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Examine the main similarities and differences in the political ideas of Plato and Aristotle. (2004)

Ans :

Introduction:

Plato and Aristotle stand at the centre of philosophical and political thought development in the Ancient Greek: Athens. The former was the student of the latter. Although Aristotle was a great philosopher, he was the ungrateful student because he criticised his teacher's theories on the many fronts. His intention was not to belittle his mentor, but to embellish his teachings. Moreover, Aristotle also took similar stance on multiple topics as did his teacher: Plato. Before discussing similarities and differences in the political ideas of Plato and Aristotle, let us take a bird eye of their theories.

(1) Plato and His Ideal state:

Plato presented his ideal state in his famous book, "The Republic". Plato was disillusioned with the governing set-up of city-state, therefore, he envisioned a

ideal state. Some of the characteristics of his ideal state are given below.

Features of Ideal State

① Class-based division of society

② Universal Education

③ Concept of Justice

④ Specialization of work

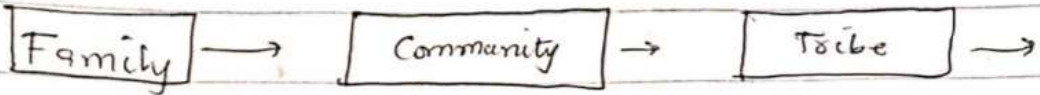
⑤ Communitism

⑥ Philosopher king

Aristotle and His View on State:

Aristotle presented his theory of state in his masterpiece, 'The Politics'. He writes that state is an organic individual which has emerged from social nature of humans. People are social animals; therefore, their survival depends on the cooperation and collaboration with others. This has compelled people to form greater organisations: Family, community, tribe.

state:



→ State

The state is the highest form of organization. Its main motive is the moral perfection of individuals as well as protection of their fundamental rights. Moreover, Aristotle said that ideal state is one which is neither too big nor too small. It is just in the middle of two. The state should be near ports & water, providing services: Agriculture, economic, army etc.

(3) Similarities in the Views of Plato and Aristotle:

There are some similarities in the views of both thinkers, some of them are as follows-

(a) Purpose of state:

Both Plato and Aristotle believed that the goal of government is to establish a just and harmonious society.

(b) Active participation of citizens

Both Aristotle and Plato

agreed to the idea of protection of masses in the politics.

(c) The concept of Rule of law:

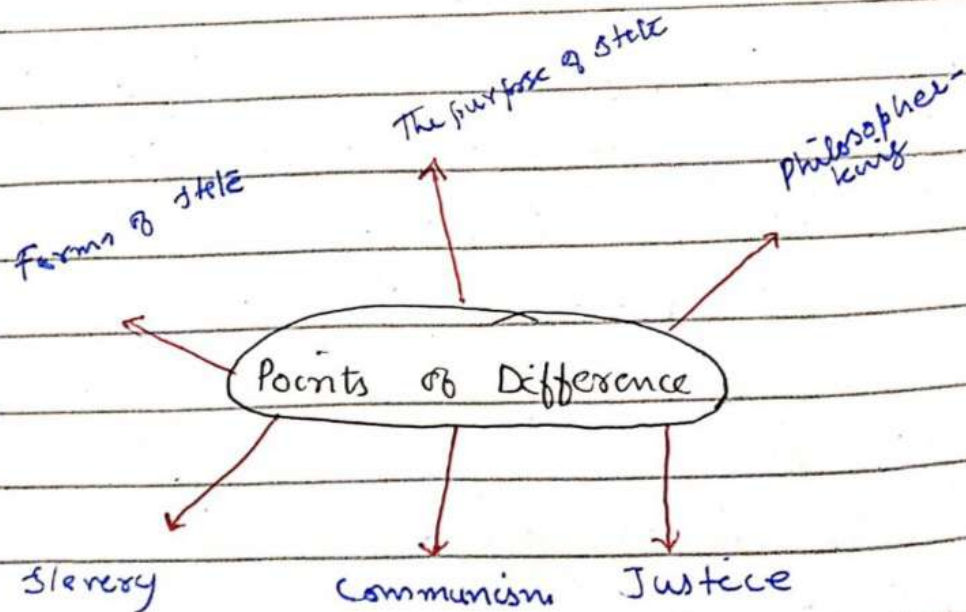
Both Plato and Aristotle agreed that laws should be equally applicable to all without any discrimination.

(d) Education:

Both Aristotle and Plato promote the education of masses at all cost.

(4) Differences in the political ideas of Plato and Aristotle:

On many fronts, Aristotle and Plato differ, some of them are as follows.



(a) Justice:

Plato believed justice is giving everyone his due, according to person's appetite or driving force.

Aristotle believed in Retributive justice meaning giving due in accordance with their contributions to society.

(b) Philosopher-kings:

Plato writes that the head of state should be philosopher. He writes in, "the Republic", "all evils of state will not vanish unless kings are philosophers or philosophers are kings".

Aristotle did not see eye to eye on this topic with his master. But he rejected the idea of philosopher-king.

(c) Communalism:

Plato envisioned strict communalism in terms of family and private property for his upper classes.

Aristotle did not see communalism as the right idea because it is against human nature and it does not serve any particular purpose.

(D) The form of government:

Plato believed in the ideal form of state with philosopher-king as its head.

Aristotle has argued for a mixed form of government which is pragmatic and attainable.

(E) Slavery:

Plato banished slavery from his ideal state and called for equality.

Aristotle allowed for slavery but with a condition that Greeks can not be slaves.

Conclusion:

The relation of Plato and Aristotle was of Master and student, but their theories were poles apart. Although some similarities exist, the fronts of differences are multiple, ranging from the form of state to slavery. Owing to their differences, political thought has been developed more rapidly.