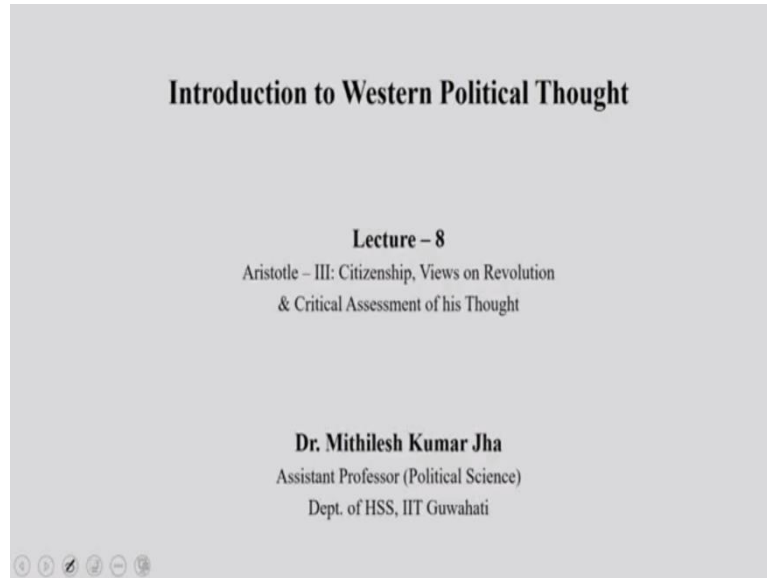


**Introduction to Western Political Thought**  
**Professor Mithilesh Kumar Jha**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati**  
**Lecture No. 8**  
**Aristotle - III: Citizenship, Views on Revolution and**  
**Critical Assessment of his Thought**

(Refer Slide Time: 0:33)



Hello and welcome everyone. This is the third and concluding lecture on the political thought of Aristotle. In the previous two lectures, we have discussed his views on ethics or virtue and the way, he developed the mechanism of classifying the prevailing constitution in the Greek city-states. His views on the ideal polity and what would be the best constitution to govern a polity in a manner where the individual will realize his true potentiality or Eudaimonia.

In the previous two lectures, we have discussed his views on ethics on virtue, and his classification on the constitution. His views on based the constitutions or based kind of a political regime that is polity. In today's lecture, we will particularly focus on his views on the constitution, his theorization of revolution, moral decay in the polity and the mechanism to prevent those.

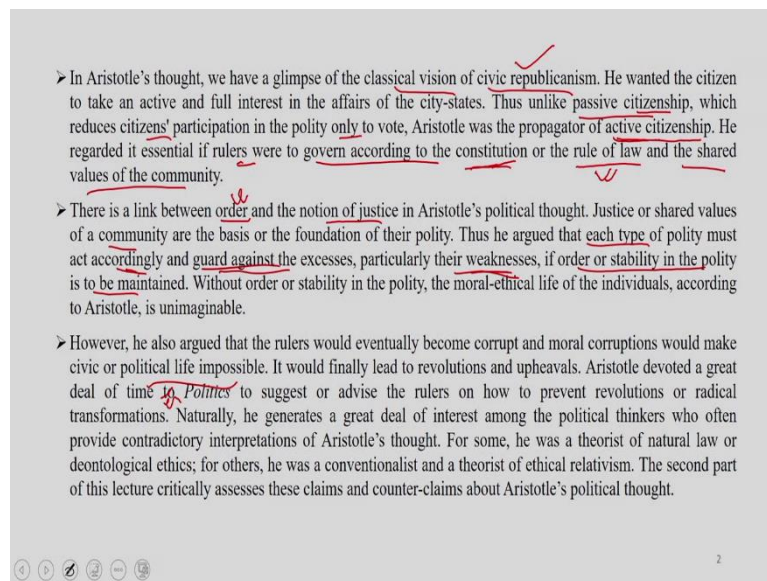
Aristotle appeared more like a kind of thinker who was devoted to retaining the status quo or preventing the radical changes in the polity than someone who would support change or revolution as it might have appeared from his theory of revolution.

In the first part of the lecture, today, we are going to discuss his views on citizenship, revolution or mechanism to prevent the revolution. And in the second part, we will critically

evaluate or assess the contribution of Aristotle in the western tradition of political thought and how his thought had a kind of determining influence in the ways human nature, political organization or constitution was thought about or theorised in the tradition of a western politician.

He had an abiding influence on the political thinking of many thinkers, particularly Hobbes, Kant, Machiavelli, and Hegel. So, we will do the critical assessment of Aristotle's thought in the second part of our lecture today

(Refer Slide Time: 3:20)



- In Aristotle's thought, we have a glimpse of the classical vision of civic republicanism. He wanted the citizen to take an active and full interest in the affairs of the city-states. Thus unlike passive citizenship, which reduces citizens' participation in the polity only to vote, Aristotle was the propagator of active citizenship. He regarded it essential if rulers were to govern according to the constitution or the rule of law and the shared values of the community.
- There is a link between order and the notion of justice in Aristotle's political thought. Justice or shared values of a community are the basis or the foundation of their polity. Thus he argued that each type of polity must act accordingly and guard against the excesses, particularly their weaknesses, if order or stability in the polity is to be maintained. Without order or stability in the polity, the moral-ethical life of the individuals, according to Aristotle, is unimaginable.
- However, he also argued that the rulers would eventually become corrupt and moral corruptions would make civic or political life impossible. It would finally lead to revolutions and upheavals. Aristotle devoted a great deal of time to Politics to suggest or advise the rulers on how to prevent revolutions or radical transformations. Naturally, he generates a great deal of interest among the political thinkers who often provide contradictory interpretations of Aristotle's thought. For some, he was a theorist of natural law or deontological ethics; for others, he was a conventionalist and a theorist of ethical relativism. The second part of this lecture critically assesses these claims and counter-claims about Aristotle's political thought.

If we look at the thought of Aristotle, we have a kind of glimpse of classical republicanism or civic republicanism in Aristotle's thought. And what is the civic republicanism? What is so different about the classical civic republicanism? That is the idea based on civic engagement or citizen's engagement in the day to day politics of the city or the polity.

In Aristotle's thought, we will find a glimpse in the classical vision of civic republicanism or civic engagement in day to day politics of state or polity and the way such engagement shaped the governing. We will also see the notion of justice or good for that particular society. Aristotle wanted the citizens to take an active full interest in the fields of the city-states. Unlike the passive citizenship that we have now, where the rule or the contribution of citizenship in the public political life is reduced merely to the periodic vote.

In today's sense of the term, the relationship between the state and citizen is reduced to a kind of passive participation that is once in 5 years, 6 years or 4 years as the constitution requires. The citizen's role is confined to electing their representative through the modes of the vote.

But Aristotle's concept of citizenship was much broader than that. It required continuous engagement in the public life of the city-states.

So, what we have in Aristotle is a kind of support for the active citizenry and not a kind of passive participation in the public life that can be observed in a modern democracy, where citizen's role in the public life is seen as limited to electing the representatives. Then we think about civil society organization or groups, civil rights groups, or democratic rights groups which will uphold the ruler or those who are there in the government accountable.

Here, the notion of citizenship is based on the continuous active participation of the citizen in day to day life of the city. He regarded this continuous active participation of the citizen as essential if rulers were to govern, according to, the constitution or rule of law.

As we have discussed in his classification of the constitution and also his ideal polity is to be based on the rule of law or constitution. That means the shared value or norms that the community collectively had arrived at. So, the government should be based on those collective norms or constitutions which the community decides. Now, who is going to ensure that governing or ruling is done according to that principle or constitutions that require day to day continuous active participation of the citizen?

Aristotle argued that if rulers were to govern according to the constitution or rule of law, or the shared values of the community, it is essential to have active citizenship. Those who participate actively or continuously in the affairs of the state. So, what we have in Aristotle is a kind of link between order and the notion of justice. There is a kind of preference of order to ensure justice in the city.

We will particularly discuss his views on revolution to know more about his preference for the order on the status quo. And how to prevent the change particularly the radical change or transformation necessary for political life to flourish. So without order, it is unimaginable to have a decent political life which will enable the ethical and moral life of the individual.

In our previous lecture, we have discussed that for Aristotle, the full or ultimate realization of humanity that is there rational, moral and ethical faculties are to be realized in the life of the city among the equals when they live an associational life.

So, this idea of Zoon Politikon is to ensure that polity provides the condition for the individual to lead a flourishing life, to lead a happy life or eudemonia. So, in Aristotle, the

conception we find a kind of link between his notion of justice to the order and justice or shared value of the community or the basis or foundation of the polity.

We have discussed how in the polity, the constitution is the soul or foundation which reflects the shared value of the community. And the governing of the polity should be based on the shared values or notion of justice for the constitution which reflect or encapsulate that shared notion of justice and does what is good for the community. Thus, he argued that each type of polity must act accordingly and guard against the accesses particularly their weaknesses if order or stability in the polity is to be maintained. So, what he argued was that the constitution reflects what is good for that particular community.

Now, if the ruling of the governing is to be based on that agreed-upon notion of justice or good for that particular community. The six types of polity that are used. That is a monarchy, which may pervert or eventually become a kind of tyrannical rule, then aristocracy which can pervert or turn into an oligarchy.

The best is the mixed constitution of a polity with the aristocratic and democratic element and which may turn into or acquire the perverted form of democracy which is the rule by many or the poor. All these six types of polities or regimes had their weaknesses or strengths.

Now, Aristotle argued that each type of polity must act accordingly and guard against their foundation, basis of the rule that reflects in their constitution or purpose of the ruling. So, they must act accordingly and guard against the excesses particularly their weakness, if order and stability in the polity are to be maintained.

So, without order and stability, the moral-ethical life of the individuals or the men according to Aristotle was unimaginable. However, he argued that the rulers would eventually become corrupt and moral corruption would make civic or political life impossible. That is a true event. Today, when we think about politics is a science or art which enables us to have the sound judgement that helps us resolve our conflicts peacefully without resorting to violence.

Now, sometimes, it happens because of the wider sense of injustice or the moral corruption there would be little scope for sound ethical, moral, and political judgement to resolve our conflicts that leads to a strife and civil wars that leads to revolution. Aristotle was aware of these gradual decay or degeneration in the polity and the eventual transformation or revolution.

He argued that the rulers would eventually become corrupt and moral corruptions would make civic or political life impossible. That would finally lead to upheavals and revolution in the polity. Aristotle devoted a great deal of time in politics that is his text to suggest or advice the rulers on how to prevent revolution or radical transformations. Naturally, he generated a great deal of interest amongst the political thinkers who would provide contradictory interpretations of Aristotle's thought.

So, whether he was arguing what ethical life was good in itself or he was arguing what some kind of relativism, where a community or the specificities of the community and their historical context would determine what is good for the society. There is all kind of contradictory and different interpretations of Aristotle's thought.

For some, he was a theorist of natural law or deontological ethics. That means ethics or the notion of justice that Aristotle had was good in itself. And on that basis, he judged that different kinds of constitution and what is desirable, good, moral, or ethical life for the human being. However, for others, he was a kind of conventionalist, and a theorist of ethical relativism.

The second part of this lecture critically assesses these claims and counterclaims on Aristotle's political thought. Now, let us first discuss his views on citizenship.

(Refer Slide Time: 14.16)

**Aristotle's views on citizenship**

- Aristotle regarded the state as the collective body of citizens. Citizens play a significant role in ensuring that power is exercised as per laws and constitution and thereby ensuring order and justice in the polity. His views on citizenship are the best example of the classical notion of civic republicanism. He presents a very thick and active notion of citizenship. He regarded it as a great responsibility that required specific training and knowledge (sound political judgement or *phronesis*). He argued that citizens must be free from productive and manual labor to have the necessary leisure to participate in the public-political life in the polity actively.
- He had a very active notion of citizenship, which he defined as 'the ability to rule and being ruled in turn'. It was not reduced to periodic voting as in large modern democracies today where citizens' role is reduced to electing their representatives. According to Aristotle, it is the intimate associational life and participation in deliberations on good and justice for the polity that enables the individual to lead an ethical life.
- However, Aristotle's conception of citizenship was limited to male members in the polity alone. He excluded large sections of the population, such as women, slaves, and residents-aliens from citizenship rights. He justified slavery. Their involvement in manual and productive works, according to Aristotle, would provide the citizens with the necessary leisure to devote exclusively to the matters related to the public-political life of the state.

So, as we have discussed that for Aristotle, all the institutions must have a purpose or that purpose or goal will justify the existence of such an institution. We have discussed household or property or the institution of slavery. How he justified it in the previous lecture before he gave reason to the existence of a polity.

He regarded polity or state as the collective body of the citizens. So, citizens were necessary for the effective rule in the city and he had a very active notion of citizenship as I have just discussed. This active citizenry played a very significant role in ensuring that power is exercised as per laws and constitutions thereby ensuring order and justice in the politician. So, the citizen has a very significant role in Aristotle's conception of polity or order or justice in society to prevail.

He was not someone who reduced the role of the citizen to a kind of passive participation once in four or five years as we see in a modern democracy. His views on citizenship are the best example. Therefore, the classical notion of civic republicanism. So, we have a responsibility if we want our polity to be governed, according to the laws and constitution.

Now, without taking interest in or participating in the public life of the state, to just criticise or have an opinion about the politics is not good. It will not lead to an ethical life. It will not help us to have more sound judgement about political matters. It requires an associational life, engagement, and participation. Therefore, in Aristotle, you have a kind of a glimpse of the classical notion of civic republicanism.

And he presented the thick notion of citizenship. The thick notion of citizenship in contrast to today's notion of citizenship was regarded as a thin notion of citizenship. Now, you are largely motivated or interested in leading your personal life which is different from public life in the cities. So, you leave it for the politicians or the political parties to decide about what is good for the rest of the society, and you perceived your self-interest.

You engage in political matters but only when it comes to electing your representative. That is a very thin notion of citizenship. In contrast, in Aristotle, you have a very thick notion of citizenship which was not just about electing alone. It was also about developing the capacity to rule.

In Aristotle, you have a very thick notion of citizenship and an active notion of citizenship, which was not a kind of passive. He regarded this thick or active notion of citizenship or responsibility of citizenship as a kind of very significant and critical for the smooth functioning of the state.

This role of citizens in the city requires a very specific kind of training and education. In the previous lecture, we have seen that how we acquire this capacity by living associational life with others. The mechanism which helps the individual to develop some right faculties to participate in the city-state is to be acquired through an associational living.

Therefore, the knowledge of ethics or morality should be the guide. But it is not sufficient in itself. The individual must also acquire sufficient experience to have the sound knowledge about the political matters which is essential to perform one citizenship duty or the responsibility of being a citizen in the city-states.

This idea of phronesis or the political judgement is necessary for the citizen to perform his duty of an active citizen in the public life of the state. Aristotle argued that citizen must be free from the productive and manual labour to have the necessary leisure. For him, leisure is cultivating the reasoning faculty or it was the life of man where the creative pursuit of free time was made available by the institution of slavery that is to involve or engage in the productive labour within the household. We have discussed this in the previous lecture when we discuss his idea on household, property and family.

In Aristotle's views, the citizen should have a sufficient leisure time or free time to engage in the public or political life in the polity. The citizens are to be free from the worries or concerns of managing the household affairs or doing the productive or manual labour, and the

leisure is different from our contemporary understanding of leisure which is the pursuit of personal interest. What is good for us? That is different from the public or political group. For Aristotle, leisure is to involve in public life or deliberate on the matters that are related to the polity. So, what is good for the community? What is the just constitution? What is the just law?

These are the matters which requires the citizens to have sufficient leisure to deliberate upon through living an associational life among the free and equal members in the city-states. He had this very active notion of citizenship which is defined as the ability to rule and being ruled in turn. So, those who are being ruled through rotation by the other citizens have in them the knowledge or judgement about how to govern.

In that sense, this is a very thick notion of citizenship which was not a kind of passive indifferent attitudes to political matters as we say in a modern large democracy, where citizens are by and large driven by their personal and private interest. They will have an opinion. But they will leave it for others to decide. Aristotle defined citizenship which is something that requires the ability to rule and be ruled in turn.

Thus, all the citizens are equally capable of ruling and being ruled in turn. It was not to be reduced to the periodic voting that we have in the modern large democracy today, where citizen's role is reduced to electing the representatives. According to Aristotle, it was the intimate associational life, the participation in the deliberation on good and justice for the polity that enabled the individual to lead an ethical is moral life. That is called the telos of the individual.

The search for happiness or the desire to led a happy life requires, according to, Aristotle. Because man is Zoon Politikon or political social animal with the rational faculty. In the sense of justice or injustice, now, this telos or nature of the individual could be fully realized in the life of the city-states that requires the individual living an intimate life.

What kind of indifferent isolated fragmented life that comes to perform their political task once in a while, once in five or four years. But it requires continuous engagement or participation in the public life of the city to hold those who are governing or accountable. So, that was a very different kind of civic republicanism or civic virtue that Aristotle was talking about.



However, we have to understand this conception of citizenship that Aristotle was arguing about what was limited to the male member in the polity alone. The large section of the population, in fact, the majority of the population who were women, slaves, residents, or aliens. He denied them any citizenship right. So, it is a kind of responsibility for the citizens which gave them certain rights, share in power or responsibility in governing the state.

This conception of citizenship was to be limited to those who had the necessary leisure to participate in deliberating upon what is good injustice. It had to be limited to the male members who performed different tasks in the polity when they were young or they should have performed a military task. When they were mature enough, they should be the statesmen or the politician. And when they were old enough, they should become the priestly class.

Now, all these roles were limited to the same section of the people who at a different stage of life would perform different kinds of roles in the cities that denied and excluded a large section of the population, who were women, slaves, and residents alien. He had a very thick or active notion (25:08) of citizenship. But it was limited to the same set of male household honour in the Athenian society.

And he justified slavery and he thought that this involvement of slaves was manual and productive work was necessary for the citizens or the member in the Athenian society to have the necessary leisure, to devote exclusively to the matters related to the public political life of the citizens. And how he justified, we have discussed later.

In his scheme of things, only those members who had the necessary leisure time, free from the financial worries or worries of managing the household, they should be given this power or responsibility to play an active role in the life of the city or deliberation about what is good for the polity. This is a very thick or active notion. But it was a very limited notion of citizenship that we had in Aristotle.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:12)

**Views on Revolution: Causes and Remedies**

- Aristotle's theory of revolution is fascinating for numerous reasons. It has to do with the fact that he argued more about how to prevent revolutions or mutinies than the ways and means to overthrow the existing states – even tyrannical. Thus, for Aristotle, the role of political judgement or knowledge of politics is to maintain political stability in the state and prevent decay or degeneration.
- His theory of revolution, also known as stasis, has two steps or parts. First, he describes the situation when it is no longer possible to lead a well ordered political life. Second, the breakdown of existing legal-political structures eventually leads to strife and also bloody civil wars. By and large, Aristotle saw revolution or stasis as evil and provided an elaborate mechanism in Politics to prevent it. And it was in this spirit of self-preservation for the polities that he advised even to the tyrant – the most perverted form of regimes as to how to retain power.
- His theory of revolution or rather how to prevent a revolution was rooted in the periodic rotations of power among the democratic and oligarchical factions in Athens and their exclusive justifications for retaining power and wealth. It was not rooted in economic inequalities alone. According to Aristotle, roots of revolutions are more in the wider sense of injustice than in purely economic disparities, as Marx would argue much later.

Now, we will discuss his views on revolution, the causes and the remedies of a revolution that Aristotle had used. His account of the revolution was fascinating for numerous reason. One of the reasons was more about how to prevent the revolution than the ways and means to overthrow the existing regimes or existing polity.

So, it would be perhaps wrong to call it a theory of revolution. The argument that Aristotle presented was how to retain power? And how to prevent upheavals or revolution from occurring or challenging the status quo in the polity? In that spirit, he even advised a tyrant who was the worst form of or most perverted form of polity.

The fascination with his theory of revolution often led many to compare his idea with Marx which is wrong and we will discuss it how. It is nonetheless fascinating and it argued more about how to prevent revolutions or mutinies, than the ways to overthrow the existing states which were even tyrannical. Thus, for Aristotle, the role of political judgement or the knowledge of politics combined the knowledge of ethics with practical wisdom that is to maintain the political stability for justice to prevail.

So, the whole idea of Aristotle's theory on revolution was to prevent decay or degeneration which led to a transformation in the polity or regime. His theory of revolution was also known as Stasis. He had two steps or parts. First, he described a situation when it was no longer possible to lead a well-ordered political life.

The purpose of a polity or regime was to give the man or citizen a scope to lead a political life. The political life is the most desirable life for the individual to realize his true

potentialities to lead a human life and a moral-ethical life. That is possible only in the life of polity. Therefore, as we have discussed, the pursuit of personal interest or economic interest is seen necessary. Nonetheless, the less significant or subordinated to the life in the public and political community or the public, political life in the polity.

So, the purpose of a polity is to enable those condition, where a man would lead a life of realization of his true potentiality. Now when a situation occurs, where it becomes impossible for a man to lead such political life. That is the first step towards this moral degeneration or revolution or stasis as Aristotle called it.

And the second step of such moral decay and degeneration was the breakdown of the existing political structure which eventually led to a strive and bloodiest civil wars. So, if you look at the modern revolution or radical transformation and different polities, you can explain or understand it better through this idea that revolution happens or radical transformation occurs, when it becomes impossible for an individual to lead a political life. That is the first step, unless, it is checked or addressed. It would lead to the eventual upheavals or transformations in the polity.

By and large, Aristotle saw these changes or evolution or hysteresis as avail and provide an elaborate mechanism in politics to prevent it. So, the whole purpose of Aristotle is to advise the rulers, the governing class of how to prevent these radical transformations and revolutions. It was in this spirit of self-reservations, or for the politics that he advised even the tyrant who was the most perverted form of regimes as to retain power or how to maintain the status quo and prevent any revolution.

His theory of revolution or rather how to prevent a revolution was rooted in the social or historical context of Athens. Like Plato or Socrates, before him, Aristotle was also addressed to the wider sense of injustice that was prevailing among the Athenian citizens. This was the result of moral decay.

The rise of the sophist and the kind of ethical relativism, there he was trying to address these instabilities or uncertainties of his time which led to the factionalism between democrats and oligarchs which were alternating power one after the other that led to murder, usurpation of power and wider sense of injustice or moral corruption in the city-states.

His understanding of revolution could also be understood through these social, historical contexture of Aristotle. Here, there was a kind of periodic rotation of power among the

democrats and the oligarchical factions in Athens. And both of them were justifying their retaining of power or responsibility or wealth of the city. So, for the democrats, the argument was if all men were equal then why ruling or governing should be limited to the few?

And the oligarch's argument was these few are wealthy noble and therefore had the right to rule. So, these contesting position or altercation led Aristotle to device the mechanism to address different claims or computing of justice, thereby, ensuring order or stability in the polity which was necessary to lead a political life. Individual needed to lead an ethical life.

So it was not rooted, therefore, in the economic disparities inequality. For revolution in modern times, particularly in Marx, we find the justification for revolution or radical transformation or civil wars rooted in the economic disparities or economic inequalities. But for Aristotle, the roots for revolution or upheavals was to be traced in the wider sense of injustice than in the purely economic disparity.

The economic disparities might be the reason. But overall, the reason for change or revolution was rooted in the notion of injustice which varied from society to society, community to community, or ages to ages, historically. In contrast to Marx, who would argue much related to the economic disparities in the society would lead to eventual transformation in the polity. Aristotle argued that it is rooted in the wider sense of injustice that prevailed.

The society was divided into classes, where there were just a few who usurped the power and used it for their benefits. There would be natural resentments and revolts against such usurpations by the many who considered themselves as an equally capable or free and equal member in the society. The roots of revolutions to be traced in this wider sense of injustice rather than economic disparities alone as Marx would argue much later.

(Refer Slide Time: 35.25)

➤ Aristotle provides specific advice to each of the six types of regimes and polities that he discusses in *Politics*. He advised them to observe their strengths and guard against their weaknesses to prevent revolutions. His advice to monarchs is to develop the obedience of law among the subjects and guard against the charlatans and demagogues. He advises the tyrant to deploy the tactics of dividing the opponents as well as to adapt the moderate tact of a decent monarch. It was much similar to the advice that Machiavelli would give to his Prince millennia later.

➤ Similarly, he wanted aristocrats to ensure the wellbeing of all and judicious distribution of resources. If it is limited to few and works for their benefits alone, then it would result in oligarchy and eventually mob-rule. He argued that democracies might enter into danger if they add up to the distresses caused already to the traditional wealthy ruling-elite. They have already forced to share power with the poor. So in his opinion, for the stability and durability of democracy, democratic aspirations of many (mostly poor) needed to be counterbalanced by the virtues or characteristics of the aristocracy. The opposite of this advice, he gave to the oligarchy. They should rule in a manner that makes their rule balance the interest of the few with the democratic aspirations of many.

➤ Aristotle argued that monarchies or kingship could degenerate into tyranny, aristocracy into oligarchy, democracies could easily give way to mob-rule and are prone to demagogues usurping power. So he regarded a mixed constitution i.e., the polity that combines the interests and virtues of aristocracy with that of democracy as the best system of rule. With a sizable number of middle class, Aristotle regarded polity as the most stable and just form of rule. Such advice of Aristotle to the rulers on self-preservation and political stability continues to echo in the writings of many political advisors and political theorists even today.

5

Now, what was his advice on different kinds of rulers or governing people. Aristotle provided very specific advice to each of the six types of regimes and polities that he discussed in politics, his text. There is a kind of specific advice. Aristotle appeared to us as a kind of neutral observer or a kind of empirical thinker who was not taking any moral position.

His only responsibility was to advise the rulers, be it aristocrats, oligarchs, tyrants, or monarchy or democracy to how to maintain the status quo or how to retain power? And in such advice, he makes specific kind of advice to the specific kind of polity. The advice may appear to us very simple, to some as commonsensical. But it is hard to practise in the actual politics or actual arrangement of the ruling and the polity or governing state.

His advice was to observe the strength and guard against the weakness to prevent revolution. For each type of qualities, they would have their strengths and weaknesses. Aristotle's advice was for these rulers to retain power. And to maintain the status quo, they must observe their strength against their weaknesses to prevent degeneration, to prevent upheavals and revolutions.

His advice to the monarch was to develop the obedience of the law. So, a monarch and the justification for the monarch is when you have in the community, one man who has superior knowledge than the rest to know what is good for the whole community. Then monarchy is justified. And now, to prevent monarchy from degenerating into tyranny. The monarch must inculcate among the citizens or subjects obedience of the law or unquestioning submission to them or laws of the monarchy.

For a monarch to prevent tyranny or degeneration of his regime, he must develop the obedience of law among the subjects and guard against the Charlatans and Demagogues. So, they may also dupe the king or monarch by presenting themselves as knowledgeable in some skills without really having those skills or abilities. So, a monarch to rule wisely or the benefit of the community, they must develop in the subject's obedience or law and also guard himself against the Charlatans and the Demagogues.

He advised the tyrants when the monarchy degenerated into tyranny and there were many tyrants. Now, to maintain the rule or retain in power, the tyrants must develop this dual tactic. That is, to divide the opponents. There will be constant conspiracies against the tyrants. And tyrants must be aware of his opponents and try to divide them to retain in power. And also, should adapt to the moderate tactics of decent monarchs. And this way, a tyrant can retain power. This advice is much similar that Machiavelli would give to his prince, millennia later.

Similarly, he wanted Aristocrats to ensure the well-being of all and judicious distribution of resources. If it is limited to the few and works for the interest of these few alone, then it would lead to oligarchy and eventually to the mob rule. For the aristocrats which is the rule by the best few, those who have the knowledge and the merit to govern the society for the benefit of all is desirable. For them, to retain the power to ensure that their rule should not be limited to the interest of few.

Once it is only for benefiting or protecting the interest of the few who are in the ruling then it is oligarchy which will eventually lead to mob rule. He argued, therefore, that the aristocrat must ensure the well-being of all. The resources of the state should be shared among everyone and not just a few. He argued that democrats might enter into danger if they adapt to the distress cause already due to the traditional wealthy ruling elites in the state.

For the democracy, his advice was that they should not do harm to those who were nobles and wealthy, and from the ruling class who were now sharing power with many of those who did not have wealth, or the poor. The democracy means to maintain the stability and the order, it must ensure that those who have the wealth or those who are from the novelty should not be put under distress that was caused to them already by ensuring the power as shared by everyone.

And there is also a danger in a democracy about the kind of general content for law, and the possibility of demagogues usurping the power. So, to ensure the durability of democracy or stability of democracy, the democratic aspiration of many needed to be counterbalanced by

the virtue or characteristic of the aristocracy. That he argued in his defence of polity as the best form of rule.

The opposite of this advice that he gave to the democrats, he gave to the oligarchy. They should rule in the manner that makes their ruling balanced the interest of the few with a democratic aspiration of many. So, the oligarchs had to ensure that the interest of the few should be counterbalanced by the democratic aspiration of the many.

Aristotle argued that the monarchies or the kingship could degenerate into tyranny, aristocracy into an oligarchy. Democracies could easily give way to mob rule and were prone to demagogues usurping power. He regarded a mixed constitution which would combine the virtues of the aristocracy, or oligarchy with democracy as the best system of rule and the most stable form of rule with a sizable number of the middle class.

Aristotle regarded polity as the most stable and just form of rule. He advised different kinds of rulers to ensure the stability to maintain power. However, he regarded polity as the justest and stable system of rule. Because it was a mixed constitution that combined the interest of few who were meritorious or had the knowledge of ruling with the democratic aspiration of many with a sizeable number of the middle class who were open to reason or debate. Then ruling based on virtue or ethics would ensure the durability and stability of political rule.

This advice of Aristotle to the rulers on self-preservation and political stability continues to echo in the writings of many political advisors and political theories even today. So, even many political advisors to many different kinds of regime, today, derive inspiration from this advice that Aristotle gave to different kinds of rulers and political regimes. That is my take in Aristotle's view on revolution. Now, we move on to assess the contribution of Aristotle to the political thought and tradition of particular thought in the western tradition.

(Refer Slide Time: 44.38)

**Critical Assessment of Aristotle's Political Thought**

- Aristotle's vision of politics is much different from Plato's. It is much more scientific, empirical, and pragmatic. However, it should not be construed that when Aristotle argues that politics is a pragmatic science, he denies any role of ethics in politics. He combines ethics with the knowledge of politics in a unique way.
- His classification of man as *Zoon politikon* has become the basis of political organization. He regarded man as rational, moral-ethical being. It is the *telos* of his existence, the full realization (*eudaimonia*) of which requires the associational life in the community with others. It is in the political community that men learn the virtue of political judgment by combining the knowledge of ethics with practical wisdom.
- There could be some merit to his theory of proportional equality, which argues that treat equals equally and unequal unequally. However, his defense of slavery is morally and ethically unacceptable and repugnant. He could not go beyond the biases of his society and age, even when he characterized men as rational and moral beings with a sense of justice or fairness. Similarly, his support of the subordinate roles for the women who could realize their full potentialities in the sphere of the household alone is very problematic and unacceptable today.

6

So, firstly that appears to us, Aristotle expanded the notion of politics that we had in Platonic conception. It appeared to be much different from Plato which was rightly argued by many scholars which were political or anti-political. Because Plato's political philosophy was to ensure the harmony of existence. Now, if there is the harmony of existence, there is no role in politics.

The role of politics is when there is competing interest when there is a diversion in opinions, how to mediate among those divergent competing opinions to arrive at certain common notions of justice. Now, that requires the knowledge of politics or sound judgement which is the mixing of ethical notion with the practical wisdom of a particular community. So, there is a kind of radical sense in understanding the role of politics and why politics is the master science, according to, Aristotle.

It is much more scientific, empirical, and pragmatic in Aristotle's conception. However, this scientific, empirical, and pragmatic conception of politics should not be construed as Aristotle was arguing about the politics as devoid of any ethical norms. It is often done in today's sense, particularly, politics is seen as more about acquiring power. And how, power is to be acquired and how it is to be distributed is regarded as the political matter. It requires political debates and discussions about how and to whom power is shared and how it is distributed.

In Aristotle's conception as in Plato, the politics required an ethical sense and there was a kind of balance between the ethical norms or ethical understanding with the political



specificities. So, he combined the knowledge of ethics with the politics in a very unique way that led different scholars to interpret Aristotle differently which we will discuss in a minute.

His classification of man as Zoon Politikon had become the basis of political organization. So, we as a human being are naturally, social and animal being who realizes his or her true potential by living associational life with others. In the household, where they were unequal according to Aristotle, the relationship between man and wife or parents, and children or man and slaves were of unequal relation.

And that is a kind of proportional equality and life in the city is life among the equals and the most ethical-moral life that is possible only is the life in the city, when an individual takes interest in the public matters and the polity. It has the necessary leisure to devote to that public life.

His classification as a man as Zoon Politikon has becomes the basis of political organisation. He regarded men as a rational, moral and ethical being, and it was the telos of his existence. The full realization of which required the associational life in community with others. It was in the political community that man learnt the virtue of political judgement by combining the knowledge of ethics with practical wisdom.

So, there could be some merit in his theory of proportional inequality that argued equal should be treated equally and unequal as unequally. However, his defence of slavery was morally and ethically unacceptable, and repugnant from today's sentiment. He could not go beyond the biases of his society and was even when he characterised men as a rational and moral being with his sense of justice or fairness.

There is some kind of telos that he argued about the man and yet he denied it to the full or equal level among the women, slaves and those whom he considered as barbaric. Similarly, his support of the subordinate roles for the women who could realize their full potentialities in the household alone was problematic. It is unacceptable today. There are many feminist critics to Aristotle's idea of discrimination based on gender.

(Refer Slide Time: 49.48)

- In the contemporary discourse on moral philosophy and the theory of justice, there are opposing camps with regards to the interpretations of Aristotle's political thoughts. Fred D. Miller regards Aristotle as a natural law theorist. He argues that for Aristotle, there is some transcendental or universal ethics that set the standards to judge the nature of other constitutions. However, others have characterized him as a conventionalist, conservative, and the theorist of ethical relativism.
- Aristotle's theory, particularly on ethics or virtue, is regarded as general, hence universal. That is, there is an inherent, innate sense of justice in men which he could fully realize only in the polity. This has influenced the thinkers like Immanuel Kant, who, in turn, influenced John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. Although, Rawls regarded Aristotle as consequentialist, perhaps wrongly, and his theory as good in itself. In contrast, communitarian scholars critical of Rawls' theory of justice, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, present Aristotle as the theorist of the community-specific, historically rooted theorist of justice who preferred the role of communities and conventions in determining what is good or just for the community. The basis of such an argument is that Aristotle argued that the actualization of ethics requires the practical wisdom of the specific community. However, both these interpretations are only partly correct.
- There are still others who regard Aristotle as the founder of classical republicanism. They focus particularly on his emphasis on civic engagement, which was based on proportional equality and 'combined the optimistic aspiration of the humanism and classical degeneracy in human affairs'. Aristotle argued that through the rule of law and constitution, moral decay and corrupt practices could be thwarted, and the full realization of human potentialities become possible.

In the contemporary discourse on moral philosophy and theory of justice, there are opposing camps with regards to the interpretation of Aristotle's political thought. Fred D. Miller regards Aristotle as a natural law theorist. And he argues that for Aristotle, some transcendental or universal ethics set the standards to judge the nature of other constitution. However, others have characterised him as the conventionalist, conservative and the theorist of the ethical relativism.

Aristotle's theory, particularly on ethics and virtue is regarded as general and universal. His notion of political judgement is dis-combination of this general understanding of ethics with the specific wisdom or practical wisdom of the specific community. That is there is an inherent innate sense of justice in man which he could realize fully only in the polity by living fully an associational life with others who are equals.

This has influenced the thinkers who are like Emanuel Kant who in turn influenced John Rawl's understanding of the theory of justice, his text. There is a kind of the deontological basis of ethical understanding of virtue, according to this theory of thinker. Although, Rawl's regarded Aristotle as consequentialist. Consequentialists are those who argued the justification for ethics or justice is in its outcome is the consequence in its application.

However, Rawl's or the ontological theorist would argue that justice is that principle of governing that is just in itself. It does not require any further justification in its justness. In Kantian ethics, certainly, we will discuss which shapes Rawl's theory of justice as based on this regime of Aristotle as someone who argued for the transcendental or universal theory of ethics.

Now, in contrast to this kind of reading, some communitarian scholars are critics of Rawls's theory of justice\ such as Alasdair MacIntyre. Aristotle as the theorist of the community-specific, historically rooted theorist of justice who preferred the role of customs and conventions in determining what is good or just for the community. For these thinkers, Aristotle appeared to be rooted in the community or historical specificities of the community, to determine what is good for that society.

And there is a plausible reason for such readings of Aristotle when he decides about the different constitution and different constitution reflecting different notions of good and different justices for communities.

The basis of such an argument is that Aristotle argued that actualisation of ethics requires the practical wisdom of the specific community. There is a kind of knowledge of ethics which is general or universal. But its actual realization requires practical wisdom as well. That is specific to the community or its historical context. Therefore, the communitarians would argue Aristotle as a thinker of ethical relativism or the notion of good which is specific to the community differs from community to community.

However, both these interpretations are partly correct. As we discussed, Aristotle is not just providing a theory of justice. He is quintessentially a political thinker who combined the notion of politics with justice and how human being could realize his true potentialities in the life of the community.

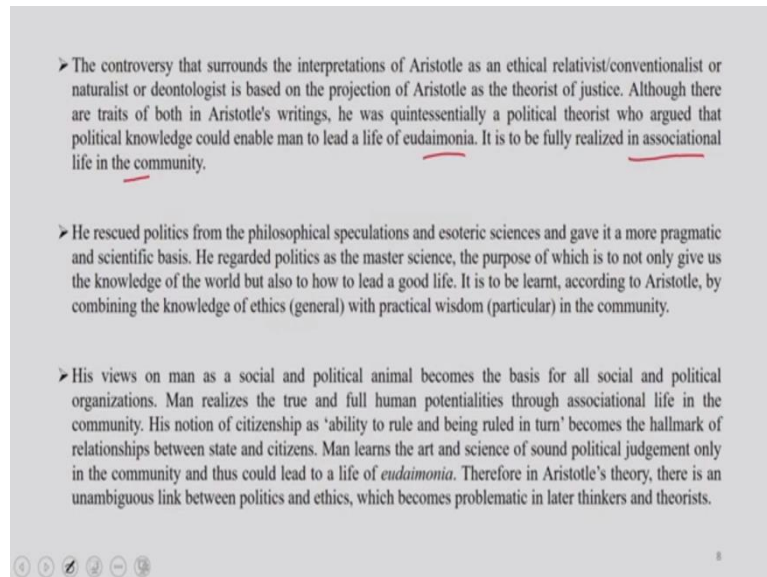
However, these theories would extract only those part that suits the justification, there particular or specific notion of justice. There are still others who regard Aristotle as a founder of classical republicanism. They focus particularly on his emphasis on civic engagement which was based on proportional equality and combined the optimistic aspiration of the humanism and classical degeneracy of human affairs.

The classical notion of civic republicanism was based on a few who were capable of governing when we allow everyone in the business of governing. It may lead to degeneration or moral corruption and how to prevent that? To prevent that, it is necessary to give only those citizens who have the leisure or free time to devote to the public matters.

In Aristotle, many scholars found a reflection of the classical notion of civic republicanism. Aristotle argued that through the law and constitution, the moral decay and corrupt practises could be thwarted and the full realization of human potentiality could be possible. He allowed

the individual to realize his true potentialities by ensuring that governing or ruling is done according to the rules and the constitution. And how it can be done, when there is the active participation in the public life of the city.

(Refer Slide Time: 55.37)



So, the controversy that surrounds the interpretation of Aristotle as an ethical relativist or conventionalist, or naturalist or deontologist is based on the projection of Aristotle as the theorist of justice although there are traits of both in Aristotle writings. He talked about the specificities of good and justice that were specific to a particular community. But he also talked about ethical notion or virtues which was universal, transcendental and sound political judgment required the knowledge of both. That is the ethics and practical wisdom.

The different interpretations are rooted in regarding Aristotle as merely the theorist of justice. But he was quintessentially a political theorist who argued that political knowledge could enable man to lead a life of *eudaimonia*. It is to be fully realized in associational life in the community.

So, Aristotle rescued politics from the philosophical speculations and esoteric sciences and gave it a more pragmatic and scientific basis. He regarded politics as the master science, the purpose of which was to not only give us the knowledge of the objects of the world which we live. But also, how to lead a good life. How to make polity a better place to live? or a more just and ethically or morally, more just order or just a mechanism of governing.

This possibility which we have discussed applies only to human affairs. So, in the life of nature among the other objects, the question of ethics and morality does not arise. It is

applicable only in human affairs, and morality that we can make our life better. Individually we can lead more virtuous life or ethical life, and realize our true potentialities and collectively make the governing more just and ethical. That is the whole purpose of politics for Aristotle.

It is to be learned, according to Aristotle, by combining the knowledge of ethics which is general, universal with the practical wisdom that is particular to a specific community. So, his views on man as a social and political animal *Zoon Politikon* as we have discussed become the basis for all social and political organisations. And men realize the full and true human potentialities through such an associational life of the community as we have discussed.

His notion of citizenship as the ability to rule and being ruled in turn becomes the hallmark of the relationship between state and citizens, and a man learns the art and science of sound political judgement only in the community. It, thus, could lead a life of *eudaimonia*. Therefore, in Aristotle, what we have a kind of unambiguous link between ethics and morality. So, the whole purpose of associational life is it in the household or the city-state is governed by this purpose in human life, to lead a virtuous life to lead an ethical life.

And that continuous search to leading a virtuous life and thereby realizing the rule potentiality becomes possible only in the life of the city. Therefore, it would be wrong to either project Aristotle merely as the pragmatic or scientific theorist devoid of any ethics or merely as the ethical theorist. So, he has a kind of balance in the transcendental notion of justice to the practical specific requirements of the community.

And this again comes to the overall theoretical premise of Aristotle that is about the golden being, the human being, or posed or posited in a manner where he is neither a beast nor a god. Not someone who does not know anything or someone who knows everything. So, there is always that element of uncertainties or realms which transcend our knowledge.

Now, within that limits, how to lead a virtuous life, how to create a polity which would be just which will enable the moral and ethical life of the individual is the whole task of politics. Therefore, while he regarded politics in adjunct science. Yet it is a very productive science necessary for leading a good life for an individual. And we see, how this relation between ethics and politics becomes problematic, among later thinkers when we discuss Machiavelli, Hobbes and others.

(Refer Slide Time: 60:59)

## References

- Boucher, David and Paul Kelly (eds). 2003. *Political Thinkers: From Socrates to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Durant, Will. 2006. *The Story of Philosophy*, New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Forsyth, Murray and Maurice Keens-Soper. 1988. *A Guide to Political Classics: Plato to Rousseau*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jha, Shefali. 2018. *Western Political Thought: From the Ancient Greeks to Modern Times*, Delhi: Pearson.
- Ryan, Alan James. 2012. *On Politics: A History of Political Thought from Herodotus to the Present*, New York/London: Liveright Publishing Corporation.

That is all in today's lecture. You can refer to some of these texts to understand Aristotle ideas and you can also read the politics. There are different ways of reading politics. So, it is divided into different books and it is argued that he wrote different books at different points of time. And it is most likely what we have now is the lecture notes of his disciples.

You can read it in your ways to know more about what Aristotle's views on politics or his classification of constitutions and other topics that we have covered in this course on Aristotle. But what I have covered, today, for that you can cover these texts like David Boucher, Paul Kelly's, *Political Thinkers*.

Well, New Durant gives you an entry point to the philosophy of Aristotle, Murray Forsyth. And Shefali Jha's text is again very good. And Alan James, Ryan's text particularly to understand his views on revolution and Stasis. That is all in today's lecture. Thanks for listening. Do share your comments and feedback. Thank you all.