

Original Paper

Comparison of Plato's Political Philosophy with Aristotle's

Political Philosophy

Ylber Aliu¹

¹ Faculty of Public Administration, AAB College, Republic of Kosovo

Received: April 4, 2018 Accepted: April 13, 2018 Online Published: April 18, 2018

doi:10.22158/uspa.v1n1p35

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/uspa.v1n1p35>

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the similarities and differences between the political philosophy of Plato and political philosophy of Aristotle. Such comparative study is very important for political thought in general. The main significance of this paper is the precise meaning of the political philosophy of Plato and political philosophy of Aristotle, as well as the meaning of differences and similarities. Often, Plato's political ideas appear as Aristotle political ideas, and Aristotle's political ideas appear as Plato's political ideas. The main method of study in this paper is the comparison method. The ancient political debate between Plato and Aristotle is important to modern political philosophy as it is the basis of modern political theories. The data for paper are taken from the books of these two authors. The political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, although they have similarities in some points, but differ in many other issues, such as: different categories of political analysis, different methodologies of policy study, and different reasons for state creation, different opinions why democracy is a bad form of government and why aristocracy is the right form.

Keywords

Plato, Aristotle, similarities, differences, politics

1. Introduction

1.1 Plato's Political Philosophy and Aristotle's Political Philosophy Have Little Resemblance, but They Have Many Differences between Them

Consequently, comparison of Aristotle's political philosophy with Plato's political philosophy is the main study aim in this paper. In other words, identifies of parts where Aristotle's political philosophy and Plato's political philosophy have similarities and differences is main goal we intend to achieve with this paper.

1.2 Methodology

The methodology of paper is based entirely on the book of Plato "*Republic*" and in the book of Aristotle "*Politics*". The main method that will be used in the paper is the comparative method. But we will also use the descriptive method depicting the political philosopher of Plato and Aristotle and then we will compare them. We have identified only some of the key issues of political debate between Plato and Aristotle and we have faced these issues with their arguments. Dealing with the various arguments given by Plato and Aristotle about why the state is created, why democracy is a bad form of government, and why aristocracy is the right form, gender relations, different methodologies of policy study, give us the impression that from here begins the two main streams of contemporary political thought: realization and idealism. So, we don't want only to describe the Plato and Aristotle political views. This not our point in paper. Our main point is to comparative the political views of Plato and Aristotle and to see when those political views has similar and differences. For this reason, in some case this paper is more abstract and theoretical.

2. The Similarities between the Political Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle's Political Philosophy

The main similarities between the political philosophy of Plato and the political philosophy of Aristotle are:

Plato and Aristotle belong to the same time period of political philosophy antic. They have lived and acted in almost an identical period of time. This period of time is characterized by the overwhelming interest of classical Athens residents for the various problems faced by peoples in relation to the external struggle against nature. Consequently, there were many attempts to explore the various problems faced by people. The ancient political philosophers had fundamental questions about the nature of existence, the composition of reality, the existence or not of being, the solution of metaphysical problems, criticisms of the polytheistic beliefs of the old Greeks, etc. Different answers were given to these issues. Miles's Miles is the first philosopher who sought "... systematically the origin of things" (Jacoby, 2006, p. 17). Elder Parmenid created the concept of "Being. There is no existence" (Ibid, p. 21). Socrates is remembered with the principle "Know Yourself" (Ibid, p. 27).

It should be noted in the process of discovering new recognitions were included those Athens residents who had minimum condition for life. Solving the material problem was the first condition to start with philosophy and knowledge. If we look at the biographies of ancient philosophers then we will see that most of them, perhaps with the exception of Socrates, have been members of wealthy families (or wealth they have achieved during their work). There are even times when these philosophers from their great love for knowing reality as much as possible have sold all their wealth.

At the center of this research and having the material conditions for dealing with philosophy were precisely Plato and Aristotle. Both Plato and Aristotle were interested in studying social phenomena. Both Plato and Aristotle intend to discover new laws by which human society functions.

This is the other point were Plato's and Aristotle's views meet. Different social phenomena posed a

special interest in their research concepts. These phenomena are quite extensive. These phenomena move from politics, economics, sociology, philosophy, logic, mathematics, literature, and so on. In the center of this interest was the search for various forms for the realization of the concept of recognition. Plato and Aristotle, were interested in expanding the boundaries of knowledge and the realization of human emancipation. Plato thought that there are two worlds “The world of phenomena is taken and seen in every conceptual clarity”. However, mathematical laws, fine art, love and virtue testify to the existence of a higher and more real world: that of eternal ideas. While Aristotle thought that “ideas” or “forms” are the ones that make up the “unstable”, eternally unstable matter, in defined objects (Ibid, p. 47). Aristotle’s principle, according to which only the “definition” of matter is based on the being and rule of the world, is extremely fertile even in our day” (Ibid, p. 57). Both of these views showed Plato’s and Aristotle’s great interest in solving various social problems from the angle of metaphysics.

At the center of this interest in studying social phenomena both for Plato and Aristotle was the interest in knowing politics. Plato’s and Aristotle’s interest in politics is another similar point between the political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle.

Both Plato and Aristotle, in the focus of their research, had research from the field of political philosophy. They both are interested in politics, the state, the forms of governance, the various categories of definition for justice, gender relations, and so on. So Plato in “... many of the early dialogues raise important political problems ..., the Republic is usually held as Plato’s first major work related to political theory” (Mc Lean, 1996, p. 439). While Aristotle “fleeing from Plato, believed that practical sciences should be based on empirical data and taxonomy. Together with a group of students, she studied the political structure and history of 158 constitutions, but we have just left the Constitution of Athens. However, some of the results of these searches can be found in his most famous political work, the Politics, which, with his analysis, advice and descriptions, gives us a number of constitutions, including Sparta, Crete and Carthage” (Ibid, p. 23).

So, in a word, its policy and research were at the center of attention from Plato and Aristotle. Consequently, their views on forms of governance are in line with what which is the best form of governance is and what the worst form is. Plato’s and Aristotle’s concepts of governance forms are also similar. In this sense, their hatred for democracy as a form of government and the preference of aristocracy are also the points where Plato’s and Aristotle’s views match. Both Plato and Aristotle thoughts that democracy is a bad form of government that does not deserve to be implemented.

Democracy does not provide governance from the most capable people, and democracy it contains many deficiencies through the concept of general equality (Plato, 1999, pp. 112-116). Instead, aristocracy is the best form of government that needs to be implemented because the aristocracy provides the leadership of the most capable people, and at the same time, the proper dependence of all strata in the society is ensured.

3. The Differences between Plato's Political Philosophy and Aristotle's Political Philosophy

In addition to some of the similarities between them, Plato's political philosophy and Aristotle's political philosophy have more differences.

The second one is the both of them looking for a truth, but using different methods to reach it. For Plato the accuracy of political philosophy can't be expressed through the philosophical writing style. The accuracy of political philosophy can only be expressed through the style of literature and dialogues. But the content of these dialogues is not far from the accuracy of mathematics. That is why Plato is determined for the style of literary writing to express his views on politics. The language that Plato is addressed to us is poetic language. It is the language of poets artfully built. The premises in which Socrates' debates occur are articulated. Characters in the book are described similarly to the characters in any work of art. Through Socrates debates with his critics in the book, Plato reveals his political ideas. Other philosophers in building their own political philosophy usually do not deal with the criticisms of political ideas. By contrast, Plato through debates reaches at every step of the expression of his political philosophy, and also addresses criticisms of this philosophy. In this way his political philosophy is more complete. Through the logic of debates Plato seeks to bring to light those thoughts that represent partial truths through polemical characters with Socrates at the same time by giving his truths about political philosophy. While Aristotle expresses his views on politics through ordinary philosophical and explanatory language. Aristotle thinks that through this style the truth about politics is easily transmitted to the reader. Differences in methodology also go in the direction of changing the logical principles of explanation. Plato uses the logical deductive method. Aristotle likes the analytical method more. Aristotle initially asserts that "... as in other domains, where the complexity should be broken down into simple parts, since they are the smallest part of the entirety, likewise, by examining the state we will see the constituent parts of and to get to know even more about them, what they differ between them, and whether something can be taken from what has been said to be important from the aspect of science" (Ibid, p. 5). Thus, in the study of various political problems Aristotle through an analytical approach aims to penetrate into the main essence of understanding those phenomena. In other words, this is noticed when analyzing the parts of which the state is composed. As Plato, such intentions pursue them through the deductive approach.

Plato's and Aristotle's views, except for research methodology, differ in terms of research categories as well. Plato and Aristotle have different opinions with the political categories to be taken for consideration.

Many political categories which are studied by Plato are not studied by Aristotle. While many political categories which are studied by Aristotle are not studied by Plato. Incidentally, a pretty good part of Plato's own political discourse devotes it to the concept of justice. Moreover, Plato's political philosophy is built in an attempt to define justice and injustice. Aristotle almost completely ignores this concept and does not consider it. Aristotle focuses heavily on the concept of slavery. To explore the "rights" the slave and their obligations. Plato, besides a very small case, does not even mention this

problem. Plato almost entirely ignores the slave category and issues pertaining to them.

Then Aristotle analyzes the concept of the middle layer and the sustainability that produces the holding of power from this layer. Plato does not analyze this problem at all. For these reasons of different categories of analysis, there are more parts where the political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle differ between themselves than they have similarities. However, Plato's and Aristotle's political thoughts collide in many other issues, such as the creation of the state, the reasons for democracy hate, and the preference for aristocracy, and gender relations.

Plato and Aristotle give different analogies when studying the concept of state creation, but also different reasons for the rationality of this creation. While Plato thought the state was created because of the inadequacy of people as an individual, on the other hand, Aristotle thinks that the state was created as the highest community in order to achieve happiness. For Plato the state is "a man of great proportions" (Ibid, p. 68). For Aristotle, "the state is imitation of the family" (Ibid, p. 5). For the Plato the state connects with the individual and makes comparisons between these subjects. For the Aristotle connects the state with the family and makes comparisons between them. For Plato the individual has more resemblance to the state. For Aristotle, more resemblance to the state has the family. Plato thinks the state is created because people as individuals are inadequate to meet their needs. While Aristotle thinks the state is created to achieve greater happiness. Plato thought that people in the state join in to complement each other's abilities. Aristotle thinks that people are united in the state because in this way they manage to realize their happiness.

Consequently, the differences between Plato and Aristotle regarding the creation of the state are in two respects. First, is the state more like the individual (Plato) or the family (Aristotle). Second, is the purpose of creating the state the fact that people are inadequate as an individual (Plato) or achieving greater happiness for all people (Aristotle).

Also, Plato's political philosophy and Aristotle's political philosophy differ in terms of reasoning for forms of governance.

Though Plato's and Aristotle's thoughts overlap when dealing with democracy as a bad form of government and preference for aristocracy as a good form of governance. But the reasons for the hatred of democracy and preferences of aristocracy are different. Plato hated democracy (Ibid, p. 320) because it was precisely Athenian democracy that in his eyes condemned and executed unjustly one of Plato's principal teachers: Socrates. Though it was not the main reason why Plato hated democracy this case had a great influence on shaping Plato's stand on democracy. Aristotle basically hated democracy because democracy did not provide leadership from the most prepared people (Ibid, p. 129). On the other hand, Plato preferred the aristocracy because the aristocracy provide the leadership of the most capable and prepared people for this task. That was why Aristotle liked the aristocracy, but this is not the main reason. The main reason for Aristotle was that the aristocracy ensures the proper dependence of all social strata. Aristotle's preference for aristocracy connects with his concept of social strata. So the differences between Plato and Aristotle are not in the conclusions, but are in the justifications for

those conclusions.

Also and the Aristotle, thinks that within society there are three layers: high, middle, and low. But unlike Plato, Aristotle does not categorize society in strata on the basis of profession. Plato classifies society in layers on the basis of the profession. Aristotle categorizes society on the basis of wealth and does not pay much attention to the problems in the society.

Further, the differences between the political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle go and as far as gender relations are concerned.

Plato's and Aristotle's thoughts on gender relations, namely the equality of men and women differ. Plato thinks that the husband and wife should have the same rights in the areas where they have the same skills. Medicine is such an example. And in the field of medicine men and women should have the same rights. Aristotle was categorically opposed to the same rights between men and women. Aristotle felt that it is in the nature of things that a woman has a submissive role while men play a leading role. By nature, the woman is weaker than the man. While men have to rule because they are created for such a task. And emotionally they are stronger than women. This Aristotelian thought is the weakest point of his political philosophy. Inequality in the relationship between men and women in Aristotle's political philosophy is his most wrong political opinion.

The main difference between the political philosophy of Plato and the political philosophy of Aristotle is in the influence these two philosophies have in the great debate of political science whether idealism or realism should influence policy making and on the basis of which principles should be politics. Plato and Aristotle with their different views on politics are considered to have laid the basis for two fundamental theoretical paradigms of political science: idealism and realism. Plato's political philosophy is considered idealistic. Aristotle's political philosophy is classified as realistic. Plato with his political philosophy is aimed at transforming politics. Aristotle aims at studying the existing forms of political reality. Plato believes the policy can be changed. Aristotle believed that politics cannot be changed. Plato by changing the policy seeks to redefine the definition for the concept of justice and injustice. Aristotle, studying existing forms of political reality, such as slavery, requires that those forms be made on a scientific basis. Plato thinks about politics in ideal terms. Aristotle thinks about politics in real terms. So the political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle is valued for their academic contribution to the establishment of two different theories of politics.

4. Conclusion

Comparing the political philosophy of Plato and Aristotle's political philosophy, we conclude that the main similarities between the political philosophy of Plato and the political philosophy of Aristotle, are: Plato and Aristotle belong to the same period of political philosophy: the antiquity; Plato and Aristotle are interested in researching social phenomena; Plato and Aristotle are also interested in policy research; Plato and Aristotle share the same view as the idea that democracy is a bad form of government and aristocracy is the best form of government. Apart from the few similarities that Plato's and Aristotle's

political philosophy more differ between them. The main differences are: Plato and Aristotle have different methodologies of exploring the problems of political philosophy; Plato and Aristotle have different categories of issues from the political philosophy they take for analysis; Plato and Aristotle have different opinions about the reasons of state creation and theses on these reasons; Plato and Aristotle have different reasons why democracy is a bad form of government and aristocracy is the best form; Plato and Aristotle have different views on gender relations; Plato and Aristotle are considered as the founders of two different theoretical traditions in political science: idealism and realism.

References

- Aristotle. (1978). *Politics*. Pristine: Rebirth.
- Bakalis, N. (2005). *Handbook of Greek Philosophy: From Thales to the Stoics Analysis and Fragments*. Trafford Publishing.
- Jacoby, E. (2006). *50 Klassiker Philosophen*. Tirana: Sentury.
- Loudovikos, N. (2003). *Theological History of the Ancient Hellenic Philosophy—Presocratics, Socrates, Plato* (in Greek). Athens: Pournaras Publishing.
- Martin Litchfield West. (1971). *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Mc Lean, I. (1996). *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*. Tirana: House of book and communication.
- Plato. (1999). *Republics*. Tirana: Maluka.