

A Comparative Analysis of Methodology of Plato & Aristotle

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ABSTRACT

Plato and Aristotle both are those Greek Political Thinkers who has contributed immensely in the development of Political Science since its inception. Though Aristotle was disciple of Plato, but both differ in their method of analysis. Plato's Dialogue and Aristotle's Treaties both differ in more than one way. Their methods, attitude, and Nature of inquiry are entirely contrasting.

Plato's Method:

In his various ethical, political and metaphysical problems Plato has adopted the dialecting method as a consequence he cast each one of his work in the form of a dialogue in which Socrates was the principal speaker and set forth his views. Similarly the various philosophical ideas and principles which he wished to examine were also put in the mouths of persons who were either contemporaries or belonged to the preceding generations. Following the footsteps of his master, Socrates Plato aimed at awakening thought in his readers and not at instilling knowledge into them. A dialogue is not a dogmatic assertion of truth but shows the philosophical spirit at work. Plato's Dialogue are more of Philosophical conversation between people to people, they are not able to provide solutions to the problematic omnipresent questions. Plato was of the opinion that philosophy is not a literary tool, and he was of the view that philosophy can be expressed in a better way in open public place. Plato expressed through a presentation way because he was of the firm belief that it was best method to examine question which was based on justice, beauty and virtue which presents the point

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of view good and potential thinkers and presents the way in which the debates were carried out.

Plato uses Analogies to define his point. The analogies are sometime drawn from arts after the fashion of Socrates and sometimes from nature. He uses the analogy of doctor or a pilot to demonstrate the need of knowledge and skill in the management of affairs of state. Similarly he uses the example of watch dog while defining the function of women as guardians along with men.

Plato is a Utopian, the first utopian of the western world. He is not interested in describing things as it is, or has been, but he is in the discovery of ideal. The ideal State is the perfect idea of the State; and Plato seeks to discover it by a process of comparison and criticism. “The *Laws*, the *Statesman* and the *Republic* are conversation of individuals in search of the ideal thought of the State. His enquiry is in the search of the ideal, for understanding the true nature of the city-states and not for showing that such things could exist in fact.” He constructs the picture of the world as it would be if the true principles of human life had free play, but it exist in imagination; its earthly counterpart is nowhere to be found.

In constructing the ideally best state and its institution Plato employed the A’prori or speculative method. He started with certain assumption and principles and deduced whatever consequences followed from them without fear and hesitation. As Sabine Points out the true relation of the *Republic* is the story of a free cleverness, liberated by custom and untrammelled by human foolishness and self-will.

Plato incorporates and transforms the doctrine of his predecessors. Plato shares the scepticism of the Sophists regarding knowledge of sense. He agrees with Socrates that genuine knowledge is always by concepts. He accepts Heraclitus doctrine that the world is in constant change. With the Eleatics, he agrees that the real world is unchangeable, but substitute for Parmenides unchanging being his world of eternal ideas. With the Atomists he agrees that reality is manifold, but replaces a plurality of atoms by a plurality of forms of ideas and finally he agrees with all Greek Philosophers that reality is basically rational. His system is the mature fruit of the history of Greek philosophy down his time.

Aristotle's Method:

Aristotle has a great love for facts, due to biological training of his childhood and youth and his scientific studies he grew into a careful and systematic observer. The study of Politics becomes empirical in the hands of Aristotle. It is interesting to note that the very first para of the Politics begins with words; 'Observation shows us first....'. This clearly indicates the use of empirical method in his writings. This method is also known as inductive method. It includes the study of specific events and on the basis of these specific observations a generalised principle is formed.

Aristotle also used the comparative method in the study of political phenomena. He had an extraordinary knowledge of the political institutions both of his own times and of the past; it is said that he had studied about two hundred constitutions.

Aristotle used scientific method of which Politics is an illustrious example, combines induction from facts with deductive reasoning from first principle. Besides insisting on the necessity of a systematic collection of facts as the first requisite of the scientific method in the study of political phenomena, Aristotle also laid emphasis on the importance of measuring their significance or value. He held that we must inquire into the end or purpose of the state in addition to studying the forms it assumed in the past. In other words the true method of Politics must not be not only historical or comparative but also teleological.

Teleology is a doctrine that attempts to explain the final cause of things. Aristotle defines the state is a union of Families or Villages for a happy or Good life. Aristotle's teleology leads him to an organic view of the state. It is his Teleological view point which leads him to regard ethics and politics as constituting one science.

One another aspect of Aristotle's method is worth noting; that is his regard and respect for tradition. It is fidelity to facts of past history which makes him conservative and prevents from being Plato. He is more of a Reformist in his thought. A person who attaches great importance to the accumulated wisdom of the past cannot become revolutionary. The whole bent and bias of his mind led Aristotle to believe that in order to be effective an ideal must not go against the

actual state of affairs. Therefore discrepancies and conflict of theory with facts were a far more difficulty in the way of Aristotle than in that of Plato.

Points of Difference between Plato & Aristotle

Though Aristotle was influenced by Platonism to a very high degree and may rightly be regarded as true Platonist, he was no blind follower of Plato. His Taken intellect did not allow him to uncritically accept all that the master has taught. He rather made his master's teaching as the basis of his own thinking and develops his thought along the sides of his scientific temperament.

While Plato poured scorn on the world of sense and deprecated sense-experience as the source and basis of the knowledge of reality, Aristotle loved facts and was deeply interested in collecting and examining them. Therefore, Aristotle couldn't possibly sympathise with or appreciate the large place Plato had given to tradition and poems in the development of his thought; he could not allow poetic descriptions to take the place of rational explanations. Aristotle wanted definite and technical understanding. His love for truth and methodical strength led him to deprecate an ideal which couldn't be fulfilled on earth. This explains why Aristotle rejects the ideal state sketched in *Republic* and why his ideal state is more close to Plato's sub-ideal state of *Laws*.

In short Plato and Aristotle have the common aim viz. the creation of body of Knowledge on which a statesman can proceed, their method differ, Plato's thinking is speculative in nature, he held that knowledge reflects a blueprint of nonfigurative information, while Aristotle build up his method of deliberation on surveillance and investigation of facts. Maxey rightly describe Aristotle as the 'First Scientist'.

Plato was a mathematician, the following words inscribed on the gate way of Academy ' *Let no one devoid of interest in Mathematics enter here*' reveal his deep interest in mathematics. Mathematics deal with numbers and figures- which are static, fixed and unchangeable things. Plato's universe is astatic universe, there is little place for growth or development in it. On the other hand Aristotle studies Biology, which is concerned with the fact of growth and development. His universe is dynamic; he regards fully developed form of a thing as its true nature. The pervasive role played by concept of evolution or growth in the thinking of Aristotle distinguishes it from that of Plato.

Another point of difference between Plato and Aristotle was their style. Plato was master artist of words while Aristotle cares zero for the beauties of approach. He was too much in earnest with philosophy to lose him in the maze of words, or to put off with metaphors instead of rational explanations. As a consequence he did not agree to his thinking to be govern by verse as Plato sometimes did.

Aristotle refers to the fundamental distinction between academic and the sensibleput into effect of reason which was not known to Plato. It is this distinction which led the previous to refuse the most profoundly original policy of Plato that states should be lined by logician- kings.

Conclusion:

We may say that Aristotle's method was determined by his empirical or inductive habit of mind, historic temper, respect for tradition and a general readiness to accept the verdict of public opinion. In all these respects he differed and differed profoundly, from Plato. The differences appeared throughout the *Politics*, and lead him to criticise his master Plato. They also lead him towards moderation in his views. In this method of study a person must be either a Platonist or an Aristotelian.

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