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# Aristotle

Evaluate Aristotle Classification of Government in detail?

## Aristotle

### Father of Political Science:

The first man to distinguish between various branches of knowledge had been Aristotle.

According to Aristotle,

"Political science is a master science."

Political science pertains to the end of human existence in itself.

"Hierarchy of Ends" implying that each branch of knowledge is merely a means and would ultimately serve the end of leading a good life.

Aristotle works on different aspects such as relation b/w man & states, classification of Governments which is relevant to modern political system also.

## I. Introduction:

Aristotle is regarded as father of political science <sup>also</sup> because he presented the first the first scientific and systematic classification of governments in his famous book **Politics**. His classification based on two fundamental criteria.

1: Number of rulers

2: Purpose of rule (common good or private interest)

He believed the best govt is one which work for common welfare, while the worst form is that which serves the self-interest of rulers.

## II. Aristotle's Basic Principle of Classification:

Aristotle writes in **Politics** (Book III).

"Governments which have a regard to the common interest are constituted in accordance with strict principles of justice, and are therefore true forms; but those which regard only the interest of rulers are defective and perverted forms"

(3)

This quote clearly shows that his classification is **moral or ethical** in nature. The purpose of rule determines whether a government is good or corrupt.

### III. The Six Forms of Government

Aristotle divided government into three pure (correct) forms and three perverted forms.

Numbers of Rulers	Pure Form (Common Good)	Perverted Form (Self-interest)
One	Monarchy	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Polity	Democracy Extreme-form.

#### A. Aristotle Pure Form of Government.

##### I. Monarchy:

Monarchy is the ruler of one "one person for common good". Aristotle believed that if a ruler is exceptionally virtuous, monarchy can be best form of govt.

Aristotle states:

"The rule of one is best when he is the best."

Monarchy can be best form if the ruler is morally superior and exceptionally wise. However, monarchy is rare because it depends upon the moral excellence of one individual.

## 2. Aristocracy:

Aristocracy means the rule of

- few virtuous and capable person
- It must be for public welfare
- It is based on merit and wisdom.

Aristotle preferred aristocracy when moral excellence exist among selected group.

This form of govt is best when selected few are morally and intellectually qualified to govern.

In Politics (Book III), Aristotle writes:

"The true form of government are those in which the one, or the few, govern with view to the common interest."

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This shows that Aristocracy is considered a true form because it aims public welfare.

### Features of Aristocracy:

- (i) Rule of few selected individuals
- (ii) Based on virtue and merit, not wealth
- (iii) Work for common interest.
- (iv) Oppose corruption, class dominance.

According to Aristotle, the rule of best and more virtuous citizens for the common good is best when it based on morality.

## 3: Polity

In <sup>his</sup> famous work Politics, Aristotle describes Polity is the third and more practical form of government.

Polity means the "rule of many people for common good" It is mixed constitution, combining elements of democracy and oligocracy. He considered polity most stable and workable system because it avoids the extreme of both rich and poor dominance.

## In Politics (Book IV) Aristotle states:

"The polity is mixture of oligarchy and democracy."

He also emphasized the importance of middle class.

"The best political community is formed by citizen of the middle class."

It shows that polity is based on balance moderation and public welfare.

### Features of Polity

- (i) Rule of majority
- (ii) Government works for common interest.
- (iii) Strong middle class support.
- (iv) Based on law and constitutional principle.
- (v) Balanced political system

Aristotle regarded polity as the most pure form of government, because it ensures stability through balance and the dominance of middle class. It aims common good and prevent class conflict.

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## B: Aristotle Corrupt Forms of Government

Aristotle identified three corrupt forms, each being degenerated version of pure form.

### 1: Tyranny (Corrupt form of monarchy)

Tyranny is the perverted form of monarchy. It is "rule of one person for his own benefit"

Aristotle write in Politics (Book IV)

"Tyranny is monarchy exercising the rule of master over political society."

He further states.

"No freeman shall be a slave a tyrant"

Tyranny is based on fear, oppression, and selfish power. Aristotle consider it is the worst form of government because it destroys justice and equality.

## 2: Oligarchy (Corrupt form of Aristocracy)

Oligarchy is perverted form of Aristocracy. It is "rule of few people for their own class interest."

Aristotle defines it as:

"Oligarchy is when men of property have the government in their hands."

Here, wealth become the qualification for political power instead of virtue, and merit. This create inequality and social conflict. In this sort of government

i Rule of few wealthy people.

ii Power is based on wealth, not virtues.

iii Policies favour the rich class only.

This create inequality and class conflict.

## 3: Extreme Democracy (Corrupt form of Polity)

Rule of poor majority for their own class interest. In this form of govt

Majority ignores law and minority rights, can lead to mob-rule.

(9)

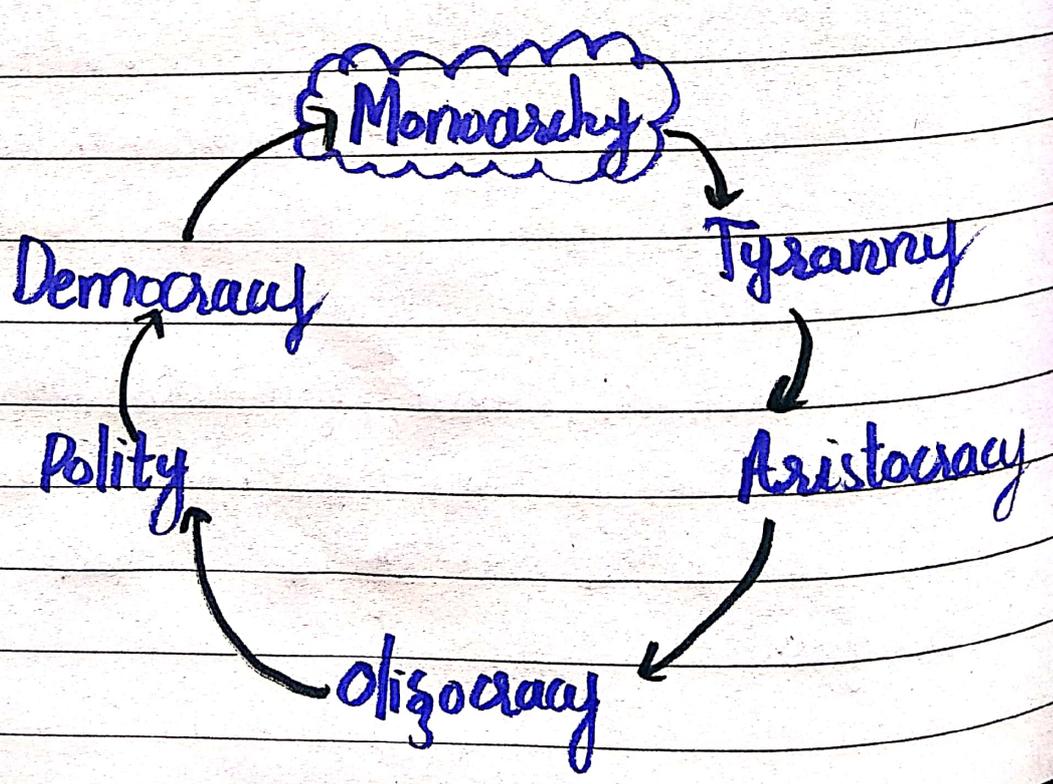
In this government, majority rule for their own advantage.

In Politics (Book III), Aristotle states

"Democracy is when the indigent, and not the men of property, are the rulers"

He emphasized this form of govt may ignore law, promote mob rule instead of justice. However Aristotle concept of democracy differs from modern democracy.

He has provided the cycle of change of governments over time. Kingship is normal form of government, turn tyranny when there is absence of control over the monarchs power. Tyranny leads to rebellion or revolution by few individuals, who establish Aristocracy. It can deteriorate and turn into oligarchy the perverted form. With time, a greater many rebels against oligarchy and superside it with polity. Polity further decay in rules, when many rulers begin to seek their self interest. In this they also lead to monarchy, because it's perverted form continue in a circular motion.



## IV. Merit of Aristotle's classification

### 1. Scientific Approach:

Aristotle studied 158 constitution of Greek city-states before forming his theory. Therefore his classification is empirical and comparative.

### 2. Moral Foundation:

His form of government, theories were primarily based on morality.

His concepts politics with ethics and justice. Government is judged on basis of their purpose.

### 3. Political Realism.

Unlike Plato, Aristotle did not propose and ideal and imaginary state. His theory based on practical observation.

His political concept is closely related to modern concept except democracy.

### 4. Concept of Mixed Government.

He <sup>had</sup> given mixed form of government (democracy & oligarchy). His ideas of polity laid foundations for modern constitutional democracy.

### 5. Influences on later Thinkers:

His classification influenced later political philosophers and constitutional theories.

### V. Criticism of Aristotle's Classification

His concept of classification was unique at one hand, but at the other sides there were small

1: limited by Greek City-States.

His theory was designed for small states, not modern nation-states.

2: Misinterpretation of Democracy:

Modern democracy is based on representation and rule of laws, not mob rule as Aristotle feared.

3: No Concept of Sovereignty:

He did not discuss sovereignty, separation of power, political parties, constitutional monarchy.

4: Rigid Classification

Modern governments are complex, cannot be strictly placed in one category.

5: Overemphasis on morality.

In modern days, Government cannot always be evaluated purely on modern grounds.

## VI. Modern Relevance:

Despite its limitations, Aristotle's classification remains relevant: to modern political system and forms of government, which described as.

- The idea of rule for common good is still standard to judge government.
  - His concept of mixed government resembles modern parliamentary systems.
  - The emphasis on middle class stability is still valid in political analysis.
- In this way, his political thoughts are still linked to modern political system.

## VII. Conclusion

Aristotle classification of govt is landmark contribution to political science. By distinguishing govts on basis of number of rulers or purpose of rulers he produced systematic and ethical framework for political analysis. Although his theory limited to Greek-ancient condition but At's core principle the Government must serves the common good remain universally aplicable. Therefore Aristotle classification continue to be a foundational theory in political thoughts.