Plato, Aristotle and Thucydides

Introduction

Thucydides was an Athenian historian, general and political philosopher son of Olorus. He is considered as the father of the school of political realism. This is because he viewed the relations between countries as basing on might instead of right. Thucydides exhibited interest in developing an understanding of the human nature to seek explanations of behavior in crises such as plague, massacres, as in that of the Melians, and civil war (Everson, 1996). Another philosopher was Aristotle. He was born in in 384 BCE in Stagirus, northern Greece. His father was Nicomachus who died when Aristotle was still a child. The two men provide good information on democracy and ancient politics (Everson, 1996).

In radical democracies, the interests of the poor are paramount; Aristotle, therefore, argues that democracy is not the best form of government. He states that oligarchy and monarchy are also not the best forms of governments. According to him, rule in democracy benefits those people who are named in the government type and it is for the needy. In a democratic state, rule is by the needy and for the needy. Aristocracy is a better type of government because the ruler has the interest of the country at his heart. He says that a nation ought to be ruled by people who have enough time and are willing to pursue virtue. This is different from current leaders who are career politicians whose motivation is create wealth at the expense of the citizens. He thinks rules are there to be leisured and propertied (Grube & Reeve, 2010).

Aristotle holds a positive view in the rule by the majority when it is moderated by a good constitution and rule of Law; he argues that a good structured democracy can reach a high level of virtue compared to the individual virtue of the citizens making up the state. He specifically opposes the rule by the elite groups such as the guardian of Plato's Republic; he argues that a static ruling group can cause great enmity among the other groups in society. He further argues that nobody in such a state can really be really happy.

Aristotle believed that an ideal state is one whose constitution is written by people who agree on a common good. He said “In doing so we shall not assume a standard of excellence beyond the reach of an ordinary man, or a standard of education calling for exceptional gifts of nature or fortune, or, yet again an ideal form of government. No, we shall confine ourselves to the sort of life that most men are able to share, and a constitution to which most states can attain” (Tredennick, 2010).Unlike the poor and the rich, Aristotle argues that the middle class have much to lose or gain in a social revolution and, therefore, can provide impartial guidance. He believed this is the best group to hold offices.

On the other hand, Thucydides does not trust the common man with leadership. He however feels that it is necessary to consider the views of the common man in the affairs of the state but should be influenced heavily by the likes and opinion of a higher standing citizen like Pericles. He believed that human nature was wild and uncontrollable, and therefore needed to be guided by a person of higher status. This is evident from the way he stressed the speech of Pericles and his views that Athenian should back what he said. He believed that democracy needed to be controlled by Pericles. He argued that the human being should continually be watched and trained by a strong man like Pericles (Grube & Reeve, 2010).

He brought to light the fact that one man had the capability of possessing people who had become wild, weak and uncontrollable. He argues that for a government to function well, leaders must use the human nature to persuade average thinkers of Athens that what they were saying was good for everyone. However, he sees it as an avenue for speaker to pursue their own interest. For this reason, he sees human nature as having slight deception and ill will. He felt that people who possess least of these human nature shortcomings that must rise to the position of leadership and authority (Grube & Reeve, 2010).

The two philosophers clearly differ on their view of democracy. Aristotle supports democracy where middle class are the ruler while Thucydides advocates for one person to rule others because of their weaknesses. I support Aristotle on democracy because in the current world the rich are the ruler that has no interest of people in their heart. They lack virtues and do not have a lot to lose in case of social revolution. With good constitution the rights of the poor and everyone else are safeguarded and guaranteed.

Aristotle highlights several problems associated with wealth distribution on democracies. He argues that whenever the poor gain much power, they use that power to enrich themselves from the public treasury making the nation poor. Similarly, problem arises when the rich gain much political power because the state end up becoming an oligarchy and the poor citizens suffer a lot. The poor suffer because oligarchs insist on treating people differently according to the wealth they possess. They believe wealth is a sign of merit and virtue hence the poor lack these qualities. He concluded that “A large middle class is absolutely essential for a stable and well-run government because the middle class does not covet rule, are not envious, foster friendship because of their similarity, and can act as neutral arbitrators between the rich and the poor" (Tredennick, 2010).

 Aristotle argues that wealth is about life and that is a necessary art that t help people learn how to obtain, maintain and use their possessions to live well. The means of acquiring these possessions determine different kinds of life that people live. He states that people live to gratify their bodily desires and not to meet their basic needs. He observed that resources that belong to common people were treated with less care unlike private possessions. He proposes that the possession of resources be private but their use is common because there are resources in a state that are share hence reflecting unit of a many people. This is hard for legislators to make them common in use even through taxation and provision of public services. He observed that people take pleasure in calling things their own (Tredennick, 2010).

He believed that this desire is natural and good because it makes wealth holders share their wealth with the less fortunate hence build the community. However, at times people become greedy and refuse to share with their neighbors because of greed and selfishness leading people into a state of depravity. The solution proposed by Aristotle to the problem of depravity and wealth limitedness is virtue. People should observe moderation and liberality. These are the only worthy ways of using properties because moderation tends towards luxury and liberality tends towards hardship. One should learn to live in moderation or temperately and liberally.
Aristotle proposes two issues in relation to wealth in terms of ethics. That people should give gifts or money generously to the right people for a good use. Those will a lot of wealth should be philanthropic. Such people are public spirited and are honored in a country. He had no problem with differences that existed between citizens in terms of wealth. He argued that a good constitution should endeavor to balance wealthy people and the poor in the country in participating in the affairs of the country. Issues of distributive justice arise in a situation that there are extremely poor people and very rich citizens. These conditions lead to wrongs being committed, occurrence of civil strife, discontent and revolution unless the rich become liberal and philanthropic (Grube & Reeve, 2010).

Plato argues that in the context of morality of an individual, justice is more important than wealth. He believed that individual should have moderate wealth in order for them to live moral life and that excessive wealth as well as poverty have negative results to individuals and the society. Moral integrity and internal harmony of a society and individual are disrupted and destroyed by excessive desire for wealth. He values justice more than money. He believes that an extreme poverty lead to disintegration of the state. Political changes occur as a result of conflict amongst power possessing individual in society. Conflicts arise as children of theses dominant individuals differences are not similar to that of their parents. He argues that dictators rise because of poverty and wealth. The rich become lawless while the poor seek to take control of the state (Everson, 1996).

Plato believes that a good education program is necessary to help in the distribution of wealth. He argues that guardians should be trained from a well selected group who then tae leadership position. Education will enable rulers to treat their subjects in a civilized way and that they would maintain good morals. These guardians must keep other rulers to their job. They should also be allowed to own resources that are considered indispensable like gold and silver. Guardians will not be allowed to have private houses but live in shared houses and eat from mess. Their needs should be met by citizens. He argues that allowing guardians to own property will turn them from guardians to managers.

Plato and Aristotle agree that wealth inequality leads to disintegration of the state. They however, differ in the solutions they propose in distribution of wealth. Aristotle proposes that power should remain in the hands of the middle class and that the rich should practice sharing with the poor. This is very realistic and practical in our modern society. However, Plato argument that education is the solution to wealth inequality is not agreeable. This is because once individuals are trained and assume leadership positions they proceed to enrich themselves.
It is true that democracy can open political decision making to the majority of citizens who are ignorant to make any rational decisions that affect the whole community. This is because ordinary people do not have knowledge and experience to run the affairs of state. They are familiar with issues that affect state like economics, conditions in other countries, military strategy and intricacies of ethics and law. They lack these skills because they take time to acquire, effort and discipline yet majority of people to not enjoy. Out of ignorance they vote for politicians who deceive them with nebulous talk and appearances. They later regret when they find themselves at the mercies of these politicians but cannot do anything about the conditions they have no control over.

On the other hand, Aristotle view of democracy being too optimistic is true. He argues that there are four types of democracies. One type is made of farmers and individuals with moderate resources. He claims that they only meet in assembly when it is important and urgent because of the work they have. The second democracy is when anyone shares in the governance so long a citizen of a country. The third type is when anyone is entitled to participate in governing of the state. He argues that in this type of democracy there is no revenue. The forth type of democracy is where there is revenue and everyone are entitled to share in the governance. He argues that the poor enjoy participating because they get paid. However, the rich are hindered by their private businesses. This show that Aristotle view of democracy is overly optimistic because contrary to his views the rich are the ones who dominate the political arena (Everson, 1996).
Aristotle compares politicians to craftsmen. He argues that a politician should produce and maintain a legal system. He states that the city should have a constitution which needs an effective ruler. A ruler according to him should have good virtues that stem from practical wisdom. He should possess virtues such as friendliness, generosity, moderation in respect of sex and wittiness. A ruler should practice genuine virtue since he alone has a wisdom that is practical. He can therefore direct other people because he understands the end of activities. He states that the goal of a ruler should be to realize moral virtue.
On the other hand, Plato compares leadership to a ship. The captain of a ship should have knowledge of weather, navigation, meteorology among other. Similarly, a political leader should be well educated and experienced in various fields such as military, relationships with other country and legal issues. The ordinary citizen does not possess these qualities according to Plato because they are not easy to acquire (Grube & Reeve, 2010).

 Plato is more convincing in terms of the qualifications of a leader. This is because uneducated and inexperienced person cannot be trusted with complex issues of state. Education shapes the character of a person. Though the virtue is important for a political leader to have, it is hard for an uneducated person to discharge his state duties simply because he has good morals. There Plato is more convincing.

References

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