

**Introduction to Western Political Thought**  
**Professor Mithilesh Kumar Jha**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Science**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati**  
**Lecture 07**  
**Aristotle – II: Politics and his Ideal State**

Hello and welcome, everyone. This is the second lecture on Aristotle. Today we will discuss his *magnum opus* or the best-known work of Aristotle - Politics. We will also discuss his conception of the ideal state; before we do that, let us recall what we have discussed in the previous lecture: the idea of virtue or ethics and what kind of ethics or virtue is necessary to lead a good, virtuous life or life – *Eudaimonia*. We have discussed that the understanding of virtue or ethics are based on a certain understanding of human nature. Aristotle characterized human being as a political animal that means human life is possible only in their community or society. Outside that community and society, there could be only Gods or beasts. So, human beings are essentially a social and political animal. Now, besides this nature of human beings, they are also rational beings with a sense of what is good or what is bad, what is just, or what is unjust. On that basis, then Aristotle imagined a polity or a community that will enable the individual to lead a good, virtuous, and a flourishing life.

In today's lecture, we will discuss his conception of ideal state, and how he justifies the existence of institutions like household, slavery, and so on. And before doing that we will also discuss how he classified then existing constitutions in the Greek city-states. In Aristotle, the idea of leading a virtuous life is based on the percept that human beings are rational, and therefore, ethical. Hence, a virtuous life is possible when human beings uses this rationality or ethics and combine it with the pragmatic knowledge. The combination of this ethical knowledge with practical wisdom allows them to have a political judgement.

For Aristotle, the purpose is to lead a life where individuals could develop their rational faculties and the full development of their rational faculties is possible only in an ideal state. We will discuss it today. We will have one more lecture on Aristotle where we will discuss his views on citizenship, his views on revolution, how polity or regimes change from one form to the other forms, and what are the mechanisms or tools through which those changes or revolutions could be prevented.

At this point, one also needs to understand that like Plato, even in Aristotle, the idea is to ensure order and stability; and to ensure the stability he wanted to avoid the extremes of either good or bad. He wanted to follow the middle path or the golden mean. We will finally evaluate Aristotle's thought critically and its enduring legacy on the political thinking and theorization in Western tradition. That we will do in the third and concluding lecture on Aristotle.

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➤ Man, as a zoon politikon, is rational and ethical-moral being realizes his full potentialities (*eudaimonia*) while living among the equals in the polis or state. Thus, for Aristotle, a good life for the individual is unimaginable without a good polity or state. In his *magnum opus*, *Politics* Aristotle outlines the nature and characteristics of his ideal polity. However, before describing his ideal polity, he studied the constitutions of 158 constitutions prevalent in the Greek city-states. His classifications of these constitutions have become the basis for the comparative study of constitutions and polity since then.

➤ For Aristotle, the purpose of institutions such as household, village, and polity or state is to help the individual realize his true human potentialities. He first examines the sphere of the household whose purpose is 'to sustain life'. In discussing the household, he also examines the nature of the economy, the justification for slavery, and so on. Then he provides his account of ideal polity which help individual develop his moral and ethical understanding by living the associational lives among the equals.

➤ It is in the polity that true friendship and the full realization of human potentialities are possible. It is through associational life in the polity that individual learns the art and science of polity that is faculty of right judgement (*phronesis*) by combining the knowledge of ethics with experience. Thus the purpose of polity is to enable good life or full realization of human life.

Aristotle had a conception of man as *zoon politikon*, that is man is by nature a social and political animal. This nature of man is combined with his rational faculty and a sense of moral and ethical being. Now, this man, as a social, political animal with rational faculty and a sense of ethics and morality, can realize his full potentiality while living among the equals in the *polis* or state. That is the purpose of leading a good life or *Eudaimonia*. For Aristotle, a good life for the individual is unimaginable without a good polity or a state. So a good polity or ideal polity is necessary, a precondition for leading a good, virtuous, ethical, and moral life. Let us contrast it with our modern conception of the good life, which is very different from the Greek idea of civic life. In the modern conception of leading a good life, it is largely seen as a self-centric, individualistic life. An individual knows what is good for him and her, and the purpose of life is to pursue what is good for that individual. In contrast, Aristotle argues that a good life is unimaginable without a community. The best ethical, moral, and rational side of a human being comes out when he participates in community life. And that is the enduring legacy of Aristotle to our modern liberal, self-centric view of individuals and how to lead a good life. In his *magnum opus*, *Politics*, Aristotle

outlines the nature and the characteristic of that ideal polity, which will enable the individual to lead a good life.

However, before describing his ideal polity, he studied the constitutions of 158 constitutions prevalent in this Greek city-states. And his classification of these constitutions has become the basis of a comparative study of constitutions and polities even today. Many constitution maker draw inspiration from this classification of constitutions done by Aristotle in Greek city-states. And the idea that constitution-making requires deliberations is very specific to a particular community. In doing that, how one should not be carried by the extremes of ideal or the worst; reaching to the middle path or the mean point which would be suitable for that particular community. So, the constitution-making exercise requires the deliberation of those with the knowledge of politics having sound judgement with a rational and moral-ethical outlook. Then, they can deliberate upon what is good or ideal for their specific community. Thus, constitution-making requires that kind of deliberation by those who have the knowledge or practical wisdom to decide what is good for their communities. And this kind of deliberations in Aristotle becomes the basis for constitution-making. We have seen throughout the twentieth century or in twenty-first century, even in many other large liberal modern democracies. For Aristotle, the purpose of any institutions such as household, village, or polity is to help human being in leading a good moral and ethical life. The village for Aristotle is the aggregate of the households. The household is the primary institution where the individual learns many values and also leads an associational life along with women, children, and slaves. Still, that kind of association life is very different and guided by different principles than the life possible in the polity.

However, for the institutions to exist, there has to be a purpose. The justification for a household; or a village; or a community is that they help the individual lead a life of *Eudaimonia* that is a human, moral, ethical, and rational life. So, for each institution, there is a definite purpose, which is to help an individual realize his true human potentiality. However, what is true human potentiality is debatable. What is true human potentiality, and who will decide that, is a subject of debate. There are contrary positions on that. But the very existence of household, state or polity, and village is to provide the condition for the individual to lead an ethical and moral life. The discussion on telos or teleology we have had already. In that, we have discussed that many individuals could be immoral, or unethical, or corrupt, but that does not replace the fact that

purpose of a good life is to lead an ethical life. So, there could be deviations, but that does not undermine that human life, and the purpose of human life is to lead an ethical, moral, rational life. And that kind of life is possible only in the state. So, even when there are deviations, distractions, people being immoral, unethical, or corrupt; yet, the purpose of human life, according to Aristotle, is to lead an ethical life or moral life, which is possible only in the community.

Aristotle first examines, while discussing the ideal polity, the sphere of household whose purpose is to sustain life. One cannot imagine the life or individual worth without the existence of household. Here, he differs from the Platonic vision of the community of wives and property. He wanted the household to be owned by the male citizen. That ownership of the household gives sustenance to his life; enables him to interact with others on the principle that he should treat equals equally and unequal unequally. All these things are learned in the household. While discussing the household, we will also discuss how Aristotle examines the nature of the economy, the role of property, and also his justification for slavery. We will also discuss how he also carried the biasness or the prejudices of his time and society.

Then he provides his account of ideal polity, which helps an individual to develop his moral and ethical faculties while living the associational life. The ethical and the moral life or the knowledge of politics or political wisdom requires a human being to lead an associational life. So, you cannot live outside the society or sit on *ivory tower* and then reflect upon what is good for the state. You develop it while living with the others; while living among the equals in the polity. And that is the basis of civic life or civic engagement; and then together deliberate upon what is good for the community, not in isolation, not in a kind of setting or living outside the society and reflecting upon what is good for the society; but, by living in the community with others who are equals. So, it is in the polity that true friendship could be formed. Human beings constantly search to have companionship, to have friendship. *Politics* is a treatise on cultivating true friendship and explain life in the sense of expansion. And how it expands? When it is associated with others, those who are equals, those who are unequal, and how he treats them. Aristotle argues that it is in the polity that human beings can have a true friendship. True friendship is possible only among the free and equals. It cannot be based on unequal terms, say between men and women, men and children, men and slaves, or among the superiors and inferiors.

Thus, it is possible to have true friendship in the life community, in associational life among those who are free and equals. It is in the polity where full realization of human potentialities is possible. So, what does it mean to be human? It means to lead an ethical life and the realization of its true and ultimate potential. That is possible only in the state.

It is through associational life in the polity that individuals learn the art and science of polity; that is the skill of right judgement, and this judgement, as we have discussed that the knowledge of politics is an inexact science, it is transient, but at the given moment, what is best or what is most just for the society and community can be arrived at only through the sound judgement. And, what is sound judgement? It is the right combination of ethical knowledge with the practical experience or the practical wisdom, individuals learn when they live the associational life in the state or the community. This idea of right judgement or *phronesis* in Greek requires the individual to lead an associational life, not just knowing a book that will enable them to have the correct judgement. But by combining the knowledge of ethics with experience, individuals could have the right judgement.

So, the purpose of polity is to enable a good life or full realization of human life. Now, we will move on to study first his notion of household property and economy and also his justification of slavery before we discuss his classification of the constitutions and, finally, his conception of the ideal state or polity.

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#### Household, property, and economy

- Aristotle, in contrast to Plato, made clear distinctions between the private and public or political life of the individual. He regarded household as historically 'prior to the *polis*', which governs the kinship relations, which was still strong. It was the primary unit or marker of personal identities – such as nobility for the Greeks. However, the principle or laws that governed the relationships in the household, according to Aristotle, was very different from the laws that govern the state or polity.
- Three kinds of relationships exist in the households – first, between parents and children; second, between husband and wife; and finally, between master and slaves. Different sorts of rules govern these relationships according to the natural disposition of the parties involved. Thus, the owner of the household is superior to children and women, and women and children are superior to slaves. However, despite these inequalities, they lead associational lives and realize their potentialities in different degrees. Aristotle argued that except for the male owner, the needs or ends of the women, children, and slaves are fulfilled within the spheres of the household.
- Aristotle describes the economy as the 'art of household management'. The Greek word *Oikos* links property, house, and family together where slaves' role in the productive activities provided the male citizens leisure necessary to deliberate upon the public or common good of the polity. Here, the conception of leisure is different from its modern day's understanding. It was a higher-order pleasure that involved training of the mind in the art and science of 'political, moral, and intellectual activity' in the life of the polity.

Aristotle, in contrast to Plato, made a clear distinction between private and the public-political life of the individual. Like Plato, Aristotle also regards the political and public life more important than the personal or private life. And according to him, the real ethical, moral side of individuals reach true potentialities or full potentiality only in the public or the political life of the city-states. Nonetheless, unlike Plato, Aristotle also recognizes the value of the household. He argues that the household is historically prior to the polis, or the state which governs the kinship relations that are still strong. And it is the primary unit or marker of personal identities, such as nobility for the Greeks. One's birth in the household is also one's marker of nobility or one's identity for the Greeks. The principles or laws that govern a household; according to Aristotle, were very different from the laws or the principles that govern a polity.

According to Aristotle, there exist three kinds of relationships in the household. The first is between the parents and the children; the second, between husband and wife. Finally, which was widely prevalent in the Greek city-states of Aristotle's time, but no longer acceptable or justified and therefore non-existent in modern time, is the relationships between the masters and slaves. Now, different sorts of rules govern these relationships according to the natural disposition of parties involved. The owner of the household, according to Aristotle, is superior to children and women; and women and children similarly are superior to the slaves. So there is a graded hierarchy, or unequal relationships that is prevalent in the household – between parents and children; husband and wife; male owner and children, women and slaves in the household. There is a kind of different sort of relationships that exist in the household among these three sorts of individuals having different natural dispositions. Thus, there are inequalities that governs the relationship between these three kinds of individuals. However, despite these disparities or inequalities, they lead some kind of associational lives and realize their potentialities in different degrees. Aristotle argued that except for the male owners, the needs or the ends of women, children and slaves are fulfilled within the sphere of the household. Only for the males, he envisioned a politics beyond the household. But, for the women, children, and slaves, their ends or the *telos* are realized in the household itself under the protection of a rational male master.

Of course, one can debate this unequal relationships between men and women, and between the male owners and the slaves in the sphere of the household. Aristotle also describes the economy of this household. It is also strange that he regards economy as something which is not in the

present sense of the term which is about the production at a large scale with the state support, regulation, or supervision, which to a great extent, influence the polity and also the community. Aristotle regards economy as an art of household management. So productive activities or the property is something that should be limited to the household. Here, the public-political sphere is to deliberate upon the public good, and economy is seen as a private pursuit which should be limited to the household affairs. And understanding of the economy is the art of household management. How to manage the property in the household? So, the idea of economy is the art of household management. The Greek word that is used for economy is *Oikos*, that links property, house, and family together. So, this is a kind of interconnected continuum. The economy or the *Oikos* connect property, house, and family where slaves role in the productive activities provide the male citizens the leisure to deliberate upon the public or the common good of the polity.

So, the purpose of the household economy is to involve the slaves in the product or the manual activities that give the male members or the owner of the household the necessary time or leisure to participate in the deliberations of what is good for the community. One more thing that we need to be clear is that this conception of leisure is very different from our modern conception of leisure, which is individual-centric, that means, what is leisure vary from individual to individual, but for Aristotle, the leisure or the idea of creative engagement with the notion of good or morality is something which requires the citizen to be free from the manual or productive work, which would be done by the slaves. So, for Aristotle, it was a kind of higher-order pleasure that involve training of mind in the art and science of political, moral, and intellectual activities in the life of polity. That is a different understanding of leisure, which was provided to the male citizens in the Greek city-states by slaves who were involved in the productive or manual activities like farming, crafting, trade, and so on.

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➤ In Aristotle's scheme of things, economic pursuits, as part of the private sphere of household, were desirable, but it was subordinated to public and political life in the polity. Economic activities or manual works in pursuit of material gains were not an honorable occupation for the Greeks. It was much in contrast to our modern, rational, and economic conception of man as a self-centered infinite consumer'.

➤ However, Aristotle regarded the role of property in determining the political participation of the citizen in the common affairs of the polity. He wanted its acquisition to be minimum, not limitless. Therefore, he preferred the agrarian economy over mercantilism and mechanical pursuit of profit. Although he considered the economy to be part of household affairs, its distribution requires the involvement of polity, laws, or constitution.

#### Aristotle's defense of slavery

➤ It is strange to find Aristotle with his emphasis on man as *zoon politikon*, rational, and moral being, justifying the institutions of slavery. However, it was widely prevalent during his time and was based on the assumptions of superiority or inferiority among the men. Aristotle's justification of slavery is based on the prejudices of his time and society, which should not and must not find justification today.

In Aristotle's scheme of thing, economic pursuits, which were prevalent to a great extent in many other societies and seen as a private sphere of the household, were desirable. Still, it was subordinated to the public and political life in the polity. The most desirable or preferential activities for the individual was to lead a life in the polity or the community of equals. Thus, economic pursuits are necessary or desirable. Still, it is limited to the private or the individual sphere of life, not in the community or public political life, which is far superior then the pursuit of economic goods or interests. So, in Aristotle approach to the question of economy, economic activities or the manual works in the pursuit of material gains were not an honourable occupation. Even today, in many societies, you will find that those who pursue money for the sake of it are seen with contempt, or something that is less honourable.

Of course, it has changed now as economics dominates all spheres of our lives. Still, the pursuit of knowledge, pursuit of wisdom, or life in the service of the nation or community continue to be seen as more honourable than the pursuit of wealth, or wealth for the sake of it. Nonetheless, the pursuit of the economy is desirable, but it is subordinated to life in the public and the political sphere of the state. It was much in contrast to our modern rational and economic conception of man as 'a self-centred, infinite consumer'. The conception of man in the modern economic sense is seen as not a moral-ethical or thinking being but a consumer. And most of us consume things without realizing their value or worth and how much these are required to lead a good and ethical life.



The basic point is that the economy is regarded as necessary or desirable by Aristotle. But, it is subordinated to the public and political life in the state. However, Aristotle regarded the role of property in determining the political participation of the citizen in the common affairs of the polity. Thus, there has to be some group of people who are involved in the productive works like farming, crafting, and so on, that will allow the citizens to have time or leisure to participate in the deliberation of the public good in the city.

So, he wanted property or wealth acquisition to be minimum, but not limitless; that is, you know, present the self-aggrandizing business model that we have: the constant expansion, accumulation, accumulation for the sake of accumulation or expansion for the sake of expansion. These do not help the individual to lead a moral and ethical life. These do not help the society to have a just order or stability. So, the pursuit of the wealth or its acquisition has to be minimum, not limitless. Therefore, he preferred the agrarian economy, which should be managed at the household level over the mercantilism or the mechanical pursuit of profit.

Although he considered the economy to be part of the household affair, its distribution requires the involvement of polity, laws, and the constitution. Now, let us look at why he justified slavery. It becomes very strange, thinking about Aristotle's conception of man as the rational, moral-ethical being. It is strange to find Aristotle with his emphasis on man as *zoon politikon*, or political-social animal, rational and moral being, justifying the institution of slavery. This is very strange for our modern-day sensibilities that how a man arguing about individual being social and political animal and also rational and moral being could justify the institution of slavery. It is hard to accept. However, it was widely prevalent during his time. And it was based on the assumption of superiority or inferiority among men. So, if you think about the classical times', to a great extent medieval times, and in some forms it exist even today when a large population lives the life of servitude; that means they are not the master of their own destiny, i.e., governed by the dictates and terms set for them by others.

Slavery was widely prevalent in Greek city-states. It was based on the principle that all men are not equal, which means there are different kinds of men with different degree of rationality and skills. Only the men who are rational or ethical should govern the community, or they should be in the business of ruling and government. But those who are inferior their own self-interest are best protected under the protection of those with superior knowledge or wisdom and rationality.

And if you think about that classical times, the institution of slavery is based on this idea that the superior should rule the inferiors. And most of these slaves were the result of the wars, or prisoners of wars, or defeated or conquered people. They were supposed to be the slaves of winners. Thus, Aristotle's justification of slavery is governed by those prevalent norms of superiority or inferiority. It is based on the prejudice of his time and society, which should not be justified or find justification today.

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- Slavery was natural for Aristotle. He writes that 'all men who differ from others as much as the body differs from the soul, or an animal from a man all such are by nature slaves, and it is better for them to be ruled by a master'. Slavery was of various types and was a result of debt traps, prisoner of wars, and children born to slaves. Aristotle justified only household slavery of those who were prisoners of just war and are from the barbarian communities. He objected to the enslavement of fellow Greeks even if they were the prisoners of war.
- His defense of slavery is inherently paternalistic. Slaves are better off under the guidance of their rational master. They could also buy themselves out of slavery or bondage or receive it as a gift from their masters. However, whatever may be the merit of the institution of slavery in Greek city-states, it is morally and ethically repugnant and could not be justified in any form.

#### Classifications of constitutions

- Aristotle, as a pragmatic and systematic thinker, before providing his description of the ideal state, studied the prevailing constitutions of his time. To this purpose, he collected 158 constitutions of the Greek city-states. His comparative study of these constitutions led him to develop six ideal types of polities or states in the Greek city-states. The classifications of these constitutions are based on the principles of – a) the number of rulers; b) interests for which ruling or governing is done or carried out.

Aristotle regarded slavery as natural. He wrote that all men who differ from others as much as the body differs from the soul; or animals from the men; all such men are by nature slaves. They should be ruled by a master who is more rational or more ethical. This justification of slavery for Aristotle is based on the natural disposition of men. There are the categories of men who prefer to live in the condition of servitude because of their rational faculty; or because they do not use their rational faculties to learn how to govern themselves, ethically, and morally. Slavery, for Aristotle, was of various types. It was a result of many things such as debt traps – when individuals are unable to pay their debts; or prisoner of wars which was the most prevalent forms of slavery, when one city-state conquered the other city-states, the conquered nation was supposed to be the slave; or the widely prevalent system of selling or purchasing of slaves by their masters. Other forms of slavery was the children born to the slaves.

Aristotle justified only household slavery. However, there were another kind's slavery, like in the polity, some works were done only by the slaves. Aristotle justified only household slavery for those who were the prisoner of just war. There was no other form of slavery which he justified. And even these prisoners of wars should be from those communities that Greek thought as barbarians such as Egyptians. They thought that it was for the benefit of these communities, if the superior Greeks governed them and their affairs. Such prejudices of his time were the basis for Aristotle's justification of the institution of slavery. He, however, objected to the enslavement of the fellow Greeks, even if they were the prisoner of war or prisoner of just war. So, his defence of

slavery in one form appears to be inherently paternalistic, that means, those who are inferior in terms of their rational or ethical faculties it is better for them, it is in their interest that they should be governed by the superiors who are rational or moral. Slaves are better off under the guidance of their rational masters, and they could also buy themselves out of this slavery or bondage or receive it as a gift from their masters. When the slaves accumulate the wealth, through it he could buy himself out of slavery or bondage. He may also receive it from his good action or use of rational, ethical faculties as a gift from his master. However, such individuals were less honourable in Greek society than the free male citizens who were the owner of the household. And owning of the household is the basis of free and equal membership in the life of the community. However, whatever be the merit of the institution of slavery in Greek city-states, it is morally and ethically repugnant. It could not be justified in any form today. There are many valid criticism against Aristotle for justifying the institution of slavery, even when he considers men a social, political animal with rational and moral faculties.

Now, we move on to the constitution's classification. Aristotle as a pragmatic and systematic thinker before providing his conception of what is ideal, he provides us a realistic description of existing polities and constitutions. So, as we have discussed before that Aristotle's conception of politics is very different from the Platonic conception of politics – that was another worldly, in the realm of ideas, which is unchangeable, which is fixed and comprehensible only for the philosopher with the training in mathematics and dialectics. Aristotle talks about politics, which is grounded in the pragmatic life of the citizens and individual. And how then, based on that pragmatic understanding, or sound judgement create a polity which would be ideal, which will enable them to lead a good moral, ethical life is the subject matter of politics.

However, before giving that ideal of polity he observed and classified the existing polities and the constitution during his time in the Greek city-states. For this purpose, he collected 158 constitutions. His comparative study of these constitutions led him to develop six ideal types of polity or state in the Greek city-states. This classification is based on the twin principle of one; how many people rule the state? In other words, what is the number of rulers? And second, this rule is for the interest of whom? Whether it is the interest of the ruler or the ruled? On the basis of this twin principles – the number of rulers; and the interest for which the ruling or the governing

is carried out; becomes the basis for Aristotle to classify different forms of the constitution or polities.

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Aristotle's classifications of Polity or constitutions		
Number of rulers	In the interest of whole community (ideal forms)	In the personal interest of rulers (perverted forms)
One	Kingship	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Polity ✓	Democracy -

➤ Aristotle ranked the order of these regimes from best to worst as kingship, aristocracy, polity, democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny. Democracy for him is the least bad among the perverted form of polity. These six types of regimes or *polities*, according to him, are the ideal types that exist only in theory. In practice, within each, there could be numerous forms. He went on to describe 'five types of kingships, five types of democracy, four types of oligarchy, and several types of tyrannies and polities'. These types are the result of the combination of the characteristics or virtues of two or more than two regimes or *polities*.

➤ He also regarded that social dispositions of citizenry determine the nature of the polity. Thus each of these types of polity has its reason or justification for existence. He also regarded that constitutions are often mixed constitutions in practice, and two perverted or corrupt forms of constitutions could turn out to be a just constitution, for example, the combination of democracy and oligarchy.

If the number of the ruler is just one, it could be kingship or *monarchy* when it is in the interest of the whole community. If it is few who are best suitable to rule with their qualifications, skills, nobility, and wealth; and if they rule in the interest of the whole community that forms of polity, he calls *aristocracy*. And then if the rule is by many, and when they rule in the interest of the whole community, he calls it *polity*. Now, the perverted form of these ideal forms of rule are – if one ruler rule in the interest of self or for perpetuating of the self-rule that is *tyranny*, which is the worst form of polity, it is the worst form of polity also according to Plato. When a state or a polity is ruled by few and in the interest of those few alone, then such perverted form is called *oligarchy*. That governing is based on perpetuating the interest of those few who rule. The money lenders or those who are in the business or trade and *oligarchy* in some form or the other continue to exist even today, such as in say *military-bureaucratic oligarchy* or corporations/corporates and their alignments with the political classes. So there could be many interpretations of *oligarchy*, which is in the interest of ruling class alone, and not in the interest of everyone in the community. Therefore Aristotle regards it as a perverted form of polity. When a polity is ruled by many, and there is no regard for rules or constitution, he called it democracy or mobocracy. In these perverted form of polities there is no possibility of pursuing justice or ethics for the whole community.

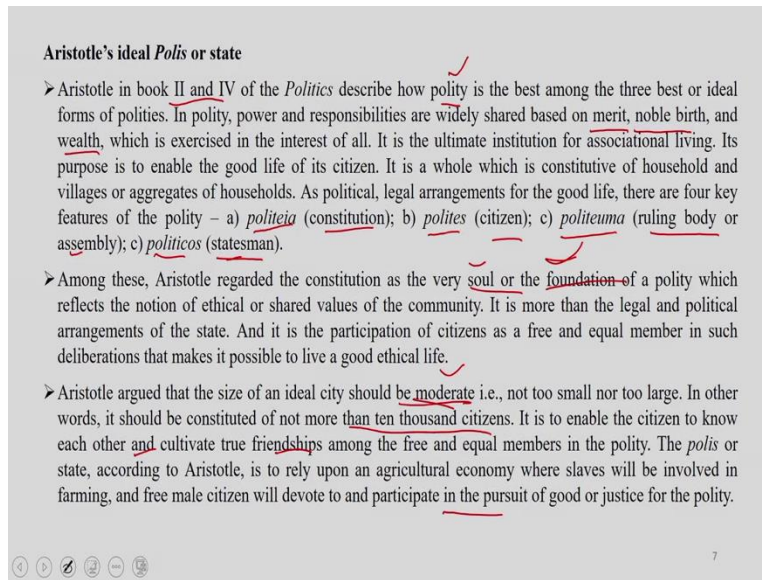
If you look at the order of these regimes and polity from best to worse – kingship, aristocracy, polity followed by democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny. Democracy for him is the least bad among the perverted forms of polity and the polity as the best form of government. These six types of regimes or polities, according to him, are the ideal types and exist only in theory. In practice, within each, say for instance, kingship or tyranny, there could be many forms of tyranny or monarchies depending upon the virtue or the combination of virtues that it often associated with aristocracy, or oligarchy, or democracy. So, in practice, within each of these polities, there could be numerous forms. And he went on to describe five types of kingships, five types of democracy, four types of oligarchies, and several types of tyrannies and polities. These types are the result of the combination of characteristics or virtues of two or more than two regimes or polities. He also regarded that social dispositions of the citizenry determine the nature of the polity. Thus each of these types of ideal polity has its own reason or justification for existence. Suppose if you have a community where one man possesses superior knowledge in comparison to the rest and he is so superior that he alone knows what is best for the whole community. That community should be just or stable when it is a monarchy or ruled by one person with superior knowledge – that is unavailable or inaccessible for the rest. In a community where few, because of their nobility, or wealth, or wisdom pursue ruling in the interest of the rest, then aristocracy is the best. In such a polity the few, knowledgeable in ruling and having the sound political judgement, are given the responsibility of governing. Like Plato, Aristotle also believed that ruling and governing require special knowledge. It is a profession, and not everyone is equally endowed with the capacity to rule or govern. And therefore, it is best suitable for the whole community when few with the sound knowledge of political judgement, with morality and ethics, are given the responsibility of ruling. Thus, aristocracy has justification on this basis. Tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy which are the perverted forms. There is always a possibility that one who is superior in the community may become a tyrant because the power or the wealth tend to corrupt his sound judgement or his ethical behaviour. Similarly, with the aristocracy when the few may turn out to perpetuate their own rule, driven by their desire to sustain their rule rather than ensuring the benefit of all become oligarchy. And democracy, when there is a complete disregard for the laws and constitution; and yet, there is the desire to share the power among those who are unequal in their talent, in their rational faculties, then it becomes a mobocracy – ruled by the multitude.

So, each of these forms, according to Aristotle, has their own reason or justification for existence. He also regarded that the constitution is often a mixed constitution in practice. Even today, if you look at the modern liberal democracies, constitution reflect the mixed characteristic. Aristotle also argued that two perverted or corrupt forms of the constitution could turn out to be a just constitution such as by combining the virtues of democracy or oligarchy or aristocracy and so on.

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**Aristotle's ideal Polis or state**

- Aristotle in book II and IV of the *Politics* describe how polity is the best among the three best or ideal forms of polities. In polity, power and responsibilities are widely shared based on merit, noble birth, and wealth, which is exercised in the interest of all. It is the ultimate institution for associational living. Its purpose is to enable the good life of its citizen. It is a whole which is constitutive of household and villages or aggregates of households. As political, legal arrangements for the good life, there are four key features of the polity – a) *politeia* (constitution); b) *polites* (citizen); c) *politeuma* (ruling body or assembly); d) *politicos* (statesman).
- Among these, Aristotle regarded the constitution as the very soul or the foundation of a polity which reflects the notion of ethical or shared values of the community. It is more than the legal and political arrangements of the state. And it is the participation of citizens as a free and equal member in such deliberations that makes it possible to live a good ethical life.
- Aristotle argued that the size of an ideal city should be moderate i.e., not too small nor too large. In other words, it should be constituted of not more than ten thousand citizens. It is to enable the citizen to know each other and cultivate true friendships among the free and equal members in the polity. The *polis* or state, according to Aristotle, is to rely upon an agricultural economy where slaves will be involved in farming, and free male citizen will devote to and participate in the pursuit of good or justice for the polity.



Now, we let's discuss Aristotle's views on the ideal state or polity. Books II and IV of the *Politics* describe how polity, among the six ideal types, is the best among the three best or ideal forms of polities. In the polity, power and responsibilities are widely shared based on merit, noble birth, and wealth. It avoids the extreme of democracy and oligarchy when few meritorious who are from noble families govern in the interest of all. Hence, it combines the interest of sharing power with the many (democracy) with giving the responsibility of governing to those who are meritorious (aristocracy). Thus, in the polity, power and responsibilities are widely shared compared to monarchy, or kingship, or aristocracy. It ensures the interests of all. Therefore, it is the ideal institution for association living. It truly ensures the free and equal participation of all; and power and responsibilities are not limited to few or one like in kingship and aristocracy.

The objective of polity is to enable the good life or ethical life of its citizen. It is a unit constitutive of households and villages (aggregate of households). As political and legal arrangements for a good life, there are four key features of the polity – one, constitution that is *politeia*; second, *polites* that are citizens, third, *politeuma* that is the ruling body or assembly, and finally, the *politicos* that is the statesman. Thus, the ideal polity is the combination of these four things constitution, citizen, ruling body or assembly, and the statesman. And statesman in every society, in every community will be those who are rational or ethical with sound political judgement, which requires both the knowledge of ethics and also the practical experience. Among these, Aristotle regarded the constitution as the soul or the foundation of a polity. Therefore, the constitution determines the



very nature or the characteristic or the purpose of a state or community. It reflects the ethical or the shared values of the community. The constitution and its study will allow you to understand the purpose of life for any community. This is the basis of comparative studies of different polities and constitutions even today. It is more than the legal and political arrangements of the state. It is the participation of citizens as a free and equal member in such deliberation that makes it possible to lead a good ethical life.

Aristotle argued that the size of an ideal city should not be too large or too small. That is, it has to have a moderate citizenry which should not be more than 10,000. It should not be too weak or too small that it finds it difficult to defend itself. It should not be too large or so big that it becomes impossible to govern it effectively. The moderate size of the ideal polity or city, according to Aristotle, is to enable the citizen to know each other and cultivate true friendship through associational living among the free and equal members in the polity. The polis or the state, according to Aristotle, is to rely upon the agricultural economy, where slaves will be involved in farming, and free male citizens will devote to and participate in the pursuit of good or justice for the polity.

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➤ Politics, according to Aristotle, achieve unity or good out of plurality or conflicting interests in the polity. That is the very essence of politics. It is in mediating the interests between the wealthy few and majority poor and yet ensuring good or ethical life for all that makes politics a master science. However, he also argued for the stability of polity; it was necessary to have the middle class – neither too rich nor too poor, in a more significant number. He also argued that though the knowledge of 'the many' could be questioned, many heads are always better than few or one. And it is this belief in 'collective wisdom' that allows Aristotle to regard polity in comparison to kingship or aristocracy as an ideal form of state.

➤ In Aristotle's ideal polity, the power of the ruler is checked by a combination of factors. Besides laws, constitutions, and an active citizenry, he argued that distribution of power and responsibilities based on the election (lot), wealth and nobility will enhance the stability of the polity. Thus his conception of polity was based on the consideration of freedom of the individuals and took into account wealth, the nobility of birth, and superiority of number.

➤ Polity combines justice with stability and order in the state. Hence, according to Aristotle, it was practically the best and most prudent and just system of rule for governing most of the Greek city-states. It was based on his principles of the golden mean, which combines the virtues of aristocracy with the interests of democracy.

Politics, according to Aristotle, achieves unity or good out of plurality or conflicting interest in the polity. The knowledge or essence of politics is that it enables us to overcome conflict and differences. There is no role of politics if there is harmony in the society or in the community. The role of politics is necessary when there are the conflicts of interest; there are the competing interests. The sound political judgement requires how to mediate those competing interests and the conflicts. Even today, politics is that science of productive knowledge that help us understand different positions, interests, or clashes among the different positions and how to mediate between them to ensure a good life. So, politics, according to Aristotle, achieve unity or good out of plurality or competing interests in the polity. That is the very essence of politics. It help us in mediating the interests of the wealthy few and the majority poor. In all the society there will be few who are wealthy; there will be many who are poor, and then there will be a sizable population in between, which he calls middle class. Now to create a condition of life where all these classes with their competing interests will lead a good ethical, moral life, you need the knowledge of politics. So, it is in mediating the interests between the wealthy few and majority poor and yet ensuring good or ethical life for all that makes politics a master science.

He also argued that for the stability of polity; it was necessary to have a large number of middle class – neither too rich nor too poor. It is very difficult to govern a society where few are too rich or many too poor. Such extreme inequality in society will not allow a stable government or a stable order or a government which could allow the pursuit of goods and ethics for the majority of its

population. So, what he desires is that for a stable polity or to have stable government, you need to have the middle class. This is the class which also listen to the reason or open to the new deliberation and or new debates. If they are in the greater numbers, then this class will enable a rule or governing, which would be for the benefit of all, or it will also ensure the stability of the polity.

If the few, who are too wealthy, govern for the interest of themselves, then there will be popular resentments against that. So, for the stability of polity, according to Aristotle, it is necessary to have the middle class in significant numbers. This argument is correct in even today. Large democracies, for their stability, requires middle class in the large numbers. The stability of democracy requires this class to be in larger number than those who are too wealthy or too poor. If they are too poor, there will be revolt; if few are controlling the whole apparatus of the state or polity, then there will be revolt too. So, he argued that though knowledge through the many could be questioned, and many heads are always better than few, or one. Aristocracy or kingship (the ideal form) is based on the knowledge of few or one. However, Aristotle thought that the knowledge of the many or the multitude maybe questioned, may not be trustworthy; yet, (unlikely Plato, for whom, only a few with the knowledge of philosophy or mathematics will be able to understand the true nature of the thing or true essence of an object) Aristotle regards that many heads are always better than the few or one. Thus, the idea of truth, or good, or morality cannot be left in the possession of one man's knowledge or few men's knowledge. It has a broader understanding or better understanding or judgement when there is the involvement of multitude; when truth, or morality, or good, or seen from different perspectives by the multitude. And then, when we arrive at some common values or common norms, they are more just that helps in greater stability than the knowledge of morality and ethics by few or one. It is in this belief in collective judgement or the wisdom of the multitude, that allows Aristotle to regard polity and not kingship or aristocracy as the ideal form of state. In Aristotle's ideal polity, the power of the ruler is checked by a combination of factors. There are laws, constitution, and an active citizenry to check the power of the rulers. We will discuss that how active citizen control or check the power of the rulers in the next class. He also argued that the distribution of power and responsibility based on election, wealth and nobility will enhance the stability of the polity. Thus, there is a combination of virtues of democracy with that of the aristocracy. Those who are knowledgeable in governing should be given the power to rule, but their power should be checked or held accountable by the rules,

constitution, and an active citizenry. Thus, his conception of polity was based on the consideration of freedom of the individuals and took into account wealth, the nobility of birth, and the superiority of numbers. So, polity combines justice with stability. There could not be justice without stability. And he regarded polity as a just system of rule, a more stable order which allow the individual to lead a moral and ethical life. Hence, according to Aristotle, the polity is practically the best and most prudent and just system of rule. It is also based on his principle of golden mean to avoid all kind of extremes. So, the polity, according to Aristotle, is the ideal form of rule or governing. We will discuss the critique of his ideal polity or the classification of constitutions in the concluding lectures. This is what I wanted to share with you on Aristotle's views on household, economy, or the institution of slavery or property, classification of the constitutions, and the ideal state, that is polity.

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#### References

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On this lecture, you can refer to the texts like David Boucher and Paul Kelly, *Political Thinkers from Socrates to the Present*; Will Durant again is a good work to understand many dimensions of Aristotle's thought. You can also refer to Murray Forsyth and Maurice Keens-Soper, *A Guide to Political Classics*. It gives you important insights into his justification for slavery, unequal relationships in the household, and also how polity alone could enable a full realization of human life or human potentialities.

Shefali Jha, again is a very good work on Aristotle and James Alan Ryan's *On Politics* you should refer to understand Aristotle's views on constitution, slavery, household, and ideal polity. That is all in today's lecture. Do share your comments and feedback. We will be happy to hear and respond to them. Thank you for listening. Thank you all.