Plato and aristotles best form of constitution politics essay

Both Plato and Aristotle believed that the best form of government is " rule by the best," or Aristocracy. This word did not mean for them " rule by the ruling class," as it did in early modern Europe; they really believed that only the smartest, most temperate, most mature, most reflective, most educated, and the bravest should be in charge of government, that is, only the best (the Greek word for " best" is aristos).

For Plato, the ideal city was one which mirrored the kosmos, on the one hand, and the individual on the other. As he described in The Republic, the ideal city, or polis, was one based on justice and human virtue. It was a form of social and political organization that allowed individuals to maximize their potentialities, serve their fellow citizens, and live in accordance with universal laws and truths.

A city's constitution is the organisation of its magistracies or offices. Every ordered state has a constitution, since every such state has some organisation of magistracies (Aristotle, Politics 278 b9, 1289 b15, 1290 a8-9). In Aristotle's teleological philosophy organisation is always for the sake of some end or purpose.

The true end or purpose of the state, he says, is to help its members live, and to live a good life. Constitutions which aim at the good life for the citizens are true constitutions; those which aim at the good of the rulers only are perversions (Aristotle, Politics 1279 a17-21). There are echoes here of Plato; remember in The Republic Socrates' argument with Thrasymachus, in which Socrates argued that government is an art the purpose of which is to further the good of the governed.

" Aristocracy". Rule by the best (aristos). In practice this usually meant rule by the well-born, those of noble family, who referred to themselves as " the best people".

" The generic name a constitution" or " polity" (politeia, constitution). In modern English " polity" is not a common word, but when it is used it means form of government or type of constitution; thus one might speak of a democratic polity or a monarchical polity. Aristotle uses " polity" both in that way, as the generic name for a constitution of any sort, and as the name of one of the sorts. One of the kinds of polity is " polity", i. e. the polity or form of government in which all citizens rule and is ruled in turn. The idea of polity is that all citizens should take short turns at ruling. It is an inclusive form of government: everyone has a share of political power. He sometimes calls it " polity", sometimes " political" or " constitutional" government — these are interchangeable.

" Oligarchy", the generic name for rule by a few, is also the name of one kind of rule by the few, the perverted kind which seeks to further the interest of the wealthy few.

" Democracy" means literally rule by the people, but Aristotle and other ancient writers use it to mean rule exclusively by the poor in their own interest.

Classification of Constitutions

Good

Bad

One
Kingship

Tyranny

Few
Aristocracy

Oligarchy

Many
Polity

Democracy

The " good" and " bad" columns come from Plato. This is the classification put forward by Plato. Plato used " democracy" for both kinds of rule by the many, because he saw little difference between good and bad rule by many. Democracy is too weak to do much good and at its worst too weak to do much harm, according to Plato.

" If, however, there be some one person, or more than one whose virtue is so preeminent that the virtues or the political capacity of all the rest admit of no comparison with his or theirs", then he or they should be supreme and not bound by laws (Aristotle, Politics 1284 a3-17); that is, under those

circumstances the city should be governed by a king or an aristocracy unfettered by rules and laws. Aristotle often alludes to this ideal constitution (Aristotle, Politics 1284 b25-35, 1288 a7-30, 1289 a30-2, 1293 b25-8, 1332 b17-25). But whereas Plato calls the seventh the true constitution and the others imitations, Aristotle calls three of the others " true", and mentions the seventh only incidentally. In Aristotle, Politics attention is focussed mostly not on the ideal form of government but on the " second best", or best practicable. A similar point is made in (Aristotle, Politics 1290 a30-b20). The criticism Aristotle is making here is that Plato's classification obscures the really significant dividing line, which is not between the few and the many but between the rich and the poor.

In chapter 8, the discussion (Aristotle, Politics 1309a) of the grounds on which various groups claim power in the state was very carefully detailed.

These groups include the rich and the poor, and also the well-born (those who come from noble families) and the virtuous. The discussion continues to the end of chapter 13 (Aristotle, Politics 1297a). It begins with a consideration of the purpose for which the state exists, because this will determine who should rule. The discussion reaches no firm conclusions, but Aristotle seems to favour the Platonic view that power should be held by the virtuous.

This brings us to the question whether the poor or the rich should rule? " If the poor, because they are more in number, divide among themselves the property of the rich, is not this unjust?" (Aristotle, Politics 1281a 13-15). " Again, when in the first division all has been taken, and the majority divide

anew the property of the minority, is it not evident, if this goes on, that they will ruin the state?"(Aristotle, Politics 1281a18).

This is an answer to some of Plato's arguments against democracy.

" Among them they understand the whole" (Aristotle, Politics 1281 b9). They need to discuss, and communicate to all, or most, what each has understood; and for this they may not have the necessary time, goodwill or ability.

" To assign them some deliberative and judicial functions but not allow them to hold office singly" (Aristotle, Politics 1281 b30). This is in effect a combination of oligarchy and democracy. Aristotle himself thinks that the best practicable state, the one in which virtue has the best chance of influence, is one in which some political functions are assigned to the many poor and other functions to the few rich, so as to produce a balance of the classes.

" All professions and arts" (Aristotle, Politics 1282a). Plato holds that government is, or can be, an art, and infers that only a few should rule because only a few can master any art. Aristotle suggests that " the intelligent man who has studied the art", but not enough to be a practitioner, may be a good judge. Also, the " consumer" may be better than the producer at judging the quality of the product (Aristotle, Politics 1282a17).

Plato set forth a five-fold classification to describe how the city ought to be governed. The best form of government, he argued, was an aristocratic model based on the ruler ship of philosopher kings. A second form of

government he called timocracy, or rule by a privileged elite of guardians, or strong men. Oligarchy, the third type, consisted of rule " by the few." The remaining two, democracy and tyranny represented rule by the many.

According to Plato, the ideal city had to be an enlightened one, one based on the highest universal principles. He insisted that only individuals who were committed to these truths, who could protect and preserve them for the sake of the common good, were fit to rule the city.

Becoming a philosopher king, or an ideal ruler, involved a rigorous course of study that extended into mid-life; Plato, Republic 540a. The ideal ruler was therefore someone chosen by an inner calling, or daimon, not by circumstance or privilege. Therefore, the ideal ruler was not someone chosen by circumstance or privilege so much as by an inner calling, or daimon. This point is crucial because it distinguishes Plato's ideal city from those of other thinkers who shared Plato's faith in guardianship but favoured oligarchical systems of government.

Aristotle drew heavily on Plato's vision but also criticized what he saw as its excessively idealistic nature. He believed that Plato's republic could never exist in the real world.

In any case, Aristotle made a number of improvements on Plato's ideal in the interest of making it more practically useful. In his view, there were three basic forms of political organization, rule of the one, rule of the few, and rule of the many. The first form, at its best, led to monarchy; at its worst, to tyranny, the second, at its best, to aristocracy; at its worst, to oligarchy. And

the third, at its best, to something he called politeia; at its worst, to democracy.

Aristotle maintained that both monarchy and aristocracy were ideal forms of government, in the sense that they were virtually impossible to achieve in reality. He therefore invented a third form which drew from the unique strengths of both, politeia. This form combined rule of law and rule by the few. It was a brilliant formulation that incorporated many of Plato's key elements (such as guardianship, the idea of self-sufficiency, and the critical role of law) while making it more practical and thereby attainable. For example, he introduced land ownership and ruler ship by lot as crucial elements of the ideal polis, while dispensing with what he considered unrealistic concepts such as distributive justice and voluntary rule.

Aristotle a student of Plato, who himself did not like democracy, because the democratic assembly of Athens condemned Socrates to death. Aristotle himself fell victim to the same assembly and was banished from Athens.

All the major Greek philosophers thought democracy was the worst form of government. Plato, in his critique of democracy in The Republic, claims that it allows people to follow all their passions and drives without order or control (Plato, Republic 557 – 558); Aristotle claimed that the competing interest in a democracy makes for chaos rather than purposive and deliberated action. Democracy did not seem to work very democratically at all, in fact. In Athens, the democratic Assembly was usually dominated by a single powerful, charismatic individual; this individual often dominated the Assembly because of his presence or oratorical skill rather than his individual

worth. As a result, the democratic governments could make some surprisingly foolish decisions, such as the Athenian decision to attack Sicily without any cause or provocation. This ill-considered war destroyed much of the Athenian fleet and eventually led to the defeat of Athens by Sparta. The position of these charismatic leaders, however, was always very precarious. The democratic Assemblies could change character overnight; they would often eagerly follow a particular leader, and then exile that leader often for no reason (this is Aristotle's central objection to a democracy).

If you can remember in the painting The School of Athens, Plato is pointing up because of his immaterial views (god, the afterlife). Then you will notice Aristotle pointing forward to demonstrate that his views develop from what is in front of him. Plato generally believes in ideas and focuses on the soul, the forms and the good. In Book 7 Plato spoke of the allegory of the cave and how only the philosopher kings were able to see the light (Plato, Republic 514a), Whereas, Aristotle is a natural scientist who studies nature, his views were that the way the natural world works is the way the world works, basically everything is part of a larger organic pod and nature has a plan for everything, nothing is created without a purpose because things are naturally related.

In my view I think Plato's work in more than intriguing, he has a lot of views that are really interesting, but also it can be said that many of his ideas can be debated negatively either in his time or ours. I am of the belief that people would never agree with his ideas of state building, and his idea of the philosopher king, and so hence, his ideas were never brought to life, but in the same breath has left a great legacy for future generations to analyse. In

comparison, there is Aristotle who is very critical of Plato's ideas. Aristotle is a very practical person, whose philosophy I can explicitly say makes better sense when it comes to state building and the way the world works. He also had a view of which I really agree with and that was " laws should rule not men".