



ARISTOTLE'S PHILOSOPHY

Dr. Anil Kumari, Associate Prof. Political Science

Shaheed Udham Singh Government College, Matak Majri (Karnal), Haryana

ABSTRACT

With an emphasis on his political theory, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Politics*, this research paper on "Aristotle's Philosophy" discusses the profound insights and ongoing significance of his philosophical concepts. The study examines Aristotle's political philosophy, which emphasises the significance of a well-functioning state in achieving individual and social flourishing, delving into his thorough grasp of human nature and the structure of societies. It also looks at his well-known essay *Nicomachean Ethics*, which investigates the nature of morality, moral character, and the quest for eudaimonia. The *Politics* by Aristotle, which offers a detailed analysis of various kinds of governance and their benefits and drawbacks, is the subject of the paper's final analysis. This research article highlights the ongoing relevance of Aristotle's philosophical works through a careful analysis of his ideas and their implications for contemporary political and ethical discourse.

KEYWORDS

Epistemology, Ethics, Lyceum, Metaphysics, *Nicomachean*, Poetics, Politics, Regimes Rhetoric Virtue

INDRODUCTION

With his important contributions to numerous disciplines, including logic, metaphysics, physics, biology, ethics, rhetoric, poetics, and politics, Aristotle stands out in the history of philosophy. Aristotle, a Plato pupil, was an active researcher, lecturer, and author. Known in the Middle Ages simply as "the Philosopher," Dante referred to him as "the master of those who know," and he wrote up to 200 treatises, of which we only have thirty-one. His was the initial attempt to divide knowledge into discrete fields like physics, biology, and ethics. The works of Aristotle can be divided into three categories: dialogues, scientific treatises, and systematic works. The systematic works are typically divided into the following categories: logical works, which include categories, on interpretation, prior analytics, posterior analytics, topics, on sophisticated refutations; physical works, which include physics, on the heavens, on generation and corruption, meteorology; metaphysics; psychological works, which include on the soul, on memory, reminiscence, dreams and prophecy; works on natural history, which include history of animals, on the parts of animals, on the natural history of plants.



Our access to Aristotle's political philosophy is through his practical writings, particularly his *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Politics*, and *Rhetoric*. These writings are not straightforward scientific treatises since, unlike theoretical sciences; we seek practical sciences for the benefits they provide rather than only for the sake of knowing. The perfect practical science is political science.

According to Aristotle, the architectonic science is the one that organises all other sciences, including medicine and agriculture, because it is generally focused on the human good, or happiness.

Human actions, or things related to them, are what practical science is all about. These are dynamic subjects. The method used in Aristotle's practical writings—rather than a philosophical inference from nature or human nature—is dialectical investigation of the viewpoints of various men or groups of men. Along with philosophers, the works' audience includes ordinary people and politicians. Aristotle also does not create a lexicon that is overly technical and unrelated to political life. In actuality, all of the important phrases used in practical works come directly from political life. We shouldn't expect the same level of precision in the practical realm as in the technical sciences or mathematics since human things are variable. The realm of application deals with viewpoints on what is a right, honourable, beneficial, or detrimental thing that are inherently controversial and about which men passionately disagree.

Political Theory of Aristotle

The reader is brought back to earth when they turn from the *Ethics* treatises to their follow-up, the *Politics*. Aristotle claims that since people are made of flesh and blood and coexist with one another in cities and communities, "man is a political animal." Aristotle used theory and observation in his political studies, just like he did in his work on zoology. One state's constitution, *The Constitution of Athens*, has survived on papyrus thanks to him and his students' documentation of 158 other states' constitutions. According to Aristotle, the goal of politics is to determine what qualities constitute excellent governance and what characteristics constitute bad government on the basis of the constitutions amassed, as well as to pinpoint the elements that are favourable or unfavourable to the preservation of a constitution.

According to Aristotle, every community strives towards a certain goal. He refers to the state (polis), which is a city-state like Athens, as the highest type of community with the highest aspirations. Families with masters and slaves make up the most primordial societies. A village is made up of families, and a state, the first self-sufficient society, is made up of multiple villages. The fact that humans have the ability to speak, which is intended to "set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore similarly the just and the unjust," serves as evidence that the state and the family are equally natural institutions. The establishment of the state was the best thing that could have happened because only within a state can human beings fulfill their potential.



According to Aristotle, governments can rule for the good of the people or for the benefit of the rulers. Governments might be in the hands of one person, a small group, or many people. Monarchy and tyranny are terms used to describe different types of single-person rule: one that serves the public interest. Government by a minority is referred to as "aristocracy" if it serves the interests of the state and as "oligarchy" if it exclusively helps the minority in power. Aristotle uses the term "polity" for popular administration that promotes the common good; he reserves the term

"democracy" for anarchic mob control. Aristotle asserts that monarchy is the ideal form of government if a town is home to an exceptional person or family. But because monarchy corrupts into tyranny, which is the worst form of government, such a case is extremely uncommon and there is a high risk of miscarriage.

Aristotle preferred a form of constitutional democracy in practice because what he called a "polity" is a state in which rich and poor respect each other's rights and the best-qualified citizens rule with the consent of all. In theory, an aristocracy is the second-best form of government after a monarchy because the ruling minority will be the best-qualified to rule.

His defense of slavery and his criticism of usury are two aspects of Aristotle's philosophy that have had a long-lasting impact on political institutions in Europe. According to Aristotle, some people believe that the master-slave relationship is unfair and in odds with nature. However, they are mistaken because a slave is a person who is by definition not their own property but rather someone else's. Aristotle acknowledges that in reality, much of slavery is unjust, and he muses that if it were possible to create nonliving machines that could perform menial jobs, there would be no need for slaves as living tools. However, some individuals are so inferior and brutish that it is preferable for them to be under the control of a master than to be left on their own.

Aristotle had an aristocratic contempt for commerce despite not being one himself. He asserts that there are legitimate and improper uses for our possessions. Money has a proper and an improper use; the former involves exchanging it for products and services rather than using it as collateral for interest-bearing loans. "Taking a breed from barren metal" is the most unnatural way to get money.

Metaphysics

The central idea of Aristotle's metaphysical system is substance. According to his theory, everything in the universe is made up of substances, which are a concoction of matter and form. While form refers to an object's structure or essence, matter is the physical substance of an object. Aristotle believed that things' identities and characteristics are derived from their substance. Aristotle divided between primary and secondary substances, two different categories of substances. Primary substances are distinct objects that may exist on their own, like a certain person or tree. On the other hand, secondary substances are groups or categories that were



created by humans, such as "tree" or "animal." According to Aristotle, primary materials are more genuine and fundamental than secondary substances, as they exist independently of human classification.

Aristotle's idea of causality is another important component of his metaphysics, along with his theory of substance. He recognised four causes: material, formal, efficient, and final, and he held that everything in the universe is connected in a cause-and-effect relationship. The formal cause relates to an object's structure or essence, whereas the material cause refers to an object's actual substance. The force that prompts change or action is known as the efficient cause, whereas the intent or end result of anything is known as the final cause.

The concepts of potentiality and actuality are strongly tied to Aristotle's theory of causality. He held the view that everything has the capacity to change and that this capacity is realised via the process of actualization. For instance, the potential for a seed to grow into a tree is realised through a process of growth and development

Epistemology

The foundation of Aristotle's philosophy of knowledge is the idea of perception. He held that knowledge is obtained through the senses and those conceptions and ideas are formed in the mind through the processing of sensory information. According to Aristotle, our senses provide us unprocessed sensory information, which the intellect subsequently transforms into more sophisticated conceptions and ideas.

The two categories of knowledge, according to Aristotle, are theoretical and practical. While practical knowledge focuses on how to behave in the real world, theoretical knowledge is concerned with understanding the nature of things. Practical knowledge is learned by habit and practise, whereas theoretical knowledge is obtained through a process of reflection and comprehension.

Aristotle also created a method of categorization for concepts and ideas known as the theory of categories. He held that there are 10 categories into which all conceptions and ideas might be divided: substance, amount, quality, relation, location, time, position, state, action, and passion. This system of categorization enables us to comprehend and arrange the environment we live in. Overall, Aristotle's ideas on epistemology and metaphysics are intertwined. While his theory of categories enables us to categorise and arrange our knowledge of the world, his theory of substance and causality serves as the theoretical groundwork for his theory of knowledge.



The Nicomachean Ethics

The main topic of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is virtue, particularly ethical or practical virtue, which includes personal qualities like bravery and temperance. Even today, his argument is strong and obvious, and the values he explains are still qualities that we strive for. He contends that the ethical virtues constitute the essence of happiness (as opposed, for example, to limitless accumulation) and set human behaviour apart from animal behaviour that is motivated by pleasure. Each virtue is the tendency to use reasoned judgement while making decisions concerning the things and interests we pursue and interact with. For instance, being moderate is indulging in pleasure in the proper amount, with the proper people, and at the proper time. Aristotle first discusses ten practical virtues, including courage (which deals with fear), moderation (which deals with pleasure), generosity (or liberality), wealth, magnificence (which deals with great expenditures), great pride (or magnanimity), ambition (which deals with lesser honours), and gentleness (or proper anger) (which deals with anger). Each virtue has two distinct vices that are related to it, an excessive and a deficient way of handling the good or emotion. The vices that connect to courage, for instance, are cowardice or haste, or asceticism and licentiousness in relation to pleasure.

Pride is the pinnacle of ethical virtues because it deals with political rule as its primary source of honour, and to possess this virtue is to possess all other virtues as well. In *Ethics*, where he discusses the various forms of justice, Aristotle addresses the relationship between virtue and politics even more thoroughly and directly. For instance, distributive fairness entails providing to equals and to unequals respectively, much as we would give the nicer violin to the better violinist rather than by chance or lot. In *Ethics*, he also discusses moral failings such as friendship and intellectual virtues like theoretical as well as practical reasoning. The best or most honourable application of reason, or the happiest life for those few to whom it is available, is the philosophic life.

How do Aristotle's politics and ethical theory relate to one another? The link comes from Aristotle's belief that character and consequently happiness are derived from habits, and as a result, from laws that encourage positive habits. Politics must also fairly distribute power or "offices" and, if possible, award them to people of moral integrity and sound judgment.

The Politics

According to Aristotle, the regime (the politician or constitution) combines the people and resources of a specific location into a whole whose rules and deeds serve a concept of virtue and happiness. As such, the regime is the centre of political activity. Even though geography, resources, and ethnic makeup are important, it is more significant than these factors. When one considers the stark contrast between Germany under Nazi tyranny and Germany under democracy, one can appreciate the significance of the regime.



Regimes differ in terms of the distribution of offices, the centrality of those offices, and their propensity to advance the common good. Democracies strive to assign positions equally to those who are equally free, and the better ones serve the common good rather than just the majority's class interest. But even the best democracies are inferior to systems like aristocracy and monarchy that aim to distribute positions of power unequally to the morally upright in the name of the greater good. However, all democracies are preferable to tyrannies that serve the tyrant's pleasure and oligarchies that distribute offices to the wealthy inequitably. Wealth, secure freedom, and morality are requirements for all political communities—all cities and nations—so excellent laws serve as a gauge of the rule of law.

Political science is a practical study, thus Aristotle takes into account many regimes that are best in various situations, constantly looking for the type of government that is most unlikely to stray from the common good. In modern parlance, Aristotle is neither an absolutist nor a relativist. He compares politics to training athletes or enhancing one's physical appearance from the perspective of someone who finds a community. By having a clear knowledge of what is best or great, one can identify what is best given the situation while not trying to "absolutely" or harmfully ignore one's limitations or act as if there is no inherent criterion for growth. Aristotle cannot and does not separate pragmatic wisdom altogether from theoretical understanding, although practice occupies its own domain.

In order to fully understand Aristotle's philosophy, one must take into account his critique of Plato's ethical philosophy in the *Ethics*, investigate his conception of the activity or "being at work" of things, such as the soul and its excellence and virtue, and investigate the conception of form, matter, motion, causality, and being that informs his *Physics* and *Metaphysics*. Aristotle's appropriate study may take a lifetime, as it did for many great thinkers of the Middle Ages

Rhetoric and Poetics

According to Aristotle, rhetoric is a subject that examines various persuasion techniques and is not subject-specific. Aristotle provides a methodical and frequently insightful analysis of human emotion in his advice to orators on how to play to their audience's emotions. He deals with each emotion in turn, providing a definition of it as well as a list of its causes and objects.

Though only the first book of the former, which discusses epic and tragic poetry, has survived, *The Poetics* is much more well-known than the *Rhetoric*. The book seeks to address Plato's objections

to representative art, among other things. Material items are imperfect copies of the original, real Forms, in accordance with the idea of forms; therefore, artistic depictions of material objects are simply copies of copies, at a distance from reality. Drama also has a particularly damaging influence since it causes its viewers to feel unworthy feelings.



In response, Aristotle believes that imitation is something that humans naturally do from a young age and is one of the qualities that sets humans apart from animals since it greatly broadens the scope of what is possible.

Aristotle makes a comparison between poetry and history in response to Plato's criticism that playwrights simply imitate daily life, which is only an imitation of the true world of Forms. It is the responsibility of the poet to describe possibilities rather than actual events, i.e., possibilities that are possible because they are necessary or likely to occur. Poetry speaks of the general while history only speaks of the specific, making poetry more intellectual and essential than history. In real life, a lot of what happens to people is purely accidental; only in fiction can one see how a character or action leads to its inevitable results.

Drama has a positive impact on the emotions, contrary to Plato's belief that it debases them. In order to accomplish a "purification" of these emotions, tragedy, according to Aristotle, must include scenes that arouse pity and terror. Nobody is really certain of Aristotle's exact definition of katharsis, or purification. Perhaps what he meant was that tragedy allows people to put their own sorrows and concerns into perspective because they see how even people who are vastly superior to them can be affected by tragedy.

Legacy

The Academy and the Lyceum have traditionally been seen as two opposing philosophical poles since the Renaissance. Aristotle is pragmatic, utilitarian, and commonsense; Plato is idealistic, utopian, and otherworldly. (This point of view is represented in the well-known image of Plato and Aristotle in Raphael's The School of Athens fresco in the Vatican.) In actuality, though, the beliefs that Plato and Aristotle hold in common are more significant than those that separate them. The commentators of late antiquity, who believed it was their responsibility to create a harmonious concord between the two greatest philosophers of the known world, were more astute than many post-Renaissance historians of ideas.

Aristotle's intellectual accomplishment is astounding by any standard. He was history's first actual scientist. He was the first writer whose works have survived that contain in-depth observations of numerous natural occurrences, and he was the first philosopher to master the relationship between observation and theory in scientific technique. He listed the many scientific fields and looked into how they related to one another. The first professor to classify his lectures into courses and place them on a syllabus was him. The first research centre where a number of academics and researchers collaborated on study and documentation was His Lyceum. He was the first person in history to establish a research library, which is crucial, a systematic collection of works to be used by his colleagues and to be handed on to posterity.



ven today, thousands of years later, Plato and Aristotle continue to stake a solid claim to the title of greatest philosophers ever. However, if their contributions to philosophy are equal, Aristotle contributed more to the global intellectual legacy. He owes both philosophers and scientists a debt of gratitude. He merits the moniker Dante bestowed upon him, "the master of those who know."

Works Consulted

Haskins, Ekaterina V. "Endoxa, epistemological optimism, and Aristotle's rhetorical project." *Philosophy & rhetoric* 37, no. 1 (2004): 1-20.

Kraut, Richard. *Aristotle: political philosophy*. Oxford University Press on Demand, 2002.

Lockwood, Thornton, and Thanassis Samaras, eds. *Aristotle's Politics: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

Mulgan, Richard G. *Aristotle's political theory*. Clarendon Press, 1987.

Nussbaum, Martha C. "Aristotle, politics, and human capabilities: A response to Antony, Arneson, Charlesworth, and Mulgan." *Ethics* 111, no. 1 (2000): 102-140.

Simpson, Peter L. Phillips. *A philosophical commentary on the politics of Aristotle*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2000.