

Reading Aristotle's Education for the 21st Century

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INTRODUCTION

The possible solutions for various social, economic, psychological and political problems of the century are hidden within the magical concept of education. Most people regard education as a key concept to be questioned in order to better our lives. The educational systems in different countries are shaped by the governments, a fact which directs us to the relation between education and politics. Additionally, the link that Aristotle establishes between education and politics focuses our attention on ethics. In order to examine how politics, education and ethics were dependent on each other in antiquity, the present study aims to explore Aristotle's view of education and how he connects education to politics and ethics. Initially in this study, Aristotle's classification of sciences into three categories according to their aims, methods and objects is explored. Then, under which classification politics and education fall and why they are related are discussed. Later, how Aristotle's view of education is tied to the concepts of good and happiness is examined. It is claimed that exploration of Aristotle's view of politics relating to education and ethics will shed light to many institutional flaws in today's educational systems.

What are sciences for Aristotle?

Aristotle did not write a book or essay on education, however, we are able to follow his ideas on education in a short passage in his Politics, Book VIII. There, he briefly describes what a basic educational curriculum should include. In Book VIII, the doctrine he presents is not of education as a whole, but is of basic education. Aristotle's doctrine of basic education is developed as a feature of politics. Before start discussing Aristotle's attitude towards basic education, it would be appropriate to present why and how he links education to politics.

Aristotle asserts that science is an activity of the soul. As each activity is performed for a reason, so does science. The subject of science is what is universal, unchanging and untimely. In this sense, Aristotle argues that perception is not science because the subjects of sensation are individual and timely. For Aristotle, there is another point that differentiates sensation from science. It is possible to see or observe a fact through sense perception but it is impossible to conclude with the necessity of that fact. That the water in a pot is hot may be true knowledge resulting from sense perception but is not science because science aims at concluding with necessary relations, generalizations and universal judgments by reshaping and expressing these relations. While individual and temporal things are subjects for sense perception, universal and perpetual things are concerns for science.

With a focus on science, Aristotle, is the first philosopher to put forward the concept of independent sciences. Furthermore, he classifies the sciences/ knowledge according to the subjects they deal with, the methods they use and their aims in his Metaphysics, Book XI. For Aristotle, a person who has knowledge, either watches/sees something/thinks about something; or produces something; or acts. With this point of start, he divides sciences into three. The first one includes sciences depending on seeing/thinking and they are theoretical

sciences. The second type is productive in which something is produced/created. The third type is practical sciences depending on practicing an act or behaviour.

Firstly, it's better to study the grounds for this classification. The knowledge of theoretical science is knowledge of things that one can acquire by seeing or thinking about objects or facts on which we can have no effect and which are independent of us. The knowledge of this type is related to the essence and the nature of the objects or facts observed or thought. For instance, the knowledge of physical entities is such theoretical kind of knowledge and physics is such kind of science. In order to have knowledge of the nature of a tree or animal, one has to see, observe and think about changes, movements and becoming of these entities. The knowledge of the geometrical figures like triangle or square, one has to see and analyse the objects of such shapes. In the case of the knowledge of the productive sciences, production or constitution is in question. Just like dressing a stone in order to make a statue, in this kind of sciences, objects are transformed and new things are created. The ways of thinking and acting are different in productive sciences. The aim of such sciences is to create useful and fine things for ourselves and for others. In this sense, dancing, painting a picture, writing poetry, or composing can be considered within the concept of production. In this kind of knowledge, there is always an end-product other than the producer. There are two distinctive things: the creator of a product and the product itself. The knowledge of practical sciences is related to the knowledge of an activity, in which the knower is involved. Arslan claims that depending on our knowledge of goodness and happiness, we can perform acts that are either noble or generous or contrarily our acts can be rude, bad or mean (2007). There is no end-product of knowing the third kind of knowledge or performing a practical science. The sole aim of practical science is the practice itself. Burnet (1967) gives the example of a proposition of geometry for a complete knowledge. On the other hand, a construction theory is an activity of soul but this can never be complete as a theory. In order for this theory to be complete, that road or bridge must be constructed. This latter type is an example of practical science while the type in the former example depends solely on the activity of knowing and is a theoretical science.

It can be inferred from Aristotle's discussions that some of the sciences are superior to others. The variety of professions, sciences and arts naturally brings the existence of different aims. Aristotle exemplifies his argument by referring to some sciences. For instance, the target of ship-building is a ship; the target of war-commanding is to win a victory. The aims of some of these sciences are dependent on higher sciences. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle gives the example that the science of making racehorse equipment is dependent on the science of horsemanship. The science of horsemanship is dependent on that of military acts and commands.

The distinction made here is that some sciences are secondary and serve for some other higher sciences and therefore some arts are basic and primary and the aims of the latter is are more valuable than that of the former. In any science, if there is an aim that is desired for its own sake, it should be "good". To reach the "good" belongs to the highest and most basic science and this is undoubtedly politics. In a state, politics is the most valuable science and it decides what others should deal with. The precious practical sciences of military, rhetoric, ethics, economics and education are all dependent on politics. "The supreme practical science – that to which all others are subordinate and ministerial- is politics." (Ross, 1995, 195)

Education and Politics as Practical Sciences

When Aristotle's classification of sciences is examined, education appears as a part of the science of politics. These sciences are not theoretical, rather they are practical. It is true to say that there are many practical sciences that are related to each other (Özen, 2011, 30). For Aristotle, one science produces the thing used by another. The science of politics uses the things produced by all other practical sciences however it does not expose something that can be used by other sciences (Burnet, 1967). The science of politics benefits from the productions of all other practical sciences. All other practical sciences are dependent on the basic and primary science of politics.

The aim of politics should include the aims of all other practical sciences and thus this aim should be "good for men". The aim of the science of politics is not a theory of a good state but is the actual practice of what is good for men. "We observe that every state is a certain sort of association, and that every association is formed for some good purpose; for in all their actions all men aim at what they think is good. Clearly, then, while all associations aim at some good, the association which is the most sovereign of all and which embraces all the others aims the highest, i.e. at the most sovereign of all goods. This is the association called the state, the association which takes the form of a state..." (Politics, Book I, I) After clarifying how education and politics are linked according to Aristotle, now we can explore how Aristotle pictured the basic education curriculum.

In Book VIII of Politics, Aristotle points out four basic practical purposes of education which are education of reading and writing, of physical training, of music and of drawing. Reading, writing and drawing serve for practical purposes of life in different ways. Physical training advance courage. The reason for music education is that it provides the soul with power to use leisure well. Leisure means happiness, well-being and pleasure. Using leisure well will foster psychological development of the young which will enhance the quality of their work. Although he fails to give a reason for music to be included in education, he still attempts to develop a motivation for including music in basic education curriculum.

In addition to his ideas about the content of education, Aristotle questions the basic objectives of education. For Aristotle, the first target of education is to train characters that can increase the prosperity and bliss of the state. The second target is to prepare the soul to spend spare time in the proper way. The spare time is time left after the soul's fulfilment of practical needs. Aristotle gives an outline of the concerns that the legislators must have for the basic education of the young citizens. These concerns are both for the welfare of the citizens and the welfare of the state, which are interdependent and which have similar ends.

As a practical science, education is dependent on politics and the aim of education should be included within the aim of politics. According to Aristotle, the first aim of education is to train good citizens for the state. These citizens are brought up in order to realize the acts to increase the state's prosperity and bliss. It is clear that for Aristotle the aim of education serves for politics.

Aristotle emphasizes the importance of education both for citizens and for the state. The welfare of the state can be realized only if the citizens of that state are good, virtuous, having moral characters, leading the best life. The nature, habit and mind are the three factors that render people good and virtuous. Education should be designed in such a way that the body, the desire and the mind are all trained. The nature enables the living things to be born as human beings. As a result of habituation, people get equipped with certain qualities. The

training of the body and the desire can be achieved through habituation. Finally, humans are intelligent beings and the training of the mind can be attained through speech and reason. The role of education is to make these three stay in harmony. "No one 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 molded to suit the form of government under which he lives." (Politics, Book VIII, I) According to Aristotle, children should be brought up as good citizens and are regarded as statues given form in order to fit into the shape of government. What Aristotle understands from education is the education of a man as a good citizen of the state. Citizens should be trained both to obey the laws and to be skilled in legislation and execution when the right time comes.

Additionally, Aristotle questions whether education is something that should be done privately or as a public duty. Aristotle mentions that education is an important and serious duty and should not be given up to individual people. It should be carried out by state and should be uniform for all people. "And since the whole city has one end, it is manifest that education should be one and the same for all, and that it should be public, and not private- not as at present, when everyone looks after his own children separately, and gives them separate instruction of the sort which he thinks best." (Politics, Book VIII, I) Since people are considered not as individuals but as citizens belonging to the state, the training of them is an important duty and should be organized by the state. Such a serious mission can only be realized by professional people.

The fact that laws should be put for education shows that education is a national matter. The education should be the chief concern of the legislators. What to teach, when to teach and the design of the whole institution are the duties of the state. While the early childhood education is the parent' duty, basic and further education is the responsibility of the state. What kind of education it should be and how this work should be carried out are other issues to be questioned by the legislators. What should be taught to the youth related to virtue and good life? "There can be no doubt that children should be taught those useful things which are really necessary, but not all useful things; for occupations are divided into liberal and illiberal; and to young children should be imparted only such kinds of knowledge as will be useful to them without vulgarizing them. And any occupation, art or science, which makes the body or soul mind of the freeman less fit for the practice or exercise of virtue, is vulgar." (Politics, Book VIII, II) Aristotle emphasizes that children should be told stories and tales, be allowed to read book and watch plays that are appropriate for morals. Aristotle believes that education is possible for children who will be citizens however slaves are taught only how to cook or other necessary arts. These kinds of arts are not included in education of citizens. "The aim of the state is to produce cultured gentlemen - men who combine the aristocratic mentality with love of learning and the arts." (Russell, 1946, 187). Aristotle's citizens are not women or slaves but are freemen. Aristotle claims that citizens and non-citizens are educated for different purposes and in different ways because their capacities are different. Non-citizens are trained to get prepared for work; thus, their education is vocational. However, citizens are educated to be prepared for moral and political actions. They are trained to obey and rule the state. Citizens learn to spend leisure with intellectually excellent activity. The education aims at enabling citizens to judge and distinguish between right or wrong, just or unjust or good or bad (Kabadayı, 2013, 83).

Ethics, Education and Politics

Generally Aristotle's view of education emphasizes moralism rather than pragmatism, uniformity rather than pluralism, statism rather than individualism. The end of education is to encourage men perfected by moral values. The education aims at bringing up uniform citizens equipped with the values of good and happiness. The good for a man will bring about the good for the state. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, Aristotle tries to answer the question "What is good for men?" All sciences aim at some good, which is the thing for which all activities are done. Nature, habit and logos are the three things that make men virtuous and perfect. Although man's nature is necessary, it is not sufficient condition for virtue. Education is what perfects the men, providing them with virtues which potentially exist in their nature. Education directs men to aim the good in all activities (Shaw, 2005, 31). Education fulfils an important role in man's life because it encourages man to determine and clarify his goals. Man can only achieve the good life by establishing the aim and ends of his actions. Education will support man to ascertain to live and act properly towards a good life. Education provides the essential exposure to and experience of virtue and nobility of the good life, which is required for the establishment of these concepts in mind.

Naturally, the highest objective of man is to attain happiness. Aristotle defines happiness as something for which everything else is desired. "Happiness in particular is believed to be complete without qualification, since we always choose it for itself and never for the sake of anything else. Honour, pleasure, intellect, and every virtue we do indeed choose for themselves (since we would choose each of them even if they had no good effects), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, on the assumption that through them we shall live a life of happiness; whereas happiness no one chooses for the sake of any of these nor indeed for the sake of anything else." (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, 1097b). Happiness is the highest goal of all because it is the only thing that man seeks for its own sake. Happiness is the highest good for man.

Man lives and thinks; his happiness depends on enjoying in life and developing our capacity to reason. The capacity to think is the distinctive feature of human beings and thus, is regarded as the most important element in achieving happiness. In a sense, happiness should include all other good things and have the quality to contribute to them. "Happiness, then, is obviously something complete and self-sufficient, in that it is the end of what is done." (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, 1097b). Happiness is self-sufficient and is something that makes life worth living. Aristotle adds that happiness is the most valuable thing. For Aristotle, the activity of happiness takes place together with virtues. This is the linking point between education and ethics. Man should be educated in such a way to take pleasure in virtuous acts. The rational soul of man is potentially good or bad and it is education that would lead a man to act towards the good. The training of citizens for the good, happy and virtuous life is the key to a good state.

The definition put forward by Aristotle is relevant to that in which happiness is considered as a form of the good. Practices that are appropriate for good are nice both on their own and for the people performing them. The delight of practices that are appropriate for good is themselves. Practices that are appropriate for good are good on their own. If happiness is identified with good, it can be gained by education. Happiness is something which all healthy people can reach after hard work and effort. Naturally human beings end towards happiness, which Aristotle defines as the reasonable activity of the soul. "Virtue, then is one of two kinds: that of the intellect and that of character. Intellectual virtue owes its origin and development mainly to teaching, for which reason its attainment requires experience and time; virtue of character is a result of habituation, for which reason it has acquired its name through a small variation on

ethos.” (Nicomachean Ethics, Book II, 1103a). We can argue that the soul and reason can be trained by education in order to achieve the end of happiness.

CONCLUSION

Aristotle claims that the aim of politics is the highest good. The science of politics struggles to train the citizens to perform good deeds. The good is problematic for the statesmen because its aim is to create good and obedient citizens. Here, the good is not the good physical condition of the body but rather the goodness of the soul. Thus the statesmen should have knowledge of the soul.

When Aristotle’s arguments about what to teach and when to teach are taken into account it can be argued that he was the first philosopher proposing a curriculum for basic education. He drew attention to the level of education and pointed that the content of teaching should be based on the ages of the learners. His division of a man’s life into periods of seven years show his idea of a strong relationship between age and the form of education. The content of the curriculum and the learner’s level of comprehension should be at the same level. Today, we design our methods, techniques, materials and content of the education according to the ages of the learners. Today’s educators are aware of the fact that different age groups require various forms of attentions. The early childhood education in Aristotle’s time was the responsibility of the parents. However, today, formal education is carried out for the children of those ages. The ages are subject to change in various countries, but at least it is a matter for discussion.

Aristotle’s assertion that the public education should be provided by the state and that it should be uniform does not include the equality in education. The education was designed for all the citizens except for the women and slaves. In today’s world, the target of education is not to create a society of uniform people. Now, it is agreed that the students have different skills, tendencies or styles. Education should be designed so as to appeal to all types of learners and to bring up citizens of a variety of abilities, characteristics and views. When we come to the equality in education, the social hierarchy was quite different. The people who are titled as “citizen” had the right to benefit from basic education. Today’s citizenship varies from that of his time and in constitutions these are articles about the rights of citizens to be provided with the opportunities of education. However, it is known that in today’s world there are people who are practically not provided with these opportunities.

Aristotle’s argument of close ties between politics and education designates the relationship between regimes and education. “The citizen should be carved out to suit the form of government under which he lives.” (Karadayı, 2013, 82). The form of education has a role in the form of constitution or vice-versa. Democratic education would create and sustain democratic state and democratic states would enhance democratic education. However, the extreme involvement of governments in the system of education is a problem. The governments are responsible to provide their citizens with opportunities but, their involvement in the curriculum design results in failure. Each party having the position of authority attempts to reshape the educational system in a way to please itself and its voters. Most of the legislators of today who are charged for curriculum design are not educators nor are trained to be one. It can be claimed that the principles, designs, contents, techniques and approaches should be decided by professional people educated in the specific fields related to education.

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