

Plato's Concept of Education in 'Republic' and Aristotle's Concept of Education in 'Politics'

Plato'nun 'Cumhuriyet' ve Aristo'nun 'Politika' Adlı Eserlerinde Eğitim Kavramı

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze Plato's and Aristotle's concepts of education. The study focuses on Plato's educational thoughts in Republic and Aristotle's theory of education in Politics. Since Plato's thoughts are rather philosophical in a way that they do not involve many practical applications to schooling, Aristotle's thoughts on education are emphasized within the scope of this study. The results of the study indicate that virtue plays an important role in creating a virtuous society. In order to create a virtuous society, we need to educate the body, desires, soul and reason of the individual.

Keywords: Philosophy of education, concept of education, history of thought.

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, Plato'nun 'Cumhuriyet' ve Aristo'nun 'Politika' adlı eserlerinde yer alan eğitim ile ilgili temel kavramları ve görüşleri incelemektir. Teorik ve tarihsel karşılaştırmaya dayalı bu çalışmada, Aristo'nun 'Politika' adlı eserine vurgu yapılmış ve eğitim kavramı ana hatlarıyla irdelenmiştir. Çalışmada, erdemli bir toplum oluşturabilmek için erdemli insanlar yetiştirmek gerektiği ve bunu gerçekleştirmek için kişinin akıl, beden ve arzularının eğitilebileceği fikri tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Eğitim felsefesi, eğitim kavramı, düşünce tarihi.

Introduction

The meaning and philosophical foundations of education have been analyzed from different perspectives over the years (Barrow, 1975; Chambliss, 1971; Ebenstein, 1969; Lodge, 1947; McClintock; Williams, 1903). Philosophy asks questions about the nature of things and analyzes them. *What is knowledge? What are the characteristics of basic education? What is the good citizen or educated individual? What are the goals of education? What are the basic principles of democratic education?* Questions like these require a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical foundations of education. From ancient times to the present, thinkers have attempted to discuss the role of true meaning of education and schooling. Many scholars who have a profound impact on our understanding of the meaning of schooling and the world are distinguished philosophers of their times such as Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, John Frederich Herbart, R u m i , Farabi, William James, John Dewey, Maria Montessori, and Jean Piaget among many others. Most of the leading philosophers interested in education in some ways because of the crucial role of education in creating a virtuous society and individual as well as state which they spent a great deal of time for analyzing.

Plato and Aristotle are the first two thinkers of philosophy as well as of education. Their ideas about education still have profound impact on schooling. Both Plato and Aristotle discuss the principles of existence. 'Ideas' and 'forms' are fundamental concepts of these two thinkers. For Plato, it is important to separate universal ideas from the material world of particular things. He believes

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that material world of men is less perfect than the universal or ideal world. In books VI and VII, Plato thinks that the world of particulars that the bounded by space and time and mediated us through our senses are uninformative (Plato, 1991). As Howie (1968, 14) points out, Plato believes "our physical environment cannot educate us because it does not contain within us the materials of reality." In contrast, Aristotle develops and forms his own thinking about the world.

Unlike Plato, the material world becomes an important part of our journey in understanding the world. "Man must start his educational journey not with pure thinking divorced from the materials of sense experience but with all that he has ready at hand in this present life, that is his intellect and his perceptions of physical environment in which he lives and of which he is a part" (Howie, 1968, 15). Aristotle's thinking and method starts from the particular and moves on inductively to ideas of generality. Since experience is the starting point in our understanding of the world or materials surrounding us, the theory of education should emphasize and start from sense of experience. This article does not discuss their philosophical and political ideas. Instead, their specific ideas on education and their applications to schooling were analyzed. It is obvious that their thinking on philosophical subjects should be understood as an integral part of the whole. Hence, the purpose of this article was to analyze Plato's and Aristotle's theories of education. The study focuses on Plato's educational thoughts in '*Republic*' and Aristotle's theory of education in '*Politics*.' Since Plato's thoughts are philosophical ones that do not contain practical applications to schooling, Aristotle's thoughts on education were emphasized because of the scope of this study.

Plato's Theory of Education

Plato (427-347 B. C.) was the first great educator and the founder of educational thought (Cooney, Cross, and Trunk, 1993). He was not the first teacher in the western world. Before him, sophists were teachers in Athens. Plato was the founder of the first Academy in Athens where he and many others practiced the activity of learning and teaching. The teachers and students of that time were very talented and gifted. The intellectual environment of Academy created a positive teaching and learning climate at that time of the history. The academy continued his teaching and learning activities more than 900 years until being closed by the emperor Justinian in A. D. 529 (Cameron, 1969; Chermis, 1980; Cooney, Cross, and Trunk, 1993; Fowler, 1990; Glucker, 1978; Lynch, 1972; Sedley, 1981).

Plato's theory of education can be found in the *Republic* and the *Laws* (Lodge, 1950). In these books, Plato develops a framework for his ideas about education. Plato sees education as an important activity of human beings which is the main responsibility of the state. Education refers to the well being of human society. For the well being of a society, some fundamental concepts that are associated with it should be analyzed. For example, he opens his discussion in *Republic* with the concept of justice by asking the question "what is the meaning and nature of justice?" (Plato, 1991, 7). In book I, he attempts to answer this question. *Republic* defines justice as "*speaking the truth and giving back what one takes*" (Plato, 1991, 7). This definition is a narrow one. In broader sense, we can ask that in order to live well and just in a society, what is the meaning of good life? Can we find justice and good life in a good society? A good society is the reflection of human nature. His discussion of human character and its relation or contribution to the good society is essential in understanding of his theory and its relation to the concept of education. In his works, instead of analyzing human soul, Plato prefers analyzing human society. The reason is clear as Nettleship (1968, 3) points out "in society we see man "writ large;" in other words, that in the broad outlines of the state, with its classes, its trade and industry, its military and political institutions, the secret and subtle elements of human nature come to the surface, take visible shape, and are unmistakably legible to observer."

Plato's Concept Education

Plato's educational thoughts cannot be separated from his other works. Education should be understood in the context of ethical and political consideration in his ideal state that all men entitled to *happiness* and *good life*. His educational views are philosophical and theoretical.

Unlike Aristotle, it is very difficult to outline his ideas about education and their applications to schooling and curriculum in Republic. However, it is possible to look at his ideas from four different perspectives. First of all, he talks about the meaning of general education. He feels that education is the main responsibility of the state because education has a significant role in providing a true science and art of politics. So, he talks about the conceptual, theoretical, and impracticable class education. Education is a part of Plato's utopian state in which philosophers should rule. In the laws, he discusses a practical code of laws for a state (Cooper, 1997; Kraut, 1992).

The role of education in this state is "to assure the success and perpetuity of a state" (Williams, 1903, 165). In Plato's view, general education should be provided for two classes. "The members of base-metal class, subdivided into husbandmen and craftsmen, are to be educated, each for the special employment for which he is best fitted. Those of the precious metal, or ruling or warlike class, are to be educated in all that gives strength and harmony to both body and soul" (Williams, 1903, 166). According to Plato, the goal of education is "to produce adults who may successfully contribute to the happiness of the whole community, which themselves enjoying happiness within that community" (Barrow, 1975, 1). Second, he emphasizes the role of abstract sciences in education. Human beings should be trained in abstract sciences, numbers, geometry and astronomy in order to compel the soul to use pure intelligence in the search after pure health. According to Williams (1903, 166), "this training, by proceeding from the visible and audible to being intellectually apprehended, is to be preparative for dialectics or reflection, which gradually draws and leads upwards the eye of the soul to the attainment of the sublimes philosophic wisdom, and which Plato thus establishes as a bulwark of moral training, and a complement of scientific education." Third, he pays attention to the importance and the role of gymnastic and music in education. In Republic, he provides general guidelines about education as well as gymnastic and music which he, time to time, he mentions through the book:

- "What is the education? Isn't difficult to find a better one that discovered over a great expanse of time? It is, of course, gymnastic for bodies and music for the soul"

- "Yes, it is."

- "Won't we begin educating in music before gymnastic?"

- "Of course" (Plato, 1991, 54).

In general, the purpose of the gymnastic is to obtain lightness and grace of movement. Fitness and health are necessary to perform many activities. For example, for guardians the body strength is essential for the success. When human beings exercise the gymnastic they feel happy. "The soul, and not body, is the primary object of "gymnastic" as well as of "music" and appeals to the fact that exclusive devotion to physical exercise affects the character no less markedly than exclusive devotion literary and aesthetic culture. The "truth is that "music educates, not the soul merely, but specifically the "philosophical part of the soul through the medium of the eye and ear; while "gymnastic," through bodily exercise, not only produces bodily health and strength, but disciplines the psychological element of "sprit" (McClintock, 1968, 28; Plato, 1991, 88-90). Finally, Plato provides guidelines about the role of censorship and literature in education. McClintock (1968, 36) points out that "if they (ideas) really vital to human life and character he (teacher) would have retained them, trusting to the child's mind to assimilate what was valuable, the later education to preserve or to rectify its sense of historical truth." Further he explains that there are literature of two kind, true or false; it is with the latter and that education must begin, for the literature which we read to children consists of myths, and myths, speaking generally, are false though they contain elements of truths as well (Plato, 1991, 54).

Aristotle's Theory of Education in Politics

Aristotle was born about B. C. 389 in Thrace which was near the borders of present Macedonia. His parents were wealthy. His father was a medical doctor who published many medical works.

When he decided to attend the academy of Plato, he was eighteen years old. He went to Athens and spent almost twenty years and enjoyed the intellectual environment of the school. Even though there is little information about his intellectual life at that time, Davidson (1907, 157) points out that Aristotle “divided his days between writing and teaching, taking his physical exercise while engaged in the latter occupation. In the mornings, he gave lectures to a narrow circle, in a strictly formal and scientific way, upon the higher branches of science; while in the afternoons he conducted conversations upon more popular themes with a less select audience. The former were called his esoteric, the latter his “exoteric discourses.” There is no reliable information about when he completed his works; he probably completed his great works between B. C. 335 to 323 including *Logic*, *Metaphysics*, *Ethics*, and *Politics*. During his years in Athens, he traveled and made some observations including spending some years at the court of Philip of Macedonia (Ebenstein, 1969). After leaving Athens for some years, he returned once again to Athens in 335 B. C. His main goal was to set up a school of his own which was called Lyceum. This school contributed a lot to the development of knowledge. The teaching program of this school included every branch of knowledge (Barnes, 1995; Davidson, 1900; Ebenstein, 1969; Omstein and Levine, 1981).

Theory of Education in Politics

The purposes of Education: In *Politics*, Aristotle discusses the importance and role of education in books VII and VIII. Even though the book as whole has very important educational lessons, the article focuses on practical applications of his thoughts to the educational system or curriculum.

In chapter three of Book VIII, Aristotle clearly defines the purposes of education. He points out at four basic practical purposes of education as (1) reading and writing, (2) physical training, (3) music, and (4) drawing. “There are some subjects which are usually included in education. They are reading and writing, physical training, and music; and some would also add drawing.” (Aristotle, 1995, 300-301, 1337b23). These classifications and subjects have objectives in education. According to Aristotle, “reading and writing, together with drawing are generally regarded as useful for the *practical purposes of life* in a number of different ways. Physical training is commonly taught to *foster courage*. But there is doubt about music. At present, indeed, it is mainly studied as if its object were pleasure; but the real reason which originally led to its being made a subject of education is that our very nature seeks to power, not only to work in the right way but also to use leisure well; indeed leisure, as we would once more repeat, is the basis of everything.” (Aristotle, 1995, 301, 1337b23). As it is clear in this paragraph, he first hesitates to point out the meaning and the purposes of music while he later relates the concept of music as a part of the leisure of the life. Moreover, he talks more about music and its role in the psychological development of the young in the following pages of the chapter. So, it becomes obvious that leisure is the fundamental principles of Aristotle’s thinking because leisure refers to the best life. He states that “it is also true that leisure is preferable, and is more of an end” (Aristotle, 1995, 301, 1337b23).

It is very hard to interpret from this paragraph the real meaning of leisure with its relation to the character formation or education. He attempts to make distinction between work and play and their relation to the purpose of education but still he does not relate the concept of leisure to the purposes of education. The connection between work and play clearly stated as “play is a thing to be chiefly used in connection with work. Aristotle says that “play should be admitted into our city at the proper times, and should be applied as a king of medicine.” (Aristotle, 1995, 301, 1337b23). Even though he did not list the concept of leisure in purposes of education, he points out the importance of it. So, educators should be aware of the importance of leisure education in their curriculum. Those who work need relaxation in modern thought as pointed out by Aristotle centuries ago. According to him, leisure means pleasure, happiness, and well being. “This is the condition, not of those who are not at work, but of those who are at leisure. Those who work do so with a view unattained. But happiness is an end; and all men think of it as accompanied by pleasure and not by pain” (Aristotle, 1995, 301, 1337b23). The relationship between leisure and the

branches of learning in later paragraphs becomes clearer. As mentioned above, even though he failed to point out the goal of music in education, he attempts to develop a rationale for including music in curriculum. He says that some branches of learning and education should be seen as a view of living a life of leisure. He states that "it is clear, too, that these forms of education and of learning are valued for their own sake, while those studied with a view to work should be regarded merely as a matter of necessity and valued as means to other things. This will explain why our forefathers made music a part of education. They did not do so because it was necessity; it is nothing of the sort. Nor did they do so because it is useful, as reading and writing are useful for money-making, for household management, for the acquisition of knowledge, and for many political activities. Drawing may be held to be useful in helping us to judge more correctly the works of different craftsmen. Nor is music, like physical training, useful in improving health and strength. It has no visible effect upon either. We are thus left with its value for living a life of leisure" (Aristotle, 1995, 301-302, 1337b23). These discussions show us the importance of the selection of subjects in education and their objectives as well as their relation to the general purposes of education. Every subject that we choose to teach the young in schools should be analyzed and discussed. These fundamental ideas about education's goals and their relations to the development of the young are still used in contemporary schools. It is the education which refers to the reflection of a society. The relationship between educational goals and their relation to the social physical development of a young and ultimate outcome of education such as good citizen and good society pointed out by Aristotle. In chapter 3 of Book VIII, Aristotle concludes that the subjects which are going to be taught should be the useful ones.

The meaning and Nature of Education:

In chapter two of Book VIII, Aristotle, discusses the nature of education. What is the meaning of education? What the young must learn? These are the two essential questions posed in this chapter. Aristotle agrees that there is no specific answer to these questions. He states that it is not clear whether or not the young must learn either with "a view of goodness" or "to the best life" and whether education should be directed mainly to the understanding, or mainly to developing moral character." He further explains that "if we look at the actual practice, the result is confusing. It throws no light on the problem whether these should be training in those pursuits which are useful in life, or which make for goodness, or those which go beyond the ordinary run [of knowledge]." (Aristotle, 1995, 229, 1337a33). Since there is confusion or disagreement about the fundamental concepts of education, Aristotle feels that there would be no agreement about the right methods of practicing or teaching of these concepts of 'goodness', 'the best life', and 'moral character.' Since there is no agreement about the nature of education and subjects that are to be taught, Aristotle suggests that we have to teach subjects that everyone would be agree on. The practical purposes of subjects are very important in his understanding of education. But that does not mean that every useful subject should be taught. Accordingly, he makes distinction by dividing the occupation into two aspects. He explains that "occupations are divided into those which are fit for freemen and those which are unfit for them; and clearly children should take part in useful occupations only to the extent that they do not turn these taking part in them into mechanical types. The term 'mechanical' should properly be applied to any occupation, art, or soul, or mind of a freeman unfit for the pursuit and practice of goodness. We may accordingly apply the word 'mechanical' to any art, or craft which adversely affects men's physical fitness, and to any employment which is pursued for the sake of gain; these preoccupy and debase the mind. Much the same may also be said of those branches of knowledge which are fit for a freeman" (Aristotle, 1995, 299-300, 1337b4). As it is obvious that so far he develops principles about which subject should be taught. The principles are (1) the principle of useful and (2) the principle of agreement on subjects.

Stages of Aristotle's Education

One of the most important contributions of Aristotle's to modern education is his explicit statements concerning the relationship between level of education and ages of individuals or periods of life. Age is a very important element in both ancient and modern education because curriculum

or the content of education should be designed in a way that a child's level of comprehension and the content of curriculum are at the same level. At the end of chapter seventeen of Book VII, Aristotle addresses the issue of age and its relation to the comprehension and psychological development of the young. He states that "there should be two different periods of education. The first is from the age of 7 to that puberty; the second from puberty to the age of 21. Those who divide man's life into seven-year periods are on the whole right" (Aristotle, 1995, 297, 1336b37). It is obvious in his discussion that there is a strong relationship between age and the form of education. The forms or stages of education are clearly classified in *Politics*. These forms of education can be listed as follows:

1. Training of the body
2. Training of desires (The unreasonable part of the soul)
3. Training of the mind (The reasonable part of the soul)

According to Aristotle, the first two refers to a kind of education as way of habituation and the last one as an education by way of speech and reason. Habituation, speech and reason place an important role in his formal education. Even though it is difficult to separate the relationship of these stages from one another, it is obvious that the content of subjects as well as the level of topics which are going to be taught in the classroom should be put in order to help positive psychological and social development of the young. Therefore, in Aristotle discussion, the order of teaching subject becomes very important. As he points out that "*first, in human life (as in all life generally), birth has a first beginning, but the end attained from such a beginning is only a step to some further end. It is therefore with a view to these that we should regulate, from the first, the birth and training in habits [of citizens]. Secondly, as soul and body are two, so there are also two parts of the soul, the irrational and the rational; and there are also two corresponding status of these parts-appetite and thought. By births, the body is prior to the soul, and the irrational part of the soul to the rational. This is proved by the fact that anger, will, and desire are visible in children from their very births; while reasoning and thought naturally appear, as they grow older. The conclusion which follows is obvious. Children's bodies should be given attention before their souls; and their appetites should be the next part of them to be regulated. But the regulation of their appetites should be intended for the benefit of their minds-just as the attention given to their bodies should be intended for the benefit of their souls*" (Aristotle, 1995, 289-90, 1334b6).

The order of subjects and activities in schooling are clearly defined many centuries ago by Aristotle. The importance of these stages has been studied from different perspectives by modern psychologists as well. Aristotle created a framework for designing curriculum. As he talks about the stages of education, he also mentions who is going to regulate education and these stages. In the first chapter of Book VIII, he says that "all would be agreeing that the legislators should make the education of the young his chief and foremost concerns" (Aristotle, 1995, 298, 1337a11). So, the role of state in educational processes becomes obvious since the state has to provide public education. The relationship between state and state's contribution was emphasized in the chapter of Book III. According to him, the form of education should be related to the form of constitution. This point is important one and has valuable contribution to the modern understanding of education as well. The relationship between regimes and education was also emphasized. There is no doubt that democratic type of education creates and sustains the democratic state and this is also true for all types of regimes as well.

Physical Training and the Goals of Music Education

Aristotle discusses the role and time of physical training in book 7 of chapter 4. According to him, "the right policy in regard to physical training is to avoid an excessive early training, which stunts the proper development of the body. Light exercise till the age of puberty, followed by a period of three years spent in study, which should be followed in turn by a period of hard exercise and strict diet-this is the best system. The young should not be made to work hard with body and mind simultaneously." (Aristotle, 1995, 303). The paragraph states that the early years of education should emphasize the importance of physical training. The later years of education should emphasize and

practice subjects which are directly related to the development of the mind.

Like physical training, Aristotle also believes in the role of music in the social and physical development of the young. As mentioned earlier, the subjects of education are listed as reading and writing, physical training, drawing, and music. At the end of the *Politics*, he points out the role and importance of music education. The purposes of music education are identified by Aristotle as (1) amusement and relaxation; (2) moral training; (3) cultivation of the mind. He further explains the meaning of these aims. Aristotle believes that amusement cannot be the goal of education. He attempts to make a distinction among amusement, the goal of moral training as well as the cultivation of the mind. "Amusement cannot be the aim: if it were, we should not want to have children taught to play music themselves; we should be content to let them get amusement by listening to the playing of others. But the same would be true if moral training or the cultivation of the mind were regarded as the purpose of music. We may therefore leave aside for the moment the question whether children should play themselves and turn back to consider independently the place of music in education. The pleasure which music produces may serve the purpose of amusement as well as that of cultivation of the mind and the right use of leisure. But music may also serve the purpose of moral training. It can supply 'images' of the virtues, and by inducing us to take pleasure in these 'images' it can induce us to take pleasure in the virtues themselves" (Aristotle, 1995, 305). In this paragraph as well as in other chapters of *Politics*, music education is an integral part of Aristotle's the 'best of the life.' However, he fails to prove or discuss in a systematic way the role and place of music in education. In fact, he mentions that his intentions are to talk about the problem of the music education rather than identifying the goals of music education. The issue of music education is a complex one in Aristotle's thinking. It can be said, however, that Aristotle sees music as one of the greatest of the pleasures. He believes that music has the power of gladdening the hearts. So, it should be placed in education. But music does not help us achieve our end, but it *serves* as a means of relaxation.

Conclusion

Plato and Aristotle are the founders of the theory of education. Plato's contribution to education is not directly targeting the content and the subject of teaching and curriculum. His comprehensive and systematic theories are the part of his philosophy. His basic concern is his society. What kind of society we want to see or live in? How we can educate the citizens of this society? The relationship between human nature and their reflection to the society were emphasized in *Republic*. Since he believes that human beings need society, the reflection of educated citizen to the society is a powerful way of living a good life. If we educate citizens, society gets paid back. Education in his society helps to create a noble character. Like society, education helps people to humanize themselves in their relations to one another. As in Aristotle, Plato also believes strong relationship between constitution and education. His contribution to the modern educational thinking is best summarized by Williams in 1903. He points out that his ideas are "great interest, not more from their antiquity and the eminence of their sources, than from the fact that several of them,-such as the necessity of universal education and compulsory education, the need of care in selecting literature for the young, and the importance of beginning any reform of national manners in the schools,-which are of recent introduction into educational practice, originated with the famous Athenian philosopher, twenty-two centuries ago."

Unlike Plato, careful observation controls Aristotle's way of thinking. His determination in education is closely related to the practice which makes him break away from the idealism of Plato. Therefore, he prefers to emphasize the possibilities of life rather than insisting on idealism. In the *Politics*, first, Aristotle defines and discusses the purposes of education by emphasizing the subjects of reading and writing, physical training, music as well as drawing in education. Second, he points out the meaning and nature of education. Even though he is not sure that what should be the nature of education, some concepts places an important role in his discussions. These concepts

includes 'goodness,' 'the best life,' and 'moral character.' Since he feels that there is confusion in these fundamental concepts of education, Aristotle points out that there would be no agreement about the right methods of practicing or teaching of these concepts. Third, his ideas about the relationship between the level of education and ages of individuals are well defined. This age is very important because curriculum of schooling or the content of education should be designed in a way that a child's level of comprehension and the content of curriculum should be at the same level. Finally, he made the role of physical training and music in the psychological and social development of the youth very clear. Physical training helps to foster courage while music gives amusement, relaxation, as well as means to cultivation of the mind.

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