

Western Political Thought — Part 1

Day 12 of your revision — the ancient-to-modern arc: **Plato**, **Aristotle** and **Machiavelli**, from the ideal state to the science of constitutions to the break with moral politics. *Revise → write a little → don't break the chain.*

PYQ footprint on this trio (UPSC, from past papers): three 20-markers, four 15-markers, a 10-marker and several comment-type questions across **1993–2025** — one of the most consistently examined units. A heuristic from past trends, not official weightage.

1 Plato — the crisis of Athens & the philosopher's turn

Plato (428/427 BCE, Athens) stands at the beginning of systematic political philosophy — disciple of **Socrates**, founder of the **Academy** (the first European university), Father of Political Philosophy and founder of **Political Idealism**. He ties politics to ethics, justice to the soul, government to knowledge.

Why the ideal state?

- His youth fell in the **Peloponnesian War**; Athens, split rich against poor, suffered defeats in 413 and 404 BCE.
- Democracy was overthrown; the **Thirty Tyrants**, backed by Sparta, devastated the city.
- **Thucydides** and Plato both saw self-interest driving political conflict.
- The **trial and execution of Socrates** (399 BCE) convinced him that public life had fallen under ignorance and passion.
- Hence his central formula: **philosophers must become rulers, or rulers must learn philosophy.**

“It is written in the spirit of a man not merely reflecting on human life but intensely anxious to reform and revolutionise it.” — Richard Lewis Nettleship (on The Republic)

Voltaire and **Friedrich Nietzsche** called Platonism the intellectual side of Christianity; **John Ruskin** and **William Morris** were drawn to his concern for human perfection. He is best read as an **idealist, not a utopian dreamer** — a physician diagnosing a diseased polity, a social reformer rather than a prophet.

2 Major works, influences & method

Works

The Republic (his central work — ideas, justice, education, communism, ideal state, philosopher-king) · **Apology** (Socrates' defence; “an unexamined life is not worth living”) · **Crito** (duty, law, citizen and polis) · **The Statesman** (classifies constitutions) · **The Laws** (mature Plato; rule of law, second-best state).

Influences

Source	What Plato took
Pythagoras	Order, number, mathematical precision — faith in a fixed ideal order; transmigration of the soul.
Heraclitus	The sensory world is in flux (“you cannot step in the same river twice”); reason as Logos — but change is not the whole of reality.
Parmenides	Distrust of the senses; one unchanging being behind appearances.
Socrates	Virtue is knowledge; statecraft is soul-craft; the method of elenchus . Professor Maxey : “In Plato Socrates lived again.”
The Sophists (opposed)	Against fees, rhetoric and relativism; Plato defends free pursuit of knowledge, truth and moral absolutism.

Method

Dialectics (thesis · antithesis · synthesis) · **deduction** (general to particular) · **teleology** (each thing has an end) · **analogy** (Sun, Divided Line, Cave, myth of metals).

3 Father of Political Idealism

Plato places politics inside a philosophical structure: the material world is defective, true reality lies in a permanent order of ideas — beauty, goodness, justice, the ideal state itself.

Political Idealism — five tenets

the ideal is real · the whole is prior to the part · the state is superior to the individual · duties matter more than rights · ethics and politics are inseparable.

Swami Vivekananda's image fits Plato's ideal — a guiding star. His thought is not idle dreaming; it grew from the concrete breakdown of Athenian public life.

4 Theory of Ideas & Forms

The centre of Plato's philosophy. “Ideas are the source of all things.” He separates a **real world** (invisible, perfect, eternal, never created) from the **physical world** (visible, material, changing, imperfect). Many tables exist, but there is one true **Form** of a table — the object behind appearance.

- Plato is both an **idealist** (the real is ideal) and a **realist** (Forms are objective and self-existent).

- **Opinion** belongs to matter and appearance; **knowledge** belongs to the world of ideas and immutable truth. Since knowledge can be attained, so can virtue — which is why philosophy is central to politics.

The Divided Line — the ascent from appearance to the Good



Visible world (opinion) below; intelligible world (knowledge) above. As the Sun makes sight possible, the Good makes knowledge possible. Allegory of the Cave: the prisoner who escapes the shadows must return to guide others — “reality is a shadow of ideas.”

The **Idea of Good** sits at the apex — source of intelligibility and value, and the reason the ruler must be a philosopher: only he can know the Good and make the city resemble the ideal state.

UPSC 2024 · 15m Critically examine Plato’s theory of Forms.

5 Criticism of the Theory of Forms

- **Aristotle** — rejects transcendent Forms; argues **immanent realism** and **hylomorphism** (form and matter are inseparable, within the object); asks how separate Forms explain motion or change (the line later linked to the **Third Man Argument**).
- **Sheldon Wolin** — idealism in governance may breed impractical or authoritarian detachment.
- **Immanuel Kant** — keeps elements of idealism but grounds them in cognition, not an objective world of Forms.
- **Bertrand Russell** and **A. J. Ayer** — reject such metaphysical entities for lacking empirical verification.

“Knowledge of the Forms is part of the good person’s understanding.” — **Julia Annas**

6 Theory of Justice

Justice is the core of Plato’s political philosophy — the very sub-title of The Republic is “Concerning Justice.” It is righteousness, more than law, grounded in the inner nature of the human spirit; it protects the weaker against the stronger and binds soul and state in harmony.

“Justice for Plato is at once a part of human virtue and the bond which joins men together in the states. It makes man good and makes him social.” — **Ernest Barker**

Built through debate: against **Cephalus** and **Polemarchus** (not merely good to friends, harm to enemies); against **Thrasymachus** (not the advantage of the stronger); against **Glaucou** and **Adeimantus** (not a contract born of fear). **Positive idea** rests on three principles: **functional specialisation · non-interference · harmony and interdependence**.

“Justice means minding your own business and not meddling with other men’s concerns.” — **Plato**

Tripartite soul written large in the state

Soul element	Class	Virtue	Metal
Reason / knowledge	Rulers / philosopher-kings	Wisdom	Gold
Spirit / emotion	Auxiliaries / warriors	Courage	Silver
Appetite / desire	Producers	Temperance	Copper / iron

“Human behaviour flows from three main sources: desire, emotion, and knowledge.” Justice exists when reason rules, spirit supports reason, appetite is disciplined, and each class performs its own function. The **state is the individual writ large** — politics is the outward form of inner moral order. **George H. Sabine**: “Justice is a bond which holds the society together.”

Criticism: moral but without legal sanction; fits a small city-state; restricts mobility through fixed functions; resembles Varna-type differentiation; concentrates power; **Nietzsche** attacks founding justice on a lie (the **myth of metals**); **Karl Popper** holds its abuses outweigh its uses.

UPSC 2005/06 Comment on “The State is Individual Writ Large.”

7 Theory of Education

Education is inseparable from justice — the machinery that produces it. Not private but a **public responsibility and instrument of the state**: compulsory, state-controlled, open to men and women, with censorship of literature, aimed at mental, moral, physical and spiritual development. It blends **Spartan** discipline and public control with **Athenian** intellectual refinement.

A scheme of gradual filtration

Stage	Content & filter
0–6 yrs	Moral lessons, manners, early music and stories; character formation.
7–18 yrs	Physical and intellectual training — science, poetry, literature, music, gymnastics.
18–20 yrs	Compulsory military training; courage and self-control. First filtration — failures move to the producer class.
20–30 yrs	Higher education — mathematics, geometry, natural science, geography, astronomy; public-service training.
30–35 yrs	Further test; failures become soldiers or officers; those who pass study advanced science, logic, astronomy and especially dialectics .
35–50 yrs	Practical training in public affairs.
At 50	Eligibility for philosopher-rule — half life in contemplation, half in state affairs.

“Education ... is not the craft of putting sight into blind eyes; it is the task of turning the whole body until the soul can bear to look at what is.” — **Plato**

George Klosko: “Platonic education is primarily a moulding of souls.” **Ernest Barker**: “Plato’s ideal state is a consequence of his system of education.”

Criticism: expensive; undemocratic (the producing class is neglected); over-weights mathematics and dialectics; abstract; builds an ideal philosopher more than a man of action.

8 Communism of Property & Family

Not universal communism — restricted to the **guardian class**. If education is the primary machinery, communism is the **supplementary machinery**: a safeguard against appetite dominating reason. Its motive is **political, not economic** — purity, unity and impartiality among rulers.

- **Property**: no private property for guardians and auxiliaries — property is a source of corruption and appetite.
- **Family**: seen as a bigger evil than property (nepotism, bias); no permanent monogamous marriage; wives and children held in common under state regulation; breeding regulated for eugenic ends; children reared by the state — freeing women from exclusive domestic burden.

George H. Sabine reduces it to two forms: no private property for rulers, and abolition of permanent monogamous family among guardians.

Plato vs Marx — similarities superficial, differences fundamental

Plato	Marx
Aristocratic communism (guardians only)	Proletarian communism (classless)
Economic cure for a political ailment	Political cure for an economic ailment
Strengthens the state	Aims at a stateless society
Three fixed classes retained	Abolition of classes
Idealist; idea as ultimate reality	Materialist; ideas as false consciousness
Rejects violence; change through education	Revolutionary transformation; class struggle
Includes communism of family & wives	Mainly the means of production
City-state scope	Universal scope

Criticism — **Aristotle**: property motivates achievement, supports stability and charity; family gives emotional stability; common wives and children create confusion; state-controlled mating lowers humans to animals — the remedy is worse than the disease. **Karl Popper** calls the devices utopian; **G. M. A. Grube** and **A. E. Taylor** find them abhorrent.

UPSC 2003 Explain Plato’s communism and compare it with modern communism. **UPSC 2007** “Plato’s communism is a supplementary machinery ... which education is to create.”

9 Ideal State & Philosopher King

The ideal state is the political form of justice — the state mirrors the soul, its three classes its three elements, justice arising when each performs its function. It rests on **three waves**: a ruling class of philosopher-kings, guardians of mixed gender, and communal living without private property for guardians.

The philosopher king — the linchpin — loves wisdom, knows the Idea of Good, undergoes fifty years of training, holds no property and no family, and is least eager to rule for selfish reasons; his rule is knowledge plus sacrifice. “Those states are best governed where the ruler is least interested to govern.”

Knowledge over law

“For, no law or ordinance is mightier than knowledge.” Law is rigid; knowledge is flexible. A wise ruler responds where law is silent; wisdom and reason hold the ultimate claim over rule.

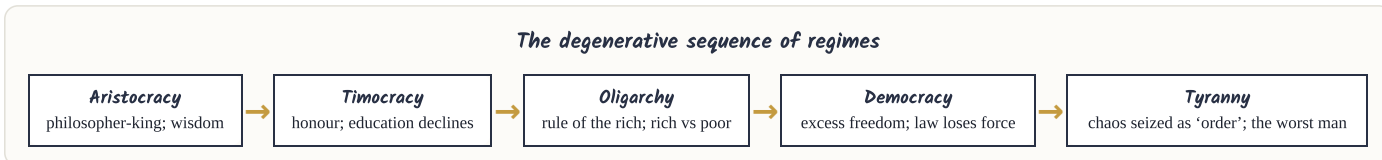
Criticism: concentrates power with little institutional supervision; risks authoritarian and totalitarian extension into public and private life; unrealistic to expect one person to possess every quality; Plato's **failed attempt at Syracuse** is the standing warning. **Nietzsche, Sabine** and **Popper** read it as anti-democratic; **Confucius** and **John Locke** stress virtue or rights without philosopher-autocracy.

UPSC 1993 "For, no law or ordinance is mightier than knowledge." **UPSC 2000** "Until philosophers are kings ... cities will never have rest from evil."

10 The Statesman, The Laws & the second-best state

Plato's later works move from the pure ideal toward practicable politics. In **The Statesman** he classifies states by number of rulers and relation to law:

Rulers	Law-abiding	Corrupt / lawless
One	Monarchy	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Moderate democracy	Extreme democracy



In **The Laws**, the mature Plato accepts a **second-best state**: government based on detailed written laws, rulers loyal to the law, private property permitted with modifications, controlled population, officials by nomination and election. **Dual purpose of law** — to educate (teach how to live) and to deter (restrain wrongdoers). The movement is from rule of knowledge toward rule through law.

11 Plato & Democracy · Plato & Women

Critique of democracy

Democracy gives no special place to knowledge; treats wealth and power as higher goals; unrestricted freedom turns into anarchy, anarchy breeds demand for a strong leader, and strong leadership degenerates into tyranny — democracy carries the seeds of its own collapse.

Relevance: democracies can produce demagogues; populism rewards rhetoric over wisdom; social media intensifies **doxa** (mass opinion without knowledge). **Fareed Zakaria, Giovanni Sartori** and **Yascha Mounk** show democracy drifting from constitutional liberalism. **Limits:** modern constitutionalism — separation of powers, judicial review, rights, accountability — blocks tyranny; leaders like **Lech Walesa** and **Nelson Mandela** show democratic politics serving welfare without turning tyrannical. **Winston Churchill:** "Democracy is the least bad among all alternatives."

Women

A striking departure from his age: Plato does not exclude women from the guardian class or from philosopher-rule, makes no difference of principle in the practice of virtue, and supports their education and military and political participation — though tied to **state utility**, not individual freedom. **Julia Annas** finds the case for gender equality inadequate; **Susan M. Okin** calls Plato a feminist, but an inadequate one.

12 Aristotle's critique of Plato's idealism

Aristotle is both Plato's greatest disciple and greatest critic — he continues the tradition by correcting it. Both belong to the Socratic line, give primacy to the state, accept natural inequality and distrust unqualified mass rule; yet Aristotle moderates and often rejects Plato.

Issue	Plato	Aristotle
Forms	Form separate from matter	Hylomorphism — form within the thing; knowledge from observation
State	Ideal, perfectionist, radical	Best practicable state; golden mean
Rule	Philosopher-king supreme	Rule of law — law is reason; combined wisdom of many beats one
Property & family	Abolished for guardians	Private property with common use; family gives stability
Unity	Uniformity	The state is a family of families — unity in diversity
Method	Deductive	Empirical, from facts and circumstance

"As Brutus loves not Caesar less, but Rome more, so Aristotle says, 'Dear is Plato, but dearer still is truth'." — **Will Durant**

Ebenstein: "Plato found the corrective to his thinking in his own student." The relation is often likened to **J. S. Mill's** to **Jeremy Bentham** — deepest disciple, strongest corrector. Aristotle's critique does not destroy the legacy; it transforms idealism into political realism.

UPSC 2019 · 20m Explain Aristotle's critique of Plato's Idealism.

13 Popper & the Open Society

The strongest modern critic. In **The Open Society and Its Enemies**, **Karl Popper** treats Plato as an enemy of the open society — a society of rights, civic liberties, limited government, political equality and constitutionalism. He attacks Plato on three grounds:

Essentialism belief in supreme knowledge **Holism** sacrifice of the individual to the whole **Historicism** a fixed social pattern read into history

The philosopher-king, myth of metals, communism and fixed class order read, for Popper, as closed social control that suppresses free speech and public reason — turning philosophy from a critic of power into its enforcer.

“The attempt to make heaven on earth invariably produces hell.” — **Karl Popper**

Defence of the open society (Popper): bold and free thought; all opinions open to criticism; no orthodoxy treated as final; persuasion not coercion; respect for the individual as a rational being; reform through **piecemeal social engineering**, not total reconstruction; open societies are imperfect but capable of self-correction.

Defence of Plato: he wrote amid civil conflict, oligarchic terror and the execution of Socrates; his rulers are denied luxury, property and family — power with sacrifice; access is by aptitude, not birth; his scheme lacks a terror apparatus. **Sidney Hook** says Popper read Plato too literally; **Rajiv Bhargava** finds the criticism ideologically driven; **Levenson** stresses difference of context and genre.

UPSC 2015 “Plato was an enemy of the open society.” Comment. **UPSC 2025 · 15m** Karl Popper presents a defence of the open society against its enemies. Elaborate.

14 Plato's place in Western thought

Foundational: Father of Political Philosophy, founder of Political Idealism, author of the first full theory of the ideal state, who tied justice, education, ethics and governance into one structure and gave education a central public role.

“The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” — **Alfred North Whitehead**

Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Plato is Philosophy and Philosophy is Plato.” Even **Karl Popper** concedes: “Western thought ... has been either platonic or anti-platonic but hardly ever non-platonic.” **Augustine of Hippo** carried Platonic themes into Christian thought; anti-Platonic lines run through **Nietzsche**, **Heidegger**, **Sartre** and **Derrida**; **Martha Nussbaum** holds his thought essential for understanding human life. The reason he is unavoidable: he set the terms of the debate — reason and sense, ideal and real, law and knowledge, order and freedom.

UPSC 2009 “Western thought ... has been either platonic or anti-platonic but hardly ever non-platonic.”

15 Aristotle — the father of political science

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) turns political thought from ideal construction to the study of constitutions, citizenship, law and stability. Son of the physician **Nicomachus**, his cast of mind is diagnostic — cause, classification, cure. He is the father of **political science** and the leading realist of Greek thought, seeking the **best possible state**, not an unrealisable utopia. Politics is a **master science** — it concerns the ends of human life.

“State comes into existence for the sake of good life and continues for the sake of good life.” — **Aristotle**

Works & method

Major works: **Politics**, **Nicomachean Ethics**, **Rhetoric** — his political theory rests on the study of around **158 constitutions**. Method: scientific and empirical (data, facts, observation), **inductive** (particular to general, against Plato's general-to-particular), historical, comparative and **teleological** (every being has a **telos** — “nature does nothing in vain”). In **Rhetoric**, persuasion rests on **ethos**, **logos**, **pathos**.

Will Durant notes no philosopher was influenced by another as much as Aristotle by Plato; **Michael B. Foster:** “Aristotle is the greatest of all the Platonists.” Yet — “Dear is Plato, but dearer is truth.”

16 Theory of State

The state is a **natural growth, not an artificial contract** — an association of associations, self-sufficing, the highest of all communities. It grows like an organism toward the good life and is **unity in diversity**, not uniformity. The polis is at once state, community, government, school and moral order.

The state as natural growth toward the good life



State prior to the individual — not in time, but in purpose and completeness; the whole is prior to the part. A hand cut from the body is a lifeless fragment; one who can live outside the state must be “a god or a beast.”

“The state is by nature clearly prior to the family and the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part.” — **Aristotle**

William Ebenstein: “Aristotle's state is a conception of moral sovereignty rather than of legal sovereignty.” What makes man political is **logos** — speech and reason, by which he distinguishes just from unjust. Hence: “**Man is by nature a political animal.**” The **best possible state** is great but not large — **C. H.**

McIlwain: “neither too rich nor too poor; secure from attack ... homogeneous, virtuous, defensible, unambitious ... great but not large.”

17 Citizenship

Citizenship is not residence, descent, or mere possession of rights — it is a **bond of active participation**. A citizen shares in **deliberative** and **judicial** office; an active public role, not a legal label.

- **Essentials:** ability to deliberate and judge; leisure; freedom from manual labour; property; education; experience — the capacity **to rule and be ruled**.
- **Excluded:** women, children, the elderly, slaves, workers and tradesmen, aliens — on grounds of leisure, maturity and self-directing reason.

“Aristotle’s idea of citizenship is that of the economically independent gentleman who has enough experience, education, and leisure to devote himself to active citizenship ...” — **William Ebenstein**

Narrow and exclusionary, not democratic in the modern sense — yet the lasting insight holds: **citizenship is a duty, not merely a status**. Unlike Plato’s sharper split, Aristotle’s citizen is both ruler and ruled at different times.

18 Slavery · Family, Women & Property

Slavery

Rests on **natural inequality** — the slave as an “animate instrument”; some fitted to rule, others to be ruled. He distinguishes the **natural slave** (slave by nature, fit for bodily use) from the **conventional slave** (enslaved by capture in war). **Criticism:** **Kant** — “each man is an end in itself”; **MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum, Charles Taylor** and **Bernard Williams** reject the anthropology. **Michael B. Foster:** “Aristotle justifies slavery on grounds of expediency”; **Ernest Barker** — “more a justification of a necessity than a deduction from ... observation of facts.” By modern standards, indefensible.

Family & women

The family (**oikos**) is the first natural unit, an ethical community of “**spousal philia**” (love and friendship) — against Plato’s communism, “what belongs to many receives the least care.” On women he is deeply patriarchal — woman as “incomplete,” confined to domestic life; one of the weakest parts of his theory, exposed by **J. S. Mill**.

Property

Property is necessary and justified if honestly acquired — it satisfies the instinct for possession and makes generosity and liberality possible.

Ownership	Use	Verdict
Individual	Individual	Excessive privatisation; dangerous if cut off from the common good.
Common	Individual	Some labour while others enjoy — resentment.
Common	Common	Impracticable, neglectful, conflict-ridden.
Individual	Common	Most acceptable — Aristotle’s preference.

The rule: **property private, its use serving common life**. He opposes unfair acquisition such as interest, and warns against excessive wealth.

19 Theory of Justice

Justice is the heart of his politics — practical and institutional, not merely inward.

“When perfected, man is the best of animals, but when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all.” — **Aristotle**

Type	Principle
General justice	Complete goodness — law-abiding virtue exercised toward others.
Distributive	Honours, offices and wealth by merit, worth, desert — geometric / proportionate equality. “Good flutes to good flute-players.”
Rectificatory	Repair of wrong (fraud, injury, theft) — arithmetic equality; the judge restores balance.

William David Ross: by ‘just’ we may mean “what is lawful or what is fair and equal.” **Michael Sandel:** “Justice is teleological ... figure out the telos ... of the social practice in question.” **Equality:** proportional, not numerical.

Aristotle’s formula of equality

“It is unjust to treat equals unequally. It is equally unjust to treat unequals, equally.” — the seed of his theory of revolution: grievance arises when equals get unequal shares, or unequals equal shares.

John Rawls later moves toward a more egalitarian position (veil of ignorance, justice as fairness); **Michael Walzer’s** plural spheres echo Aristotle’s sensitivity to context. **Plato vs Aristotle on justice:** Plato — duty-oriented, moral, inward; Aristotle — rights-oriented, practical, institutional and distributive.

UPSC 2015 Comment on Aristotle’s conception of equality.

20 Rule of Law & Theory of Constitution

Rule of law — law is less arbitrary and fairer than personal rule; free of personal feeling; the collective wisdom of ages, superior to even the wisest individual ruler. This is the direct criticism of Plato’s philosopher-king.

“Law is a reason without passion.” — Aristotle

“The people, though individually they may be worse judges than those who have special knowledge, are collectively as good.” His defence of law is a foundation of **constitutionalism**.

Constitution is not a mere set of rules but a **way of life** that fixes the moral character of a state. Classified by **number of rulers** and **purpose of rule**:

The six-fold classification of governments

Rulers	Right form (common good)	Perverted form (self-interest)
One	Monarchy	Tyranny
Few	Aristocracy	Oligarchy
Many	Polity	Democracy

Polity — the best practicable government

The golden mean between oligarchy and democracy; a moderate democracy on a **middle-class** basis. The larger the middle class, the greater the stability — it knows how to command and obey as free men. In modern language, polity anticipates constitutional democracy.

Cycle of constitutional change



Democracy gives way to monarchy and the cycle begins again. Modern critics note Aristotle often blurs government with the state.

21 Theory of Revolution

Revolution = any change in the constitution, rulers or political balance, big or small — even a democracy becoming less democratic. Aristotle is an advocate of stability, not a celebrant of upheaval. Causes run through a three-fold chain: a **state of mind**, an **objective sought**, and an **occasion** that triggers upheaval. The deepest cause is **injustice and inequality**.

“Everywhere inequality is a cause of revolution.” — Aristotle

Inequality may be **real or imagined** — relative deprivation matters as much as the objective kind. **General causes:** greed of rulers, concentration of power, fear of domination, class struggle for office, racial conflict, disproportionate growth of one part, corruption, maladministration, neglect of small changes, a weak middle class. **Prevention:** obedience to law, civic education in the spirit of the constitution, fair distribution of honour and wealth, short tenures, preventing any person or class from becoming too powerful, patriotic feeling, a strong middle class and mixed constitution.

Aristotle vs Marx: Aristotle is conservative — revolution means political change and leads to instability; **Karl Marx** is radical — revolution means total upheaval, the “locomotive of history,” driven by class exploitation toward communism. **Criticism:** the meaning is narrow, political and status-quoist; yet the central insight endures — perceived injustice is the most combustible material in politics.

UPSC 2017 · 15m “Everywhere, inequality is a cause of revolution.” Comment.

22 Aristotle in the evolution of Western thought & modern democracy

Aristotle is the bridge between ancient ethical politics and later empirical, constitutional and comparative science.

Era	Hallmark	Thinkers
Ancient Greece	Ethics and politics fused; idealism then constitutional realism	Socrates · Plato · Aristotle
Medieval	Religion and divine right shape the order	Dante Alighieri
Renaissance	Secular turn; statecraft split from ethics	Machiavelli
Social contract	Security, consent, popular sovereignty	Hobbes · Locke · Rousseau
Utilitarian / liberal	Utility, representative democracy, rule of law	Bentham
Socialist critique	Class contradiction; revolution as structural change	Karl Marx
Contemporary	Normative revival; power, action, post-colonial thought	Rawls · Foucault · Arendt · Said

Contribution to constitutional democracy: rule of law, constitutional (polity) government, mixed government anticipating checks and balances, middle-class stability, responsible citizenship and civic virtue, distributive justice and the common good — absorbed indirectly through later thinkers such as **Montesquieu**.

Limits: slavery, exclusionary citizenship, patriarchy, preference for the small homogeneous polis prevent any direct identification with present-day democracy. **Eduard Zeller:** the Politics is “the richest treasure that has come down to us from antiquity.”

UPSC 2020 · 20m Trace the evolution of western political thought from ancient to contemporary period. **UPSC 2021 · 20m** Explain the Aristotelian view of

politics & its contribution to constitutional democracies.

23 Machiavelli — the watershed to modernity

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527, Florence) stands on the borderline between the medieval and modern ages. A diplomat shaped by the “rough and tumble” of Italian politics, he grounds inquiry in what rulers actually **do**, not what theologians say they ought to do.

Space & time

- **Renaissance** — new age, new man (ambitious, glory-seeking), self-determination; growth of commerce, the printing press, geographic discovery ending the Church’s monopoly over knowledge.
- **Italy of that time** — Florence, Milan, Venice and Naples warring among themselves and with France and Spain; this turmoil forms the backdrop of his attempt to unify Italy.

Harold Laski held that the whole Renaissance could be seen in Machiavelli’s works; **Dunning** — he ushered in the modern age by separating politics from the vassalage of religion.

Method

Historical **Empirical** **Realist** — the present read through the past (human nature is constant); conclusions from observation and historical data. Unlike Aristotle’s abstract classification, Machiavelli studies the **actual working of governments**.

24 Fundamental premises

Two works carry the thought — **The Prince** (advice to rulers on holding power) and the **Discourses on Livy** (a case for republican government).

Autonomy of politics

Political action is judged by political standards, not by ethics or religion — the reason Machiavelli is called the **father of modern political science**, against Aristotle’s science of virtue.

- **Moral indifference** — neither moral nor immoral but **amoral**; he separates the facts of political life from the values of moral judgement.
- **Universal egoism** — human nature is driven by self-interest; men are “generally ungrateful, disloyal, insecure, deceitful, timid of danger, and avid for profit”; desire is limitless, breeding everlasting conflict.
- **Secularism** — religion is useful but must not be the foundation of political behaviour; the state must be supreme in worldly matters.

Leo Strauss calls him the “teacher of evil” for preferring cruelty, fear and deception to the common values of justice and mercy.

25 Advice to the Prince · *virtu & fortuna*

“How we live is far different from how we ought to live” — the ruler who chases what ought to be will ruin himself. The prince must be a **realist**, combining the strength of the **lion** and the cunning of the **fox**; cold-blooded, opportunistic, keeping the interest of the state above all and ready to commit sins unhesitatingly in its service.

- **Fear over love** — fear is the more reliable bond; love is easily broken, but dread of punishment holds men fast. Yet keep your hands off the property and women of subjects, and avoid heavy taxation.
- **Expansion or perish** — neighbours are natural enemies to be acquired; states that do not expand are bound to perish.
- **Citizen army** — maintain a nationalised standing army of patriotic citizens, never mercenaries, who fight for anyone.

virtu & fortuna

virtu = the prince’s capacity to achieve and preserve the state — situational, strategic, tied to power, not moral goodness. **fortuna** = chance, “a fountain of misery,” to be mastered by the bold and impetuous rather than the cautious. **virtu** is the preparation that fights **fortuna**.

His reading of human nature seeds the **classical realist** school of International Relations.

26 Religion & secularism

A **utilitarian view of religion** — not against religion, but against the **Church’s command over the state**. Religion is a **disciplinary force** that maintains order; useful as an organ of state policy, but it must not dominate political affairs. He thus lays the foundations of European secularism.

Critique — **Gandhi**: sought to spiritualise politics; “politics without religion is a death trap.” Machiavellian secularism is of only instrumental value, with no doctrinal commitment to secularism as **Sarv Dharma Sama Bhava**.

“It is illogical to expect Rose flower by sowing the seed of Babool.” — **M. K. Gandhi (Hind Swaraj)**

UPSC 2018 · 15m

Critically examine Machiavelli’s views on religion and politics.

UPSC 2020 · 10m

Comment on Machiavelli’s secularism (150 words).

27 The Prince vs the Discourses

Two systems of government run through his thought — held together by **humanism**, a concern for the common good and the welfare of the people.

Monarchy — The Prince

one-man rule; crisis and survival; security and unity; despotic measures to restore a

Republic — the Discourses

popular liberty; involvement of the masses; institutional checks and a citizen army; Rome

corrupt state



as the model

· Conflict of **Grandi** (nobles) and **Popolo** (masses) is permanent; a prince must restrain the nobility and, if forced to choose, **support the masses**.

· Monarchy reads as a **transitory phase** — the prince should cede power to a republic once new laws are set; only a republic can keep a city truly free and great.

George H. Sabine sees two admirations — for monarchy and for self-government — which some read as inconsistency; most scholars find no contradiction, since despotic violence in *The Prince* is a remedy to restore a corrupt state.

28 Assessment — “narrowly dated and narrowly located”?

The charge (George H. Sabine): Machiavelli’s theories are “narrowly dated and narrowly located” — shaped by faction-riven Italy and its peculiar ecclesiastical dominance; his pessimism on human nature and politics would have differed in another time and place. He is also “almost blind” to the role religion would play over the next two centuries, and never built a psychological basis of human behaviour as **Thomas Hobbes** later did.

The defence: a “child of his times,” yet his moves escaped their birthplace — he anticipated the **central, sovereign modern state** and the nationalised army; secularised and amoralised statecraft; was the first **pragmatic** thinker. **Sabine** himself admits Machiavelli, more than any other thinker, created the modern meaning of the **state**.

“Machiavelli is the only major political thinker whose name has become synonymous with a kind of politics ... associated with cynicism, manipulation, and amorality.” — **Leo Strauss**

Benedetto Croce reads him as a **realist and pragmatist** — “non-moral” rather than “immoral.” **Quentin Skinner** defines *virtu* as “the ability to shape one’s circumstances rather than be shaped by them”; **J. G. A. Pocock** names the “Machiavellian moment” of civic *virtu* against corruption; **Isaiah Berlin** calls him “one of the makers of pluralism” for exposing the clash of ultimate values. **Dunning’s** paradox: everyone is Machiavellian in practice, but no one admits it.

29 Power Quotes — carry these into the hall

“Justice means minding your own business and not meddling with other men’s concerns.” — **Plato**

“For, no law or ordinance is mightier than knowledge.” — **Plato**

“The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” — **Alfred North Whitehead**

“Man is by nature a political animal.” — **Aristotle**

“The state is by nature clearly prior to the family and the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part.” — **Aristotle**

“Law is a reason without passion.” — **Aristotle**

“Everywhere inequality is a cause of revolution.” — **Aristotle**

“Dear is Plato, but dearer is truth.” — **Aristotle**

“The attempt to make heaven on earth invariably produces hell.” — **Karl Popper**

“It is illogical to expect Rose flower by sowing the seed of Babool.” — **M. K. Gandhi (on Machiavellian politics)**

30 Scholar Index — if a name feels unfamiliar, go back to your notes

A. E. Taylor · A. J. Ayer · Alfred North Whitehead · Aristotle · Augustine of Hippo · Benedetto Croce · Bernard Williams · Bertrand Russell · C. H. McIlwain · Charles Taylor · Confucius · Dante Alighieri · Derrida · Dunning · Eduard Zeller · Ernest Barker · Fareed Zakaria · G. M. A. Grube · George Klosko · George H. Sabine · Giovanni Sartori · Harold Laski · Heidegger · Heraclitus · Immanuel Kant · Isaiah Berlin · J. G. A. Pocock · J. S. Mill · Jeremy Bentham · John Locke · John Rawls · John Ruskin · Julia Annas · Karl Marx · Karl Popper · Lech Walesa · Leo Strauss · Levenson · M. K. Gandhi · MacIntyre · Martha Nussbaum · Michael B. Foster · Michael Sandel · Michael Walzer · Michel Foucault · Montesquieu · Nelson Mandela · Niccolò Machiavelli · Nicomachus · Nietzsche · Parmenides · Plato · Professor Maxey · Pythagoras · Quentin Skinner · Rajiv Bhargava · Ralph Waldo Emerson · Richard Lewis Nettleship · Sartre · Sheldon Wolin · Sidney Hook · Socrates · Susan M. Okin · Swami Vivekananda · Thomas Hobbes · Thucydides · Voltaire · Will Durant · William David Ross · William Ebenstein · William Morris · Winston Churchill · Yascha Mounk

31 How UPSC asks it — the chapter, mapped

Theme	Years & marks (from past papers)
Plato — theory of Forms	2024 / 15m
Plato — state is individual writ large	2005/06
Plato — communism vs modern communism	2003
Plato — communism & education	2007
Plato — no law mightier than knowledge	1993
Plato — philosopher-king	2000
Plato — place in Western thought	2009
Aristotle — critique of Plato's idealism	2019 / 20m
Aristotle — conception of equality	2015
Aristotle — inequality & revolution	2017 / 15m
Aristotle — view of politics & constitutional democracy	2021 / 20m
Machiavelli — religion & politics	2018 / 15m
Machiavelli — secularism	2020 / 10m
Western thought — ancient to contemporary	2020 / 20m
Popper — open society & its enemies	2025 / 15m · (also 2015)

Years & marks reproduced from past papers; a few comment-type questions carry no marks in the record. A revision heuristic, not official UPSC weightage.

32 Today's practice — write before the evening

1. Critically examine Plato's theory of Forms. (UPSC 2024, 15m)
2. Explain Aristotle's critique of Plato's Idealism. (UPSC 2019, 20m)
3. "Everywhere, inequality is a cause of revolution." Comment. (UPSC 2017, 15m)
4. Critically examine Machiavelli's views on religion and politics. (UPSC 2018, 15m)

Model answers drop tonight on the channel — @psirbyamitpratap. Keep notifications on. Blank on a scholar or a line above? It is covered in full in your **Foundation / OGP** class notes and handouts — revise it, then write. **Don't break the chain.**

See you tomorrow with Day 13 — Western Political Thought Part II (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, J. S. Mill).