



ARISTOTLE'S EDUCATIONAL IDEAS

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Abstract:

Aristotle (384-322 BC) was a great thinker, an encyclopedic brain of ancient Greek science and philosophy. Perhaps few people know him as an educator who brought out extremely deep opinions about subjects, program contents, role of education, etc. nearly 2500 years ago. In all his researching life, he has many scientific works that are meticulous and scientifically valuable aimed at bringing “*the best things*” for humans. In the book Politics - although educational ideas are not the main contents of the book, they are presented quite closely by Aristotle – positive factors are included and have been very important up to now.

Keywords: idea, education, reform

Introduction

In human history, Greece is one of the places where its people's mind is soon affirmed through lots of brilliant achievements in many different fields like philosophy, politics, culture, art, science, education, etc. Their values have been shining until now. Aristotle is the person who leaves the most indelible mark on the road having been conquered by Greek people. To build an ideal State, Aristotle considers that it is necessary to dignify the role of education because educating a citizen to become a virtuous man is a particularly important matter. When a country has its citizens both well-educated and irreproachable, it will turn better. Aristotle claims the authorities' mission is to construct the best educational system for all citizens. That education must be shown in terms of both physicality and spirit in every citizen.

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In this article, we will use such the methods as analysis, synthesis, logic and history to study Aristotle's educational ideas and have discussions on their values.

2. Content

2.1 Historical conditions forming Aristotle's educational ideas

Aristotle is a great philosopher of ancient Greece. He is the man who fully embodies essence and performs a summary of Greek history in the ancient times; the age when he lived is the "classical" period of Greek culture (the fifth – sixth century BC), and the center is Athens with the features of diversity and variability, the trend for freedom and humanity having been expressed in literature, art, philosophy, science, etc.. Besides, one noticeable thing is that in the prosperous time of philosophy, the Greek spiritual culture is shaped and developed in a receding democracy. The crisis of the democracy together with serious conflicts within the society leads to the risk of disbanding many city states. In that context, on the one hand, Aristotle raises the aspiration to obtain the sublimation of thoughts in splendid accomplishments of spiritual culture, but on the other, it is an effort to overcome the existent order for the construction of a better society. In such the historical conditions, Aristotle's educational thoughts are formed and manifested deeply and systematically in the book *Politics*. Indeed, it is only education and through education to solve thinkers' meditations and concerns.

Living in the Athens democratic age that is weakening and showing serious defects accompanied by the crisis in values and beliefs, the state of people getting lost in spiritual life, the depravity and self-indulgence of the authorities; Aristotle sees in there the necessity for giving prominence to the role of education. He states that education not only directs people to virtue, to the official origin of happiness but also creates basic conditions for the establishment and stabilization of morality, which means ensuring the contentment for community. He considers education a condition to reach to the idealization which is the unity of goodness and supreme benefit. Therefore, all the citizens have to be comprehensively educated in physicality, mind and spirit for the purpose of serving the government.

2.2. Contents of Aristotle's educational ideas

2.2.1 Idea of educating the whole people

In the theory of politics - society by Aristotle, the ideal state is constructed on the foundation of citizens' virtue. Hence, he particularly concerns education and contemplates it as a vital aspect in the training of philosophers, authorities in future as well as good citizens for the state. Aristotle divides them into two groups, the prominent ones must be educated to become authorities and all citizens must be trained

to obey the laws and to suit the government model in which they are living. *“For man, when perfected, is the best of animals, but, when separated from law and justice, he is the worst of all; since armed injustice is the more dangerous, and he is equipped at birth with arms, meant to be used by intelligence and virtue, which he may use for the worst ends. Wherefore, if he has not virtue, he is the most unholy and the most savage of animals, and the most full of lust and gluttony. But justice is the bond of men in states, for the administration of justice, which is the determination of what is just, is the principle of order in political society”* (Aristotle, 1999, p. 6). Education aims at bringing common benefits for people so it must be homogeneous for all of them. Education also has an effect on the unity of a country, overcomes problems about local separation. For Aristotle, the goal of education is not only to head to humanitarian idealization but also as a supporter for humans, an enormously important condition for an individual to take part in the community. Therefore, the subject that education intends is all citizens.

To Aristotle, education is the foundation for the sustainable and thriving development of the State. According to him, one of the methods performing politic power most effectively is educating humans, tempering sense of citizenship and responsibility towards society. Like Plato, Aristotle considers that education equips humans with the ability to awake to life, to shape the right track to greatest advantages and generosity. While Plato only focuses on educating combatants and leaders in future, Aristotle specifies the subject of education broadly. The talents need training to become leaders-to-be and the populace also needs the education to live and act legally. For the subject's ascertainment of education is all people for the purpose of creating excellent citizens, so the model of ideal state that Aristotle mentions can be obtainable in reality in comparison with that of Plato.

2.2.2 Idea of comprehensive education

Aristotle sets forth the idea of comprehensive education in physicality, spirit and intelligence. He expresses the role of a pedagogue when he suggests four subjects for teaching program: reading and writing, physical education, music and drawing. *“The customary branches of education are in number four; they are – (1) reading and writing, (2) gymnastic exercises, (3) music, to which sometimes added (4) drawing”* (Aristotle, 1999, p. 182). *“Of these, reading and writing and drawing are regarded as useful for the purposes of life in a variety of ways, and gymnastic exercises are thought to infuse courage”* (Aristotle, 1999, p. 182). Music, from Aristotle's view point, is an important subject not only for entertainment but also for using free time appropriately. *“Enough has been said to show that music has a power of forming the character, and should therefore be introduced into the education of the young. The study is suited to the stage of youth, for the young persons will not, if they can help, endure anything which is not sweetened by pleasure, and music has a natural*

sweetness" (Aristotle, 1999, p. 188). In addition, the nature of music is the combination of sounds that makes the soul reaches a balance between emotion and reason. Therefore, music should be included in the educational system. It is realized as a way for people to freely use for relaxation in spare time. It seems that Aristotle's age is the period of art, poetry, music, etc., and the period of acquiring Plato's ideas about role of art that is thought to have a contribution to the formation of fantastic qualities of humans. Hence, art has to serve education so that is why Aristotle dignifies music and drawing in the educational program.

Next, Aristotle proposes a program training adolescents completely and that suitable for every different age group, from the way bringing up children to educating them to be mature. The educational system that Aristotle aims at is a permanent, constant, covered and lifelong one. From his viewpoint, people, when reaching adulthood, continue practicing things they learned and turning them into habits and skills for themselves. By means of education, people who are perfect, charming and generous are produced, which is regarded as the most adequate condition for the achievement of ideal State.

In order to have the best preparation for the birth of a child, Aristotle assigns the pregnant age suitable for both father and mother, and the pregnancy should be in winter. During the pregnant period, mothers must look after themselves carefully by going for a walk, having an adequate diet, and having a complete peace in mind. He states that after children are born, what they eat considerably influences their physical strength. Thus, they need to have a highly nutritious food portion. People should be trained as soon as possible to be able to endure difficulties that their bodies must have capacity to cope with; yet this process should be done gradually. As for children, from their natural warmth, they can be trained to withstand the coldness easily. That children gain the endurance of chilliness in their childhood is contemplated as an excellent approach assisting them to stay healthy and training their body strong enough for later military missions. These training should be applied from the very first stage of life.

The next stage lasts to the age of five. In this period, children should not be forced to study or work in order not to prevent their development, but should have moderate activities for their arms and legs to exercise. It is possible to do this in many ways. One of which is using games that should not be too violent or weak. Choosing stories to tell children must be done carefully and it should be performed to prepare for children's later career and should aim at jobs that children will seriously pursue in future.

Aristotle emphasizes that children should be taught really useful and necessary things. A special attention should be paid on education so that children can be

developed physically and morally: Children should be limited their relations with slaves in the house for until the age of seven children still stay indoors, thus they are easily influenced and infected by evil things that they hear, etc.. Therefore, children are not allowed to repeat or hear something bad and ashamed. In them, rudeness in speaking manner or seeing inappropriate pictures must be excluded to avoid causing bad influences. Not until children reach their adulthood, they will keep away from all what morality chastises.

When children get to the age of five, in the next two years, they should locate targets that they will learn later. The age of seven is the time children need to go to school. Teaching must contemplate limits suitable for learners including age, characters, acquiring competence, physical strength of learners. Education should be divided into two stages in each person's life: the former is from the age of seven to the puberty, and the latter is from the puberty to the age of twenty-one. However, the process of education is not finished at the age of twenty-one. In this duration, humans receive a sagacious education and care. Until they get to their adulthood, they still practice things they learn in this period and turn them into customs, habits of themselves.

According to Aristotle, subjects only making children delighted should not be taught to them as study is not a pleasure but is accompanied by hard work. The study that targets at benefits will not assist people to get freedom and sublimation. At the same time, Aristotle considers that in educating children, practice must be taught before theory and subjects training their mind must follow physical education. Accordingly, children should be sent to gymnasts to help them have a supple body and to wrestling instructors to teach them wrestling exercises.

The eclectic principle is again applied in education by Aristotle who claims the avoidance of extreme and intense in teaching. Also, in the field of physical training, the desire to generate champions at all cost is inadvisable. In tutoring music, it is better to build a pleasure in music for everyone than training geniuses. Moreover, it is recommended to require learner to do what he can. Politic lessons should not be imposed upon the youth when they have not gained any life experience.

As presented by Aristotle, legislators have to build an educational system that is homogeneous for everyone and must be a public education prescribed by the State. Aristotle realizes that the study is to cultivate virtue or to create the finest life. Education should be more concerned about the training of mind and virtue.

On that account, in his educational philosophy, Aristotle regards music as one of the subjects being recognized and as a tradition of education. Children should be taught useful things such as reading and writing, not only because of the usefulness of these subjects, but also by means of which children can collect other kinds of knowledge. With a similar look, children ought to learn drawing not for the prevention of making

mistakes in shopping but for the training of their competence in observation and evaluation about the beauty of appearance. He suggests the teaching for children to develop physical state before that to develop mind. Therefore, children should learn physical exercises beforehand as instructors will assist them in building endearing habits, then music and subjects about knowledge finally. Following that order, children will be developed perfectly. Learning should be seen as a means not to obtain personal goals but to reach free spirit and the ability to self-select. Moreover, Aristotle highly appreciates the communicative method, the voluntariness in education which shape human personalities such as self-control and flexibility. Such the teaching method does not make learners incurring passively. Conversely, only that method can evaluate learning result accurately.

2.2.3 Educational idea to match government model

According to Aristotle, education is a national mission because education not only determines the perfection of human personality but also affects the existence or perishableness of political regime. He said that *"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"* (Aristotle, 1999, p. 180). Due to the belief that education aims at matters bringing common benefits, he advocates the necessity for building a homogeneous educational system for everyone. To him, citizens have to be educated to live and follow regulations of law, clearly awake to their role and responsibility towards the State. The talents must be trained to become leaders. He lists noble qualifications that leaders need to possess *"(1) first of all, loyalty to the established constitution; (2) the greatest administrative capacity; (3) virtue and justice of the kind proper to each form of government"* (Aristotle, 1999, p. 125). All those prove that Aristotle does not define virtues of an officer generally for all regimes, but states that there must be virtues fitting every different form of government. Hence, if a political regime wants to last for a long time, a proper education has to be established for *"The best laws, though sanctioned by every citizen of the state, will be of no avail unless the young are trained by habit and education in the spirit of the constitution"* (Aristotle, 1999, p. 126).

Accordingly, by looking at the whole educational ideas of Aristotle, we can see that virtues are imbued in his opinion about the purposes of education that target at the suitability and service for the government; the creation of citizens and officers talented and skillful to shoulder missions of the State; the establishment of a regime most appropriate to human characters; the intensification of happiness and advantages for each individual and of leaders' qualities, etc.. However, those virtues are not natural or innate characters of individuals and the State, but are formed from education. Hence, in Aristotle's thoughts, virtues play the role of a political foundation and are

simultaneously a basic content of education for learning is to cultivate virtues or to build the best life; and at the same time, education serves politics. Aristotle considers education as one of the approaches to perform political power most effectively. It is the unity between politics, virtue and education in his thoughts.

By making clear many matters of the State like origin, power, the State nature, etc., Aristotle points out the role of the State is training citizens in term of virtue. The main duty of the State is directing citizens to right activities, teaching them to head to a noble goal of life and to stay firm in that life. Citizens will be brave, calm, free, noble and will perform justice, express their behaviors as if they are perfect friends. In short, they are *"nice and kind"* persons. Cultivating the citizens to become virtuous ones is extremely important. When a country has their citizens who are well-educated and moral, it must, of course, become better and the political regime will be more stable.

According to Aristotle, if members of a country are real citizens, they have to take part in opportunities that the country produces. *"Those who possess ability to participate in discussions or management of national private law become citizens of that country; and generally speaking, the state is an entity of citizen which is enough for purposes of life"*. Aristotle states that citizen character of a person is not generated due to that person having been born and settled in some country. Citizens in the democracy are different from those in the first regime. Therefore, education to match the model of government can produce proper citizens best serving the political regime.

In Aristotle's view, there is only one criterion to specify a citizen's character: A citizen is the one who has the right to take part in political affairs and hold many positions in the government, *"there are many different kinds of citizen, a citizen in the deepest meaning is the one who has honor in the State"*. Together with those rights, citizens need to have responsibilities towards the country. He tightly glues rights and responsibilities together when discussing about citizen's nature. He displays pictures to compare: sailors on a ship keep it safe to arrive at an intended place. Like citizens, the final purpose is the maintenance of the regime safety, which is defined as the common *"virtue"* of all citizens. Aristotle says *"The help towards community is the common work of them all. This community is the constitution, thus virtue of citizens must relate to the constitution in which he is a member"*. Citizens, in spite of taking the position of leaders or normal persons, have to have knowledge as well as competence to guide or obey. *"An excellent citizen must possess both of the capacities (rule and comply), he should be clear in how to govern a free person and how to obey like a free one – these are virtues of a citizen"*. Aristotle also particularly requires an extra quality in leaders apart from what all citizens have: *"People who never learn obedience will be unable to become a good leader"* and *"the perfect officer is a generous and wise one, and that anyone in the role of a politician will have to be a wise one. Several people say that educating leaders must be a special kind of education"*,

wisdom is a characteristic of a leader. Hence, Aristotle realizes the role of education in training useful citizens for the State. It is true that by means of education citizens gain enough competence to perform their rights and responsibilities and train their skills, experience to be inured to become a person skillful in both conducting and serving the regime. Thus, citizens are able to attend activities that bring goodness for the country. Hence, Aristotle affirms that education is a national mission. The State keeps responsible for not only organizing an ordered and ruled life, bringing a good life for individuals and community, but also organizing the optimum education to generate a qualified workforce for society.

3. Discussion

Twenty-one centuries have gone by, Aristotle's educational ideas, despite having overcome distances of time and space, are still meaningful to present time. Globalization has given lots of opportunities and challenges, required countries to cooperate and compete with each other. To meet that demand, to push the countries out of difficulties and to stay firm in integration, educating and training people is an extremely important mission; for education generates persons who are intellectual and creative etc. and especially the core of education is to produce moral people. The education of virtue and lifestyle is one of essential contents in which the focus is on the youth, pupils and students.

Therefore, it is education to create for the country future hosts who are virtuous and talent, aware of their responsibilities towards society, competent enough to absorb knowledge and shoulder missions, active in catching opportunities, etc. to foster the country to be rich and strong. Hence, virtue has to be an extremely important matter and is always the initial goal of education in every country, which proves that ideas about education and the relation between education and politics that Aristotle mentions are still historically meaningful to us.

The opposite side of the globalization has caused some alarming problems such as: a not-small part of the youth is depraved, unconscious of great values in traditional virtues of the nation; lacks ideals for their life, accepts unhealthy lifestyle, relies on others; prefers enjoyment, looks down on labour; concerns only themselves rather than other people; lacks self-awareness, often puts the blame on others, becomes dishonesty and irresponsibility, neglects present situation, refuses participation in community activities; involves bad habits, imitation, wastefulness, immoderate adoration for idols, etc.. There are many young people behaving unmannerly, showing the shortage of respect to the poor, disgusting and staying away from the ill, the disable... More seriously, education in schools is getting worse, crimes and social evils are increasing.

School violence does not end at struggles, fights, or quarrels but also causes many murders. Another deeply worrying problem in the recent years is that educated youth getting involved in criminal cases is also rising. The fact that moral education is degrading results in the increase of crimes and social evils, which has become a concern and an urgent matter in many countries and is requiring appropriate and timely solutions.

To solve those problems, in our opinion, we have to simultaneously carry out the following approaches: Firstly, there is a close connection between family, school and society in education in which the role of family is fundamental, of school is decisive and of society is important. Secondly, teachers are trained to be conscientious and diligent with their career, always self-improve their virtue, cultivate their mind to become a perfect example and promptly adjust learners' wrong behaviors. Thirdly, the necessity for students, pupils to experience the reality, visit historical remains or different areas of the country to meet hard-working and poor people; concurrently the youth is assisted to directly participate in social-political life of the country, make friends with exemplars. Real people, real works will form in the youth sympathy and a fully meaningful experience that strongly impact their thoughts and emotion as well as wake up the pride and the desire of the youth. Fourthly, organizing many programs considerably emphasizing the humanity, campaigns and movements on a large scale are launched extensively together with lots of activities of culture, music, sports, etc. from which active and positive young persons are praised and awarded, encouragement and reminder are timely given to other young individuals so that they can strive for self-improvement. Fifthly, law system should be reinforced to make it stricter and clearer.

The dignity of qualities that officers need to possess is able to drive the majority of people to such great things as loyalty to the established constitution, the most effective management competence, virtue and justice appropriate with every form of government that Aristotle mentions and all of that have been still considered as "golden criteria" so far to selectively choose officials. The leading requirement refers to the loyalty then come talent and virtue. The message Aristotle leaves us is like a reminder in selecting personnel for the State organization that must be based on competence of selected ones and that work must be reasonably arranged for those who are skillful in it. The chosen are the ones who have ability to meet requirements of work and own an absolutely faithful spirit. It is necessary to contemplate the effectiveness of work to assess official's quality. Therefore, the State officials must be competent and virtuous. The emphasis on leaders' qualities also expresses a great educational meaning as a living example is worthier than a hundred speeches.

The appropriation of education with the government model that Aristotle discusses about not only has a profound significance for the period of city states or countries coexisting together, but is particularly paid attention in our age. Besides, the concentration should be emphasized on the development of working skills and methods, competence, professional knowledge and proficiency which help the young gain enough stuff and ability to adapt to rapid changes of society. Thus, we can deeply feel the ideas Aristotle puts forward, education aims at making the spirit of constitution imbued so that all people avoid doing things influential in the safety of the regime.

In the present stage, the leaders are required to be strong-willed, determined, enthusiastic, and creative in their work. To promote those qualities in official and civil servants, that the State uses them rightly to their trained professions, simultaneously establishes policies for officials and civil servants to encourage their talents, arranges work suitable for their competence are basic and necessary missions. The State operation is fairly complicated and plays a crucial role for the whole social life, the existence and growth of the nation. That is why it is essential to train officials and civil servants rightly with skills and majors in State management. Officials with other majors are not absolutely used in State management, which helps avoid the state *"every organization is at the same time overstaffed and short-staffed"* due to the fact that workforce is plentiful but highly qualified staff remains deficient, recruitments concentrate on relatives or *"descendants of an influential family"* and ignore the top criterion that is talent and virtue.

If in the past Aristotle affirms that the government needs to take control over the education, the State, nowadays, always keeps its role in managing and orienting the education to match the demands and the development of society because the honorable missions of education are to raise people's intellectual standards, to train human resources, and to develop talents.

Aristotle widens subject of education to the whole population and advocates setting up a system of comprehensive education. That is the vital factor leading to the solid growth of a country. A society whose members are all well-behaved, well-educated, intellectual, and knowledgeable will surely be an advanced and civilized community. Concurrently, a system of national education is constructed fairly fully with all grades and levels from education in nursery school, high school to university and postgraduate ones, which generates advantages for all people to learn and study throughout their life. In spite of facing lots of adversities and challenges, and problems that are still unclear and unsold, that action program has brought back the ideas that Aristotle proposed thousands years ago.

4. Conclusion

With the thoughts of enlightening humanity, Aristotle always concerns and seeks an ideal politic institution in order to bring the most positive things for people. The considerable desire of the thinker is driving the society out of the crisis and the sluggishness. Aristotle realizes in there the essentiality of education towards cures for defects of present society, limitation on depravity of authorities, appeasement of bitter conflicts in the society heart, etc. Therefore, in his thoughts, education must aim at subject in large scale – the whole population; education must be inclusive in physicality, mentality and spirit. When a citizen has enough competence and virtue, he will certainly be the person who efficiently serves the government, awake to their role and responsibility and be the one who will try hard to preserve the regime. That is the close relationship between education and politics, in other words, education must suit and target at serving the politics in his ideas.

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