

Plato was the theorist of an aristocratic form of absolute government. As the fundamental problem of political theory, he posed the following questions: 'Who should rule? Who is to govern the state? The many, the mob, the masses, or the few, the elect, the elite?'

Once the question 'Who should rule?' is accepted as fundamental, then obviously there can only be one reasonable answer: Not those who do not know, but those who do know, the sages; not the mob, but the few best. That is Plato's theory of the rule by the best, of aristocracy.

It is somewhat odd that great theorists of democracy and great adversaries of this Platonic theory—such as Rousseau—adopted Plato's statement of the problem instead of rejecting it as inadequate, for it is quite clear that the fundamental question in political theory is not the one Plato formulated. The question is not 'Who should rule?' or 'Who is to have power?' but 'How much power should be granted to the government?' or perhaps more precisely, 'How can we develop our political institutions in such a manner that even incompetent and dishonest rulers cannot do too much harm?'

Karl Popper, *In Search of a Better World* (1992)