

Primary Sources: Aristotle and Plato

Document A: Aristotle's Politics

The Greek Philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) was a student of Plato. Like Plato, Aristotle was suspicious of democracy, which he thought could lead to mob rule. Instead, Aristotle favored rule by a single strong and virtuous leader. In this excerpt from The Politics, Aristotle outlines the forms of government and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of each form.

We call that form of government in which one rules, and which regards the common interest, kingship or royalty; that in which more than one, but not many, rule, aristocracy. It is so called, either because the rulers are the best men, or because they have at heart the best interest of the state and of the citizens. But when the citizens at large administer the state for the common interest, the government is called by the generic name- Constitutional government...

Of the above mentioned forms, the perversions are as follows: of royalty, tyranny; of aristocracy, oligarchy; of constitutional government, democracy. For tyranny is a kind of monarchy which has in view the interest of the monarch only; oligarchy has in view the interest of the wealthy; democracy, of the needy; none of them the common good of all.

Questions

1. What is the main idea of this excerpt?

2. How does Aristotle view democracy?

Document B: Plato's Republic

Unless either philosophers become kings in their countries or those who are now called kings and rulers come to be sufficiently inspired with a genuine desire for wisdom; unless that is to say, political power and philosophy meet together ... there can be no rest from troubles, my dear Glaucon, for states, nor yet, as I believe, for all mankind... There is no other way of happiness either for the state or for the individual...

Questions

1. What is the main idea of the excerpt?

2. What kind of leader does Plato seem to prefer?