

The paradox of democracy assignment



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ Like the best life, the best system of government is conducted in accordance with excellence. ” (Aristotle, N. Ethics 1295a- 25) In terms of Democracy, Plato and Aristotle differ extensively. For instance, Plato considers Democracy as a fundamentally corrupted form of government, where the possession of power rests upon the will of the masses, which for Plato are incapable of achieving true knowledge. Conversely, Aristotle recognizes Democracy among the best forms of governance. However, he argues that democratic rule, if exercised in the form of Polity, will eventually lead society to pursue the best life.

Moreover, for the purpose of this essay I will concentrate in analyzing Plato and Aristotle’s works with respect to democracy in terms of: political participation, authority and freedom. Since their interpretations of such concepts are, in my mind, distinctions that can be compared and contrasted alongside. Nevertheless, it is precisely in terms of democracy that we have to acknowledge, and take into account the concerns of perspective and backgrounds that shape the similarities and differences in Plato and Aristotle’s judgments of it.

For instance, their theory’s leading premises can definitely be seen as a major difference in perspective, since while Plato is seeking for the absolute city with the perfect type of society, Aristotle aims for the most attainable form of government with the existent society. Therefore, we shall see how Plato and Aristotle’s main doctrines influence their understanding of democracy. First, in terms of political participation both philosophers differ profoundly. On one hand, Aristotle thinks that a citizen’s engagement in political activities is an important feature of a good life.

For example, such argument seems implicit, in both, his doctrine that man is a political animal (POL 1253a-8), and his definition of a citizen. Since for him “ A citizen in common parlance is the person who has a share in ruling and being ruled; in the best system of government [namely, a polity] on which a citizen is both, able and willing to rule and be ruled in accordance with a life lived with excellence as its aim. ” (POL. 1283b-42) On the other hand, in Plato’s conception of good governance, there is not space for political participation.

In fact, his Kallipolis portrays a city in which the political activity, if any at all, is relegated only to the philosopher kings. However, we could argue that the reason for the inexistence of political affairs in Plato’s city is mostly due to the peculiar understanding of justice, in addition to the city inhabitants’ conviction on their role within society. Additionally, in contrast to Plato’s doctrine of political rule, in which the philosopher kings are the only ones capable of exercising power, Aristotle’s conceptions of political rulership and power, also expose the value of political participation.

For instance, according to Aristotle one of the premises of political rule is precisely the alternation of power among equals, with respect to ruling and being ruled in turn. (POL. 1288a-15) Nevertheless, we have to acknowledge the fact that neither Plato, nor Aristotle thought about political participation in a truly democratic sense. In fact, while Plato completely disregards a society’s necessity of political action. Aristotle argumentation about it, somehow shows an elitist connotation. Specially, if we take into account who he considers able to freely participate in decision making.

Second, in terms of authority, both Aristotle and Plato agree on the belief that in a democracy, authority is exercised by the majority who seeks for its own benefit. Additionally, we could argue that most of Plato's dislike with democracy, lies in the fact democracy is precisely the government that leaves its control upon the masses, which for him are incapable of acquiring the Form of the Good. (REP. 330d-5) On the other hand, while Plato acknowledges only one possibility of democratic rule, always a fundamentally corrupted one.

Aristotle, on the other hand, recognizes four, which he divides according to the existing participation level. (POL. 1297b-37) In addition, Aristotle and Plato fundamentally disagree in the conception of positive outcomes with democratic governance. Specifically, Aristotle argues that if and only if the majority exercises its power according to the rule of law, the majority's will is considered as valid, since only by following the principles of law a society can achieve the best life. (POL 1295a) Conversely, Plato clearly rejects the possibility of any positive consequence under democratic authority.

Since according to him, the masses' possession of political authority in a democracy appears to be the complete negation of social order and hierarchy. (REP. 556a-10) Third, there are two major aspects in which Plato and Aristotle criticize democratic freedom. For instance, Plato criticizes democracy mainly because he argues that the particular way in which a democratic government exercises freedom allows individuals to behave lawlessly; therefore living upon their desires. (REP 557a-5) In contrast, Aristotle recognizes two important elements of freedom in a democracy.

First, he acknowledges as positive the fact that in a democracy freedom can be understood as the possibility of rule and being ruled in turn. (POL 1317a-40) Next, like Plato, Aristotle criticizes democracy based on the idea that for him, it symbolizes the rule of the majority that has the liberty to act without constraints. (POL 1317b-13) Additionally, Plato and Aristotle are equally critics of the democratic perception of freedom. In fact, they claim that such perception is completely misguided.

Particularly, since democracy bases equality in the concept of freedom, rather than in merit and justice; situation that often produce instability. Consequently, for both Aristotle and Plato, this is major flaw in democracy because if a society guides itself upon such understanding of freedom. It will soon comprehend justice as whatever the majority decides, which opposes altogether both philosophers' principle of justice. Finally, in order to see how Plato and Aristotle's main doctrines influence their understanding of democracy. I consider necessary to first highlight individually their particular concepts and arguments.

Since only by being able to distinguish the differences between Plato and Aristotle's political thought, one would be able to address their conception of democracy more profoundly. On one hand, in the Republic, Plato attempts to create a utopian prototype of society, the Kallipolis, which characteristics are built upon the idea of the optimal state. Furthermore, in the outline of the Kallipolis, Plato exposes some of his most characteristic political arguments, such as the concepts of the Kallipolis' societal division, the exercise of power and rulership, and justice.

For instance, Plato argues that the adequate roles of the citizens and their relationship with the state will be based on an individual's capacities, and the nature of their souls. Additionally, Plato divides the Kallipolis into three different social classes, the philosopher kings, intellectual and moral leaders, the auxiliary, and finally the money makers, those designated to produce material goods, given the fact that their souls are primarily ruled by their appetites and desires.

Consequently, democratic values of political participation and authority are clearly opposed to Plato's doctrines. Since in a democracy, political participation and authority are open to all citizens, whereas for Plato, such activity is relegated only to the philosopher kings. In the Republic, Plato also deals with the nature of justice. In fact, the Republic starts by discussing justice, which leads to the creation of the ideal state. Plato considers justice as a quality of an individual's soul.

Therefore, he sees justice as an ethical virtue, in which men set aside the irrational tendency of looking for pleasure, and the selfish habits of seeking personal benefit in every single action. For Plato, the optimal society can be understood as the most just one. Additionally, his assertion of justice, with respect to the state and its society, comprehends the fact that an ideal society is the one where all people would have the conviction that their role in life is just, and would carry out the responsibilities of such role without protest.

Therefore, the values of democratic freedom contrast Plato's idea of justice because given his societal inflexibility of behavior, a democratic society

represents the complete opposite, since a democracy allows people to choose among the roles they would like to exercise in within society, without restrictions in terms of property or wealth. On the other hand, Aristotle's political philosophy, in which the theoretical concerns are primarily practical, also deal with the concepts, like Plato, of social division, rulership and power, as well as justice.

However, Aristotle, contrary to Plato, is mainly concern about the achievement of the best political system or constitution. Nonetheless, his main goal is not only to accomplish the best type of government, but also to achieve the form of the best life. And he argues that “ to seek out what is the best system of government, it is first necessary to define what the most desirable life is. ” (POL. 1323a-15) Additionally, in the Politics, he attempts to outline the way in which the administration of government should be carried out.

In fact, after the study and evaluation of several kinds of constitutions, among them Democracy, Aristotle presents one the most important aspects of his political theory; the concept of Polity as the optimal system of government. Aristotle argues that Polity is the optimal way of governing because it requires a balance between social classes (POL. 1293b-33) In fact, Polity can be understood as the best type of democracy because it is a form of government that is controlled by different sections of the population in such a way, that the rich and the poor coexist and share the administration of government.

However, what is extremely particular about Aristotle's political thought ? in this social class sense ? is the importance on achieving a type balance among social classes, which is the main difference between democracy and polity. Particularly, Aristotle clearly argues about the importance on the existence of a middle class within society, in order to attain stability. (NE. 1101a-14) Additionally, in the Politics, Aristotle also deals with the concept of Justice.

He, like Plato, considers justice as a necessary characteristic of a perdurable state. However, one of the main differences between both theories is the fact that Plato considers justice, either group or individual, as an ethical virtue; therefore, limiting its existence to a metaphysical scope. Conversely, in the Politics, Aristotle addresses justice as being a communal virtue, thence a compromise, which is in everybody's interest because it benefits the whole city state (POL. 283a-36) Therefore, Aristotle claims that democracy's understanding of freedom, merely as equality, is a fallacy. Because it compromises the term of justice to be whatever the majority decides, which contrast, both Aristotle and Plato's doctrines of justice. ??? Bibliography 1.

Platon. Apologia de Socrates. Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria, 1986 2.

Plato, The Republic, translated by C. D. C. Reeve, Cambridge: Hackett

Publishing Company Inc, 2004 3. Aristotle, The Politics, translated by C. D. C.

Reeve, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc, 1998,