
UNIT 3 ARISTOTLE

Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Introducing Aristotle
 - 3.2.1 The Man and His Times
 - 3.2.2 His Works
 - 3.2.3 His Methodology
- 3.3 Philosophical Foundations of Aristotle's Political Theory
 - 3.3.1 Plato and Aristotle
 - 3.3.2 Politics and Ethics
- 3.4 Political Ideas of Aristotle
 - 3.4.1 Theory of Justice
 - 3.4.2 Property, Family and Slavery
 - 3.4.3 Theory of Revolution
 - 3.4.4 Theory of State
- 3.5 Evaluation of Aristotle's Political Theory
 - 3.5.1 Influence
- 3.6 Summary
- 3.7 Exercises

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Unlike Plato, Aristotle (384-322 BC) was not an Athenian by birth, He **was** born in Stagira, was a pupil of Plato and subsequently taught Alexander and then established his own school, the Lyceum. Aristotle's relationship to Plato was similar to J.S. Mill's relationship to Bentham as both Aristotle and Mill repudiated major portions of the teachings of their master—Plato and Bentham respectively. This fundamental difference between Plato and Aristotle led them to initiate two great **streams** of thought which **constitute** what is known as **the** Western Political Theory. From Plato **comes** political idealism; and from Aristotle **comes** political realism. On this basis, it is easy to understand the comment by Coleridge, the poet, that everyone is born either a Platonist or an Aristotelian.

The difference between Plato and Aristotle is the difference **between** philosophy and science. Plato was **the** father of Political Philosophy; Aristotle, the father of Political Science; the **former** is a philosopher, the latter is a scientist; **former** follows the deductive methodology; the latter, an inductive one. Plato portrays an unrealisable utopia—the ideal state whereas Aristotle's concern was with the best possible state. Professor Maxey rightly (Political Philosophies, 1961) says: "All who believe in new worlds for old are **the** disciples of Plato; all those who believe in old worlds made new by the tedious and toilsome use of science are disciples of Aristotle."

Aristotle, like Plato, wrote voluminously. We know Aristotle **has** written on many subjects, His admirer claimed for him the title of 'The Master of Them That Know'. For about thousand years, according to Maxey: "Aristotle on logic, Aristotle on mechanics, Aristotle on physics, Aristotle on physiology, Aristotle on astronomy, Aristotle on economics, and Aristotle on politics was almost the last word. The unimpeachable authority than which none was more

authentic." "His information was so much vaster and more exhaustive, his insight so much more penetrating, his deductions so much more plausible than true of any of his contemporaries or any of his successors prior to the advent of modern science that he became the all-knowing master in whom the scholastic mind could find no fault" (Maxey). Whatever subject he treated, he treated it well; whatever work he wrote, he made it a master piece. His legacy, like that of his teacher Plato, was so rich that all those who claim themselves as realists, scientists, pragmatists and utilitarian look to him as teacher, guide and philosopher.

Referring to Aristotle's contribution to social science, Abraham Edel (Aristotle's International Encyclopaedia of Social Science) says: "Aristotle's distinctive contributions to social science are: (a) a methodology of inquiry that focuses on man's rationality yet stresses the continuity of man and nature rather than a basic cleavage; (b) the integration of the ethical and the social, as contrasted with the dominant modern proposals of a value-free social science and an autonomous ethics; and (c) a systematic foundation for morals, politics and social theory and some basic concepts for economics, laws and education."

3.2 INTRODUCING ARISTOTLE

3.2.1 The Man and His Times

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was born at Stagira, then a small Greek colony close to the borders of the Macedonian kingdom. His father, Nicomachus was a physician at the court of Amyntas II. A longer part of his boyhood was spent at Pella, the royal seat of Macedonia. Because of his descent from a medical family, it can well be imagined that Aristotle must have read medicine, and must have developed his interest in physical sciences, particularly biology. Upon the death of his parents, Aristotle's care fell upon a relative, Proxenus, whose son, Nicaner, Aristotle later adopted.

Although not an Athenian, Aristotle lived in Athens for more than half of his life, first as a student at Plato's *Academy* for nearly twenty years (367-347 BC), and later as the master of his own institution, the *Lyceum*, for about twelve years or so, between 335 and 323 BC. He died a year later in Chaleis (the birth place of his mother, Phalstis) while in exile, following fears of being executed by the Athenians for his pro-Macedonian sympathies: "I will not allow the Athenian to commit another sin (first being the execution of Socrates in 399 BC)", he had said. During the intervening period of twelve years (347-335 BC), he remained away from Athens, his "journeyman period." Between 347-344 BC he stayed at Assus with one Hermias, a tyrant, and an axe-slave but a friend of the Macedonian King, Philip. He married Hermias's niece and adopted daughter, Pythias, and on whose death, later he began a union, without marriage, with Herphyllis, a Stagirite like Aristotle and they had a son named Nicomachus, after Aristotle's father.

Aristotle's relationship, with Hermias got Aristotle close to the Macedonian King whose son, Alexander and later Alexander the Great was Aristotle's student for some time, much before the establishment of Lyceum in 335 BC. Like his teacher Plato, Aristotle had kept his association with men of the ruling classes; with Hermias between 347-344 BC, with Alexander between 342 and 323 BC and with Antipater after Alexander's death in 323 BC. Such an association with rulers helped Aristotle's penetrating eyes to see the public affairs governed more closely. From Hermias, he came to value the nature of one-man rule, learn something of economics and the importance of foreign relations and of foreign policy, some reference to these are found in his *Politics*. From Alexander, Aristotle got all possible help that could impress upon the

collections (Alexander is said to have utilised the services of about 800 talents in Aristotle's service, and inducted all hunters, fowlers and fishermen to report to Aristotle any matter of scientific interest). From Antipater came Aristotle's advocacy of modern polity and of the propertied middle-class, something that Aristotle had advocated in *Politics*. From Lycinus, the Athenian Statesman (338-326 BC) and a Platonist and Aristotle's classmate, Aristotle learnt the significance of reforms which he made a part of his best practicable state. But that was not all that was Aristotle's. Aristotle, indeed, had his own too: his family background of looking at everything scientifically, Plato's impact over a period of twenty years, his keen observation of political events, his study of 158 constitutions of his time, and his elaborate studies at the *Lyceum* through lectures and discussions—all these combined to make him an encyclopedic mind and prolific writer.

3.2.2 His Works

Aristotle is said to have written about 150 philosophical treatises. About the 30 that survive touch on an enormous range of philosophical problems from biology and physics to morals to aesthetics to politics. Many, however, are thought to be 'lecture notes' instead of complete, polished treatises, and a few may not be his but of members of the school. There is a record that Aristotle wrote six treatises on various branches of logic, twenty-six on different subjects in the field of natural sciences, four on ethics and morals, three on art and poetry, one each on metaphysics, economics, history and politics, and four or more on miscellaneous subjects.

Aristotle's works can be classified under three headings: (1) dialogues and other works of a popular character; (2) collections of facts and material from scientific treatment; (3) systematic works. Among his writings of a popular nature, the only one, which we possess is the interesting tract *On the Polity of the Athenians*. The works on the second group include 200 titles, most in fragments. The systematic treatises of the third group are marked by a plainness of style. Until Werner Jaeger (*Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Developments*, 1912), it was assumed that Aristotle's writings presented a systematic account of his views. Jaeger argues for an early, middle and late period where the early period follows Plato's theory of forms and soul, the middle rejects Plato and the late period, including most of his writings, is more empirically oriented.

It is not certain as to when a particular work was written by Aristotle. W.D. Ross (*Aristotle*, 1953) presumes that Aristotle's writings appeared in the order of his progressive withdrawal from Plato's influence. The dialogues, especially in *Rhetoric* (also the *Gryllus*), *On the Soul* (also the *Eudemus*), the *Protrepticus* (*On Philosophy*) were written during Aristotle's stay in the Academy. Dialogues like *Alexander* and *On Monarchy* were written during the time or later when Alexander assumed power. To the period between 347 and 335 BC, belong Aristotle's the *Organon*, the *Physics*, the *De Dialectica*, a part of *De Anima* and the 'Metaphysics', the *Eudemian Ethics* and a greater part of the *Politics*—all these are largely Platonic in character, but in the forms of dialogues. To the period of his headship of the *Lyceum* belong the rest of the works, notably the *Meteorological*, the works on psychology and biology, the *Constitutions*, the *Nicomachean Ethics* after his son (and not father), *Micomachus* from Herpyllis, the *Poetics*, and the *Politics*.

Aristotle's political theory is found mainly in the *Politics*, although there are references of his political thought in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. His *Constitutions* analyses the system of government on the basis of his study of about 158 constitutions. Notable among them is the *Constitution of Athens*. Aristotle's *Politics*, like any other work of his, has come down to us in the form of lecture notes (See Barker: *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle*, 1948) and consists of

several essays written at various times about which the scholars have no unanimity. Jaeger argues that there is a distinction to be made between "The Original Politics" (Books, 2, 3, 7, 8) which is Platonist in inspiration and which deals with the construction of the Ideal state or the best possible, and the truly "Aristotelian Politics" (Books 4, 5, 6) which contain a much more empirical grasp of how politics works to the real political world. Barker puts the order of the eight books of the *Politics* on the basis of internal development of Aristotle's ideas: the first three books deal with the beginning of preliminary principles and criticism, the fourth and the fifth books (traditionally arranged as the seventh and eighth books) deal with the construction of the ideal or the best possible state, the last three books, i.e., sixth to eighth (traditionally, fourth to sixth) deal with the analysis of the actual states, and also with the causes and cures of revolutions.

3.2.3 His Methodology

Aristotle's methodology was different from Plato. While Plato adopted the philosophical method in his approach to politics, Aristotle followed the scientific and analytical methodology. Plato's style is almost poetic whereas that of Aristotle, prose-like.

Scientific as Aristotle's method of study is, it is, at the same time, historical, comparative, inductive, and observational. Barker comments that Aristotle's methodology is scientific; his work is systematic, his writings are analytical. Aristotle's each essay begins with the words: 'Observation shows ...'. It is said that Aristotle had employed over a thousand people for reporting to him anything of scientific nature. He did not accept anything except which he found was proven empirically and scientifically. Unlike his teacher Plato who proceeded from the general to the particular, he followed the path from the particular to the general. Plato argued with conclusions that were pre-conceived while Aristotle, in a scientific way arrived at his conclusions by the force of his logic and analysis. Empiricism was Aristotle's merit. Aristotle's chief contribution to political science is to bring the subject matter of politics within the scope of the methods, which he was already using to investigate other aspects of nature. Aristotle the biologist looks at the developments in political life in much the same way that he looks at the developing life of other natural phenomena. Abraham Edel identifies features of scientific methodology in Aristotle. Some such features are: "His (Aristotle's) conception of systematic knowledge is rationalistic"; according to him: "Basic concepts and relations in each field are grasped directly on outcomes of an inductive process"; "Data are furnished by accumulated observation, common opinion and traditional generalisation"; "Theoretical principles emerge from analytic sifting of alternative explanation"; "The world is a plurality of what we would today call homeostatic systems, whose ground plan may be discovered and rationally formulated"; "Matter and form are relative analytic concepts. Dynamically, matter is centred as potentiality ... and form as culminating actuality"; "Man is distinctively rational".

Major characteristic features of Aristotle's methodology can be briefly explained as under:

- a) **Inductive and Deductive:** Plato's method of investigation is more deductive than inductive where Aristotle's methodology is inductive than deductive. The deductive features of Aristotle's methodology are quite visible, though shades of Plato's reasoning remain in the margins. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* does contain ideals of normative thinking and ethical life. Same is true about his *Politics* as well. Like Plato, Aristotle does conceive 'a good life' (his deductive thinking) but he builds, 'good' and 'honourable life' on the inductive approach about the state as a union of families and villages which came into existence for satisfying the material needs of man. His inductive style compels him to classify states as he observes them but he never loses sight of the best state that he imagines.

- b) **Historical and Comparative:** Aristotle can claim to be the father of historical and comparative methods of studying political phenomena. Considering history as a key to all the secrets, Aristotle takes recourse in the past to understand the present. The fact is that all his studies are based on his historical analysis: the nature of the causes and description of revolution, which Aristotle takes up in the *Politics*, have been dealt historically. Aristotle also follows the comparative method of study both intensively and extensively. His classification of states together with the consequent cycle of change is based on his intensive study of 158 constitutions of his times. Through comparative analysis he speaks about the 'pure' and 'perverted' forms of states.
- c) **Teleological and Analogical:** Aristotle pursued teleological and analogical methods of analysing and investigating political phenomena. His approach was teleological using the model of craftsmanship. Aristotle insisted that nature works, like an artist and in the process it seeks to attain the object for which, it exists. Nature, Aristotle used to say, did nothing without a purpose—man lives in society to attain his development; state helps man to achieve his end. Following his teacher Plato, Aristotle found much in common between a ruler and an artist, between a statesman and a physician.
- d) **Analytical and Observational:** Aristotle's methodology was both analytical as well as observational. In his whole thought-process, he observed more than he thought; all his studies were based on data and facts, which came under his keen observation. Through study, experiments and observation, Aristotle analysed things and, therefore, reached conclusions. Regarding state as something of a whole, for example, Aristotle went on to explain its constituents—families, and villages. He declares man, a social animal by nature, considers family as the extension of man's nature, village as the extension of family's nature, and state as the extension of village's nature.

3.3 PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ARISTOTLE'S POLITICAL THEORY

3.3.1 Plato and Aristotle

There was much that separated Aristotle from Plato, the pupil from the teacher. Their view about life was different; their vision about the world was different; their approaches were different and accordingly, they differed in conclusions. Maxey writes: "Where Plato let his imagination take flight, Aristotle is factual and dull; where Plato is eloquent, Aristotle is terse; where Plato leaps from general concepts to logical conclusions, Aristotle slowly works from a multitude of facts to conclusions that are logical but not final; where Plato gives us an ideal commonwealth that is the best his mind can conceive, Aristotle gives us the material requisites out of which, by adapting them to circumstances a model state may be constructed."

Aristotle was Plato's disciple but he was his critic as well. It is, therefore, common to project Aristotle against Plato as Andrew Hacker (*Political Theory*, 1961) really does. One is acclaimed to be a scientist while the other, a philosopher, one a reformist, the other, a radical; one willing to work and build on the actual state, the other, anxious to recast the state afresh. On the farthest possible extreme, one advocating political realism, the other adhering to political idealism; one beginning with particular and ending at general, the other starting from the general and coming down to particular.

Aristotle's criticisms of Plato were on the following grounds. His greatest complaint against Plato was that he made a departure from experience. Aristotle says: "Let us remember that we should not disregard the experience of ages; in the multitude of years these things, if they were good, would certainly not have been unknown...". He admitted Plato's works were "brilliant and suggestive" but were at the same time "radical and speculative" (See Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, First Indian Edition, 1973).

Aristotle criticised Plato's state as an artificial creation, built successively in three stages with producers coming first and thereafter followed by the auxiliaries and the rulers. As an architect, Plato built the state. Aristotle, on the contrary, regarded the state as a natural organisation, the result of growth and evolution. He says that if the numerous forms of the society before society were natural, so was natural the state as well. With Plato, Aristotle does recognise the importance of the state for the individual, and also, like Plato, considers the state like a human organism, but unlike him, he does not think of the state as a unity. For Aristotle, the state was a unity in diversity.

Aristotle did not agree with Plato on the notion of justice, for he, unlike Plato, found justice more in the realms of enjoying one's rights rather than performing one's duties. For Aristotle, justice was a practical activity virtue and not doing things in accordance with one's nature. Plato's justice was ethical in nature while that of Aristotle juridical or more specifically, legal in nature. Plato's justice was, as Aristotle believed, incomplete in so far as it dealt predominantly with duties, and more or less ignored rights. In other words, Aristotle labelled Plato's justice as moral in nature since it gave primacy to the performance of one's duties.

Aristotle did not approve of the three classes of Plato's ideal state, especially the guardians having the political power with them. He disagreed with the idea of one class (guardians consisting of the rulers and the auxiliaries) enjoying all power of the state. The failure to allow circulation, says David Young (*Rhetorical Discourse*, 2001), "between classes excludes those men who may be ambitious, and wise, but are not in the right class of society to hold any type of political power." Aristotle, he continues, looks upon this ruling class system as an ill-conceived political structure.

Plato, in his Republic did not consider laws as important. He was of the opinion that where the rulers were virtuous, there was no need of laws, and where they are not, there the laws were useless. Aristotle realised the significance of laws and held the view that rule of law was any day better than the rule of men, howsoever wise those rulers might be. Even Plato realised the utility of laws and revised his position in his *Laws*.

Aristotle doubted if Plato's community of wives and property would help produce the desired unity. Rather, he regards these devices as impracticable for communism of property created conflicts while that of the family led to a system where love and discipline within the family would evaporate. By providing communistic devices, Plato, Aristotle felt, had punished the guardians and deprived them of intrinsic love among the members of the family. Plato's communism created a family of the state which, according to Aristotle, led to a point where the state ceases to be a state. Sabine says: "A family is one thing and a state is something different, and it is better that one should not try to be the other."

Aristotle's criticism of Plato, violent as it is at times on grounds mentioned herein, is a matter of fact. But there is the other fact as well and that is that there is a Plato in Aristotle. Foster (*Masters of Political Thought*, 1969) says: "Aristotle the greatest of all Platonists that he is, is permeated by Platonism to a degree in which perhaps no great philosopher besides him has

been permeated by the thought of another." Every page which Aristotle writes bears the imprint of Plato. In fact, Aristotle begins from where Plato ends up. "The ideas, expressed by Plato as suggestions, illusions or illustrations are taken up by Aristotle." (Dunning: A History of Political Theories, 1966 edition). It would not be unfair if the pupil is thought to be an extension of the teacher. Aristotle, instead of damaging Plato's ideals, builds on them. Ross (*Aristotle*, 1923) points out: "But of his (Aristotle's) philosophical, in distinction from his scientific, works, there is no page which does not bear the impress of Platonism". Both; Plato and Aristotle, start with ideal, examine the actual and stop at the possible. There is, in each, a belief in natural inequality, in the dominance of reason over the passion, in the self-sufficing state as the only unit necessary for individual development. Like his teacher Plato, Aristotle thinks that the ethical perfection of man is possible only in a state and that the interest of the state is the interest of those who constitute it.

Indeed, Aristotle's criticism of Plato cannot be ignored, and in fact, he had no regrets on that count. Will Durant rightly says: "As Brutus (a character of Shakespeare Julius Caesar) loves not Caesar less, but Rome more, so Aristotle says—dear is Plato, but dearer still is truth." So writes Ebenstein (*Great Political thinkers*): "Plato found the corrective to his thinking in his own student."

3.3.2 Politics and Ethics

Aristotle is not a philosopher of Plato's type, but the philosophical basis of his political ideas cannot be ignored. There is the philosophical basis in whole of his political theory. There is a belief of God in Aristotle: this provides a spiritual outlook to him, considering God as the creator of everything. According to him, every phenomenon has two aspects: form and matter. As against Plato, Aristotle gives significance to what constitutes matter, whereas Plato believes that whatever is visible is the shadow of the form. Aristotle, on the other hand, is convinced that what is visible is also important in so far as it is itself the result of numerous elements constituting it, the form only activates it, guides it and helps it to attain its end which is ethical. Aristotle also believes that man's soul has two parts, logical and illogical, and through ethical virtues, man attains rationality, the logical part of the soul.

Aristotle is a political realist, but in it, he has not lost sight of politics existing to achieve its moral ends. In fact Aristotle does not regard politics as a separate science from ethics; politics is the completion and a verification of ethics. To say it in other words, politics is, in Aristotle's views, continuation of, and continuation with ethics. If one would like to put Aristotle's point, one would say that as it is part of human nature to seek happiness, it is also a part of human nature to live in communities; we are social animals, and the state is a development from the family through the village community, an off-shoot of the family; formed originally for the satisfaction of natural wants, state exists for moral ends and for the promotion of the family, formed originally for the satisfaction of natural wants, state exists for moral ends and for the promotion of the higher life; the state is a genuine moral organisation for advancing the development of human beings. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle clearly says: "We regard the object of politics as supreme which is the attainment of a good and honourable life of the members of the community." Ethics guides his political theory, seeking the co-relation of political and ethical life. His *Nicomachean Ethics* is an inspiration to his Politics:

- 1) For Aristotle, the state is not merely a political community; it is at the same time a government, a school, an ethics, and culture. It is what expresses man's whole life; gives man a good life which, in turn, means a moral and ethical living.

- 2) In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, he describes the moral qualities a man should possess. In *Politics* as well, he points out the qualities of a citizen; a good man can only be a good citizen. As in a good man, so in a good citizen there ought to be qualities such as cooperation, tolerance, self-control, qualities which Aristotle says, are imbibed by practice. Thus practice helps attain qualities and politics helps achieve ethical ends.
- 3) Ethics and politics are so closely related that it is through politics, Aristotle asserts, that we see ethical life. As politics, he continues is a science of practice and as through our activities we seek the achievement of moral virtues, it is, he concluded, in our own hands to adopt good or bad virtues. Through our efforts we can attain qualities and leave what is not virtuous.
- 4) Aristotle's basis of political theory is his ethics. In his work on ethics, he says emphatically that man is different from animal in so far as he is more active and more rational than animals. It is through his rationality, the element of reason in him, that man does what is in his interest or is in the interest of the community of which he is a part; he seeks what is good for him and for his fellow-beings. Men, Aristotle holds the view, and not animals, have had lessons of ethics.
- 5) Aristotle's political theory is intimately related to his ethical theory. His theory of justice, for example, is ethical-oriented. For Aristotle, justice is virtue, a complete virtue, morality personified and all that is good. This is his notion of justice in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. In his *Politics*, the view about justice is distributive linked to the notion of proportionate equality which for Aristotle meant to treat equals equally, and unequals, unequally. Ethics is not only a basis for his political theory, it is its escort on inspiration as well. Nowhere in the discussion of his political ideas does Aristotle say anything which is not ethical.

3.4 POLITICAL IDEAS OF ARISTOTLE

3.4.1 Theory of Justice

Like his teacher Plato, Aristotle believed that justice is the very essence of the state and that no polity can endure for a long time unless it is founded on a right scheme of justice. It is with this consideration in view that Aristotle seeks to set forth his theory of justice. He held the view that justice provides an aim to the state, and an object to the individual. "When perfected, man is the best of animals, but when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all."

Like his teacher, Plato, Aristotle regarded justice as the very breadth of the state/polity. According to him, justice is virtue, complete virtue, and the embodiment of all goodness. It is not the same thing as virtue, but it is virtue, and virtue in action.

Justice is virtue, but it is more than virtue; it is virtue in action, i.e., virtue in practice. Reason is, for example, a virtue, but the reasonable/rational conduct is justice; truth is a virtue, but to be truthful is justice. What makes a virtue justice is the very practice of that virtue. So Aristotle says: "The good in the sphere of politics is justice, and justice contains what tends to promote the common interest."

For Aristotle, justice is no less significant, for he regards justice as the very virtue of the state. It is justice that makes a state, gives it a vision and coupled with ethics, it takes the state to the heights of all ethical values. Justice saves the state from destruction, it makes the state and

political life pure and healthy. Ross says: "Aristotle begins by recognising two senses of the word. By 'Just', we may mean what is lawful or what is fair and equal".

For Aristotle, justice is either general or it is particular justice as a part of general justice; a part of complete virtue if by general justice we mean complete virtue. According to Aristotle, "General justice is complete goodness...It is complete in the fullest sense, because it is the exercise of complete goodness not only in himself but also towards his neighbours." Particular justice is a part of complete/general justice; it is, therefore, a part of complete goodness, its one aspect. A person seeking particular justice is one who observes laws but does not demand from the society more than what he deserves.

Particular justice is of two types—distributive and corrective. For Aristotle, distributive justice hands out honours and rewards according to the merits of the recipients—equals to be treated equally and unequal, unequally. The corrective justice takes no account of the position of the parties concerned. But simply secures equality between the two by taking away from the advantage of the one and adding it to the disadvantage of the other, giving justice to one who has been denied, and inflicting punishment to one who has denied others their justice.

One can compare the notion of justice as given by Plato and Aristotle:

- i) for Plato, justice is the performance of one's duties to the best of one's abilities and capacities; for Aristotle, justice is the reward in proportion to what one contributes;
- ii) Plato's justice is related to 'duties'; it is duties-oriented whereas Aristotle's justice is related to 'rights'; it is rights-oriented;
- iii) Plato's theory of justice is essentially moral and philosophical; that of Aristotle is legal;
- iv) Both had a conception of distributive justice. For Plato, that meant individual excellence and performance of one's duties while for Aristotle it meant what people deserve, the right to receive.
- v) Plato's justice is spiritual whereas Aristotle's, practical, i.e., it is virtue in action, goodness in practice,
- vi) Plato's justice is related to one's inner self, i.e., what comes straight from the soul; Aristotle's justice is related to man's actions, i.e., with his external activities.

Aristotle's theory of justice is worldly, associated with man's conduct in practical life, of course with all ethical values guiding him. But he was unable to co-relate the ethical dimension of justice to its legal dimension. His distributive justice (rewards in accordance to one's abilities) is far, far away from the realities of the political world. It is, indeed, difficult to bring about a balance between the ever-increasing population and ever-decreasing opportunities of the state.

3.4.2 Property, Family and Slavery

Aristotle's theory of property is based on his criticism of Plato's communism of property. Plato thought of property as an obstacle in the proper functioning of the state and, therefore, suggested communism for the guardian class. But for Aristotle, property provided psychological satisfaction by fulfilling the human instinct for possession and ownership. His chief complaint against Plato was that he failed to balance the claims of production and distribution. In Plato's communism of property, those who produce do not obtain the reward of their efforts, and those

who do not produce (the rulers and the auxiliaries), get all comforts of life. His conclusion, therefore, is that communism of property, ultimately, leads to conflicts and clashes. He was of the opinion that property is necessary for one who produces it and for that matter, necessary for all. Professor Maxey expresses Aristotle's voice when he says: "Man must eat, be clad, have shelter, and in order to do so, must acquire property. The instinct to do so is as natural and proper as the provision nature makes in supplying wild animals, and the means of satisfying the needs of sustenance and production". Property is necessary, Aristotle says himself: "Wealth (property) is a store of things, which are necessary or useful for life in the association of city as household."

According to Aristotle: "Property is a part of the household and the art of acquiring property is a part of managing the household; for no man lives well, or indeed live at all unless he is provided with necessaries." With regard to the ownership of property, Aristotle referred to: (i) individual ownership, and individual use, which is, for Aristotle, the most dangerous situation; (ii) common ownership, and individual use, a situation which can begin with socialism, but would end up in capitalism; it is also not acceptable; (iii) common ownership and common use, a device invariably impracticable; (iv) individual ownership and common use, a device generally possible and equally acceptable. Aristotle says: "property ought to be generally and in the main private, but common in use."

Private property is essential and therefore, is justified, is what is Aristotle's thesis, but it has to be acquired through honest means: "Of all the means of acquiring wealth, taking interest is the most unnatural method." Aristotle was also against amassing property. So he said: "To acquire too much wealth (property) will be as gross an error as to make a hammer too heavy".

As against Plato, Aristotle advocated the private family system. According to Aristotle, family is the primary unit of social life, which not only makes society but keeps it going. Criticising Plato's communism of families, Aristotle writes: "For that which is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it. Everyone thinks chiefly of his own, hardly at all of the common interest, and only when he is himself concerned as an individual. For besides other considerations, everybody is more inclined to neglect something which he expects another to fulfil, as in families many attendants are often less useful than a few. Each citizen will have a thousand sons who will not be his sons individually, but anybody will be equally the son of anybody, and therefore, will be neglected by all alike."

Aristotle believed that family is one institution where an individual is born, is nurtured, gets his identity, his name and above all attains intellectual development. He asserts that family is the primary school of social virtue where a child gets lessons of quality such as cooperation, love, tolerance, and sacrifice. It is not merely a primary association, but is a necessary action of society. If man is a social animal which Aristotle insists he is, family becomes the extension of man's nature; the village, the extension of families; and the state, an extension, and union of families and villages.

A family, Aristotle says, consists of husband, wife, children, slaves and property. It involves three types of relationships that of the master and slave, marital (between the husband and wife) and parental (between the father and the child). The master, Aristotle held, rules the slave; the husband rules the wife (Aristotle regards women inferior to man, an incomplete male), and the father rules the son. With his belief in patriarchy Aristotle wanted to keep women within the four-walls of the house, good only for household work and reproduction and nurture of the species. For him, man is the head of the family. Likewise, Aristotle affirmed that man is superior to woman, wiser than the slave and more experienced than the children.

Aristotle was convinced that family is the very unit, which makes up, ultimately, the state: from man to family, families to village, from villages to the state—that is how the natural growth of the state takes place:

Aristotle's views on family are quite different from Plato's. And yet, Aristotle is, philosophically, no better than Plato. Plato regards filial affection contrary to the interests of the ideal state; Aristotle makes families the very basis of the state for he upheld the divide between the public and private sphere. This view was later incorporated and elaborated by the liberal feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft and J.S. Mill.

Aristotle justifies slavery, which in fact, was the order of the day. He writes: "For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule." So Foster rightly says: "In fact, Aristotle justifies slavery on grounds of expediency". According to Barker: "Aristotle's conception of slavery is more a justification of a necessity than a deduction from disinterested observation of facts." Maxey is more clear than numerous others in expressing Aristotle's justification of slavery: "Some persons, remarks Aristotle, think slavery is unjust and contrary to nature, but he is of the opinion that it is quite in accord with the laws of nature and the principles of justice. Many persons, he asserts, are intended by nature to be slaves; from the hours of their birth they are marked for subjection. Not that they are necessarily inferior in strength of body or mind, but they are of a servile nature, and so are better off when they are ruled by other man. They lack somehow the quality of soul that distinguishes the freeman and master... Consequently it is just that they should be held as property and used as other property is used, as a means of maintaining life."

Why should a person be a slave and another, a master? Aristotle's answer is: "For he who can be, and therefore, is, author's and he who participates in rational principle enough to apprehend, but not to have, such a principle, is a slave by nature," and one who is one's own, and participates in the rational principles because he has such a principle is a master. What distinguishes a master or freeman from a slave? Aristotle makes the point: "Nature would like to distinguish between the bodies of freeman and slaves, making the one (slave) strong for servile and labour, the other (freeman) upright, and although useless for such services (as labour), useful for political life, in the arts both of war and peace." So he concludes: "It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slave, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right." The argument supporting Aristotle's contention may be stated in his own words: "Where then there is such a difference as that between soul and body, or between man and animals (as in the case of those whose business is to use their body, and who can be nothing better), the lower sort are by nature slaves, and it is better for them as for all inferiors that they should be under the rule of a master."

Slavery is not only natural, it is necessary as well. It is natural, Aristotle argued, because nature does not admit equality; it is necessary, he continues, because if the master needs a slave so that he is able to enjoy a free life, the slave also needs a master so that he is able to attain the virtues of freeman only in the company of freemen.

A slave, according to Aristotle, is not a human being. He is sub-human, incomplete, and a barbarian. However, he is an animate means for action and not intended for production, for he helped in the business within the household. He belonged to the master. But Aristotle rejected inhumane treatment of slaves, and advocated their emancipation as a reward for their good behaviour. Aristotle had emancipated his slaves a year before his death. In contrast to Aristotle

it is argued that Plato abolished slavery in the Republic. But the actual fact is probably that Plato accepted it as given as it was a universal institution then and to abolish it would have been economically destructive. Aristotle on the contrary merely described the facts as they existed in the ancient West. However, he anticipated a time when there would be no slavery when the spinning wheel will move of its own, when machine will replace the human worker and this is what precisely happened. Slavery ended with the coming of the industrial revolution.

3.4.3 Theory of Revolution

In Book V of the *Politics*, Aristotle discussed one of the most important problems, which made it a handbook for all the statesmen for all times to come. The problem, which he took up, was one that related to political instability or the causes and cures of revolutions. The analytical and the empirical mind of Aristotle gives numerous causes, which would affect the life of the state. As a physician examines his patient and suggests remedies, so does Aristotle, the son of a medical practitioner, Nicomachus, ascertain the causes of what ails the states and thereafter suggests remedies. Gettel says: "Politics is not a systematic study of political philosophy, but rather is a treatise on the art of government. In it, Aristotle analyses the evils that were prevalent in the Greek cities and the defects in the political systems and gives practical suggestions as to the best way to avoid threatening dangers." Dunning writes the same thing: "In Book V of the *Politics*, Aristotle follows up his elaborate array of the causes that produce revolutions by an equally impressive array of means of preventing them."

Revolution means, according to Aristotle, a change in the constitution, a change in the rulers, a change—big or small. For him, the change from monarchy to aristocracy, an example of a big change, is a revolution; when democracy becomes less democratic, it is also a revolution, though it is a small change. In Aristotle's views, political change is a revolution; big or small, total or partial. So to sum up Aristotle's meaning of revolution, one may say revolution implies: (i) a change in the set of rulers; (ii) a change, political in nature; (iii) a palace revolution; (iv) political instability or political transformation; (v) a change followed by violence, destruction and bloodshed.

Aristotle was an advocate of status quo and did not want political changes, for they brought with them catastrophic and violent changes. That is why he devoted a lot of space in the *Politics* explaining the general and particular causes of revolutions followed with his suggestions to avoid them.

Professor Maxey identifies the general causes of revolutions as stated by Aristotle in his *Politics*. "They are (1) that universal passion for privilege and prerogative which causes men to resent and rebel against condition which (unfairly in their opinion) place other men above or on a level with them in rank or wealth; (2) The overreaching insolence or avarice of rulers or ruling classes which causes men to react against them; (3) The possession by one or more individuals of power such as to excite fears that they design to act up a monarchy or an oligarchy; (4) The endeavours of men guilty of wrong doing to foment a revolution as a smokescreen to conceal their own misdeeds or of men freeing the aggressions of others to start a revolution in order to anticipate their enemies; (5) The disproportionate increase of any part (territorial, social, economic or otherwise) of the state, causing other parts to resort to violent means of offsetting this preponderance; (6) The dissension and rivalries of people of different races; (7) The dynamics and family feuds and quarrels; and (8) struggles for office and political power between rival classes and political factions or parties."

To the general causes of revolutions, Aristotle adds the particular ones peculiar to the various types. In *democracy* the most important cause of revolution is the unprincipled character of

the popular leaders. Demagogues attack the rich, individually or collectively, so as to provide them to forcibly resist and provide the emergence of oligarchy. The causes of overthrow of oligarchies can be internal as when a group within the class in power becomes more influential or rich at the expense of the rest, or external, by the mistreatment of the masses by the governing class. In *aristocracies*, few people share in honour. When the number of people benefiting becomes smaller or when disparity between rich and poor becomes wider, revolution is caused. *Monarchy*, *Kingship* and *tyranny* are bad forms of constitution to begin with and are very prone to dissensions.

To these causes of revolutions, Aristotle suggested means to avoid them. Maxey, in this connection, says: "The *first* essential, he (Aristotle) says is jealousy to maintain the spirit of obedience to law, for transgression creeps in unperceived, and at last reins the state", "The *second* thing is not to maltreat any classes of people excluded from the government, but to give due recognition to the leading spirits among them...". "The *third* device for preventing revolution, according to Aristotle, is to keep patriotism at fever pitch." The ruler who has a care of the state should invent terrors, and bring distant dangers near, in order that the citizens may be on their guard, and like sentinels in a night-watch, never relax their attention". "The *Fourth* expedient is to counteract the discontent that arises from inequality of position as condition by arrangements which will prevent the magistrates for making money out of their positions by limiting the tenure of office and regulating the distribution of honours so that no one person or group of persons will become disproportionately powerful...". *Fifth*, and finally, this: "... of all the things which I have mentioned, that which most contributes to the permanence of constitutions is the adaptation of education to the form of government...". The young, in other words, must be trained in the spirit of the constitution whatever that constitution may be; must be disciplined to social habits consonant with the maintenance of the constitution; must learn to think and act as integral parts of a particular form of political society.

Profound and realistic analysis of the general and particular causes of revolution together with the suggestion to cure the ailing system as is of Aristotle, the whole treatment of the subject of revolution is not without serious weaknesses. He has given a very narrow meaning of revolution ... a political change only, forgetting that revolution is always a comprehensive social change in the fabric of the whole system. He also has a negative role for the revolution, i.e., brings with its destruction, violence and bloodshed, without recognising the fact that revolutions, as Marx had said, are locomotives of history, violence only a non-significant attending characteristic of that wholesome change. With Aristotle, revolutions should be kept away, making him the status-quoist of his times.

3.4.4 Theory of State

For Aristotle, as with Plato, the state (*polis*) is all-important. Both, Plato and Aristotle, see in the *polis* more than a state. The *polis* is, for both, a community as well as a state, state as well as a government; government as well as a school; school as well as a religion. What is more is the fact that both regard the *polis* as a means for the attainment of complete life. The state with Aristotle, as with Plato too, began for the satisfaction of basic wants, but as it developed, it came to perform more elevated aims essential for good life. Aristotle says: "But a state exists for the sake of a good life, and not for the sake of life only."

The characteristic features of Aristotle's theory of state can be, briefly, stated as under:

- i) The state, for Plato, is a natural organisation, and not an artificial one. Unlike Plato's ideal state, Aristotle's state is not structured or manufactured, not a make, but is a growth,

growing gradually out of villages, villages growing out of families, and the families, out of man's nature, his social instincts. The state has grown like a tree.

- ii) The state is prior to the individual. It is so in the sense, the whole is prior to the part: "The state," Aristotle says, "is by nature clearly prior to the family and the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example, if the whole body be destroyed, there will be no foot or hand, except in an equivocal sense, as we might speak of a stone hand; for when destroyed the hand will be no better than that. But things are defined by their working and power; and we ought not to say that they are the same when they no longer have their proper quality but only that they have the same name." "The proof that the state is a creation of nature, and prior to the individual," he continues is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore, he is like a part in relation to the whole. But he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must either be a beast or a god; he is no part of a state."
- iii) The state is not only an association or union as Aristotle calls it, but is an association of associations. The other associations are not as large as is the state; they are specific, and, therefore, limited in their objective and essence. The state, on the other hand, has general and common purposes, and, therefore, has larger concerns as compared to any or other associations.
- iv) The state is like a human organism. Aristotle is of the opinion that the state, like the human organism, has its own parts, i.e., the individuals. Apart from the state, he argues, the individuals have no importance, and separated from the body, the parts have no life of their own. The interest of the part of the body is inherent in the interest of the body—what separate interest a hand has when away from the body. Likewise, the interest of the individuals is inherent in the interest of the state.
- v) The state is a self-sufficing institution while the village and the family is not. The self-sufficient state is higher than the families and the villages—it is their union. As a member of the family the individuals become social.
- vi) The state is not, Aristotle says, a unity which it is for Plato. Plato seeks to attain unity within the state. Aristotle too seeks to attain the unity, but for him, it is unity in diversity. For Aristotle, the state is not a uniformity, but is one that brings all the diversities together.
- vii) Aristotle's best practical state is according to Sabine what Plato called second-best state. Aristotle's state is the best possible state, the best practicable. McIlwain sums up Aristotle's best possible state, saying: "Aristotle's best possible state is simply the one which is neither too rich nor too poor; secure from attack and devoid of great wealth or wide expansion of trade or territory, homogeneous, virtuous, defensible, unambitious community, self-sufficient but not aggressive, great but not large, a tightly independent city devoted to the achievement of the highest possible measure of culture and virtue, of well-being and true happiness attainable by each and by all." It is one (i) which is a small city-state; (ii) whose territory corresponds to the population it has; (iii) that is geographically located near the river and where good climatic conditions exist; (iv) where the rule of law prevails, and (v) where authority/power is vested in the hands of the rich.

On the basis of his study of 158 constitutions, Aristotle has given a classification which became a guide for all the subsequent philosophers who ventured to classify governments. For him, the rule of one and for the interest of all is monarchy and its perverted form is tyranny if such

a rule exists for the benefit of the ruler. The rule of the few and for the interest of all is aristocracy, and its perverted form is oligarchy if such few rule in their own interest. The rule of many and for the interest of all is polity, and its perverted form is democracy if such a rule exists for those who have the power. Aristotle too refers to the cycle of classification—monarchy is followed by tyranny; tyranny, by aristocracy; aristocracy, by oligarchy; oligarchy, by polity; polity by democracy; and democracy, by monarchy and so goes on the cycle of classification.

Aristotle's classification has become out-dated, for it cannot be applied to the existing system. What he calls the classification of states is, in fact, the classification of government, for, like all the ancient Greeks, he confuses between the state and the government.

3.5 EVALUATION OF ARISTOTLE'S POLITICAL THEORY

Aristotle's encyclopedic mind encompassed practically all the branches of human knowledge, from physics, biology to ethics and politics. Though his best state is Plato's second best state, the tone and temper of Aristotle's *Politics* is very different from the vision in the *Republic*. One important reason for the marked difference is the fact that the *Politics* unlike the *Republic* is a collection of lecture notes and a number of different essays written over a period of time. Unlike Plato's *Republic*, which was written in the background of defeat of Athens by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War and the execution of Socrates by the Athenian democracy, Aristotle's works were measured in thinking and analysis, reflecting the mind of a scientist rather than that of a philosopher.

Aristotle is rightly regarded as the father of Political Science, as by his meticulous and painstaking research of political institutions and behaviour he provided the first framework of studying politics empirically and scientifically. His classification of constitutions provided the first major thrust for studying comparative politics. The primacy of the political was most forcefully argued when he commented that man by nature is a political animal, distinguishing between individualistic animals like the lions and tigers to the gregarious ones like the humans, elephants, ants, bees and sheep. His most lasting importance was in his advocacy of the rule of law rather than personalised rule by the wisest and the best. The entire edifice of modern civilisation is based on respect for constitutional provisions and well-defined laws. The origin of both is with Aristotle. In this sense being a less ambitious but more a practical realist than Plato, Aristotle's practical prescriptions have been more lasting and more influential than the radical and provocative ideas of Plato.

3.5.1 Influence.

It is because of such extraordinary acumen that Aristotle's influence on the subsequent political philosophers is without a parallel in the history of political theory. In fact, he is accepted more than his teacher is. His views about the state and particularly the nature of the state have not been challenged. All those who ventured to classify state start from Aristotle. His views on revolution were the last words on the subject until Marx came to analyse it differently. However, the collapse of communism has revived more interest in Aristotle's perceptions than that of Marx. Polybius (204-122 BC), Cicero (106-43 BC), Thomas Aquinas (1227-74), Marsilio of Padua (1270-1342), Machiavelli (1469-1527), John Locke (1632-1704) and the recent communitarians like MacIntyre, Sandel, Taylor follow Aristotle in spirit. This spirit is evident in all the major works of political theory originating even in contemporary times.

3.6 SUMMARY

Aristotle, as the first political scientist, was a disciple of Plato, though he criticised his teacher severely. He considered man as a social animal and the state as a natural organisation, which exists not only for life but for the sake of good life. Polity that combined oligarchic with democratic characteristics was the best form of government and was the best way of preventing revolutions and violent changes. It was not the ideal, but one that is possible and practicable. Aristotle is convinced that the individual can develop only in a state. Since men by nature are political, it is the responsibility of the state to ensure they are socialised.

True to the times he belonged, Aristotle is an advocate of inequality for he considered men as unequal. A slave is a slave because his hands are dirty, he lacks virtues of a freeman, namely rationality, he has to be mastered and ruled until the time he has acquired reason for securing emancipation. Aristotle is for the best form of government but one that is within the realm of possibility. The scientist in Aristotle does not allow him to reach the extremes. He believes in the golden rule of mean. He quotes Empedocles with approval: "Many things are best for the middling. Fain could I be of the state's middle class". The scientist Aristotle is not a philosopher and this makes him the advocate of the status quo, conservative for some.

3.7 EXERCISES

- 1) Evaluate Aristotle's criticism of Plato.
- 2) Discuss Aristotle's theory of justice and compare it with that of Plato.
- 3) State and examine Aristotle's theory of slavery.
- 4) "Aristotle is 'a status-quoist'". In the light of this statement, examine Aristotle's views on revolution.
- 5) Critically examine Aristotle's theory of state.
- 6) What is Aristotle's contribution to the Western Political Theory?