

Plato and aristotle
saw education
philosophy essay



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Plato and Aristotle saw education as a prime source of the individual and the chief function of the state. It was a necessity to mankind and a remedy to all problems. Education should not only be in place when children are young, but it should be upheld until adulthood. Its goal was to educate men to be just and nurture the soul. In this paper, I will defend that though both philosophers believed that education will nurture the soul, they both had very different concepts of that theory. I will also examine the restrictions and regulations for all subjects that are to be taught in the city.

Plato was born in 427 B. C. into a wealthy family that played a prominent part in Athenian politics. At the age of twenty, Plato became a student of Socrates. After the execution of Socrates in 399 B. C., Plato went into exile[1]. He became unhappy with the corruption of society and sought to find a remedy. He concluded that society would not change until philosophers became rulers. In 386 B. C., Plato founded the Academy, an institution that taught subjects ranging from mathematics to astronomy[2]. Plato taught at the Academy until his death in 347 B. C. during the 4th and 5th century in Athens, all citizens were literate[3]. However, education was private and only the wealthy could afford it. This reason might explain Plato's interest in expanding education to everyone including women in *The Republic*.

Aristotle was born in 384 B. C. in Stagirus, a Greek colony. His father was a physician to the king of Macedonia. His father sent him to Athens to study philosophy in Plato's Academy. When Plato died, he returned to Macedonia in 338 B. C to tutor Alexander the Great. Shortly after Alexander conquered Athens, Aristotle returned to Athens to set up his own school called the

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Lyceum[4]. After Alexander's death in 323 B. C., Athens rebelled against Macedonia's rule. Because of his connections with Alexander, Aristotle fled to Chalcis where he soon died at the age of 62.

Aristotle on Happiness

The ultimate aim of education according to Aristotle was not only to nurture the soul by attaining knowledge but also attaining happiness which would promote balance between the soul and the body. So then what is happiness? He does not think happiness enjoyment, pleasure or satisfaction. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle spends a great deal of time describing happiness. He states that happiness is the highest good which we are seeking and an activity that is desired for its own sake. It is never chosen for the sake of something else. It measures how well you have lived your life. "One day or short time does not make a man blessed and happy ."[5]He means that one cannot measure whether they have lived a happy life until it is over. For this reason, we cannot call a child or an animal happy. A child is not capable of acquire happiness and animal is not capable in participating in this activity. It is the ultimate goal of life because there is nothing further than happiness.

Since happiness is a good filled with excellent activities, then how do we acquire it? He comes up with three theories: it's either by nature or a gift. It clearly cannot be by nature. When it comes to nature, things are arranged the best way possible. He implies that this is done by chance and to leave happiness up to chance would not be right. Next, is to determine if it is a god-given gift. It could be possible, but Aristotle believed that gods do not

just give anything away. They set patterns for us to follow. Therefore, happiness must be something that is acquired through some kind of learning or training.

Happiness is an activity in the soul that is in accordance with excellence and virtue. Virtue according to Aristotle is equivalent to excellence. It is something that is learned through practice and habits. There are two kinds of virtues: intellectual virtues and moral virtues.[6]Intellectual virtues are developed through teaching and include virtues such as reasoning, wisdom and understanding which enables us to attain the truth. Moral virtues are developed through habit and are concerned with our emotions and desires. They include virtues such as generosity and self-control. Moral virtue is also a mean between two extremes which are deficiency and excess. Let's take courage for example. The deficiency of courage would be having too much fear, cowardice, and overvalues the mean. The excess would be stupidity, foolhardiness, and too little fear and poor judgment. Randall Curren asserts that the separation of the virtues follows a pattern with the separation of the soul.[7]The soul consists of two elements: irrational and rational. The irrational element has two parts: first part is common to all living things and the second part is vegetative in nature. The first part is responsible for the nurture and growth and is most active in sleep. It also includes appetites, desire and partakes in reason.[8]The rational element of the soul has two parts: one part obeys the rule of the reason which is used to guide the body, and the other part conceives rational rules. We can then identify moral virtues with the desiring part of the soul which belongs to the irrational element and intellectual virtues with the rational part of the soul. Thus, the

purpose of this description is to show the significance of moral education.

Aristotle attempts to show that moral education is not something that can be taught through instruction alone. It requires close supervision to make sure the children act correctly.

We can then summarize that the aim of education is to attain happiness. As stated earlier, children are incompetent of attaining happiness at their age. This is why they need teachers to train them to be virtuous. Therefore, ethics and education must fuse together. A happy individual is virtuous, but virtue is only acquired through education. In addition, since virtue is knowledge, then society should be remodeled upon this principle through education. This also helps create a virtuous polis and ensures that the citizens are happy. So it is through education that a polis is formed.

Aristotle on Education

In the Three Historical Philosophies of Education, William Frankena states that education existed so that certain characters of the soul would be produced when the child was young. The theory of education is part of what Aristotle calls " Politics." Politics is a practical science and it consists of three kinds of disciplines: theoretical science, productive science, and practical science.[9]Theoretical science such as mathematics, theology, and physics set out to know the truth about the world for its own sake. Productive science is concerned with making things useful or beautiful. Lastly, practical science is concerned with human action.[10]Politics is the art that uses products of all other practical sciences and does not make anything to be used by the any other art. Politics also produces happiness in the state,

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which is known to be highest of all goods. Therefore, Politics must be contributory to education.

Burnet agrees that when children are born, their diet must consist of only milk because it is best adapted to their bodies.[11]To keep their limbs strong, their daily routine must consist of any movements they can make. Aristotle also insists that children must be accustomed to the cold at an early age. He asserts that it is a great preparation for military service. Aristotle divides the stages of life into two groups: seventh year till puberty, and puberty till twenty-first. At the age of seven, they must begin their lesson. Aristotle also believes that education should be supervised. But first he considers two questions: whether supervision of children should be public or private, and what the character of supervision should.[12]Education should be the same for all and therefore education must be public and not private. Aristotle claims that it would not be right for any citizen to think that they belonged to themselves. Burnet urges that children should feel that they are part of a larger group, therefore, part of a larger state.[13]Since education is public, the next thing to determine is the character of education and what subjects should be taught. Aristotle contemplates whether intellect or character should be the main concern in education. So, should education be training in what is useful in life or what promotes goodness? The children should be taught things that bring useful knowledge. They must be taught arts and studies that bring goodness.

Aristotle presents four subjects that should be taught in education: reading and writing, gymnastics, music, and drawing. He briefly describes reading and writing, drawing and gymnastics. He saw reading and writing as “ the <https://assignbuster.com/plato-and-aristotle-saw-education-philosophy-essay/>

highest utility for practical.”[14]Reading and writing are used to pursue knowledge and intellectual excellence. Next, drawing is to be taught so that man can be able to see the bodily beauty. It used to help men form correct judgment in art and to avoid making mistakes in buying or selling them. According to Aristotle, gymnastics would promote courage.[15]He insisted that upon the age of puberty, gymnastic exercises should be mandated in children. After puberty is over, three years should be spent on other studies. Aristotle argues that it is wrong for a man to work hard the mind and body at the same time.[16]These two exercises are opposed to one another.

However, when it comes to music, he was confused as to whether it should be part of the curriculum. Music is thought to be an art of pleasure. It is not a necessary thing useful thing. Aristotle contemplates if it should be used for amusement or leisure. Burnet insists that amusement only exists for the sake of rest, which is pleasant.[17]Leisure involves pleasure and beauty, which creates happiness. It is the right employment for men to enjoy leisure. Aristotle claims that nature requires that we not only work but have leisure and use it well. Conclusively, music was not admitted because it is useful like reading or writing but because it brings intellectual enjoyment in leisure. One reason to study music is because it transforms the character through imitation. The rhythm and melody in music produce imitations of anger, gentleness, courage and many others. However, many musical modes affect people differently.[18]For example, some of them may make men feel sympathy or anger. Aristotle states that the kind of music that produces the best states of character such as justice, courage and temperance, is deemed acceptable. Next, Aristotle continues by saying that the children should not

study music for professional performances. Professional performances benefit and give pleasure only to the audience. Music is to be studied for its own good not for the good of others. Therefore, Aristotle agrees that the flute should be banned because they require professional skill. The flute is not an instrument that expresses the character because it is too exciting. [19]The flute also gets in the way of using the voice to sing. So perhaps, learning to play the flute is not good for the mind because it only tends to produce pleasure to the listeners and does not benefit the mind of the player in any way.

Last but not least, is the topic about rhythms and melody. We must determine the use of education in music, which is produced by rhythms and melody. Some philosophers have divided melodies into three groups: melodies of character, melodies of action, and melodies of passion or inspiration. All of these modes must be used but not all in the same way. In education, only melodies that express the character shall be accepted. On the other hand, melodies of action and passion may be accepted because they are used in listening to the performances of others. Aristotle goes on further and states that there are two kinds of audiences in music performances: the free and educated, and the unrefined group that consists of laborers, artisans and many others. Professional musicians may play lower sort of music for an audience of lower type.[20]However, as stated earlier, for the purposes of education, only melodies that express the characters should be played.

Plato

The ultimate aim of education according to Plato was to provide nurture to the soul by attaining knowledge. He saw education as a key for society. Its goal was to educate men to be just. His view is different from Aristotle's. Plato believed that attaining knowledge was for the interest of the society and the individual.[21]Therefore, it was virtue by itself. Aristotle believed that the purpose of education was to attain knowledge and also happiness and the only way to attain virtue is through happiness.

According to Plato, the purpose of education is to free the soul and turn it towards the truth.[22]One cannot study Plato's education without reading the Allegory of the Cave, which illustrates how an individual acquires knowledge. Two prisoners are chained and unable to turn their heads; therefore, they can only see what is in front of them. Behind them there is a firelight which allows them to see shadows that are cast by objects. Between the prisoners and the fire there is a wall with puppeteers. The shadows the prisoners see are the only reality they recognize. Now, if the prisoners were forced out of the cave, they would be confused and the sunlight would cause pain to their eyes. Eventually, their eyes would adjust to the light and they would begin to see shadows, reflection and then the objects themselves. Now we should determine the meaning behind the Allegory of the Cave. The cave where the prisoners were held symbolizes a world of ignorance while the prisoners symbolize ignorant people who need to face reality. Their chains would symbolize how the prisoners are being held back from their own understanding and the truth. The shadows, which misrepresent things as they really are, represent what Plato considers the realm of illusion.

[23]Finally, the sun represents reality which is acquired when the prisoners

are released from the chains. Without the sunlight, everything is invisible. The pain caused by the sun symbolizes that learning is a gradual step at a time. First the prisoners could only see the shadows of the objects, next the reflection of the objects, and finally the objects themselves. In the final step, the prisoner is able to gain reality.

This brings up the discussion about The Divided Line. It's divided into four parts which consist of Knowledge, Opinion, Intelligible Realm, and Visible Realm. The lowest objects contain images and sensible objects. Images can be understood as shadows, reflections and illusions and individuals cannot distinguish between real images and illusions. "Sensible objects" are images that are accessed through our senses. These two parts compose the Visible Realm. Next, is Opinion which includes imagination and belief. Imaging is a mental activity where appearances are taken as true reality.[24]It is also the lowest degree of truth that is dominated by secondhand opinions. Belief is a type of knowledge of things that does not grasp the true concept and takes the world as it appears. Imagination and belief is directed by hypothesis and beliefs. Next, is Knowledge which includes understanding and reason.

Understanding uses mathematics but is unable to differentiate real objects and their representations.[25]Therefore, it is also dominated by assumptions and includes of hypotheses that it cannot prove. The highest level of Knowledge is reason. Reason is a mental activity that attempts to prove the hypothesis. Only at this stage can truth be finally discovered. Last but not least, is the Intelligible Realm which deals with the Forms. The Forms provide an explanation of how knowledge is possible. The highest form is the Form is the Form of Good which is the form of intellectual knowledge. This form

sheds light on all other forms and provides understanding. We are now able to see how the mind ascends towards truth. First it begins by barely seeing things and then being able to see but with uncertainty; then moves on to sense perception and opinion; finally we are able to gain truth through reason and understand.

So how does education turn the soul “ towards the light?” education’s main goal must help the soul “ see” the truth. However, you cannot put knowledge into an empty soul just like you cannot put sight into blind person.[26]Plato asserts that the “ eye of the soul”, which is the organ of intellect must be turned toward light but this cannot be done without turning the entire body. According to Plato, the soul had three distinct parts: appetite, spirited, and rational. The rational part of the soul seeks to find the truth, judges what is true and false to make rational decisions. It is also wise and rules the appetitive and spirited part of the soul. The appetitive part of the soul pursues bodily desires such as food and it accepts the rules from the rational part. Lastly, the spirited part of the soul shows emotion and uses reason. It is also courageous, obeys the rational part and rules the appetitive part. A just soul is where the rational part of the soul rules the body, the spirited part of the soul supports the rule, and the appetitive part of the soul follows and obeys the rule. For the “ eye of the soul” to function properly, the entire soul must turn towards the light and be in harmony.

Early Education

From birth and up until the age of three, children should be sheltered from any kind of pain and distress. From the age of four through seventh, the

character of the child must be formed. This means that the child should no longer be spoiled and any wrongful action should result to punishment. The children must also meet at the village temples from the ages of three through six where their lessons will begin.[27]There, the children will be supervised by their nurses and to restrain them from any bad behavior. When the children have reached the age of six, the sexes must be separated. The males will attend lessons for javelin-throwing, slinging and archery.[28]The females too may also join. The problem then arises over which hand children should use to write with. People think that the right and left hand are fit for different tasks. However, the potential of each is just the same. In the Laws, the Athenian gives an illustration:

A Scythian doesn't use his left hand exclusively to fit in the arrow, but uses both hands for both jobs indifferently. There are a lot of other similar examples to be found- in driving chariots, for instance, and other activities- from which we can see that when people train the left hand to be weaker than the right hand they are going against nature (Laws 759a1-7).

This should be kept in mind by the officials while they supervising the children in their lessons. They must make sure that every child uses both their hands and feet equally.

Music and Gymnastics

Plato's education theories first discussion begins in Book 2 in the Republic where Socrates describes the creation of the city. Socrates states that the Guardian, who must be the ruler of the city, must spend most of his time in education. But how would they manage the upbringing of his education?
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Socrates states “ we shall tell tales and recount fable that will serve to educate them. And what better education than that which has been for so long part of our heritage?”[29]Thus he proposes that education includes both physical and cultural courses. That means gymnastic would be used for the body while music would be used for the soul. Gymnastic includes basic training for the body, dancing and training for the war. Music would include poetry, stories and literature.

First let’s begin with the discussion with music. Music was intended to educate the spirited part of the soul which contains emotions and reason. Any negative emotions will be tamed so the children remain unaffected by them. The function of music education is to satisfy the soul with music that is gentle and loving. However, it is just not enough that music alone will nurture the soul; it must be balanced with gymnastics because music alone causes softness in the soul. As stated earlier, music includes stories and poetry. There are two kinds of stories: true and false. Children will have to be educated in both beginning with false .[30]However, children cannot just listen to any tales or fables. Socrates argues that this would cause the children to form opinion and beliefs that could be contrary to the beliefs of their society. To avoid this mistake from happening, education must be censored. The censors must ban tales and fables that they consider harmful while ones that are considered good will be approved. Mothers and nurses will be persuaded to tell children stories that are approved. Socrates gives some examples of some stories that should not be told. One tale describes how Cronos revenged himself on his father. Another tale is how Cronos suffers in the hands of his son, Zeus.[31]Stories like these tell malevolent lies

about the nature of gods. They also teach children to abandon all restraint and punish the misdeeds of their fathers. It must not be permitted in the city to say that gods plot against each other or make war against each other. “ So what are the norms that should govern the telling of tales about the gods[32]?” Gods should always be portrayed as good in an epic, lyre or tragic form. Since god is always good, he must represent as good. Socrates goes further to demonstrate that since a good thing is never harmful and what is not harmful can do no harm or cause no evil. Therefore, a good thing is the source of happiness. Plato tries to emphasize that just because writers and poets do not know historical knowledge regarding gods; it does not mean that they can speak falsely about gods. Socrates proposes a law that writer and speakers must conform and only write good things about gods. Further, mothers are not permitted to frighten their children with the wrong versions of myths about how gods haunt the nights.[33]Plato presents a hostile attitude towards poetry. Public censorship would also be destructive and impossible to do. Poets would be limited by the censorship and would not be allowed to invent any new ideas or explore their imagination. Plato continues by discussing narratives and imitative. He questions if imitation/impersonation should be the governing principle in poetry. [34]Should poets be allowed to exhibit many personalities? Plato asserts that imitation of a good man is acceptable. He should imitate people he is not ashamed of. However, when it comes to someone unworthy or lower than the poet, it would unacceptable. Plato’s main notion is that everyone person in the city has one job. He is not convinced that any person can excel in more than one job. A poet cannot be both a writer and an actor.

Next, Socrates begins the discussion of poetry and prose. The first law of poetry is that gods must be correctly represented in poetry and prose. Any poet who writes otherwise shall be forbidden to present their writings in public. Vocabulary of terror and fear that is used in poetry must be suppressed. Socrates claims that this makes men fear death. He goes on to say that lamentations should be banned and the purpose is so “ that a good man will not think death is a terrible thing.”[35]Man is to be taught that he does not need anyone else. He will lament only a little when he has misfortunes. Homer and other poets must be asked not to portray Achilles as, “ lying on his side, then on his back, and again face down, then rising up distraught and quivering on a beach of the waste and barren sea.”[36]Such poetry must not be permitted. Therefore, lamentation should be banned; however, men and women of lesser account are permitted to read such poetry. Plato has two key points when it comes to poetry: individuals become the character they enjoy reading and personalities are affected. For instance, imagine when a person is reading a piece of poetry that they enjoy. Let’s say that poetry contains lamentations, terror and fear. As they are reading, their emotions are engaged and they are completely affected by it. This could alter their perceptions and cause them to be hot-heads. By censoring poetry, Plato is attempting to prevent man from building a bad character. One problem I see with censorship is the banning of lamentations. Socrates states “ that man has the least need of anyone else.”[37]Does this not teach a man to be prideful? If you were to need some kind of assistance wouldn’t your pride get into the way of you asking? Nettleship states that the man who could face death without flinching was the most worthy to be called a man.[38]A good man does not need to be afraid of death and nor does he

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need to be afraid of his friends' death. Grief over death was seen as unmanly and weak and men were taught to only rely upon themselves.

After poetry comes the discussion about songs and melody. All songs have three parts: words, melody, and rhythm.[39]Words can be sung or said but must follow the rules already laid down. Melodies will not require instruments with many strings. Therefore, no one should manufacture lutes, harps or any multi-stringed instruments. Rhythm will not require any complex beats and express qualities of a brave and orderly life. Rhythm and harmony should conform to the words and not the other way around.[40]When it comes to instruments, only lyres and cithara shall be used in the city. Beginning at the age of thirteen, three years should be spent on learning the lyre. The lyre-master must teach his students to produce notes that are identical in pitch to the words that are being sung. Plato insists that education in music and poetry must come first before everything else. This is because they cause the greatest influence in the soul, which if it is properly trained it will bring grace into the soul. A person who is appropriately educated in these subjects, will welcome and praise beautiful things into his soul. In result, he would become beautiful himself and good.[41]

Next is the discussion of gymnastics. Gymnastics produces strength, health and disciplines the appetitive part of the soul which deals with the desires and urges. Proper gymnastics will cultivate the impulses of violence and produce an individual filled with courage. However, too much attention on gymnastics can cause a man to be filled with pride because of his conscious of strength. His intelligence would be neglected and weak and his courage would begin to sink.[42]Plato insists that athletes must sustain from sweets
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and must maintain their daily routine in order to prevent any dangerous diseases. The aim of gymnastics should not to simply gain strength but awaken and bring more life to the spirited part of the soul.[43]The training of the athletes must prepare them for war. They must be keen in their hearing and sight and must withstand any sudden change they may face.[44]We can conclude then tha