plato's "Republic" is one of the most influential works of philosophy in western history. It presents a comprehensive examination of an ideal state. It is composed in the form of a dialogue between Socrates and several other characters, offering an insight into justice, the ideal state, the nature of the human soul and the complexities of governance. The biggest contribution of Plato is "Theory of the philosopher king" - state is ideal where philosophers are rulers.

In the words of Plato,

"until philosophers are rulers or rulers learn philosophy, there is no end to predicament of human life"

2 - Justice is an integral part of human soul

Justice has been the most critical part of a person's personality since time immemorial. Perhaps, it is for this reason that Plato, considered it crucial to reach a theory of justice. Greek political thought originates from Socrates. We know him only from the writings of Plato.

(a) Essence of justice was described by a dialogue

The Republic represents the idea of justice, its definition and full content. He mentioned a dialogue where Socrates was on one side and on other side there were various characters Cephalus, an old wealthy man defines justice as speaking truth and paying one's debts. Polymachus, the son of Cephalus, agrees with his father, he says, is giving to everyone his due. But Socrates demurs.

What does polymachus means? Does he intend to say for example, Justice is doing good to one's friend and harm to one's enemies?

Polymachus accepts this interpretation and Socrates demolishes it and says. that doing harm to an enemy may make the enemy worse than he was. Another character in the dialogue Thrasymachus states that justice is the interest of the strong. Might is right. In any society those who have power, use it for their own benefit. This individualistic nature is protested by Socrates and states that interest of state and ruler is same for him. All these examples of

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Justice are away from man's soul. This

"Human" was the thesis statement of Plato to construct a just state. Plato believed in "like man, like state" implying that the character of the state is dependent on the characters of its citizens.

(b) Plato characterises human behaviour in three main sources

Each human being has all three emotions but what varies is the degree to which these emotions are present. According to Plato, there are three constituents in human nature namely knowledge, courage, and desire.

Firstly, individuals driven by desires or appetite will lead to growth and production. They are producers. This class is like stomach to the state. Secondly, others who are driven by their emotions, courage and spirit are best suited to become soldiers to provide protection. These are like heart to a state.

Thirdly, individuals are forces of knowledge, wisdom or intellect and would become rulers. These are like brain to a state.

Justice creates harmony in all three social classes and is necessary condition for human happiness.

3. Educational scheme will divide three social groups

It was through education that the principle of justice was properly maintained. It was the positive measure for the operation of justice in the ideal state. Plato was against the buying of knowledge, which according to him was a heinous crime than buying meat and drink. He believed in strong state-controlled education for both men and women.

(a) Plato's Elementary Education

Child is to be taught simple religious and moral truths up to age of six. Then they should be taught the lessons of good manners. They should be told the stories of bravery and patriarchy.

From seven to eighteen, education is both physical and intellectual. It includes basic sciences, music for literature, and gymnastic to develop a sound physique.

After that there is two years military training, which is calculated to develop

courage, self control and discipline. Those who do not study after 18 years are dropped down to become artisans or producers. After military training there is a public examination and those who fail become producers and others become warriors.

(b) Plato on Higher Education

From twenty to thirty years of age, students are taught natural and mathematical sciences.

At the age of thirty, there is a selective test and those who fail are dropped down to become subordinate officers of the state.

The remaining are given 5 years more training.

At the age of 35, they are required to undergo practical training of 15 years. At the age of 50, they will become full guardians.

They are now guardians or philosophers in the true sense, "what they think is law", "they are law". They enjoy absolute authority.

4. Communism: creates harmony among these three classes

(a) communism of property: Plato said that there should be no private property for guardian class. They will keep minimum goods for their day-to-day use and whatever

goods they keep, would be shared by all. They will live together and eat from a common kitchen. Producers will provide them with basic needs. Property is just a diversion of their attention from state.

(b) Communism of wives: Guardian class will not have any private family. There will be no system of lasting wedlock and women will be shared for all men. Children born will be separated from their mothers and placed in the custody of state. Parents and children wouldn't know identity of each other to avoid nepotism.

5- Criticism on features of Plato's Republic

Firstly, it is impracticable to divide a whole society into three classes. Division of society comes with separation of powers but this theory implies strict non-interference.

Secondly, Absolute authority comes with absolute corruption. Thirdly, Plato built his ideal state on the analogy of individual and this identification leads to confusion.

He failed to distinguish ethics from politics.

Plato failed to condemn the institution

of slavery and regard it as fundamental evil. Fourthly, it is primarily meant for the ruling class only and ignores the lower class. Its censorship means there would be no freedom of speech and expression of opinion other than what the state suggests and allows, which is unacceptable in modern times. Curriculum is more theoretical and less practical. Last but not the least, Plato's system of communism of women and temporary marriage is unethical. Plato is moralist rather than a political idealist. His assumption that the state would control the entire lives of its citizens is false and contrary to human liberty. Being human, thinking about future with family is natural and it is unethical to restrict humans.

6. ~~Today~~, Plato's features cannot be taken as absolute truths

It is important that while Plato's ideas have enduring values and continue to inform contemporary thoughts, they are also subject to criticism. Modern scholars often consider them alongside other

philosophical perspectives. Plato's work are valuable for their historical significance and their role in shaping the western philosophy, but they are not taken as unquestionable truths.

Some features like censorship, division of society, and communism of wives and property are not valid now a days. Educational scheme is also more theoretical and less practical.

Conclusion

Plato's "Republic" is a foundational work in the history of philosophy and political thought, it is not without critics. Its idealism, censorship, and hierarchical society have been subjects of debates and contention for centuries.

Nevertheless, it continues to be a governance thought provoking and influential text that raises important questions about justice, governance, and the nature of human soul.

Critical analysis of Aristotle's classification of government.

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1. Introduction

The classification of government is a timeless and foundational concept in the realm of political philosophy, serving as a lens which shows diverse forms of government. Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher and polymath, made significant contributions to this field with his classification of governments, a work that has had a profound and lasting impact on the development of political thought. They are not without their criticism and limitations. That is the most lasting classification which is even today regarded as the most valid basis of difference of one government from the other.

2. Aristotle's view over the classification of government/state

(a) Identification of state with constitution

Aristotle identifies "state" with constitution, the same classification which is valid for the former is also valid for the latter.

In Aristotle's own words "constitution and the government have the same meaning"

For Aristotle, constitution, state and government were identical.

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(b) Aristotle's classification of state follows two bases

There are two major bases of Aristotle's classification of states: first which can be termed as quantitative basis and second is qualitative basis. The first is the numbers of those in whom sovereign power is vested, composed of elite or upper class. Second is the end or purpose towards which the power is directed.

If the government whether of one, few or many aims at the common interest of people, it is pure form of government. On the other hand, if the government serves the private or self interest, it becomes perverted or corrupt.

The number of Rulers	Pure government (common welfare)	perverted government (self interest)
The One	Monarchy	Tyranny
The few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
The Many	polity	democracy

Fig: Classification of governments

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(c) Aristotle's classification is borrowed from Plato's "Statesman"

According to Aristotle, pure governments are monarchy, aristocracy and polity. They perform rules for the good of community under law.

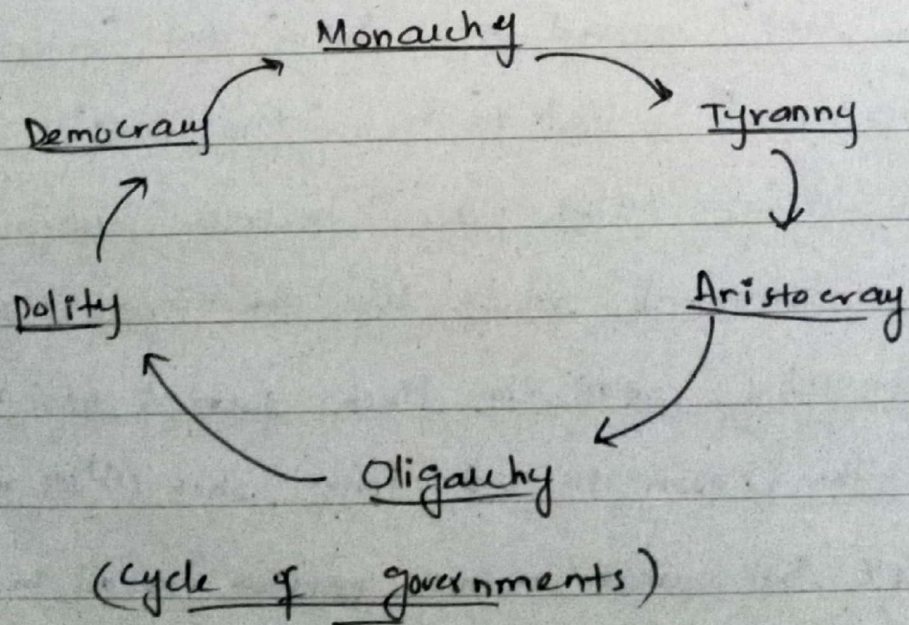
Each form has its perversion, which are also three: tyranny, oligarchy and democracy. They rule for self interests.

According to Plato, law-abiding states are monarchy, aristocracy and moderate democracy. If law-abiding state become lawless, it turns into tyranny, oligarchy and extreme democracy respectively.

For Plato it is whether state is law-abiding or lawless; in Aristotle it is end they serve. Plato uses the term "moderate democracy" instead of "polity" and "extreme democracy" instead of "democracy".

(d) Change takes place because forms of governments revolve like the wheels of a cycle. Monarchy was the first form; probably for the reason in old times, when cities were small. But when many persons equal in merit arose, its place was taken by tyranny, which is unstable and would not go for a

long time, society build a new government against that tyrann which show public interest and that would be aristocracy is also a stable form and get spoiled by few corrupt people ^{Oligarchy} and again replaced by a government that is stable and include all levels of society called Polity in which the citizens at the large administer for the common interests. It is an attempt at uniting the freedom of poor and wealth of rich, without giving either of them predominant position. Their perverted form of polity is democracy, is the government for the poor and by the poor only, again gives birth to monarchs and the cycle goes on.



4. Aristotle's classification has certain criticisms and limitation

(a) Ethnocentrism and limited scope: a major criticism

His analysis is primarily based on the Greek city-state, which was a unique political entity with its own characteristics. This limited perspective may not be applicable to other cultures and societies with different political structures. Aristotle's classifications do not adequately account for non-Greek political systems, lacking universality.

(b) It lacks consideration of modern context

Aristotle's classifications do not easily translate to the complexities of modern states and societies. The world has evolved significantly since his times, with the rise of nation-states and new forms of governments like limited monarchy, totalitarian government, dictatorship, parliamentary system, federation and so on.

His classification does not provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing modern political systems.

(c) Aristotle's categories of government can be somewhat ambiguous

Some forms, such as monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, can be subject to overlap. For example, he describes polity (a mixed form of government) as a blend of oligarchy and democracy, but it can be challenging to determine where one form ends and the other begins. This ambiguity can make it difficult to apply his classification to real-world situations.

(d) Classification assumes a relatively static view of government-

Each type of government is treated as a fixed entity. In reality, governments can evolve, and change over time, making it challenging to fit them neatly into one category. Political systems often shift between different forms, making a rigid classification system less relevant.

(e) Aristotle's classification carry implicit value judgements.

He ranks monarchy as the best and democracy as the worst. This hierarchy reflects his elitist biases, which may not align with modern democratic values that emphasize equality and popular sovereignty. Secondly, modern writers tend to reject Aristotle's thesis that democracy is the government by poor. There is a possibility that the majority of people in a given country are rich and prosperous.

(f) Individual rights and freedoms are not primary focus of this classification

The primary focus is structure and stability of government rather than rights and freedoms. This is a significant limitation in his classification, especially in contrast to modern political thoughts, which place strong emphasis on human rights.

(g) There is lack of attention to socioeconomic factors

Socioeconomic factors play a crucial role in shaping governance. Factors such as inequality, class struggle, and access to

resources can profoundly impact the functioning of a government but are not explicitly addressed in his classification.

5-Conclusion

Aristotle's classification of government is a seminal work in political philosophy and provides valuable insights into different forms of governments, if approached with a critical perspective. Contemporary political thinkers often draw on Aristotle's ideas but also recognize the need to adapt and expand his framework to better analyze and understand modern political systems.
