

Assessment of polity and aristocracy



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Compare Aristotle's relative assessments of polity and aristocracy. Which regime does he prefer? On what basis does he prefer one over the other? Is his preference convincingly defended?

Different types of politics are exercised in countries all over the world. It is widely discussed, studied, and practiced in different forms of administration all over the world today. Many influential philosophers and political scientists of the modern day world base their knowledge of politics on the studies, books and thoughts written by respectable philosophical scholars of the past. Aristotle, a renowned Greek philosopher discusses politics in a sequence of books called Politics. In Politics, Aristotle establishes an importance of human excellence by setting out causal principles for a clear understanding of nature of all political philosophy. Throughout his observation in the books in Politics, Aristotle sets out the conditions of a perfect state in order to fulfill the best way of life. He states in Books VII of Politics that investigating to find the best regime is essential to one's life and emphasizes the importance preserving merits of virtue as an essential goal of politics to maintain freedom, stability and happiness. To investigate the regime Aristotle values, it is important to interrelate Aristotle's " way of life" with the characteristics of a regime that he would prefer. This essay will introduce the six different types of constitutions that Aristotle examines in Politics, and will compare the common practices of the regimes polity and aristocracy. The analysis of the two regimes, polity and aristocracy will further reveal Aristotle's preference of the political system, polity.

Aristotle adapts Plato's " six-fold classification" chart from his book Statesmen and categorizes the six possible types of constitutions into two

groups; the correct constitution, and the deviant. Under the “ deviant” constitution lies tyranny, oligarchy and democracy; and underneath the possible “ correct” constitution, kingship, aristocracy and polity remains. Aristotle creates the notion of two types of humans; individuals that were of “ nature free” and of “ nature slaves”. He then separates the naturally free persons into two types; the prosperous oligarchs and the democrats. With the three “ deviant” types of constitutions evident, Aristotle sought to find a superlative regime by taking the good traits of the erroneous regimes.

An analysis of Polity and Aristocracy

Polity is among one of the constitutions that Aristotle believes it to be one of the correct forms of ruling. Polity is “ a mixture of oligarchy and democracy.” Oligarchy is the rule of the few, in general consisting of the wealthy citizens and democracy, rule of the people, whereas the ruling class of the poor. In polity, power between the oligarchs and democrats is shared among the rich and the poor creating a balance of power among the different types of classes. It is viewed as the most stable and practical regime to Aristotle. Polity takes out the best qualities of oligarchy and democracy creating a regime in which the interests of the poor and the rich are balanced. For example, the mixture of the two constitutions is made by including some of the characteristics usually related with democracy, such as a legislative body open to all citizens, with other qualities generally linked with oligarchy such as election to high bureaus.

Aristotle places an importance of the middle class in polity. In book IV, he identifies the class of a city into three parts; the rich, the poor, and middle class. He states that “ it is evident that in the case of the goods of fortune as <https://assignbuster.com/assessment-of-polity-and-aristocracy/>

well a middling possession is the best of all. For [a man of moderate wealth] is readiest to obey reason, while for one who is [very wealthy or very poor] it is difficult to follow reason. The former sort tend to become arrogant and base on a grand scale, the latter malicious and base in petty ways; and acts of injustice are committed either through arrogance or through malice.”

Aristotle suggests that an individual from the middle class are liberated from superciliousness that embodies the wealthy and the resentment that depicts the poor.

Aristocracy is a type of regime ruled by the best few chiefly those from a noble family as oppose to polity that consists of many rulers. In book III of Politics, A “ a monarchy that looks to the common benefit we customarily call a kingship; and rule by a few but more than one”, is viewed as an aristocracy by Aristotle. In Politics III, Aristotle discusses aristocracy to be the “ rule of the few” for the general benefit. A second definition is given in the later of Politics III, where he states aristocracy as a constitution with a “ view to what is best for the city and for those who participate in it.” Aristocracies rule lies upon tradition and judgement. Partisanship in an aristocratic constitution was merely hereditary, not through accomplishments and morality.

Aristotle’s preference of regime

To determine the regime Aristotle prefers, it is important to include the characteristics of the “ best regime” and the “ rule of the best” that Aristotle defines to be of importance in book VII of Politics. “ Concerning the best regime, one who is going to undertake the investigation appropriate to it must necessarily discuss first what the most choice worthy way of life is. As long as this is unclear, the best regime must necessarily be unclear as <https://assignbuster.com/assessment-of-polity-and-aristocracy/>

well..." Polity is a type of regime ruled in the interests of all, upper, middle and lower classes. It is a regime where citizens are viewed equal and are able to have the opportunity to rule under the law. Polity is populated by an acceptable number of middle class that subsequently dominates over the wealthy and the poor. As a result, some inequalities may be present in polity whereas the rich and the poor minority are represented in few numbers while the middle class represents the majority. However, Aristotle overlooks the details of inequality in polity and finds reasoning as to why polity is a best regime. In book IV of Politics, Aristotle states..

" It is clear therefore also that the political community administered by the middle class is the best, and that it is possible for those states to be well governed that are of the kind in which the middle class is numerous, and preferably stronger than both the other two classes... Hence it is the greatest good fortune if the men that have political power possess a moderate and sufficient substance, since where some own a very great deal of property ..

By implying that " the political community administered by the middle class is best" Aristotle's preference of polity as an ideal state is clearly evident. He concerns himself with the balance of power in polity amongst the different classes as means to achieve peace, virtue and maintain freedom within the state. Although the regime polity might instil a few inequalities because of the wealthy and impoverished minority, in Aristotle says that " the ideal state all lead the middle class life of moral virtue and that the citizens have a share in the government." As for aristocracy, Aristotle does not show enough enthusiasm of aristocracy as the ideal state in Politics although he has referenced in Nicomachean Ethics, the " good life is the end of the city -

state”, “ that is life consisting of noble actions.” “ Noble actions” mentioned refers to the noble elites that rule over a city-state, typically in an aristocratic regime. However Aristotle’s remarks of aristocracy as the best regime stated in few parts of his works should be disregarded as there is more evidence of him preferring polity as the supreme regime.

There are indeed some flaws to polity. In volume IV of Politics, Aristotle states, “ whichever of the two succeeds in dominating its opponents does not establish a regime that is common or equal, but they grasp for pre-eminence in the regime as the prize of victory.” Aristotle believes that a regime like polity would never exist because if one of the social classes such as lower or upper class obtains power, then that specific class will only carry out matters that will benefit themselves rather than considering the interests of the other groups. However, Aristotle states that in an ideal regime, the balance of power will remain and that thought of self-interests will not occur because the middle class will hold majority of the power.

To Aristotle, a constitution consisting of virtue, property and freedom is generally referenced to polity. His preference of polity is moderately defended in parts of Politics, however since the best regime discussed in Politics is unidentified, it is hard to clearly state that ultimate best regime referenced in Politics is polity. Many characteristics of the regime that Aristotle discusses in book VII of Politics relates to both aristocracy and polity, depending on the view one takes it. Because of the ambiguities and controversies regarding the order of the books listed in Politics, Aristotle’s theory of polity being the ideal regime is weak and questionable. In volume VII of Politics, Aristotle describes the best city as a city that “...is happy and

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acts nobly. It is impossible to act nobly without acting [to achieve] noble things; but there is no noble deed either of a man or of a city that is separate from virtue and prudence.” A deeper examination of this text taken from VII of Politics can be questioned for a couple of reasons. Firstly, what is regarded as “ happy” and what acts regarded as “ nobly”; and from what deed is an action deemed to be a “ noble” deed?

In conclusion, after assessing the two regimes, polity and aristocracy, as regarded to be one of the “ correct” regimes under the “ six-fold classification” chart, indicates Aristotle’s preference of the constitution called polity as the principal ideology of ideal order. Evidence in his works Politics display Aristotle of polity over aristocracy for reasons such as many rulers of polity will represent the interests of all classes of the hierarchy. Polity emphasizes on the importance of citizens having a share in the government where they are able to attain property and are in “ good circumstances.” For when equal share of power among classes is apparent in a regime, then the virtuous acts and happiness is manifested in the state.

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