

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328134352>

Principles of Good Governance Advocated by Ancient Greek Thinkers

Chapter · August 2018

CITATIONS

0

READS

36

1 author:



Desh Raj Sirswal

Post Graduate Government College Sector 46 B Chandigarh

73 PUBLICATIONS 7 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Ambedkar Philosophy, Human Rights, Dalit Studies and Women Studies [View project](#)



A Philosophical Study of the Concept of Mind [View project](#)

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Some Ethical Issues

Edited by

**Mrinal Kanti Basak
Riki Chakraborty**

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Some Ethical Issues

Jacket Design : S. P. Das

D. P. Compose
Progressive Publishers
37A, College Street

Edited by

Mrinal Kanti Basak
Dr. Riki Chakroborty

Price : ₹ 100.00
Paper One hundred only
2 : 4.45
3 : 4.40

ISBN : 978-81-8064-273-9



PROGRESSIVE PUBLISHERS

37A, College Street :: Kolkata-700 073

© All Rights Reserved

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Some Ethical Issues

First Published : August, 2018

Jacket Design : S. Hazra

D.T.P. Compose
Progressive Publishers
37A, College Street
Kolkata-700 073

Mirnal Kant Basak
Dr. Riki Chakraborty

Price : ₹ 100.00

Rupees One hundred only

\$: 4.45

£ : 4.40

ISBN : 978-81-8064-273-9

PRINTED IN INDIA

Published by Sri Kamal Mitra for Progressive Publishers
37A, College Street, Kolkata-700 073 and printed at
Narayan Printing, 3, Muktarambabu Lane, Kolkata-700 007

Contents

Corporate Governance In Ancient Indian Society <i>Palash Chandra Modak</i>	15
Concept of Punishment In Mahabharata <i>Dr. Papia Gupta</i>	29
Sannyasi Rebellion in Cooch Behar in the Late Eighteenth Century: An Overview of History <i>Tahiti Sarkar</i>	48
Principles of Good Governance Advocated By Ancient Greek Thinkers <i>Ajay Kumar Sharma & Dr. Desh Raj Sirswal</i>	66
The Relevance of the Idea of Plato's Philosopher King in Contemporary Indian Politics <i>Alok Kumar</i>	79
Good Governance and The 73rd Constitution Amendment : New Horizons Of Participatory Governance In West Bengal <i>Subhadip Mukherjee</i>	90
'Good Governance' In Tune With The Issue Of 'Human Rights' <i>Shampa Dutta</i>	100
Initiating Good Governance In Empowering Young Gigs : A Case Study Of Kanyasree Prokalpo Of Government Of West Bengal <i>Dr Sanchita Dasgupta</i>	108
The Role Of Ethics In Good Governance In Making Digital India <i>Dr. Debika Saha</i>	114
Educational Ethics and Governance <i>Subhash Chandra Debnath</i>	118
Archival Record Keeping Through The Ages <i>Dr. Ananda Bhattacharyya</i>	124
Index	131
About the Contributors	133

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE ADVOCATED BY ANCIENT GREEK THINKERS

Ajay Kumar Sharma
Dr. Desh Raj Sirswal

Introduction

Governance stands for adequate maintenance and upkeep of the atmosphere, by the State, wherein people have the opportunity to be their best selves. 'State' comprises all the legislative, executive and judicial institutions and the laws governing the inhabitants of the territory to which it lays claim. Governments on the other hand, may come and go in accordance with the Constitution or customs of the state. Public administration, in its everyday mode of operation, deploys techniques of power to extend and enforce the domain of governmental rationality. While in office, a Government in power, whether elected or unelected – may change the institutions and laws of the state, but at any given moment, it is an agent of the state. While the State is expected to be permanent, the authority of the Government to make policy is likely to last as long as it continues to be in office.

Good Governance that has emerged as the central theme of administration connotes not only the maximum opportunity or liberty to the citizens at present, but also the potentiality of the improved condition which would ensure greater opportunity and freedom in the future. Good Governance encompasses components core to the citizen-fabric viz., rule of law, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, promptness of action, people's participation.

Assuming Good Governance to be democratic in nature, the

Human Development Report 2002 laid down nine parameters of Democratic Governance:

- i. People's human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected, allowing them to live with dignity.
- ii. People have a say in decisions that affect their lives.
- iii. People can hold decision-makers accountable.
- iv. Inclusive and fair rules, institutions and practices govern social interactions.
- v. Women are equal partners with men in private and public spheres of life and decision making.
- vi. People are free from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class, gender or any other attribute.
- vii. The needs of future generations are reflected in current policies.
- viii. Economic and social policies are responsive to people's needs and aspirations.
- ix. Economic and social policies aim at eradicating poverty and expanding the choices that all people have in their lives.

Constitution is the sacred document that guides the government and citizens, and conducts governance. The scholars of Public Administration and Philosophy have always laid emphasis on the piety of Constitution and its virtuous use. However, the provisions can vary as per the needs of the citizens. Aristotle has classified the Constitutions into two broad categories: (i) right or ideal Constitution or Government, and (ii) wrong or perverted form. The Constitutions which aim at the common interest or good are regarded as the ideal or right constitutions. The Constitutions in which the holders of power give priority to private interests and want to hold office continuously are called perverted or wrong Constitutions. This is a clear reflection of the desired nature of Constitution that it should rest on the principle: political rule is the maximization of the benefit of the ruled, the people.

The Ancient Greek Philosophers

It perhaps goes without saying that the western intellectual

tradition, as well as the history of western philosophy, must begin with an investigation of ancient Greek thought. From Thales and the matter philosophers to the empiricism of Aristotle, the Greeks passed on to the West a spirit of rational inquiry that is very much our own intellectual property. And while we may never think of Plato or Aristotle as we carry on in our daily lives, it was their inquiry into knowledge that has served as the foundation for all subsequent inquiries. Indeed, many have argued with W. H. Auden that "had Greek civilization never existed we would never have become fully conscious, which is to say that we would never have become, for better or worse, fully human." In ancient Athens, democracy was based essentially on a social contract, where citizens decided collectively on all significant issues that concerned their city. They accepted the decisions of the majority in the Parliament and committed solidly to bear the responsibility for the consequences of their decisions. Here we will have a look of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle's ideas with reference to the principles of good governance.

Socrates

Socrates in addition emphasized justice, equality and equity as cornerstones of an ideal state. He stated that "the paradigmatic society which stands behind every historical society is hierarchical, but social classes have a marginal permeability; there are no slaves, no discrimination between men and women. The men and women are both to be taught the same things, so they are both able to be used for the same things". He was a good citizen but held political office only once - he was elected to the Council of Five Hundred in 406 B.C. In Plato's Apology, Socrates remarks that: "The true champion of justice, if he intends to survive even for a short time, must necessarily confine himself to private life and leave politics alone."

What we can be sure about Socrates was that he was remarkable for living the life he preached. Taking no fee, Socrates started and dominated an argument wherever the young and intelligent would listen, and people asked his advice on matters of practical conduct

and educational problems. Today Socrates serves as an inspiration to all of us. By sacrificing his life at the altar of his values, he has shown that a true philosopher must never compromise his principles. He is an exemplar of integrity and character for everyone. He is also a symbol, challenging the notions of orthodox and complacency in society.

Plato

Plato, the disciple of Socrates, furthers his teachings whereby his ideal state emphasized on elements such as "the distribution of talent was non-genetic"; and "women should be educated to the same degree as men. Plato is generally viewed as one of the greatest and most influential philosophers in the Western tradition. His political philosophy is held in similarly high regard, and is the earliest comprehensive political view we possess. As with other great figures, Plato's political theory was not only part of his overall philosophical system but profoundly shaped by his social and political circumstances.(Plato's Political Philosophy)

Plato's concept of the ideal state is given in his book *The Republic*. It also contains his ideas about 'Justice', 'Education', 'Ideal Man' and best form of government. According to Plato, the State is like a human being. A human being consists of three elements. They are called Reason, Spirit and Appetite. Just like the individual, in the State also, there are three elements. They are called the Philosopher, the Soldiers and Workers. Each one possessed a special character or nature. Reason exists in the Philosopher. It means the ability to think intelligently. Spirit exists in the Soldier. It means courage and valor. Appetite exists in the Worker. It means great interest to work and produce results immediately. Wisdom is the quality of the Philosopher. Courage is the quality of the Soldier. Appetite is the quality of the worker.

There are certain reasons for the formation of the State. The first reason for the formation of the state is economic motive. Everyone wants to satisfy his food and other needs. So, there should be people doing economic activities. The Workers are engaged in economic activity. Secondly, there is the need for protection. The soldiers are

engaged in protection of the state. Thirdly, there is the need for government. The philosophers will take care of it.

Plato's Philosopher is like a King. He is called the Philosopher King. There is the rule of Philosophy through the Philosopher King. He is the head of the State. The Philosopher King represents Reason. He is engaged in the government of the state. The Philosopher King makes laws. But he is above law. However, he is a true statesman. Thus it can be seen that in the Platonic state, there is the system of specialization of functions. It means that there is a special group of people to take care of each function of the state like production, protection and government. Plato's State is like an individual. All the individual elements like Reason, Spirit and Appetite should be present in the state in the form of Workers, Soldiers and Philosophers. Thus, the state reflects human nature. The State is like a large individual. The state is individual *writ large*. The object of the Ideal State is good life or goodness.

Plato was one of the world's first thinkers to argue that there could be a body of knowledge whose attainment would make it possible to heal political problems, such as factionalism and the corruption of morals, which can lead a society into a state of perpetual decline. He has influenced western political thought in many ways. His critique of democracy may not be applicable to the core principles of liberal democracies of today, but the moral and spiritual dimensions involved in the leftist movements in the world owe a great deal to ancient Platonic ideas. He used to believe that virtue must form the basis of any good society and that is certainly an eternal truth.

Aristotle

Due to their natural sociability, men have eventually gathered in a politically organized community. Once realized, this association is required to demonstrate its superiority and this thing can be established by means of its ability to perform the functions for which it was "invented." Aristotle lays the basis for both the theory of good governance and the ways to achieve it. (Professor Corina Adriana Dumitrescu, *The Concept of Good Governance in Aristotle's*

View, Part II The Practical Dimension) For Aristotle, the "best constitution" is the one wherein each and every citizen will possess moral virtue and the equipment to carry it out in practice, and thereby attain a life of excellence and complete happiness. All of the citizens will hold political office and possess private property because "one should call the city-state happy not by looking at a part of it but at all the citizens". Moreover, there will be a common system of education for all the citizens, because they share the same end.

Referring to the nature of Government, Aristotle analyzed the different aspects of Oligarchy and Democracy and recommended the establishment of a state which would be both ideal and practicable. It is free from the extremes of oligarchy and democracy, because experience has shown that extreme form of government is chaotic and hazardous. In Book 3 Aristotle mentions the possibility of such a form of government and calls it Polity. In Book 4 Chapter 8 Aristotle dwells into the nature of Polity which is a carefully crafted blend of oligarchy and democracy. Usually the name is confined to those blends which have an inclination towards democracy, and those which incline to oligarchy are called Aristocracy. Polity thus has certain prominent advantages.

The key merit is that both common interest and virtue get priority, and therefore Aristotle has called it an ideal or right type of constitution. In his opinion every polity will have a popular assembly, but its powers will be limited. Appointment of officers will be based on both oligarchic and democratic methods, and judicial functions are to be performed by specialist juries.

Polity is also identified with the middle class. Chapter 11 of Book 4 throws ample light on this aspect of polity. Polity as a form of government has both ethical and social foundations. It highlights that Virtue is a mean, the middle of the two extremes, and happiness of life is possible only if the mean is achieved. The same principle can also be made applicable to practical or political life. The social foundation of polity is the existence of a large number of people constituting the middle class. The city or polis possessing the largest number of middle class people is the best administered polis. It is

so suggested because the glaring 'disparity between the rich and the poor is the root cause of dissension among classes. Both these classes resort to violence as the most effective weapon to gratify personal desires and to achieve material gain'. Poor want to capture power of office to become affluent like the rich, and the rich people's greed and inordinate love for wealth leads them to a conflicting position vis a vis the poor. The state is thus converted into a perennial battle-ground. As far as practicable a state should consist of like and equal men who constitute the middle class. The best government is certainly to be found in a polis which is dominated by the middle class. Only a polity can effectuate a balance and, hence, stability. A state ruled by the middle class can be most secure and can be the most law-abiding of practicable constitutions.

Good governance takes states towards virtue and happiness, the ultimate goal of mankind. Law enforced by such a government helps making citizens good and just. So, a trade alliance and pact does not form a state. The perverse constitutions just bring about a law that gives surety to one another, of justice and do nothing more. Aristotle commented that the law should be supreme in the eyes of the people and should operate without any interference. Rulers must be "the servants of the laws," because "law is order, and good law is good order". Where the laws have no authority, there is no constitution. The law ought to be supreme over all. Aristotle stressed that these laws must uphold just principles, such that "true forms of government will of necessity have just laws, and perverted forms of government will have unjust laws".

Aristotle stated that "the rule of law . . . is preferable to that of any individual". This is because individuals possess flaws and could tailor government to their own individual interests, whereas the rule of law is objective. A man should not desire to hold power with an eye to his personal gain. "Justice" means "equality" or "fairness", and this includes distributive justice, according to which different individuals have just claims to the shares of some common asset such as property.

Aristotle views that for the stability of a state, both quality and quantity matter substantially. He believes in the collective wisdom

of a sober public opinion and there is less possibility of being corrupted. At the same time men of position, experience and education are required for good administration. Aristotle's belief on rhetoric can certainly help public administrators deal with situations which involve conflicting and irreconcilable values. It can assist and guide public administrators in dealing with value conflicts, because it promotes a greater self-consciousness among administrators about their own values. Additionally, it encourages them to seek ways of accommodating their values to the values of others, and requires that administrators logically consider the concrete specifics of specific practical situations in dealing with value conflicts.

Greek philosophers laid stress on Ethics which consists of knowledge and choice of the good things in life, and can be extended to administrative sphere as well. Moreover, discourse about values essential for guiding conduct was considered as a value in itself, as it would bring about virtue and happiness if sought after persistently and systematically. Thus, according to Aristotle, ethos is 'the habit of the good' and ethics is about choice, 'the choice of the good, which is then habituated in actual conduct'. A further inference is that ethics cannot be conceived of as a matter of punishment and rewards, rather as a matter of voluntary choice of the good, which is then unfailingly exhibited in one's conduct. Not surprisingly, therefore, the prime criterion and objective of good governance was, for Aristotle, to accustom citizens, and civil servants, to the practice of virtue. He states, ... "by what happens in states; for legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator, and those who do not effect it miss their mark, and it is in this that a good polity differs from a bad one".

Unsurprisingly, the basic principle and aim of worthy administration is, according to Aristotle, to acclimatize citizens and civil workers to the inculcation of virtue. This is validated by the events in states, for law makers shape citizens to act properly by inculcating good habits in them. Officials and civil servants exposed to acute dilemmas can hardly help succumbing to a state

of confusion and embarrassment in which they are often quite unwillingly thrust. During such situations, public administration instead of functioning as a well-ordered state of legitimate purposes, degenerates into a state of confusion and indeterminacy. Decision-making and promptness of action are the worst hit. It is then that the case of ethical vagueness and lack of clarity about overall values to guide action and choices in 'hard cases' comes about in administration. But if everything stands and anything goes, then nothing can be taken seriously, neither ethics and values, nor rights and duties of public servants and citizens alike. The growing group of basic tenets or facets that unite and restructure the procedure of handling ethical dilemmas in public governance are: (i) democratic answerability of governance, (ii) the application of law and the notion of legality, (iii) official honesty, and (iv) alertness to civil society needs.

The processes of government have now resorted to Managerialism, an ideology that demands that the focus of public servants' attention must be on the achievement of goals of 3Es, economy, efficiency and effectiveness. However, public administration, or public management which is the term now in use, needs to be guided by an ethical compass, sans which the administrators will indulge in doing unscrupulous actions efficiently and effectively. Philosophers, ancient and modern, have explored the basis for the ethical conduct of public governance, i.e., public administrators, all involved in government, to seek to achieve the good life. Making money and profits are inadequate guides to the good life but they have come to dominate modern government owing to the dominance of a Neo-liberal ideology that assumes that public servants, like all human beings, can act only as selfish rational maximisers. Good governance demands that public administrators and their political masters need to focus on the administrative virtues of accountability, legality, integrity, objectivity and responsiveness if they are to make an appropriate contribution to the good life of the community. Contemporary administrative functioning is hence dominated by economy,

efficiency and effectiveness, with an exclusion of public service values of accountability, equity and probity.

Towing the same line, politicians in office provide excessive levels of public services in order to maximise their votes at the next election. Similarly, officials constantly seek to expand their bureaux in order to improve both their status and their salaries. Both of these arguments run directly counter to the view held by Aristotle that the public servant or the politician in government must govern in public interest and specifically they must not take an account of their own personal interest.

Public policy too is increasingly driven by strategies that would maximise profits and reduce government spending to the minimum necessary. Sole or primary concern for profit and loss account is not a sufficient guide to living the good life. For both Plato and Aristotle, the making of money through business and financial transactions was not the means to achieve the good life, though they do have their proper place in the social order. They defined public interest in terms of maintaining and promoting the four cardinal virtues: courage, wisdom, discipline and above all justice, none of which is associated with wealth creation. Contrarily, preserving social harmony was of crucial importance and was the true vocation of those in administrative positions.

Consequently the most pertinent concern for the public administrator is, whether to promote and protect a collective public interest, or purely to regulate the commercial transactions carried out by individuals. The Greek philosophers judiciously opined that the collective public interest must supervise and control the conduct of individuals in their market activities. For ensuring that the state adequately exercises its responsibilities, public governance must be in the hands of politicians accountable to the citizenry, who in turn are assisted by administrators with an essential role not only to protect the collective public interest but also to safeguard that such interest is recognised in all spheres of life. These are the higher goals that must shape the moral compass within which the responsibilities of politicians and public administrators must be exercised.

The philosophers and economists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who believed in the political and economic liberties for the people, had studied thoroughly the principles of the Athenian democracy. Hence, they were well versed in the fact that the state performs certain tasks which cannot be carried out by citizens themselves, being mindful of how civil liberties and the economy could be affected, if the state escaped from the control of citizens. This explains why in the set-up of representative democracy with careful delineation of the tasks of the state, citizens should be alert to always avert the lurking danger of government becoming autonomous, which might encourage elected officials to decide and act arbitrarily.

The principles and the institutions of the Athenian democracy influenced greatly the revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which sought the progress of the individual and not of the state or the leaders. The texts of Aristotle and other ancient Greek philosophers provided a basis for the people to claim more power from the kings who governed them. However, various hurdles inhibited the adoption of direct democracy, and for this reason countries adopted systems of representative democracy. The nearest prototype of democracy to that of ancient Athens is the system of governance in the United States of America (USA), whose founders embraced the classical Athenian political culture. In the United Kingdom, continental Europe and other countries, systems of democratic governance were established containing more or less elements of direct democracy, at the local level.

Antonis Makridimitris has suggested four cardinal virtues summarised by the acronym "ALIR": (i) Accountability to elected representatives and ultimately to the citizenry; (ii) Legality is the requirement that public servants, more than all other citizens, must conform to the laws of the land and not engage in illegal abuses of their powers; (iii) Integrity requires objectivity, honesty and diligence in the conduct of government business and; (iv) Responsiveness requires the public servant to pay heed to the wishes, interests and demands of the citizens who he serves as customers, clients, passengers or patients but who as citizens have

the right and the duty to participate in the government of their community.

Christopher Hood has recognised that the displacement of the established values of public administration by business oriented values of competition, profit, economy, efficiency and effectiveness has resulted in serious distortion of both the teaching and the practice of public administration. For giving a sensible, meaningful and value oriented direction to public administration and its practice, the tenets of Good Governance need to be adhered to. It is noteworthy that Good Governance is quite in tune with the philosophy propagated by Aristotle. The state is a self-sufficient unit and this self-sufficiency is not for the purposes of life alone, but for good and noble life. Noble and good life can be shaped by public governance and it can be termed as happy life.

References

1. Aristotle (1962): *The Politics*, translated by TA Sinclair, London, Penguin Books.
2. Aristotle, (1920): *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by D Ross, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
3. *Ancient & Medieval Political Thoughts* (2011) University of Calicut, School of Distance Education, Calicut University, Kerala, pp. 5-6.
4. Downs, A (1957): *An economic theory of democracy*, New York, Harper and Row.
5. Elcock, Howard: 'Public Administration and the Good Life', Political Studies Association Annual Conference, Brighton, April 2016.
6. Elcock, (1995): 'The fallacies of management', *Public Policy & Administration*, Volume 10.no. 1, pp. 34-48.
7. Elcock, H: (1998): 'The changing problem of accountability in modern government', *Public Policy and Administration*, Volume 11, no. 1, pp., 23-37.
8. Doorgapersad, ShikhaVyas (2017), 'Progression from Ideal State to Good Governance: An Introductory Overview', *International Journal of Business and Management Studies*, Vol.9, NO.1, 2017 (ISSN: 1309-8047 (Online), pp. 29-49

9. Hood, C, (1991): 'A public management for all seasons', *Public Administration*, Volume 69, pp. 3-19.
10. Keerthisinghe, Lakshman Indranath, (2011) 'Principles of Good Governance Advocated By Ancient Philosophers', *The Sunday Leader*, Colombo, October 23.
11. Kreis, Steven (2009) 'Lecture 8, Greek Thought: Socrates, Plato and Aristotle', *The History Guide: Lectures on Ancient and Medieval European History*, Last Revised -- August 03, 2009.
12. Makridimitris, A, (2002): 'Dealing with ethical dilemmas in public administration: the ALIR imperatives of ethical reasoning', *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, Volume 68. no. 2, pp. 251-266.
13. Niskanen, William A., (1973): *Bureaucracy: Servant or Master? -Lessons from America*, Hobart Paperbacks.
14. Niskanen, William A., (1994): *Bureaucracy and Public Economics*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton.
15. Radhika, D: 'Ethics in Public Administration', *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research*, Vol. 4(2) pp. 23-31 March, 2012.
16. 'The Crisis of Governance', Human Development Report in South Asia, 1999, The Mehabub Ul Haq Human Development Centre, Islamabad.
17. *The Classical Democracy*-Springer, pp. 25-26. Citation :http://www.springer.com/cda/content/document/cda_downloaddocument/9783642334207-c1.pdf?SGWID=0-0-45-1370419-p174668332.
18. Verma, Anoop (2011), *Philosophers from Socrates to Sartre*, Spectrum Books Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, pp.7, 17.

Mrinal Kanti Basak is Head of the Department of Philosophy at A. B. N. Seal College, Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India. He is Editor of two Books—*Political Philosophy of Rabindranath* and *An Anthology of Ethics*. He has already published many scholarly articles on various topics in national and international Journals and Books. His research interests include Epistemology, Social and Practical Philosophy and the Philosophy of Language.

Riki Chakraborty is a Part Time Teacher of the Department of Philosophy at A. B. N. Seal College, Cooch Behar, West Bengal, India. She earned her PhD in 2010 from University of North Bengal. She has published many scholarly articles on various topics in Indian Philosophy in national and international Journals.

PROGRESSIVE PUBLISHERS

37A, College Street, Kolkata-700 073
Phone : (033) 2219 1595 / 6539
E-mail : progressivepubl@yahoo.co.in
Website : www.progressivepublishers.co.in



Price : ₹ 100
US \$: 4.45 UK £ : 4.40