

What is Aristotelean Classification of the State?

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INTRODUCTION:

Aristotle considers ^{state} community as the ultimate kind of community that aims at the highest good. Therefore, he classified the state on the basis of the purpose of the state and the number of the rulers. Based on purpose, he further classified the state into two categories, i.e. pure state and perverted state. A pure state works for the good of the citizens; on the other hand, the perverted state exploits citizens at large. Similarly, based on the number of rulers, the state is classified into three more categories: monarchy, a rule by one, aristocracy, a rule by few, and polity, a rule by many. Besides, Aristotle also gives the cycle of state, in which a state originates from monarchy and ends up being democracy. This cycle gets completed and then starts all over again.

ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT OF STATE:

Although the narrative prevailed in Athens before Aristotle has been somewhat different, he defines a state as a community of persons

where each community has a definite purpose that is nothing but good. However, he also asserts that a state is not an ordinary community. He said:

State comes into existence for the sake of life and continues for the sake of good life.

ARISTOTLE'S PRINCIPLE OF CLASSIFICATION OF STATE:

Aristotle classified the state on the principle of:

- Number of rulers
- Purpose of state

He classified the state on the number of rulers, which entails the number of persons who exercise the supreme authority in the state. The purpose of the state entails the objectives for which the supreme authority is exercised.

CLASSIFICATION BASED ON THE PURPOSE OF STATE:

Aristotle classified the state on the basis of the purpose of the state into following two categories

i- PURE STATE:

Pure state aims at the common and collective good, it works for the betterment of citizens. The pure state allowed for the proper functioning of the soul and facilitated flourishing.

ii- PERVERTED STATE:

Perverted state signifies a deviation from the golden mean, leading to excess or deficiency. In a perverted state the ruler is selfish and works for his self-interest.

CLASSIFICATION BASED ON THE NUMBER OF RULERS:

Aristotle classified the state into three categories based on the number of rulers, which are given below.

i- MONARCHY AND TYRANNY:

In a monarchy, a single person rules the state, and that ruler works for the betterment and welfare of his subjects. Aristotle regards monarchy as the best form of government as in monarchy, rulers prioritise national interest over

self interested. He said:

"Monarchy is the one system of government, where power is exercised for the good of all."

According to Aristotle, in a monarchy, when the ruler becomes selfish and corrupt, the monarchy converts into tyranny, which becomes the perverted form of state.

ii. ARISTOCRACY AND OLIGARCHY:

In an aristocracy, the state is ruled by a few people. The ruling class consists of a small group of wealthy and virtuous people, who work to better the citizen.

According to Aristotle, Education and discipline are qualities for suffrage and office holding in aristocracy.

The state under them is a welfare state. However, when ruling class become tainted, corrupt, and ignores the subjects, the aristocracy becomes an oligarchy. Aristotle regards oligarchy as perverted form of state.

iii- POLITY, AND DEMOCRACY:

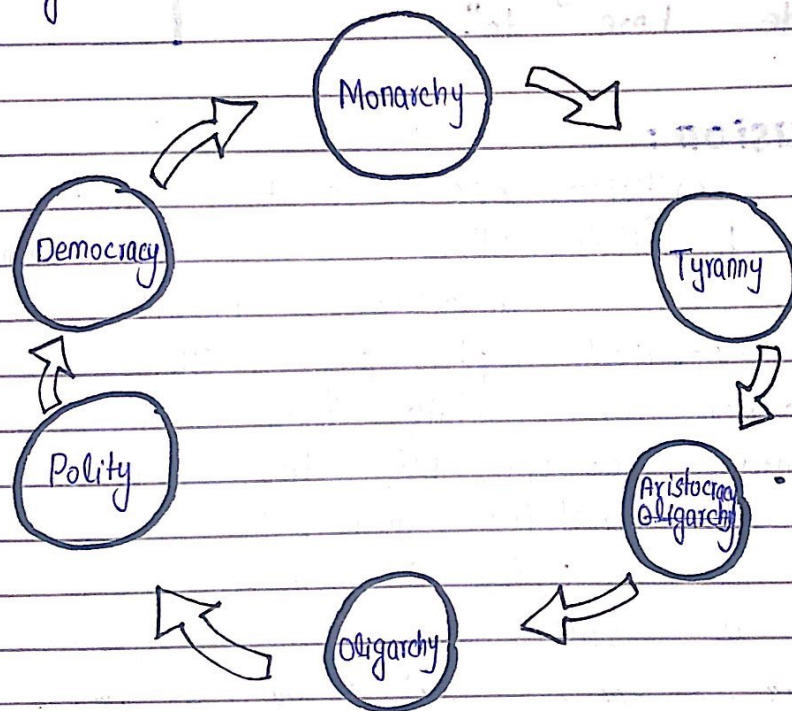
In polity, the state is ruled by the middle class, and many citizens participate in this system. Rulers are elected representative of the people, and they run the state following the desires and will of the people. Polity changes into democracy when this ruling class becomes selfish and corrupt. Aristotle saw dangers in democracy, and in his views, it is the worst form of state: as democracy can easily be converted into tyranny with many heads.

Number of rulers	Pure State	Perverted State
One	Monarchy	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Polity	Democracy.

ARISTOTLE'S CYCLE OF STATE:

Aristotle says that all the states undergo the cycle of change. A state originates from monarchy, that is the single man's virtuous rule. When monarchy is converted into tyranny, it is replaced by an aristocracy. When aristocrats become corrupt, aristocracy turns into an oligarchy. Popular uprising turns

oligarchy into the polity, and polity degenerates into democracy. Ultimately, a supremely virtuous man arises who restores law and order. Thus, the cycle becomes complete and starts all over again.



CRITICAL ANALYSIS :

Aristotle's classification is highly remarkable in political philosophy. His work turned out as a cornerstone for the forthcoming philosophers. However, his classification does not cover all the forms of modern era. As a result, it is often criticized as an unscientific classification and that it did not differentiate between the state and the government.

Gilchrist writes;

"Aristotle's classification was not sufficient for modern forms of government, but it has provided the historical basis of practically all classification made here to".

Conclusion:

Despite criticism, one must admit that Aristotle's theories of classification possess an undeniable importance in political philosophy. The classification of state was the fundamental concept till the 19th century. His Aristotle gave the base to the discipline which the world is still trying to improve.