

Aristotle's theory



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Aristotle propounds his critical understanding of the notions of the good, happiness, virtue, and justice in the book entitled *Nicomachean Ethics*. With regard to the concept of 'good', he says that every art or enquiry is always directed towards achieving some good. However, he notes that 'we cannot determine with precision what is 'good' (12).

According to Aristotle, happiness is an activity that involves the soul, says Aristotle. In every virtue, one is sure to find a vice. Therefore, virtue is a state of someone's character, which is gained by rational choice. Only voluntary actions can be blamed or praised. Aristotle says that 'involuntary actions always receive pity or pardon' (14). I agree with this contention. However, the main problem with this conception of what is good lies in the difficulty in differentiating between voluntary and involuntary actions.

Good temper, according to Aristotle, is mean with anger and respect. Aristotle argues that 'one who claims to be great, but is unworthy, is vain' (54). I disagree with this argument simply because there is no accurate, subjective criterion for determining who is worthy and who is not. Some people consider certain people as worthy or unworthy only with regard to the roles they can or cannot play in their goals.

With regard to justice, Aristotle poses the question: 'can somebody act justly without being considered an unjust man?' Aristotle uses this question to explain the concept of political justice, which he says is neither natural nor legal. If it was natural, this form of justice would be applied uniformly everywhere. Political justice is one that involves people whose mutual relations are controlled by the law. In Aristotle's view, there cannot be justice

between a husband and his wife since they have many mutual interests. I agree with this argument since it spells out the ways in which change always determines the manner in which justice is applied.

The notion of suffering injustice willingly appears odd at first. However, sometimes people are treated justly when they are not willing to be treated as such. Aristotle says that 'no one wills that which he does not consider good'. It is true that being treated unjustly has to be involuntary. Two main problems arise in this way of thinking. First, it is unclear who between the person giving too large a share and the one receiving it is the guilty one. The equitable man ought to take less than what is due to him. Here, I disagree with Aristotle's theory. I think an equitable man ought to take his rightful share, nothing more or less. The concept of 'being equitable' should not be confined to taking a portion that is smaller than his rightful share.

The example of slavery highlights a scenario where people can do unjust things without acting unjustly. According, it is clearly wrong to commit adultery, pass a bribe or assault someone. However, in a practice such as medicine, observes Aristotle, the definition of 'wrong' depends on the skills that the surgeon has acquired in medical school, and 'not merely the understanding of what surgery of hellebore is' (125). This argument sheds light on the complex nature of issues relating to justice. It also reveals the circumstances under which people can be treated justly without knowing it.