

ARISTOTLE: ON VIRTUE EDUCATION

Talip KABADAYI*

Abstract

As Aristotle has it, the activities of man are of three kinds: theoretical (seeking knowledge), practical (regulating conduct) and productive (making things). The second, the practical, type of activity is in the field of ethics. The ethics of Aristotle shows that, as the realm of Nature as a whole seems to be drawn toward some ideal, human beings also are drawn toward a highest end for man. What he is drawn is his highest well-being, the perfection of his nature or realization of his possibilities, *eudaemonia* or happiness. This is the supreme good, which is aimed at in all virtuous living. It is attained by the rule of reason in life and reason counsels moderation in all things. Each specific virtue is a mean between two extremes, as courage is a mean between cowardice and foolhardiness. At this point, human beings are responsible beings to the extent that they can make *choices* and regulate their lives. Especially they must have a rational attitude toward pleasures, *choosing* the best and keeping them in their proper place. In this context, Aristotle gives a fascinating discussion about *friendship* that is necessary for our life. *Friendship* is also a kind of soul activities expressing virtue. So Aristotle's ethics were basically naturalistic: human good is defined by human nature. Aristotle sought the define the good for humans in terms of what the human organism in fact naturally seeks, namely, happiness. Hence, this paper is interested in Aristotle's philosophy of education which is based on largely on his ethical ideas as well as virtue.

Key Words: *Ethics, Virtue, Happiness, Reason, Friendship, Choice, Education.*

ARİSTOTELES'TE ERDEM EĞİTİMİ

Özet

Aristoteles'e göre, insanın üç tür etkinliği vardır: teorik (bilgi arayan), pratik (davranış düzenleyen) ve üretici (ürün ortaya koyan). Bunlardan ikincisi olan pratik etkinlik etik alanındadır. Aristoteles etiği bir bütün olarak Doğa alanının bir ideale doğru gidiyor görüldüğünü; insanların da insan için en yüksek bir ereğe doğru gittiğine işaret ediyor. İnsanın yöneldiği şey onun için nihai iyi, doğasının mükemmelliği, olanaklarının gerçekleşmesi, *eudaemonia* ya da mutluluktur. Bu tüm erdemli yaşamda amaçlanan en yüce iyidir. Buna aklın yaşamda egemen kılınmasıyla erişilir ve akıl tüm her şeyde orta olanı öğütler. Her spesifik erdem iki aşırılık arasındaki orta olandır; buna göre, cesaret korkaklık ve çılgınlık arasında bir orta olandır. Bu noktada, insanların sorumlu varlıklar olduğu; *seçimler* yapmak ve yaşamlarını düzenlemeleri gerektiği olgusu önem kazanır. İnsanlar özellikle hazlar konusunda rasyonel bir tutum sergilemeli ve en iyi olanları seçerek onları kendilerine uygun bir yerde tutmalıdır. Bu bağlamda, Aristoteles yaşam için vazgeçilmez olan *dostluk* üzerine muhteşem bir tartışma başlatır. *Dostluk* da ruhun bir tür etkinliğidir ve erdemi işaret eder. İmdi, Aristoteles etiği temelde doğalcıdır; buna göre, insani iyi insan doğası tarafından belirlenip tanımlanır. Aristoteles insanlar için iyi olanı tanımlarken insanın gerçekte doğal olarak aradığı şeyin mutluluk olduğu kabulünden yola çıkar. İşte bu çalışma, Aristoteles'in eğitim felsefesini serimleme işine girme çabasıdır zira onun eğitim görüşü büyük ölçüde onun etik ilkeler ve erdem anlayışına dayanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Etik, Erdem, Mutluluk, Akıl, Tercih, Dostluk, Eğitim.*

* Doç. Dr., Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, Felsefe Bölümü, AYDIN
e-posta: tkabadayi@adu.edu.tr.

Introduction

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) systematized all that was then known and he extended the limits of knowledge in virtually every existing subject, including biology, psychology, zoology, physics and astronomy as well as in those areas that today are deemed the province of philosophy, including ethics, politics, aesthetics and logic. His work was of enormous and lasting significance. Aristotle was born in Stagira, a Greek colony along the Macedonia coast. His father was the physician of the King of Macedonia, Amyntas II. When he was eighteen, Aristotle went to Athens where he studied under Plato at Plato's Academy for some twenty years. In 342, Aristotle was hired by Philip of Macedonia to tutor his son, Alexander, who was thirteen at the time. Whatever Alexander learned from Aristotle he repaid by sending Aristotle zoological specimens from his many travels and by funding his studies. In 335, Aristotle formed his own school at the Lyceum in Athens. Because of his practice of lecturing in the Lyceum's walking place or *peripatos*, Aristotle's follower's became known as the peripatetics, the "walkers". Aristotle emphasized the importance of direct observation of nature and believed that you must obtain factual data before you can begin to theorize. He also maintained that knowledge of things requires description, classification and causal explanation. This is, of course, the modern scientific view, though Aristotle emphasized a different aspect of causation from that stressed in modern science. Aristotle's works are often classified under five headings: the *Organum*, which consisted of six treatises on logic; the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*; his works on natural science, including most importantly the *Physics* and *De Anima* (on the soul); *Metaphysics* and the works on ethics and politics, which include the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* (Moore and Bruder, 1993: 43).

In Aristotle's point of view, our principle or highest objective by nature is the attainment of happiness; for it is that alone that we seek for its own sake. And, because the attainment of happiness is naturally our highest objective, it follows that happiness is our highest good. In what does happiness, our highest good, consist, according to Aristotle? To answer,

we must consider man's function, he said. To discover what goodness is for an axe or anything whatsoever, we must take into consideration its function, what it actually does. And when we consider what the human does as a human, we see that most essentially, s/he (a) lives and (b) reasons. Thus, happiness consists of two things, Aristotle concluded: enjoyment and the exercise and development of the capacity to reason. It consists in part of enjoyment because the human being, as a living thing, has biological needs and impulses the satisfaction of which is pleasurable. And it consists in part of developing and exercising the capacity to reason, because only the human being, as distinct from other living things, has that capacity. Because this capacity differentiates humans from other living things, its exercise is stressed by Aristotle as the most important component of happiness. Pleasure alone does not constitute happiness, he insists (Moore and Bruder, 1993: 175).

The exercise of our unique and distinctive capacity to reason is termed by Aristotle virtue; thus Aristotle's famous phrase that happiness is activity in accordance with virtue. There are two different kinds of virtues. To exercise actively our reasoning abilities, as when we study nature or cogitate about something, is to be intellectually virtuous. But we also exercise our rational capacity by moderating our impulses and appetites, and when we do this, we are said by Aristotle to be morally virtuous. The largest part of Aristotle's major ethical work, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is devoted to analysis of specific moral virtues, which Aristotle held to be the mean between extremes; for instance, courage is the mean between fearing everything and fearing nothing. He emphasized as well that virtue is a matter of habit: just as an axe that is only occasionally sharp does not fulfill its function well, the human who exercises his rational capacities only occasionally does not fulfill his function, that is, is not virtuous (Moore and Bruder, 1993: 176). So Aristotle's philosophy of education in which this paper is interested is based mostly on his ethical ideas. He thought that men needed to understand the relationship that existed between contact and pleasure and how to take pleasure in noble acts. Man who has a rational soul has the potential to become either good or bad.

Aristotle believed in a free will and felt that a good educational program could introduce the desire in men to act for the good and to follow the moderate path in all cases. Aristotle advocated education to be controlled by the state and sensed that the primary aim of education is to make people virtuous and he advocates training of the body as well as training in literature, music and gymnastics.

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Underlying every successful educational program there must be a philosophy of education. We are not always aware that it is there and many educational programs are planned without a philosophy in mind. However, if our educational ideas are to work, they must be based on something solid, a foundation and this foundation is our philosophy of education. Hence, Aristotle's philosophy of education has many things to offer us to develop and progress our system of education as well as solving our educational problems. Without an understanding of educational philosophy, it strikes me that, any attempt to improve education would be meaningless and futile. We would simply be reformulating old errors and outdated beliefs. Adequate knowledge of the history of educational ideas is the only safe assurance that we will not repeat past mistakes and build our educational policies on shifting or quick sands. According to Aristotle, every art or applied science and every systematic investigation and similarly every action and choice seem to aim at some good; the good, therefore, has been well defined as that at which all things aim (Aristotle 2011: 378). Since all knowledge and every choice is directed toward some good, as far as its name is concerned, people call it happiness; namely, being happy is the same as living well and doing well (Aristotle, 1962: 3-7). Hence, human beings have a nature, i.e., an end or *telos*. The natural end of human beings is *eudaimonia* (flourishing, well-being, or happiness). *Eudaimonia* is the activity of the soul according to reason, i.e., activity in accordance with the most perfect or complete virtue or excellence and it includes goods of the soul (virtue), goods of the body (health), and external goods (friendship, wealth, liberty) (Aristotle, 2011: 384-386).

Aristotle's conceptions of *eudaimonia* and virtue depend heavily on his conception of the human soul. The human soul for Aristotle consists of irrational and rational parts (Aristotle 1941: 596-598). The irrational and rational parts of the soul each appear to be further subdivided into two parts. The two irrational parts of the soul are I) the vegetative faculty and II) the appetitive faculty and in general the desiring faculty. The rational part in turn appears to be two-fold: 1) the rational faculty, which has reason in the strict sense, with authority and in itself, and 2) the other, apparently the desiring faculty insofar as it obeys reason (Aristotle 2011: 390-391). The rational faculty is itself further subdivided into two parts with distinctive functions: i) the scientific part, by which we contemplate the kind of things whose principles cannot be otherwise (the necessary), and ii) the deliberative or calculative part, by which we contemplate variable things (the contingent) (Aristotle, 2011: 412-413) and reason about means and ends.

As seen above, for Aristotle, the end or the highest good of man is happiness or *Eudaimonia*, a flourishing life. Now, what are the features of the highest good:

1. It is pursued for its own sake.
2. Other things are pursued for the sake of it.
3. It is not pursued for the sake of anything else.

The best good should be complete, self sufficient and the most choice-worthy. Aristotle's discussion of common beliefs about the highest good or happiness goes as follows: So many things you can say here; no stress, self-satisfaction, something subjective, a state of mind, something as states of consciousness.

For Aristotle, happiness is a whole state of one's life and objective. He examines several candidates for happiness according to common beliefs:

1. Pleasure (something makes you feel great)
2. Honor (a life of cultivated people, conceiving the good as honor)
3. Virtue (people are good in doing things and help others)

What makes a pen as a good pen? It writes well. What is the function (purpose) of a knife? Cutting. What is the function of a carpenter? What is peculiar to us? We, as living things, share something with plants (a life of nutrition and growth). Also, we share a life of sense perception with other animals. But what is special in us? Reason! According to Aristotle, only reason is special for human beings. The soul's activity is the good with the use of reason (Aristotle, 2011: 380-383).

Happiness is the best of all things but we must attain it by our own efforts. There are several things as options of the source of happiness: learning, discipline, reason, chance or something else, which one is the most important for man to get happiness? Aristotle goes on to say that happiness is a certain sort of activity of the soul expressing virtue, hence not a product of fortune. So happiness depends on virtue, not on fortune or by chance. But fortune still affects happiness. As Aristotle has it, man is the only animal that can make rational judgments and hence it is in this unique capacity that his/her goodness is found. The ability to reason really matters in one's good life. Aristotle focuses on moral virtue, a virtue of character. The first question is how to produce moral virtue? To Aristotle, there are three ways here: nature, teaching/education and habituation through doing them. So the answer is that moral virtue is a result of habit. We learn to be good by doing something good. Learning is actually by doing or building good habit. Now, virtue is acquired through our good habit rather than a good fortune. It is up to you if you can become a good person. It is within your power. Virtue is a state (not a feeling or capacity but state) that decides; a state consists in a mean. How can we reach the mean? Aristotle puts forward that it is going to take practical wisdom (*phronesis*) to figure out the right thing to do and this is a life long practice. It is worth mentioning that you also need a social life associated with good people to make right decision by using for reason for good (Weston, 2011: 77-79).

Thus, Aristotle distinguishes between intellectual and ethical virtues. The intellectual virtues are excellences of thought whereas the ethical virtues are excellences of character expressed in action. Each of the parts of the

rational faculty -the scientific and deliberative- has its own distinctive set of intellectual virtues. The key intellectual virtues for our purposes are *sophia* -contemplative wisdom- and *phronēsis* -practical wisdom or prudence. *Sophia* belongs to the scientific part of the rational faculty and involves excellence in apprehending true first principles and true conclusions drawn from them. Aristotle defines *phronēsis*, which belongs to the deliberative part of the rational faculty, as "a state [of the soul] involving truth and reason concerned with action regarding things that are good and bad for a human being" (Aristotle, 2011: 415). The ethical virtues belong to the second rational subdivision of the soul, the desiring part insofar as it obeys reason. An ethical virtue is an activity of the soul that makes a man good, enabling him to perform his function well, and is a constitutive part of *eudaimonia*. An ethical virtue is a right action, a mean between extremes of excess and deficiency in specific contexts. Aristotle argues that practical wisdom is inseparable from the ethical virtues: "It is clear, then, from what has been said, that it is not possible to be good in the strict sense without practical wisdom, nor practically wise without moral excellence" (Aristotle, 2011: 423). Aristotle thus implies the unity of virtue, for the presence of practical wisdom entails the presence of all the ethical virtues. At this point, for Aristotle, *eudaimonia* and virtue require voluntariness and *choice*. Voluntary actions are those of which the moving principle is in the agent himself, he being aware of the particular circumstances of the action. Involuntary actions, on the other hand, are those done under compulsion or by reason of ignorance, but actions done by reason of anger [a passion] or appetite are not rightly called involuntary (Aristotle, 2011: 403). After this definition of voluntary and involuntary, Aristotle discusses choice which seems to be very closely related to virtue. Aristotle uses the term *choice* more narrowly than it seems to be used today. Choice is not simply reducible to voluntary action. Other animals and children share in voluntary action, but not in choice (Aristotle, 2011: 403). Choice is related to wish and yet it is different, because one can wish for the impossible or for something not in one's power but one cannot choose the impossible or something beyond one's power (Aristotle,

2011: 404). As Aristotle has it, wish is of the end, choice of the means: for example, we wish to be healthy, but we choose the acts which will make us healthy, and we wish to be happy and say we do, but we cannot well say we choose to be so; for, in general, choice seems to relate to the things that are in our power (Aristotle, 2011: 404). Nor is choice simply opinion, for choice has to do with character and therefore action (Aristotle, 2011: 404). Choice follows and is the completion of deliberation: The same thing is deliberated upon and is chosen, except that the object of choice is already determinate, since it is that which has been decided upon as a result of deliberation that is the object of choice. In this context, the object of choice being one of the things in our own power which is desired after deliberation, choice will be deliberate desire of things in our own power; for when we have decided as a result of deliberation, we desire in accordance with our deliberation (Aristotle, 2011: 406). The object of choice, then, the means, is discovered by the deliberative part of the rational faculty but the end, the object of wish, is discovered by the scientific part.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle gives also a fascinating discussion about friendship. His view of friendship is still very attractive and worth of exploring. He goes on to say that “after what we have said, a discussion of friendship would naturally follow, since it is a virtue or implies virtue, and is besides most necessary with a view to living” (Aristotle, 1941: 1058). According to Aristotle’s analysis; friends can be different kinds (complete; incomplete), essential elements of friendship and benefits of friendship are discussed as well. Friendship is necessary for our life; all of us love to have friends, besides we need friends in a good life. So, friendship is not only necessary but also what is fine. Friendship, which is a kind of soul activities expressing virtue, happens only among creatures with soul. As Aristotle has it, there are three necessary conditions for friendship to somebody, namely, mutual love, reciprocated good will and not mere reciprocated good will but also awareness of it. Man’s soul is going to help him/her to realize the reciprocity between friends (Aristotle, 1941: 1060). Now, there are actually two kinds of friendship: incomplete and complete, despite the fact that Aristotle says “there are

three kinds of friendship, equal in number to the things that are loveable” (Aristotle, 1941: 1060). The incomplete includes friendship for utility and for pleasure and the the complete one is friendship for virtue. The friendship for utility and pleasure is dissolved when utility stops. It is also changeable as well as being unstable and lasts for a short time. The complete friendship must be the friendship of good people, who are good in themselves. These people also wish goods to each other for each other’s own sake. This friendship is unconditional as well as being enduring and stable. Good people are pleasant to each other and get help one another as well. Their friendship includes utility and pleasure and also characters. But, while people find no enjoyment in one another if they get no benefit, good people endure their friendship even though there is no advantage from another. They still can be friends to each other because of the other person himself or herself. They also appreciate each other’s character (Aristotle, 1941: 1061-1063). Aristotle in his *Ethics* describes also many features of friendship: good wishes and do them for the friend’s own sake; spend time together; make the same choices; share the friend’s distress and enjoyment (Aristotle, 1941: 1061). All these properties can be applied to oneself, too. One wishes and does them for one’s own sake. One can be a friend of oneself, because one always cares about self. Good people wish for good for the thinking or understanding part; value their intellects most of all; live according to intellect’s guidance figuring out the best; desire what is fine; care about an action’s being praiseworthy and advancing the common good; act unselfishly and self-sacrificing and the like. Thus, a virtuous person always wishes good and does them since he does them for the sake of his thinking or understanding part. Virtuous people seek goods and do good things, e.g., moderate eating, drinking, fun, etc (Aristotle, 1941: 1081). As interchangeable terms, in Aristotle’s point of view, only friends of good people, virtuous people, can be true friends. People can develop incomplete friendship into complete kind. Complete friends have reciprocal relationships, that is, not only taking but also giving each other, and have good wills or wishes for one another. They share both pleasant and unpleasant things. They make similar choices as well as enjoying

each other and they value the other party's character. The point is that friendship requires virtue. According to Frankena, friendship, in Aristotle, is an excellence or involves excellence and also it is most necessary for life, excellence and happiness. Two men are friends when each has a fixed disposition of liking and goodwill toward the other and both are aware that this is the case. There are three kinds of friendship: in the first, two persons are friends because they are pleasing to one another; in the second, because they are useful to one another; in the third, because they are both good and may help each other toward excellence. Of these the last is the highest kind. Friendship of all kinds is the cement that should hold society together and in the ideal state the friendship of citizens should be that of the highest kind (Frankena, 1965: 52). Friendship also provides a necessary supplement to justice and holds the polis together. Aristotle considers friendship to be essential for happiness because it contributes what is already good in life. In the activity of the intellect and the thoughtful conversation of individuals who are lovers of wisdom, friendship brings the natural human capacities for speech and reason to a complete realization. Therefore, promoting ethical education and the cultivation of friendship among the citizens of the polis is vital for Aristotle. To repeat, according to Aristotle, everything in the world has a distinctive and essential function. Plants and animals grow in special ways depending on their kinds. Craftspeople have their particular crafts and in Aristotle's view, this function or activity in turn determines admirable or excellent traits or characteristics, that is, virtues. For instance, virtue in a craftsperson is to practice the craft well: it takes attention, care, productivity and the like. Similarly, then, there must be a characteristic or set of characteristics that defines our essence. In Aristotle's point of view, the moral virtues are those character traits that fulfill our essence as human beings. They are, fully realized, the distinctive excellences of human beings. Since we are, in Aristotle's famous definition, rational animals, the virtues for humans must be those traits that express and help us to fulfill our rational nature, broadly understood, knowledge and understanding, in the life of the mind, along with the right choice and judiciousness as well

as self-discipline to keep our more passionate side in balance. On Aristotle's view, this balancing often requires finding the mean between the extremes of our passions. In sum, growing in all of these virtues together allows us to achieve our potential, to become fully human. Rightly understood, virtue is nothing less than the royal road to becoming ourselves.

Now it is time to set forth the educational principles of Aristotle for guidance of educators briefly with regard to virtue and friendship. Aristotle puts forward that education is the business of the state for the training of its future citizens. Nobody will doubt that the legislator should direct his attention above all to the education of youth; for the neglect of education does harm to the constitution. The citizen should be carved out to suit the form of government under which he lives. For each government has a peculiar character which originally formed and which continues to preserve it. The character of democracy creates democracy, and the character of oligarchy creates oligarchy; and always the better the character, the better the government (Aristotle, *Politics*, Book VIII, Chs. 1-4). Education begins with health and a sound physique. Therefore, good diet and exercise are essential, as are heredity and good race, for they are basic to a sound body. The pupil must submit to all suggestions, exercises and disciplines of the master, for these are necessary to the development of his moral and intellectual character. The master must also lead a disciplined life. The educators leads his pupil to discover where and of what kind his creative powers are and helps him to become a living form (Aristotle, 1941: *Politics*, Book VII, Chs. 13-17; Bk. VIII, Chs. 1-7). That education should be regulated by law and should be an affair of state is not to be denied, but what should be the character of this public education and how young persons should be educated, are questions that remained to be considered. As Aristotle has it, the customary branches of education are in number four: they are 1- reading and writing, 2- gymnastic exercises, 3- music and 4- drawing. Of these, reading and writing as well as drawing are regarded as useful for the purposes of life in a variety of ways and gymnastic exercises are thought to infuse courage. Music was included

in education because nature herself requires that we should be able, not only to work well, but to use leisure well. It is clear then that there are branches of learning and education that we must study merely with a view to leisure spent in intellectual activity and these are to be valued for their own sake; whereas those kinds of knowledge that are useful in business are to be deemed necessary and exist for the sake of other things. And therefore music is admitted into education, not on the ground either of its necessity or utility, for it is not necessary, nor indeed useful in the same manner as reading and writing that are useful in money-making, in the management of a household, in the acquisition of knowledge and in political life, nor like drawing, useful for a more correct judgment of the works of artists, nor again like gymnastics that gives health and strength; for neither of these is to be gained from music. Then, there remains the use of music for intellectual enjoyment in leisure, which is in fact evidently the reason of its introduction, this being one of the ways in which it is thought that a freeman should pass his leisure (Gruber, 1973: 20). Furthermore, Aristotle believes that citizens and non-citizens should receive different educations because their capacities and functions are different; as far as possible the education of citizens should be liberal while that of non-citizens must be vocational. In other words, the education of citizens should be aimed as wholly as possible at the formation of the excellences of the good man while that of non-citizens must be aimed at preparing them for their work. Second, citizens must be trained to both obey and rule since they will have to take their turns at ruling and being ruled; non-citizens must be taught to obey the rules. Third, education must prepare citizens for both action and leisure. Action means all forms of doing including especially moral and political one in Aristotle. Leisure means free time filled with intellectually excellent activity, especially contemplation. Citizens must be provided with the knowledge, abilities and skills needed for action, but since action is for the sake of leisure, they must be more prepared for leisure. Fourth, citizens should be trained and equipped for peace. Fifth, education must prepare men to do what is necessary, what is useful and what is excellent in itself. Consequently, human

beings are for Aristotle both rational and moral agents capable of deliberating about choices and distinguishing between right and wrong as well as being unique in having a moral sense that is a perception of what is good and bad, just and unjust. Endowed with powers of reason and speech, the human being is the best creature when perfected by virtue. Left to mere chance, without moral guidance, individuals may choose wrong ends, unworthy of human beings. Therefore, a task of Aristotelian education is to endow a polis with a core of virtues or ethical values in order to guide it to noble ends. Now the ethical and educational theory developed by Aristotle is called eudaimonism meaning happiness which must be based on complete friendship, an indispensable aid to the most perfect exercise of virtues.

In the final analysis, for Aristotle, the highest good is the contemplation of truth. He uses the word *eudamonia* –happiness- for the moral ends men ought to pursue. The soul is not a substance but an action. A particular man is a substance, but his soul is what he does. Therefore, virtue is a condition and particular instances of virtue are actions. The virtue of justice is a condition – the condition of having a well-established habit. Basing his whole system of ethics upon this point, Aristotle held that ethics and politics are mutually dependent. Ethics examines how men may live best, but as by nature man is a political animal, it is in society that he finds his noblest fulfillment. States are formed to enable men to live; they are perpetuated to make them live well. An important function of the state is to educate its citizens. Basic to education in a cultural and political sense is the development of right habits, which Aristotle considers man's second nature.

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