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Q3(a)

Explain the Aristotelian view of politics. To what extent do you think it has contributed to the development of modern-day constitutional democracies?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · PSIR GS 1 · 20 marks · Federalism

Federalism: Constitutional provisions; changing nature of centre-state relations; integrationist tendencies and regional aspirations; inter-state disputes.

Core demand of the question

- Explain the Aristotelian view of **politics**. To what extent do you think it has contributed to the development of modern-day constitutional democracies? (20 marks)

Revision summary

Aristotle sees **politics** as the natural pursuit of the good life through a constitution as a way of life.

Regimes are judged by who rules and whether they seek the common advantage; mixed polity is praised.

Modern constitutional democracy borrowed mixed offices, rule of law, and civic education.

It rejected natural slavery, the exclusion of women, and the face-to-face polis.

Austin, Mill, Habermas, and Kesavananda show the debt and the liberal-democratic surplus.

Introduction

Aristotle treated **politics** as the highest practical science of the good life in a polis. The human being is a political animal whose speech about just and unjust needs a constitution. Modern constitutional democracy inherited parts of that view and rejected others.

Body

Aristotelian politics

- The polis exists by nature for living well, not only for trade or war. Household and village are prior in time; the city is prior as end.
- A constitution (**politeia**) is the arrangement of offices and the way of life of a people, not a mere parchment.
- **Classification of regimes by who rules and whether they rule for the common advantage:** kingship, aristocracy, polity versus tyranny, oligarchy, democracy as deviation.
- The mixed regime and the middle class are stabilisers. Extreme democracy of the poor and oligarchy of the rich both decay.
- Citizenship is ruling and being ruled in turn among free equals. Slaves, women, and resident foreigners were outside that equality.
- Law should rule rather than passion. Education forms the civic character that a constitution needs.

What modern constitutional democracy took

- Rule of law, mixed offices, and suspicion of faction are Aristotelian gifts, restated by Polybius, **Machiavelli**, and later constitutional designers.
- **J. S. Mill**'s representative government still asks about the character of citizens, not only about counting heads.
- Federal lists, bicameralism, and judicial review in India are mixed-regime devices against a single passionate majority.
- **Granville Austin**'s reading of the Indian Constitution as a way of life, not only a lawyer's document, is closer to **Aristotle**'s **politeia** than to a night-watchman contract.
- Deliberation about the common advantage, which **Habermas** restates in modern form, has an Aristotelian ancestor in speech about justice.

What it did not give, or gave badly

- Natural slavery and the exclusion of women contradict **Pateman**, **Mill**'s suffrage argument, and **Article 15**.
- The small face-to-face polis is not a continental electoral democracy. Scale forced representation, parties, and **Easton**'s systems language.
- Modern rights against the state, in **Locke** and Part III, are more liberal than **Aristotle**'s teleological ranking of lives.
- **Rawls** starts from free and equal persons, not from a natural hierarchy of souls.
- Capitalism, caste, and the secret ballot are not in the **Politics**. **Rajni Kothari**'s Congress system is a modern party answer **Aristotle** did not imagine.

Extent of contribution

- Contribution is real in constitutionalism as mixed office, law's supremacy, civic education, and the idea that a regime is a way of life.
- **Contribution is limited:** democracy as universal adult franchise, fundamental rights, and social revolution in **Ambedkar**'s sense are modern.
- **Kesavananda Bharati** (1973) is Aristotelian in spirit when it says a constitution has an identity that amendment may not destroy, and liberal in content when that identity includes rights and judicial review.
- So **Aristotle** is a grandfather of constitutional democracy, not its working manual.

Flow diagram

Aristotle -> Political animal
 Aristotle -> Mixed regime and law
 Mixed regime and law -> Modern constitutional democracy
 Aristotle -> Excludes women slaves
 Modern constitutional democracy -> Franchise rights Ambedkar

Conclusion

Aristotle's **politics** is the science of the good life in a mixed, lawful polis of citizens who rule and are ruled. Modern constitutional democracies took mixed office, rule of law, and civic character. They rejected slavery, the closed citizen body, and the small city. The contribution is foundational and partial.

Facts & figures

Politics

Aristotle's treatise on the polis, citizenship, and classification of constitutions.

Politeia

Both a regime-type (polity) and the arrangement of offices as a people's way of life.

Austin

The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation reads the text as a seamless web of political and social aims.

Kesavananda, 1973

Basic structure as constitutional identity, a modern analogue of a regime that cannot become another regime by mere vote.

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