
The Views Of Aristotle On Who Should Wield Authority In Government

Aristotle's Politics is divergent to the Republic created by his predecessor Plato. Unlike Plato's desire to position both political systems and individuals to mimic a higher form of virtue, Aristotle emphasized practicality. His philosophical work is grounded in our state of nature rather than abstractions we are to manifest and replicate. Aristotle was one of the first western philosophers to take this stance and therefore dismantled and reconstructed the political foundation left behind by Plato. Before engaging the text, it is important to provide context on Aristotle as it provides a framework from which he positions different kinds of people within his philosophical work.

Aristotle was a son of a wealthy upper-class physician in ancient Greece and student of Plato. Parallel to the Politics the one who should wield authority and government would come from a similar if not identical background. With this knowledge, the following analysis can be understood by Aristotle's particular lens allowing for an accurate assessment of conclusions and their origins. Before a household or an individual, the Politics positions the city-state as the foundation from which other features of politics develop. Aristotle states, "a city state is among the things that exist by nature, that a human being is by nature a political animal, and that anyone who is without a city-state, not by luck but by nature, is either a poor specimen or else superhuman."

As human beings we are social creatures, therefore this social nature inadvertently creates the framework for the city-state, while our rationality breeds the politics necessary to navigate within the city-state. As this political entity is formed we transition into the house-hold where each individual begins to habituate the virtue of a ruler and one who is ruled, "For a man rules his wife and children both as free people, but not in the same way: instead, he rules his wife the way a statesman does, and his children the way a king does." Aristotle posits that men are naturally more fitted to lead than women, however, by ruling as a statesman the man acknowledges that his wife is developed completely in her position within the household. The children on the other hand are ruled like a king as they are young and not fully developed, while the father is fully evolved and better equipped to rule. As the children grow, in the context of Aristotle specifically boys who develop as men, learn starting in the household how to be ruled and intern how to rule by being introduced to the duality of this virtue.

Transitioning outside of the household, Aristotle establishes that the governing class is the authoritative element that rules for the common benefit. However, when private interests are

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prioritized the governing class contorts the constitution from which they rule and thus produces deficient political systems. Aristotle breaks down this corruption as follows: a tyranny from a kingship, an oligarchy from an aristocracy, and a democracy from a polity. Aristotle goes on to say that these transitions are the case because a, “tyranny is rule by one person for the benefit of the monarch, oligarchy is the benefit of rich, and democracy benefit of poor. But none is for their common profit. ” Aristotle conceived and believes in the concept of Eudaimonia or the “Good Life”. A good life is one of happiness, independence, flourishing, and virtue which is found within a rule that is for the common benefit of a particular society. According to Aristotle the one who should wield authority in government is one who understands virtue, and in most cases, this is someone exposed to the resources and teachers who emphasize the importance of Eudaimonia. Therefore, the city-state cannot flourish without a ruler who is virtuous, free, well born, and rich. Someone who is well born has a larger share of land which is something in common, is more trustworthy in treaties, and has the freedom and resources to claim a position to office. However, Aristotle emphasizes that without virtues like justice a city state will be mismanaged and ultimately result in the corruption of constitutions as illustrated with a kingship, aristocracy, or a polity. Justice as a communal virtue acts as a means to establish an efficient rule and breeds a ruler who acts from rationality rather than his passions which would pervert virtuous intentions. The one with authority in government must understand this dichotomy between the soul and body.

In ancient Greece when Aristotle wrote the Politics an ideal ruler would be an individual who was free, wealthy, and noble born because they would have had the resources to interact with philosophers who could help habituate virtuous action. Just as Plato saw current constitutions problematic because of the sophists, Aristotle also understood that social standing and wealth does not produce a fine ruler because the sophist lacked common virtue namely a sense justice.

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