

BLOCK III

ARISTOTLE

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BLOCK III INTRODUCTION

Aristotle along with teacher Plato has a pre-eminent place as the great masters and teachers in the Western philosophical tradition. However, their methods differed – Aristotle is seen as a moderate and realist while Plato is regarded as an idealist, utopian and radical. At the same time, Aristotle is also seen as the father of the discipline of Political Science as he systematically analysed, classified and criticised the existing constitutions of his time. Aristotle was one of the earliest thinkers to use the comparative method in this endeavour. Aristotle's idea of citizen based on the virtue of being a ruler and ruled is a relevant cornerstone of modern liberal democracies. Similarly, Aristotle's notion of justice as fairness and justice based on the principle of reciprocity has influenced future scholars of political theory and political philosophy. Aristotle's understanding that different contexts demand different forms of government is a relevant point to understand the significance of context in defining political experiments and experiences. Relevance of Aristotle's ideas is eminent in the fact that for some contemporary issues and challenges in politics, his ideas act as a signpost. Aristotle also made tremendous contribution to research as his Lyceum was first research institute where scholars and investigators came together for collaborative inquiry and documentation. He was also the first person to establish a research library with systematic collection of works to be used by other scholars. Given his vast knowledge in diverse fields, Italian poet Dante referred to Aristotle as “the master of those who know.”



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UNIT 5 ARISTOTLE: STATE AND GOOD LIFE

(*ENDAEMONIA*)*

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 A Brief Outline of Aristotle's Life
- 5.2 Forms
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5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this chapter, a brief introduction to the life of Aristotle is given to understand the context in which his political philosophy developed. The chapter also explores the points of convergence and divergence between the teacher and the student; that is, Plato and Aristotle, in their approach to understand the relationship between form and matter. Further, the unit explains how Aristotle perceived virtue and its relevance in a political community. The next section focuses on Aristotle's theory of the state and the concept of good life. After reading this unit students will be in a position to understand the context and text in which Aristotle's concept of the state and good life evolved.

5.1 A BRIEF OUTLINE OF ARISTOTLE'S LIFE

Aristotle (c. 384 B.C.E to 322 B.C.E) was an Ancient Greek philosopher and scientist. He was born in Stagira, a small town on the northern coast of Greece. His father, Nicomachus, was a court physician to the Macedonian king Amyntas II. Although Nicomachus died when Aristotle was just a young boy, Aristotle remained closely affiliated with and influenced by the Macedonian court for the rest of his life. Little is known about his mother, Phaestis. She is also believed to have died when Aristotle was young. After Aristotle's father died, Proxenus of Atarneus, who was married to Aristotle's older sister, Arimneste, became Aristotle's guardian until he came of age. When Aristotle turned 17, Proxenus sent him to Athens to pursue higher education. At the time, Athens was considered the academic centre of the universe. In Athens, Aristotle enrolled in

* Dr Rashmi Gopi, Assistant Professor, Miranda House, University of Delhi

Plato's Academy, Greece's premier learning institution and proved himself as an exemplary scholar. Aristotle maintained a relationship with Greek philosopher Plato, himself a student of Socrates and his Academy for two decades until Plato's death in 347 B.C.E. Aristotle was not there as an Athenian citizen in origin and he remained a foreigner. For a man who would become renowned for having insisted that the activities of a citizen, taking turns in ruling and being ruled, was the optimum life for the fulfilled man who by nature was a polis-living animal, his foreigner status in the Athens where he taught and lived was, at least, a notable irony. Many of Aristotle's views were the result of a critical reflection on Plato's teachings. Aristotle's approach led to another way of seeing and understanding the same world that Plato settled. He would come to reject some of Plato's explanations of that agreed world, by finding other causes that were more numerous, obvious and demonstrable than a single, separate, transcendent and unifying Form of the Good to elucidate the way things are. This difference between the two philosophers is often thought to be exemplified for any visitor to the Vatican in Rome who is able to admire Raphael's famous Renaissance painting *The School of Athens*. In this painting, Plato and Aristotle are shown in discussion. Plato points to the heavens while Aristotle, holding a copy of his *Ethics* in his left hand, extends his right hand in front of him and appears, by this gesture, both to be restraining Plato's transcendental enthusiasm and to be encompassing the material world before him. Because Aristotle had disagreed with some of Plato's philosophical treatises, Aristotle did not inherit the position of director of the Academy, as many imagined he would.

After Plato died, Aristotle's friend Hermias, king of Atarneus and Assos in Mysia, invited Aristotle to court. There with like-minded friends and collaborators, Aristotle carried out scientific research. In 343 B.C.E. Aristotle was called to the Macedonian court to serve as tutor to Philip's son, Alexander, who was then thirteen years of age. His final twelve years, Aristotle spent in the school established by him called Lyceum. It was said that Aristotle collected an extraordinary library which later became the model for the famous library in Alexandria. Aulus Gellius (a second century C.E Roman) described how Aristotle taught. In the evenings he opened his lectures to young men who were interested and he spoke apparently more informally, on rhetoric, the cultivation of quick wit and civic education. But in the mornings his lectures were restricted to those whom he judged to have sufficient education, were keen to learn and to work hard and they listened to his more exacting investigations of nature and dialectical discussion. It was at this time that he clarified his views on ethics and politics. In 323 B.C.E., Alexander the Great died at the age of 32. Athens decided on war with Antipater. Aristotle was charged with immorality and he abandoned Athens for Chalcis, where his mother's family had some property. He went there with a freed woman, Herpyllis, with whom he had lived after the death of his wife and he died in the following year in 322 B.C.E. He was 62 or 63. Aristotle wrote an estimated 200 works, most in the form of notes and manuscript drafts touching on reasoning, rhetoric, politics, ethics, science and psychology. They consist of dialogues, records of scientific observations and systematic works. His

student Theophrastus reportedly looked after Aristotle's writings and later passed them to his own student Neleus, who stored them in a vault to protect them from moisture until they were taken to Rome and used by scholars there. Of Aristotle's estimated 200 works, only 31 are still in circulation. Most date to Aristotle's time at the Lyceum.

5.2 FORMS

Aristotle positioned sensible particulars at the centre of his enquiry. Aristotle strongly believed in the reality of the physical world and in its study as an essential instrument of knowledge. For him, the source of our knowledge is perception which is the result of particular sensations. Sensation is a vital precondition of knowledge. Although sensation on its own does not yield knowledge. Experience, for Aristotle, is a kind of knowledge of individual somethings. But the principles or foundations of this knowledge are reached or revealed by induction from sensation. Induction is the process of reasoning from particular cases to general conclusions. Knowledge relies on induction and observation. Induction and observation give rise to commonly accepted views which can be subject to error. But it is only through these opinions that the truth can be teased out. Knowledge comes from the psyche's capacity to generalise, based on its perception of particulars and these generalizations are then subject to a kind of logical or rational testing. Knowledge then depends on the correct interpretation of that direct acquaintance with individuals that is provided by the bodily senses.

Though Aristotle learned much of what he knew about philosophy from Plato, his ideas grew so far removed from his teacher's that he directly challenged many Platonic ideas in his writing. In *Book VII* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, he particularly mentions the theory of 'forms' which Plato introduced in his text, *The Republic*. Aristotle then recommends his own theory of forms, which is quite different from Plato's. Both Plato and Aristotle acknowledged that there are two critical elements that compose all things that exist: the form and the matter in which the form manifests itself. However, Aristotle's reflection of being led him to disagree with Plato on the relationship between form and matter. Though both Plato and Aristotle mention form as one of the main components of things that exist, their ideas of just what form is were quite dissimilar. In Plato's *The Republic*, narrator Socrates explains the 'form of the good' to his friend Glaucon as 'what gives truth to the things known and the power to know to the knower'. He might just be giving his definition of 'good,' until he goes on to say that 'the good is not being, but something yet beyond being, superior to it in rank and power'. He compares the form of the good to the sun, saying that the form of the good is 'sovereign of the intelligible kind and place, as is the sun of the visible.' This analogy of Plato is difficult to comprehend. He is saying that there is an 'intelligible realm' where the forms of things such as justice, good and beauty can only be conceived of with the mind. The representations of these things on Earth, according to Plato, are just weak reflections of the perfect forms in the intelligible world. He believes that the goal of a philosopher is to come to know

and understand these forms. However, Plato's forms are not just ethical concepts. He also notes that students of geometry 'use visible forms and make their arguments about them, although they are not thinking about them but about the things that they are like'. For instance, you can draw a square with a diagonal and argue that the diagonal divides the square in half, but you aren't really talking about what you've drawn, you're talking about the concept of a square and diagonal or as Plato would say, their forms.

As Aristotle systematically studied what it is to be, he drew conclusions that lead him to reject Plato's theory of forms. Aristotle tells us that 'a thing comes to be from its need or from its subject which we call the matter'. What he means is that all things must have matter, from which they come into existence. A chair might come to be from wood, which is why we call it 'of-wood,' or 'wooden.' However, another thing must be present for anything to come to be: the form. Aristotle defines a form as 'whatever the shape in the perceptible thing ought to be called'. For example, wood might take on the form of a house or concrete might take on the form of a sidewalk or a seed might take on the form of a tree. Aristotle says that "the form does not come to be and there is no coming to be of it". According to him, both form and matter are necessary for anything to come to be and when things come to be, it is not a matter of creating one or the other, but of combining them. For example, a shoe might be created by forming leather into the correct shape, but the shoemaker creates neither leather nor the shape of the shoe. Shoemaker merely combines these two elements of being.

The consideration of the roles of form and matter led Aristotle to ask whether there could be any such thing as a form apart from matter. Contrary to Plato, Aristotle says that it is not. This is his way of saying that it is impossible for a form to exist without matter, for both must be there for anything to come to be. There can be no form of a table without any existing tables. One could talk about a table apart from its materials, but 'it is not a thing and something definite'. In other words, it is not an actual table. Aristotle continues that it is evident, then, that the forms, construed as things apart from particulars, are useless as causes, at any rate of comings to be and of substances; this role, at any rate, is no reason for these forms to be substances in their own right. Aristotle dismissed Plato's forms without empirical groundings (particular experience) and matter as "useless."

However, a careful consideration of both Plato and Aristotle's arguments shows that they do not inevitably contradict each other. Aristotle countered Plato's ideas by saying that forms without matter could not be 'something definite;' they could not actually, physically exist. Plato never claimed that forms were anything 'definite,' though. In fact, he specifically said that forms reside in the 'intelligible realm.' If we take Plato's intelligible realm to be not some parallel universe that the perfect forms of everything reside in, but rather the realm of our own thoughts and ideas, then in a way both philosophers are correct. As Aristotle said, form cannot really exist without matter. There is no 'house apart from bricks.' However, the ideas of things can be thought of and talked about because we have a mutual understanding of the forms of objects and ideas. This seems to be what

Plato really meant when he described forms. Students of geometry can discuss squares with perfectly equal sides and right angles, even if they cannot draw a perfect square, because they all understand the form of a square.

Both Plato and Aristotle present carefully thought out arguments regarding the nature of forms in objects. It was probably inevitable that Aristotle countered Platonic ideas in his writings, for philosophy, like all sciences, is the process of continually challenging previous beliefs in the search for knowledge. At first glance, it is not apparent that Plato and Aristotle’s arguments are not truly contradictory, especially when Aristotle so readily and openly denounces Plato’s theory. However, it is often the case with two opposing viewpoints that the best solution is some combination of the two, and this may be true for the question of forms. Although it is true that forms do not exist without matter in the physical world, having an understanding of forms as perfect conceptions of things we find in the physical world may be necessary for understanding and talking about the world around us.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. What is the primary difference between Plato and Aristotle in understanding ‘forms’?

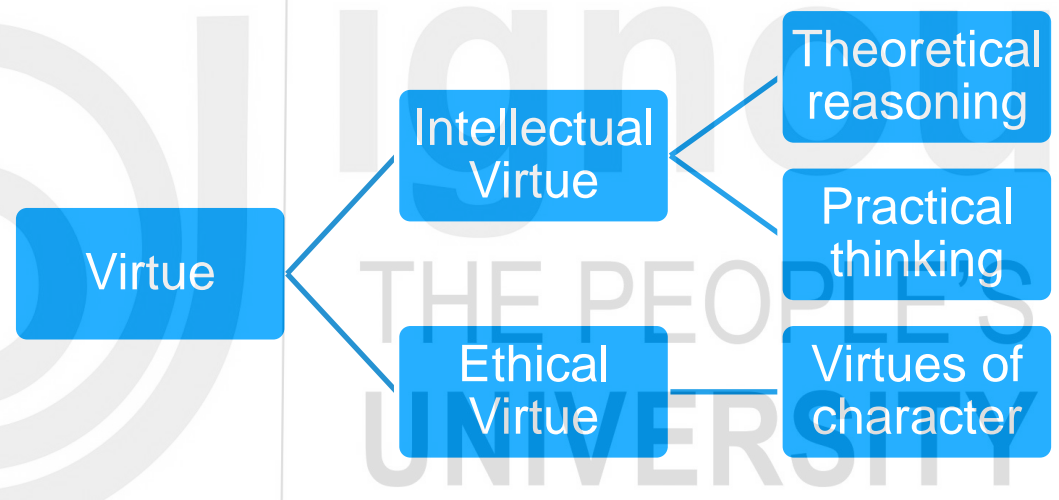
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5.3 VIRTUE

Aristotle’ views about virtue can be located in two of his works : the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemian Ethics*. The words “*Eudemian*” and “*Nicomachean*” were added later, perhaps because the former was edited by his friend, Eudemus, and the latter by his son, Nicomachus. It is widely presumed that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is a later and improved version of the *Eudemian Ethics*. Aristotle’s search for *the good* is a search for the *highest* good and he believes that the highest good, whatever it turns out to be, has three characteristics: it is desirable for itself, it is not desirable for the sake of some other good and all other goods are desirable for its sake. According to Aristotle, if we use reason well, we live well as human beings. Doing anything well needs virtue or excellence and therefore living well consists in activities caused by the rational soul in accordance with virtue or excellence. Living well contains in doing something, not just being in a certain state or condition. It involves in those

lifelong activities that actualize the virtues of the rational part of the soul. Also, Aristotle makes it clear that in order to be happy one must possess other goods as well—such goods as friends, wealth and power. For Aristotle, one's happiness is endangered if one is severely lacking in certain advantages—if, for example, one is extremely ugly or has lost children or good friends through death. Then that means, to a certain level, living well requires good fortune. However, Aristotle insists, the highest good, virtuous activity, is not something that comes to us by chance. Although we must be fortunate enough to have parents and fellow citizens who help us become virtuous but ultimately it is we ourselves who share much of the responsibility for acquiring and exercising the virtues.

Aristotle separates two kinds of virtue: those that relate to the part of the soul that engages in reasoning (virtues of mind or intellect) and those that connect to the part of the soul that cannot itself reason but is nevertheless capable of following reason (ethical virtues, virtues of character). Intellectual virtues are in turn divided into two sorts: those that pertain to theoretical reasoning, and those that pertain to practical thinking.



Aristotle maintains that the virtues differ from the crafts and all branches of knowledge in that the former involve appropriate emotional responses and are not purely intellectual conditions. Likewise, every ethical virtue is a condition midway (a “golden mean” as it is popularly known) between two other states, one involving excess and the other deficiency. Further, Aristotle says, the virtues are no different from technical skills: every skilled worker knows how to avoid excess and deficiency and balances a midway between two extremes. For instance, the courageous person judges that some dangers are worth facing and others not and experiences fear to a degree that is appropriate to his circumstances. The courageous man lies between the coward (who flees every danger and experiences excessive fear) and the rash person (who judges every danger worth facing and experiences little or no fear). Aristotle argues that this same topography applies to every ethical virtue: all are located on a map that places the virtues between states of excess and deficiency. However, Aristotle highlights the fact that finding the balance or midway between excesses and deficiency depends on particular context in which an individual is situated, there

is no universal way to this. Discovering the mean in any given situation is not a mechanical or thoughtless procedure, but requires a full and detailed acquaintance with the circumstances. His theory explains the nature of virtue, but what must be done on any particular occasion by a virtuous agent depends on the circumstances. But, Aristotle makes it clear that certain emotions (meanness, shamelessness, envy) and actions (adultery, theft, murder) are always wrong, regardless of the circumstances.

The initial point for practical reasoning: Practical reasoning always assumes that one has some end, some goal one is trying to achieve; and the task of reasoning is to decide how that goal is to be reached. It has to be kept in mind that practical reasoning is correct only if it begins from a correct premise. Then what is it that assures the correctness of its starting point? Aristotle answers: "Virtue makes the goal right, practical wisdom the things leading to it". A good person starts from meaningful concrete ends because his habits and emotional orientation have given him the ability to know that such goals are within reach, here and now. Those who are flawed in character may have the rational skill needed to achieve their ends—the skill Aristotle calls cleverness but often the ends they seek are worthless. The cause of this deficiency lies not in some impairment in their capacity to reason but in the training of their passions. Aristotle reasons that the happiest kind of life is that of a philosopher, someone who exercises, over a long period of time, the virtue of theoretical wisdom and has sufficient resources for doing so. One of his reasons for thinking that philosopher's life is superior to the second-best kind of life—that of a political leader, someone who devotes himself to the exercise of practical rather than theoretical wisdom—is that it requires less external equipment. The grandest expression of ethical virtue requires great political power because it is the political leader who is in a position to do the greatest amount of good for the community. The person who selects to lead a political life and who targets at the fullest expression of practical wisdom, has a standard for deciding what level of resources he needs: he should have friends, property and honours in sufficient quantities to allow his practical wisdom to express itself without obstruction. But if one selects instead the life of a philosopher, then one will look to a different standard—the fullest expression of theoretical wisdom—and one will need a lesser supply of these resources. If one opts for the life of a philosopher, then one should keep the level of one's resources high enough to secure the leisure necessary for such a life but not so high that one's external equipment becomes a liability and a disturbance rather than an aid to living well. The philosopher will need to determine, in particular situations, where justice lies, how to spend wisely, when to meet or avoid a danger and so on. All of the normal problems of ethical life remain and they can be solved only by means of a comprehensive understanding of the particulars of each situation. Having philosophy as one's ultimate aim does not put an end to the need for evolving and exercising practical wisdom and the ethical virtues.

Aristotle believes that the intellectual virtues were acquired by inheritance and education and the ethical ones through the imitation of practice and

habit. According to Aristotle the highest virtue is intellectual contemplation. In addition, Aristotle mentions twelve virtues and they are as follows:

- Courage – bravery and valour (mean between cowardice and rashness)
- Temperance – self-control and restraint (mean between insensibility and over-indulgence)
- Generosity (mean between stinginess and extravagance)
- Magnanimity (mean between pettiness and vulgarity)
- Pride – self-confidence (mean between timidity and conceit)
- Proper ambition (mean between under-ambition and over-ambition)
- Good Temper – equanimity, level headedness (mean between impassivity and ill-temper)
- Friendliness and friendship – conviviality and sociability on the one hand and camaraderie and companionship on the other (mean between unfriendliness and flattery)
- Truthfulness – straightforwardness, frankness and candour (mean between false modesty and boastfulness)
- Wit – sense of humor – meaninglessness and absurdity (mean between humourlessness and buffoonery)
- Proper shame – (mean between shamelessness and excessive shame)
- Justice – impartiality, even-handedness and fairness (mean between malice and envy)

Aristotle’s virtue theory has been criticised for various reasons. Scholars like Grotius feel that many of the virtues enlisted by Aristotle are not following the mean between extreme vices. For thinkers like Kant, without moral principles, misapplied virtues become vices. For philosophers like J.S. Mill, morality involves judging actions and not character traits. In spite of all these criticism’, Aristotle’s vision on virtues are reference points for political theorists of all times.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Explain two main types of virtues identified by Aristotle.

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2. Mention twelve virtues of individual emphasised by Aristotle in an ideal polis.

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5.4 STATE AND GOOD LIFE

For Aristotle, the state is a community of persons. Every community has definite aim and that aim is good. As a community, the state has an aim and that aim is also good. Nevertheless, the state is not an ordinary community. It is the premier of all communities and naturally its aim shall be the highest or supreme. The state being the highest association enjoys the highest position in the social structure.

Aristotle being a biologist treated the state as a natural living being consisting of many small parts/units. For Aristotle, the state exists by nature. Aristotle states that the state is characterized by natural growth. However, during its different stages of progress, man-made laws and conventions have intervened. Aristotle believes that in the evolution of state as a community, laws and conventions played a positive role. Laws and conventions are basically good and man has made them to serve their beneficial objectives. These laws and conventions have facilitated and enriched the functioning of the state.

In its natural development, the state witnessed various stages. For Aristotle, the first stage of the state is the household. The union between male and female forms the basis of family. Again, the union between male and female is vital for reproduction, since each is powerless without the other. This is not a matter of choice. It is the result of desire implanted by nature and this desire is to be found in all animals. Family includes other constituents such as slave, ox and plough. Without these constituents, a family cannot maintain its own physical existence. In Aristotle's definition: "This association of persons, established according to the law of nature and continuing day after day, is the household." The household is the basic form of association and meets the basic necessities. But man's necessities are various and naturally, it is beyond the capacity of the family to satisfy those demands.

Several families come together and form a village to fulfil the greater demands and necessities. It generally comes into being naturally. The village, though higher than the family, cannot cope with the growing demands of its members. When several villages come together, they form a Polis or State. Thus, Aristotle states, "The final association formed of several villages is the city or state. For all practical purposes the process is now complete. Self-sufficiency has been reached and so, while it started as a means of securing life itself, it is now in position to secure the good life". Aristotle notes that besides securing life itself, it has also a

greater purpose, that is, to secure a good life. Securing good life is the ultimate aim of both individual and community. The state is a perfectly natural form of association, as the earlier associations from which it evolved were natural. This final stage of association is the end of those others and its nature is itself an end. The state alone meets all the needs of man, it is alone self-sufficient. Household and village are not self-sufficient. They could meet only a fragment of man's necessities. We have already discussed that, according to Aristotle, for the sake of good life the use of both ethical and intellectual virtues is very much vital and the former requires the easy availability of sufficient amount of external goods. Only the state with an adequate size and sufficient population can guarantee the smooth supply of external goods. In Aristotle's vision, man seeks to satisfy his physical or material demands to attain good life. Any institution or community other than state is insufficient. Therefore, the membership of state is essential.

Aristotle says that man is by nature a political animal. The term political animal means an animal that lives in state or polis. Nature has stimulated and encouraged man to be a part of the state. Aristotle believes that it was not possible for man to live outside the state. It is the state that fulfils all his requirements. If due to inevitable bad luck, a man fails to get membership of polis then he will come down to the level of sub-man. On the other hand, if anybody refuses to live in a state he may be regarded as a superman/God. It is the basic nature of man to live in a state. Aristotle declares that, nature does nothing without purpose and for the purpose of making man a political animal, she has gifted him alone among the animals with the power of reasoned speech and other good qualities. The consequence of the term political animal is man is reasonable and with the power of reason, he can distinguish between good and bad; right and wrong; just and unjust. According to Aristotle, reasonability is the basis of sharing a common view in the matters that make a household or city. The fundamental difference between man and other animals is that man possesses consciousness and reasonability while other animals do not have these qualities. These unique qualities enable man to form organisation and also pursue a good life.

Aristotle's theory of state is organic in nature—which means that the state is a compounded whole. He has made distinction between “aggregate” and “whole”. The aggregate means that different parts of a thing are put together to make a unit. By their association, the parts make a unity. But the whole means a different thing. The polis or state is a whole. The state has several parts. But when they are put together, the unity will have a different meaning. The state is not a mere aggregate of individuals. Its members are not atomized individuals connected to one another only by the fact that they inhabit the same territory. When the individuals form a whole they share a joint activity and simultaneously lose their separateness. It is important to note that for Aristotle if the parts are separated from the whole, they will be useless. This is the organic theory of state. Aristotle has said that the polis or state has priority over the household and over any individual. For the whole must be prior to the parts. Separate hand or foot from the whole body and they will no longer be hand or foot. Only the membership of

state makes man self-sufficient and helps him fulfil his ambition and also to be moral and virtuous. Although man is a part of the whole, he will stand in the same relationship to the whole as other parts. It indicates that the individual will be able to keep his separate identity intact. In the state the individuals will perform different functions, but these functions are complementary. By claiming that the membership of the polis does not destroy the separate identity of man and group, Aristotle has recognised the plurality of parts composing the state. According to Aristotle, the individual can achieve morality and goodness only through the membership of and subordination to the state. He cannot have rights and liberties apart from the state or against the state. The individual, though not merged with the state, is completely dependent upon the state for pursuit of his moral and ethical objectives. Aristotle holds that without the membership of the state, the lofty ideals of individuals will remain unfulfilled.

Like many other philosophers, Aristotle placed self-preservation as the basic reason for man agreeing to form higher associations, particularly the state. No question of compromise can arise in respect of personal protection. But if the purpose of the individual is to help the polis in achieving the common good, then the opinion of the state will always predominate and the individual must submit to the state. For all other purposes, other than self-preservation, man must sacrifice himself for the sake of the common good embodied in the state. Aristotle is embedded in Greek philosophy which always thinks of the community as a whole. The view of the individual cannot get precedence over that of the state.

For Aristotle, the objective of the state is to make the life of the individual noble and happy. This is the most important function. But the state must also look after the security and general welfare of its citizens. According to Aristotle, a real state is concerned with both outward and inward actions of man. If the state makes itself busy only with the outward actions, it will do only half of its functions. Aristotle has stressed upon education. Education is the most powerful weapon for making men good or for training them in virtue. Education can be imparted by the institutions set up by the state. On this point, Aristotle and Plato have common understanding. The object of institutions should be to train men to goodness, to intellectual, moral and physical excellence. The state should be the school of citizens. The state in Aristotle's theory is a reformatory. As the state is the supreme organization, it is entitled to look after the interests of all men in a balanced way which no other association or institution can do.

For Aristotle, the good life is ensured by the state when according to the specificity of the person and his circumstances, moral practices can be chosen. The state facilitates choices for good life which is particular to each individual. For Aristotle, political entity, that is, the state, is a precondition for good life. Human excellence can be realised only under the aegis of correct compulsive norms and just laws of a state. The primary function of the state is character formation as man is not born with characters, but acquire them in a given context. Cultural rules, proper educational training and right laws of the state help human beings to acquire good character. In such a situation, human beings know why

they choose what they choose in given circumstances. For Aristotle, good life falls into three levels. They are life of pleasure, life of honour/virtue and life of contemplation. Life of pleasure is sought by the masses. Life of honour/virtue is sought by people in positions of power. Life of contemplation is chosen by a very few persons who understand the incompleteness of life in pleasures and honour. They think more about life. They try to understand the life beyond the immediate given circumstances. For this, rationality is a primary requirement. Therefore, ideally good life for human beings is not about nutrition and growth (plants also do it). Good life is also not about sentience (horses and other animals also do it). Good life is about rationality, the ability to think. For Aristotle, soul and body are inseparable. Humans exercise excellence of soul to think rationally, to choose an option of living in a given situation (animals and children cannot do this). Here, the ability to exercise one's virtue is more important than merely possessing virtue. Therefore, for Aristotle, soul and body act together to define good life.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Explain the organic nature of the Aristotelian state.

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5.5 CRITICISM OF ARISTOTLE'S STATE AND GOOD LIFE

Aristotle's theory of state has been criticised for subsuming individual and all other associations under the state. His state is seen as a totalitarian state. In the vision of Aristotle, there is hardly any scope for the individual to think in his own way and to do something independently.

According to Aristotle, the state is all-embracing and it leaves no room for the individual's freedom. The morality, ethics and idealism of the state and that of the individual are inseparable and same. Since the state is the highest association, it is quite capable of accepting the responsibility of helping and enriching the moral and ideal values to which the individual aspires. So the individual must be subordinate to the state and not vice versa. If the reverse is accepted then the authority of the state as the supreme organisation will be challenged and the non-existence of the state will suggest the non-fulfilment of the goals. Again, this is unacceptable. Hence, the subordination of the individual to the state is a must.

This type of subordination of individual to the state—which may also be described as totalitarian, authoritarian or paternalistic—is undoubtedly recommended by Aristotle. He thinks that people want to be happy and their happiness is required to be maximum. This is possible only if the state takes steps in making legislation and regulating the entire educational system. That means, the state-controlled education and state-sponsored laws are the only weapons of attaining happiness. The state is the only authority of all the enterprises and the individual has no choice. There is no alternative but subordination.

His concept of organic theory of state is also a powerful hint of totalitarianism. In an animal body the parts have no importance away from the whole. Although this is true, yet the same cannot hold good for the relationship between the individual and the state. The state is essential for the individual no doubt, but it cannot claim to embrace all the aspects of his life. The state can fulfil a part of human demands but not all the demands. For complete satisfaction and happiness, the individual seeks the membership of different organizations. Aristotelian state cannot tolerate this. It is absolutely unintelligible how a political association can make all its inhabitants moral, ethical and ideal single-handedly. It is both physically impossible and morally unjustifiable. No person or organization can take the absolute guardianship of all individuals. Aristotle's polis is a community and not an association, because men value it for its own sake and not just as a means to the fulfilment of separate individual ends. If this is the nature of Aristotle's polis, the individual finds no honourable position in the state. Any form of defiance to the state is seen as irrationality on the part of individuals. Rationality of the individual is equated with unconditional surrender to the state.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Do you think Aristotle's state is totalitarian in nature? Justify your answer.

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5.6 LET US SUM UP

In spite of all the criticism, one cannot ignore the fact that Aristotle's state came into existence to preserve life and continues to exist to ensure good life. Thus, we could see that for Aristotle a state is not a mere society, having a common place, established for the prevention of mutual crime and for the sake of exchange.

These are conditions without which a state cannot exist; but all of them together do not constitute a state, which is a community of families and aggregations of families in well-being, for the sake of a perfect and self-sufficing life. Such a community can only be established among those who live in the same place and intermarry. Hence, there arise in cities family connexions, brotherhoods, common sacrifices, amusements which draw men together. But these are created by friendships for to choose to live together is friendship. The end of the state is the good life and these are the means towards it. The state is the union of families and villages in a perfect and self-sufficient life, by which we mean a happy and honourable life. Then, the conclusion is that political society exists for the sake of noble actions and not for living together. Those who contribute most to such a society have a greater share in it than those who have nobility of birth or wealth. Aristotle brought theory of the state to empirical world. Aristotle amply understood the impact of changing context on changing nature of the state. In the next chapter, we can see in detail how Aristotle has propounded classification of constitution to highlight variations in state formations.

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5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Contrary to Plato, Aristotle says that there is no difference. This is his way of saying that it is impossible for a form to exist without matter, for both must be there for anything to come to be. There can be no form of a table without any existing tables. One could talk about a table apart from its materials, but 'it is not a thing and something definite'. In other words, it is not an actual table. Aristotle continues that it is evident, then, that the forms, construed as things apart from particulars, are useless as causes, at any rate of comings to be and of substances; this role, at any rate, is no reason for these forms to be substances in their own right. Aristotle dismissed Plato's forms without empirical groundings (particular experience) and matter as "useless."

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Aristotle separates two kinds of virtue: those that relate to the part of the soul that engages in reasoning (virtues of mind or intellect) and those that connect to the part of the soul that cannot itself reason but is nevertheless capable of following reason (ethical virtues, virtues of character). Intellectual virtues are in turn divided into two sorts: those that pertain to theoretical reasoning, and those that pertain to practical thinking.
2. Courage, Temperance, Generosity, Magnanimity, Pride, Proper ambition, Good Temper, Friendliness and friendship, Truthfulness, Wit , Proper shame and Justice.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1. For Aristotle, the basic unit of political community is formed when a man and a woman with slaves and children form a family. Families come together to form villages. Then villages come together to form a state. The parts (individuals, families and villages) are subservient to the whole (state).

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

1. (a) The morality, ethics and idealism of the state and that of the individual are inseparable and same. (b) The state-controlled education and state-sponsored laws are the only weapons of attaining happiness. (c) It is absolutely unintelligible how a political association can make all its inhabitants moral, ethical and ideal single-handedly. It is both physically impossible and morally unjustifiable.

UNIT 6 ARISTOTLE: CITIZENSHIP AND THE RULE OF LAW (PRESENTATION THEMES: CLASSIFICATION OF GOVERNMENTS, MAN AS ZOON POLITIKON)*

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Aristotle Science
- 6.2 Aristotle's Views on Human Nature
- 6.3 Citizenship
- 6.4 Justice and Rule of law
- 6.5 Classification of Governments
- 6.6 Aristotle and Contemporary Relevance
- 6.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.8 References
- 6.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this unit is to understand the way Aristotle saw integrity of different branches of knowledge and how he viewed science. This unit throws light on the fact that human nature defines political structure of a particular community. How Aristotle perceived citizenship, justice and classification of governments have been discussed in this unit. By analysing these concepts and categories, we realise continuities and changes in political discourses over the years. Understanding Aristotle and his relevance is important for the present generation to understand how political science of today came into existence.

6.1 ARISTOTLE'S SCIENCE

For Aristotle, reality of the physical world is important. The source of our knowledge is perception of the physical world which is the consequence of particular sensations. Aristotle believes in inductive method based on sensations to reach knowledge from particular to general. For this reason, Aristotle perceives science as a product of cognitive quality of persons engaged in search of knowledge. He emphasises on change and plurality of truth we experience. Science for Aristotle is a product of three things coming together, namely, production of something, practical action and theoretical contemplation. All three

* Dr. Rashmi Gopi, Assistant Professor, Miranda House, University of Delhi

aspects are connected and unified. Thus, for Aristotle, science is based on concrete physical reality and arena of ethics.

Aristotle highlights the fact that the condition in which people fixed their states of mind influences social behaviour. But once condition in which people live changes, then state of mind takes more time to change. The sciences which are dependent more on human behaviour are identified as 'inexact sciences' by Aristotle. 'Inexact sciences' are less universal, precise and stable as 'concrete sciences' based on physical world. Unlike Plato, Aristotle believes that all men by nature, seek knowledge and all have a potentiality for knowledge. The function of man is to engage in moral and rational activities seeking possessions of their good. The aim of science of politics as a branch of philosophy is action. Politics is not metaphysical. Aristotle says that men like Pericles are judged to be prudent and political experts par excellence. But people like him are incapable of teaching their knowledge as they rarely sat and wrote what they know. Therefore, Aristotle concludes that science of politics is specialised by those who study it systematically. In science of politics, theorists and practicing politicians are equally important.

To study nature, Aristotle believes, one has to begin with observation and experience. People talk about kinds/categories of things. People trust their experiences more than theories. Therefore, Aristotle observes that natural and political science theories must be examined and tested against experiences, not by another specialist but by everyman. Aristotle speaks about scientific method from the point of view of an anthropocentrism because it is only from human point of view that we know anything at all. Perception and thinking of human is important and through language it is conveyed to others. Therefore, before we start to systematise the 'scientific' disciplines and their respective subject matter, we need to study mind's own workings and its consistent arguments (logic).

For Aristotle, logic is rational quality of mind. Through speaking, people display logical ways of thinking. Aristotle gives significance to logic. He states that without a reflection on the rules which govern the expression of our thoughts, we would not be able to say anything conclusive about our knowledge of reality. Logic does not discover facts about the world but provides a system to articulate what we think we know. Logic does not guarantee a correct starting point of study. For correct starting point all intellectual learning should start from pre-existing knowledge by wise men. Aristotle's logical writings were grouped together in the sixth century C.E. under the name *Organon* (tool of analysis).

For Aristotle, language plays a significant role in scientific study. Language reflects the way we think of individual things and we think through naming things in common. Intuition enables us to pick out the universal in the particular. For Aristotle, knowable is prior to knowledge. Actual things are already existing, that we acquire knowledge about them. Perceptible is prior to perception. When we state something about a subject, then we do two things, we name it and we define it. The logos (set of words) which indicates the essence of a subject does

not change over time or culture. It is because, the elements of the definition are prior, more universal and intelligible absolutely than any particular subject.

According to Aristotle, nature has a purpose (*telos*), whether conscious or unconscious. It is constructive. Its purpose is observable. *Telos* helps to explain reality as intelligibly structured. It sees nature as in motion – from potential to actual. Therefore, man as part of nature is also ‘goal-oriented’. Definitions express the actualized purpose of things. For Aristotle, definitions are a combination of human thought and human language. Definitions are best provided by the experienced and wise down the ages. Aristotle makes it clear that all facts of life handed down by wise men should be tested against one’s own experience. This is because human beings are not pure intellects, but creatures of flesh and blood, body and mind. Human beings are desirous and cognitive within a physiological state as well as members of cultural communities. Definitions are set of words which shows the essence of a thing. Dialectician provides reasons for choosing one definition as opposed to another. Aristotle understands dialectic as a method of analysing the consistency of plausible arguments. It precedes practical and theoretical. Aristotle’s dialectic is a tool to help analyse commonly accepted views that emerge from premises within a given community. Dialectic enables a discussant to reason more clearly and without contradiction in arguments with others in his community. It is a skill in speaking between two competitive opponents. In dialectic engagement, premise is important to know the accepted thesis amongst wise. Intention is to reach closer to truth and not display of skill in argument. Aristotle uses dialectical method in ethics and politics. In the following sections, we will see how Aristotle developed his ideas about human nature, citizenship, rule of law and classification of governments.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. What is science for Aristotle?

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6.2 ARISTOTLE’S VIEWS OF HUMAN NATURE

For Aristotle, man is by nature social being, political being and ethical being. Human beings are social beings, because they are always to be found living

together with others in society or in a polis. Additionally, however, Aristotle considers it to be a 'characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust'. According to Aristotle, then, man is by nature an ethical being. In Aristotle's view, for human beings a natural life is a life of justice. This is what differentiates the human species from other species of animals. Only if human beings live a life of justice, do they satisfy the requirements of their own nature and thereby, become proper human beings. For Aristotle, the ultimate aim of politics is to enable this process of personal development to take place. It is political society that makes it possible for human beings to live a 'good life' in this sense of the term. To fulfil one's potential as a human being in this way is to achieve a condition called by Aristotle as '*eudaimonia*'. This term can be translated as fulfilment in English language. In Aristotle's view, the achievement of *eudaimonia* necessarily requires that there be rules or laws which serve as a standard of right and wrong for individual moral agents. For Aristotle, in the final analysis, these rules are the principles of 'political justice' of the polis in which they live. As an ethical life is possible only in political society, Aristotle's views on ethics and politics are closely related to one another. Aristotle states that the study of politics is the 'highest master science' because it incorporates within itself the study of ethics. The study of politics tells us what we ought to do and what we ought not to do.

6.3 CITIZENSHIP

Aristotle discusses about who a citizen is in his work named *Politics*. He begins with a definition of the citizen, since the city-state is by nature a collective entity, a multitude of citizens. Citizens are differentiated from other inhabitants, such as women, children and elderly members of city-states on the one hand, resident aliens and slaves on the other hand. After more analysis, he defines the citizen as a person who has the right to participate in deliberative or judicial office. For instance, in Athens citizens had the right to attend the assembly, the council and other bodies or to sit on juries. The Athenian system varied from a modern representative democracy in that the citizens were more directly involved in governing. Although full citizenship was restricted in the Greek city-states (with women, slaves, foreigners and some others excluded), the citizens were more deeply enfranchised than in modern representative democracies because they were more directly involved in governing. This is reflected in Aristotle's definition of the citizen (without qualification). Further, he defines the city-state as a multitude of such citizens which is adequate for a self-sufficient life.

He excludes certain categories of people from the ranks of citizenship:

- “‘made’ citizens” (a sort of honorary title, in the sense that a university might confer an honorary doctorate)
- mere residence in the area governed by a polis does not count as citizenship: slaves and resident aliens are not citizens
- women

- people who by law have access to the legal system, but who otherwise would not qualify as citizens (foreigners covered by commercial treaties, for instance)
- boys too young for military service and old men retired from duty may be citizens, but not fully-fledged ones: they are a sort of semi-citizen
- people who have been exiled or stripped of their rights

But Aristotle acknowledges that citizenship is defined differently in different places depending on the nature of the constitution. Aristotle highlights that though citizenship is often reserved for those who are born to citizen parents, this hereditary status becomes irrelevant in times of revolution or constitutional change, during which the body of citizens alters. This brings the question: to whom may citizenship be justly granted and can the city be held accountable for decisions made by governing individuals if these individuals have not been justly granted citizenship? Further, if the city is not identical to its government, what explains a city, and at what point does a city miss its identity? Aristotle points out that a city is defined by its constitution, so that a change in constitution signifies a change in the city. He does not, however, answer the question of whether a city should honour debts and obligations made under a previous constitution.

Aristotle asks the question of “whether the virtue of the good man and the excellent citizen is to be regarded as the same or as not the same”. For Aristotle, definition of the good man is the one who pursues his *telos*, living a life in accordance with virtue and finding happiness by doing so. Because there are several different types of regime (six, to be specific, which will be considered in more detail shortly), there are several different types of good citizen. Good citizens must have the type of virtue that preserves the partnership and the regime. As there are indeed several forms of regime, it is clear that it is not possible for the virtue of the excellent citizen to be single or complete virtue. There is only one situation in which the virtue of the good citizen and excellent man are the same and this is when the citizens are living in a city that is under the ideal regime: “In the case of the best regime, [the citizen] is one who is capable of and intentionally chooses being ruled and ruling with a view to the life in accordance with virtue”. For those of us not living in the ideal regime, the ideal citizen is one who follows the laws and supports the principles of the regime, whatever that regime is. That this may well require us to act differently than the good man would act and to believe things that the good man knows to be false is one of the unfortunate tragedies of political life.

There is the further question of whether manual labourers can be citizens. Aristotle acknowledges that they are necessary to a city but states that not everyone who is necessary to the city can be a citizen: good citizenship requires that the citizen be free from the necessary tasks of life. These are the people who must work for a living. Such people lack the leisure time necessary for political participation and the study of philosophy. In the ideal city they would play no part in political life because their necessary tasks prevent them from developing their minds and taking an active part in ruling the city. Their existence, like those of the slaves and the women, is for the benefit of the free male citizens. Still, in

oligarchies, in which citizenship is determined by wealth, a rich manual labourer may qualify for citizenship. In regimes where the citizens are similar and equal by nature – which in practice is all of them – all citizens should be allowed to participate in politics, though not all at once. They must take turns, ruling and being ruled in turn. This means that citizenship is not just a set of privileges, it is also a set of duties. The citizen has certain freedoms that non-citizens do not have, but he also has obligations (political participation and military service) that they do not have.

Aristotle's suggestion that a citizen is someone who shares in the deliberative or judicial offices of a city may seem odd to the modern reader, as very few people in the twentieth century would count as citizens by this definition. In the *polis*, on the other hand, involvement in the affairs of the city defined one's identity to a large extent. Though there were certain leaders concerned exclusively with the government of the city, all citizens were required to contribute in some way. Assemblies of citizens made decisions in bodies whose modern equivalents are law courts and city councils and these assemblies would rotate membership so that every citizen served a specific term. The only aspect of this system that remains in modern times is jury duty.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Explain human nature as understood by Aristotle.

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2. Explain the grounds on which Aristotle defined citizenship.

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6.4 JUSTICE AND RULE OF LAW

After working with Plato at his Academy for a couple of decades, Aristotle was understandably most influenced by his teacher, also adopting, for example, a virtue theory of ethics. Yet part of Aristotle's greatness stems from his capacity for critical appropriation, and he became arguably Plato's most able critic as well as his most famous follower in wanting to develop a credible alternative to Sophism. Book V of his great *Nicomachean Ethics* deals in detail with the moral and political virtue of justice. It begins arbitrarily with the circular claim that it is the condition that renders us just agents inclined to desire and practice justice. But his analysis soon becomes more enlightening when he specifies it in terms of what is lawful and fair. What is in accordance with the law of a state is thought to be advantageous to the common good and/or to that of its rulers. In general, citizens should obey such law in order to be just. The problem is that civil law can itself be unjust in the sense of being unfair to some, so that we need to consider special justice as a function of fairness. He analyses this into two sorts: distributive justice includes dividing benefits and burdens fairly among members of a community, while corrective justice needs us, in some circumstances, to try to restore a fair balance in interpersonal relations where it has been lost. If a member of a community has been unfairly benefited or burdened with more or less than is deserved in the way of social distributions, then corrective justice can be required, as, for example, by a court of law. Notice that Aristotle is no more an egalitarian than Plato was, while a sort of social reciprocity may be needed, it must be of a proportional sort rather than equal. Like all moral virtues, for Aristotle, justice is a rational mean between bad extremes. Proportional equality or equity involves the "intermediate" position between someone's unfairly getting "less" than is deserved and unfairly getting "more" at another's expense. The "mean" of justice lies between the vices of getting too much and getting too little, relative to what one deserves, these being two opposite types of injustice, one of "disproportionate excess," the other of disproportionate "deficiency". Proportional equality emphasises that those who are equal ought to be treated equally as their circumstances are similar. Those who are not equal in a relevant respect ought not to be treated equally. This means that unequals ought to be treated differently provided the difference in treatment is proportional to the inequality that exists between them.

Political justice is held to apply only to those who are citizens of a political community (a *polis*) by virtue of being "free and either proportionately or numerically equal," those whose interpersonal relations are governed by the rule of law, for law is a prerequisite of political justice and injustice. Nonetheless, since individuals tend to be selfishly biased, the law should be a product of reason rather than of particular rulers. Aristotle is prepared to distinguish between what is naturally just and unjust. He also speaks of a particular system of taxation for some particular society to deliver justice. Aristotle discusses the relationship between justice and decency, for sometimes following the letter of the law would violate fairness or reasonable equity. A decent person might

selfishly benefit from being a stickler regarding following the law exactly, but decides to take less or give more for the sake of the common good. In this way, decency can correct the limitations of the law and represents a higher form of justice.

In his *Politics*, Aristotle further considers political justice and its relation to equality. For Aristotle, justice involves equality “not for everyone, only for equals.” He agrees with Plato that political democracy is essentially unjust, because, by its very nature, it tries to treat unequals as if they were equals. Justice rather requires ‘inequality’ for people who are ‘unequal’. But, then, oligarchy is also intrinsically unjust in so far as it involves treating equals as unequal because of some contingent disparity of birth and wealth. Rather, those in a just political society who contribute the most to the common good will obtain a larger share, because they thus exhibit more political virtue, than those who are inferior in that respect; it would be simply wrong, from the perspective of political justice, for them to receive equal shares. Therefore, political justice must be viewed as a function of the common good of a community. Aristotle acknowledges that it is the attempt to specify the equality or inequality among people that constitutes a key ‘problem’ of ‘political philosophy.’ He considers, we can all readily agree, that political justice requires ‘proportional’ rather than numerical equality. But inferiors have a vested interest in thinking that those who are equal in some respect should be equal in all respects, while superiors are biased, in the opposite direction, to imagine that those who are unequal in some way should be unequal in all ways. Thus, for instance, those who are equally citizens are not necessarily equal in political virtue, and those who are financially richer are not necessarily morally or mentally superior. What is relevant here is “equality according to merit,” though Aristotle cannot precisely specify what, exactly, counts as merit, for how much it must count, who is to measure it, and by what standard. All he can suggest, for example in some of his comments on the desirable aristocratic government, is that it must involve moral and intellectual virtue.

While Plato accepted slavery as a legitimate social institution but argued for equal opportunity for women, in his *Politics*, Aristotle accepts sexual inequality while actively defending slavery. Anyone who is inferior intellectually and morally is also socially and politically inferior in a well-ordered *polis*. A human being can be naturally autonomous or not, ‘a natural slave’ being flawed in rationality and morality, and thus naturally fit to belong to a superior; such a human can rightly be regarded as ‘a piece of property,’ or another person’s ‘tool for action.’ Given natural human inequality, it is supposedly unfitting that all should rule or share in ruling. Aristotle holds that some are marked as superior and fit to rule from birth, while others are inferior and marked from birth to be ruled by others. This hypothetically applies not only to ethnic groups, but also to the genders and he unequivocally asserts that males are “naturally superior” and females “naturally inferior,” the former being fit to rule and the latter to be

ruled. The claim is that it is naturally better for women themselves that they be ruled by men, as it is better for “natural slaves” that they should be ruled by those who are “naturally free.” Aristotle does argue only for natural slavery. He opposes custom slavery wherein in ancient period conquered enemies were made prisoners of war and slaves. Aristotle (like Plato) believes that Greeks are born for free and rational self-rule, unlike non-Greeks (“barbarians”), who are naturally inferior and incapable of it. So the fact that a human being is defeated or captured is no assurance that he is fit for slavery, as an unjust war may have been imposed on a nobler society by a more primitive one. While granting that Greeks and non-Greeks, as well as men and women, are all truly human, Aristotle justifies the alleged inequality among them based on what he calls the ‘deliberative’ capacity of their rational souls. The natural slave’s rational soul supposedly lacks this, a woman has it but it lacks the authority for her to be autonomous, a (free male) child has it in some developmental stage, and a naturally superior free male has it developed and available for governance.

Aristotle’s theory of justice has been criticised in modern times for being highly racist, sexist and for completely ignoring notions of human rights. Aristotle’s theory of justice fails adequately to respect all persons as free and rational agents. Aristotle was so focused on the ways in which people are *unequal*, that he could not appreciate any fundamental moral equality that might provide a platform for natural human rights.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Explain the proportional equality propounded by Aristotle.

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6.5 CLASSIFICATION OF GOVERNMENTS

As we have seen that Aristotle places the state above individuals, we have to understand that this state was contextual for Aristotle. Aristotle realised that different contexts will lead to formation of different types of states and governments. In Aristotle’s writings, he has interchangeably used the words governments and constitutions. Therefore, here we are also using the term government and constitution interchangeably. Aristotle differentiates several

types of rule, based on the nature of the soul of the ruler and of the subject. He first reflects on despotic rule, which is exemplified in the master-slave relationship. Aristotle thinks that this form of rule is justified in the case of natural slaves who lack a deliberative faculty and thus need a natural master to direct them. Though a natural slave allegedly aids from having a master, despotic rule is still primarily for the sake of the master and only incidentally for the slave. Aristotle next considers paternal and marital rule, which he also views as defensible. For him, the male is by nature more capable of leadership than the female, unless he is constituted in some way contrary to nature and by nature the elder and perfect are more capable than the younger and imperfect (these points we have already discussed). This sets the stage for the central claim of Aristotle's constitutional theory that constitutions which aim at the common advantage are correct and just without qualification, whereas those which aim only at the advantage of the rulers are deviant and unjust because they involve despotic rule which is inappropriate for a community of free persons.

Aristotle's constitutional theory is based on his theory of justice, which is expounded in *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle distinguishes two different but related senses of “justice” (universal and particular) both of which play an important role in his constitutional theory. Firstly, in the universal sense “justice” means “lawfulness” and is concerned with the common advantage and happiness of the political community. The conception of universal justice shapes the distinction between correct (just) and deviant (unjust) constitutions. But what exactly the “common advantage” (*koinionsumpheron*) entails is a matter of scholarly controversy. Secondly, in the particular sense “justice” means “equality” or “fairness”, and this includes distributive justice, according to which different individuals have just claims to shares of some common asset such as property. Aristotle analyses arguments for and against the different constitutions as different applications of the principle of distributive justice.

The distinction between correct and deviant constitutions is combined with the observation that the government may consist of one person, a few, or a multitude. Hence, there are six possible constitutional forms:

Number of rulers	Correct	Deviant
One Ruler	Kingship	Tyranny
Few Rulers	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many Rulers	Polity	Democracy

Aristotle discusses various forms of constitutions in his book *Politics*. There are three whose nature is correct (*orthai*), namely kingship (the good rule of one man), aristocracy (the good rule of few), and republic or *polity* (the good rule of the majority) and three whose nature is corrupted or deviated (*parekbáseis*), namely tyranny (the perverted rule of one man), oligarchy (the perverted rule of

few), and democracy (the perverted rule of the majority). This means thus, that good political rule can take various and heterogeneous institutional forms, which produce thus, different legitimate ways of solving the problem of sovereign authority within the city. In this theoretical scheme, even though kingship appears as the system that exhibits the most elevated concentration of power and whose monocratic nature would seem, at least on a first approach, counteract what is proper of the political organization of the city, the rule put into practice by a king is explicitly stated as a form of government as legitimate as that is found in an aristocracy or even in a republic, since the principle that defines the essence of the genuine exercise of political power - the search of the common interest or of the public good - is entirely contemplated and preserved by it. Aristotle seeks to show how each of the right political regimes mentioned above - kingship, aristocracy, and republic (or *polity*) - can be considered the best one, if one examines the different social contexts and takes then into account the plurality of the political and moral circumstances. Aristotle defends kingship on two grounds. The first ground has a pure theoretical nature and bases itself on the argument according to which, being the main purpose of political life the achievement of virtue, if in a city an exceptional political situation takes place concerning the emerging of a man of extraordinary or transcendent virtue, there is no other procedure to be adopted with regard to this outstanding man but to grant him full powers, raising him above the law itself and instituting accordingly an absolute kingship. On the other hand, the second ground has a sociological and historical character and proceeds from the empirical verification of the fact that the absolute monarchical rule that exists in some nations and cities, exercised by an actual king entrusted with unfettered powers over every issue, is the most suited to the character of certain people and to the particular situation of some political associations. When rule of man deviates from common good and fulfils only one man's interests, then that system of government slips from kingship to tyranny (perverted form).

He observes that the dominant class in oligarchy (literally rule of the *oligoi*, that is, few) is typically the wealthy, whereas in democracy (literally rule of the *dêmos*, that is, people) it is the poor, so that these economic classes should be included in the definition of these forms. Polity is characterized as a kind of "mixed" constitution typified by rule of the "middle" group of citizens, a moderately wealthy class between the rich and poor.

Aristotle studies a comparable range of constitutions: first, the constitution which is best without qualification, that is, "most according to our prayers with no external impediment"; second, the constitution that is best under the circumstances "for it is probably impossible for many persons to attain the best constitution" and third, the constitution which serves the aim a given population happens to have, that is, the one that is best "based on a hypothesis". Therefore, we can see that Aristotle pursues to find not only the best constitution but for next best constitution also.

Regarding the constitution that is ideal or “according to prayer,” Aristotle is highly critical of the ideal constitution set forth in Plato's *Republic* on the grounds that it overestimates political unity, it holds a system of communism that is impractical and inimical to human nature and it disregards the happiness of the individual citizens. In contrast, in Aristotle's “best constitution,” each and every citizen will own moral virtue and the equipment to carry it out in practice and thereby attain a life of excellence and complete happiness. All of the citizens will hold political office and own private property because “one should call the city-state happy not by looking at a part of it but at all the citizens.” Furthermore, there will be a common system of education for all the citizens, because they share the same end.

The second-best system typically takes the form of a polity in which citizens possess an inferior, more common grade of virtue. Polity is also seen as a mixed constitution combining features of democracy, oligarchy and where possible, aristocracy, so that no group of citizens is in a position to abuse its rights. Aristotle claims that for city-states that fall short of the ideal, the best constitution is one controlled by a numerous middle class which stands between the rich and the poor. For those who possess the goods of fortune in moderation find it “easiest to obey the rule of reason”. They are consequently less apt than the rich or poor to act unjustly toward their fellow citizens. A constitution based on the middle class is the mean between the extremes of oligarchy (rule by the rich) and democracy (rule by the poor). “That the middle constitution is best is evident, for it is the freest from faction: where the middle class is numerous, there least occur factions and divisions among citizens”. The middle constitution is therefore both more stable and more just than oligarchy and democracy.

Aristotle classifies democracy as a deviant constitution (although the best of a bad lot). The central claim is that the many may turn out to be better than the virtuous few when they come together, even though the many may be inferior when considered individually. For if each individual has a portion of virtue and practical wisdom, they may pool these assets and turn out to be better rulers than even a very wise individual.

Aristotle points out that to reform a constitution is no less a task of politics than it is to establish one from the beginning and in this way the politician should also help existing constitutions. Aristotle also alerted to be cognizant of forces of political change which can undermine an existing regime. Aristotle criticizes his predecessors for excessive utopianism and neglect of the practical duties of a citizen.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Aristotle has propounded six types of constitution. Which are they? Amongst them, which one is best suited for contemporary times? Justify your answer.

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6.6 ARISTOTLE AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Aristotle’s relevance lies in the fact that he brought significance of empirical engagement in political philosophy. Aristotle’s influence on John Rawls’s theory of justice is more than evident. Like Aristotle, Rawls treats justice as fairness. Rawls also borrows formal and substantive understandings of justice. Another important fact which reflects Aristotle’s impact on Rawls is seen in ‘principle of reciprocity’. Justice for both Aristotle and Rawls rests on the fact that one should treat another human being the way one wants to be treated oneself. Even the human rights discourse reflects this contribution of Aristotle. In the modern political judicial structure, rule of law is followed and ‘treating like cases alike’ is followed. Rawls failed to imbibe certain values in Aristotle’s theory of justice. Rawls theory is excessively universalistic and rationalistic and lacks Aristotle’s sense of community, of the historical rootedness of the ethical conduct of individual moral agents. In the theory of communitarians like MacIntyre, they ignore Aristotle’s theory of justice where weightage is given to universally valid and rationally apprehensible principles of natural justice.

What we learn from above insight is that even today philosophers, theorists and thinkers need to find a refined balance between physical/social, universal/particular, rational/irrational, just/unjust and ethical/unethical – from Aristotle.

6.7 LET US SUM UP

After reading the main ideas of Aristotle regarding citizenship and the rule of law, it becomes clear that his ideas were products of his time. For Aristotle, the universal adult franchise was not a reality as he was a product of society divided on the basis of the binary opposition of master/slave; native/foreigner, man/woman, adult/child. Here these two categories were not only different from each other but hierarchical also wherein one aspect is superior to the other. Thus, Aristotle’s citizenship idea was limited to ‘adult native master man’. However, Aristotle’s idea of citizen based on the virtue of being a ruler and ruled is a relevant cornerstone of modern liberal democracies. Similarly, Aristotle’s notion

of justice as fairness and justice based on the principle of reciprocity has influenced future scholars of political theory and political philosophy. Aristotle's understanding that different contexts demand different forms of government is a relevant point to understand the significance of context in defining political experiments and experiences. Therefore, we can conclude that the relevance of Aristotle's ideas is eminent in the fact that for some contemporary issues and challenges in politics, his ideas act as a signpost.

6.8 REFERENCES

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6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Aristotle perceives science as a product of cognitive quality of persons engaged in search of knowledge. He emphasises on change and plurality of truth we experience. Science for Aristotle is a product of three things coming together, namely, production of something, practical action and theoretical contemplation. All three aspects are connected and unified.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. For Aristotle, man is by nature social being, political being and ethical being. Human beings are social beings because they are always to be found living together with others in society or in a polis. Additionally, however, Aristotle considers it to be a 'characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust'. According to Aristotle, then, man is by nature an ethical being. In Aristotle's view, for human beings a natural life is a life of justice. This is what differentiates the human species from other species of animals. Only if human beings live a life of justice do they satisfy the requirements of their own nature and thereby become proper human beings. For Aristotle, the ultimate aim of politics is to enable this process of personal development to take place.

2. He begins with a definition of the citizen, since the city-state is by nature a collective entity, a multitude of citizens. Citizens are differentiated from other inhabitants, such as women, children and elderly members of city-states on the one hand, resident aliens and slaves on the other hand. After more analysis he defines the citizen as a person who has the right to participate in deliberative or judicial office.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1. Proportional equality or equity involves the “intermediate” position between someone’s unfairly getting “less” than is deserved and unfairly getting “more” at another’s expense. The “mean” of justice lies between the vices of getting too much and getting too little, relative to what one deserves, these being two opposite types of injustice, one of “disproportionate excess,” the other of “disproportionate deficiency”. Proportional equality emphasises that those who are equal ought to be treated equally as their circumstances are similar. Those who are not equal in a relevant respect ought not to be treated equally. This means that unequals ought to be treated differently provided the difference in treatment is proportional to the inequality that exists between them.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

1. The six forms of constitutions propounded by Aristotle are kinship, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, polity and democracy. Polity can be seen as a best form of constitution in the contemporary world. Polity is characterized as a kind of “mixed” constitution typified by rule of the “middle” group of citizens, a moderately wealthy class between the rich and poor.