

The Road to Happiness('Eudaimonia'): Aristotle's Educational Thought and Implications

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Keywords: Aristotle; Happiness; Education; Marxist Concept of Happiness

Abstract: Happiness is the ultimate pursuit of life for people throughout the ages. In his writings on ethics and politics, the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle discussed, from the social reality of his time, that happiness is a realistic activity in accordance with virtue; that a happy life can be obtained and embodied as the unity of individual life and city-state life; and that the highest and widest happiness can be achieved only through civic education. The essence of Aristotle's happiness thought is happiness education, and his profound philosophical exposition provides important theoretical guidance for us to carry out happiness education and cultivate a correct concept of happiness today.

1. Introduction

Happiness is an eternal topic for human beings. No matter what era we are in, we never stop thinking about the essence of life. The emergence and popularity of words such as "involution" and "lying flat" reflect people's confusion and distress about what happiness is and how to achieve it. Aristotle had a very profound discussion about happiness. Aristotle's thought is rich in content, in which "ethics and politics are an inseparable whole; ethics is the precursor of politics, politics is the completion of ethics, and educational thought is the completion of both" ^[1]. Both ethics and politics point to one purpose, which is the pursuit of supreme good, i.e., a happy life, which includes not only the cultivation of the individual but also involves the organic unity of the individual and the city-state. Hegel once praised Aristotle as "the most worthy of study among ancient philosophers" ^[2]. The theoretical essence of Aristotle's many discussions on happiness and education has not only been carried forward and innovated by Marxism, but also provides many inspirations for the cultivation of people's concept of happiness nowadays.

2. Constructing the logic of happiness: the pursuit of the highest good

The most important thing to achieve a happy life is to clarify what happiness is. It is believed that happiness is derived from the concept of "good", which is the best realization of human activity. "Good" in the Greek sense means something that is good. ^[3] "Every practice and choice of man is aimed at some good." ^{[4]p3} According to Aristotle, the good is the end, and there exists the highest good, the ultimate end, through which one does not obtain anything, but chooses it and pursues it because of itself. Such a "supreme good", understood from the human point of view, is happiness, because we choose certain virtues with the aim of happiness, but we do not choose happiness with these aims.

Further, happiness is understood in terms of human activity, which is "the realization of the soul's virtuous activity" ^{[4]p19}. The ancient Greeks believed that good things are divided into three categories: external goods, goods of the soul, and goods of the body. Happiness is not an external material condition, nor is it only the qualities of the body in all its aspects; "the good of the soul is the good in the most proper sense and the most real." ^{[4]p22} There are three states of the soul: feelings, abilities, and qualities, and virtue is neither feelings nor abilities, but qualities, qualities

that make a person good and make him excel in his activities. On the one hand, Aristotle understands happiness in terms of nature and state, seeing it as a static possession, that is, the supreme purpose of all things; on the other hand, he sees happiness in terms of the Greek consensus, seeing it as a practical activity, an action of human beings entirely from their own hearts. ^[5] His interpretation of happiness not only encompassed all the definitions of happiness at that time, but also was in line with the views of most philosophers and could be accepted.

The question that arises from this is: Is it possible for human beings to attain happiness? First of all, it is very clear that happiness, the realization of virtuous activity, is unique to human beings, and that there is no "happiness" in plants and animals. Aristotle divided virtue into two types, rational virtue and moral virtue. "Wisdom, understanding and wit are rational virtues, and generosity and moderation are moral virtues." ^[4] p³⁴ There is no moral virtue without the rational virtue, and there can be no rational virtue without the moral virtue. Rational virtue arises and develops primarily through teaching, while moral virtue is formed by social influence through habit. Aristotle believed that moral virtue can be developed because nature endows us with the ability to receive virtue, which exists in us in the form of potential and can become a reality through good activities, but can likewise be destroyed by bad ones. Secondly, Aristotle argues against the view that happiness is not divine, nor is it the result of some kind of luck, "it is acquired by study, some habit or training" ^[4] p²⁵. Even if it does not come from a divine gift, happiness is the most divine thing, because virtue brings about the best result, i.e. some kind of divine blessing. Although happiness needs luck as a supplement, it cannot be produced entirely by luck, and happy people do not easily change themselves because of good or bad changes of luck; this realization activity exists for a long time in one's life. In short, happiness is understood from the human point of view as the realization of human virtue, and therefore as the "good" that people can obtain through certain conditions.

3. The embodiment of a happy life: the unity of personal life and city-state life

Since happiness is a virtuous realization activity, worthy of desire in itself, it is distinguished from those carnal, lower pleasures. Although Aristotle does not believe that we can achieve happiness apart from external material conditions, he believes that sensual pleasures are never as good as those of the soul, if they are kept in moderation. Physical pleasure is available to all, but the pleasure of the most complete realization is not available to all. Russell also believed that happiness "is the highest level/realm of pleasure". ^[6] Happiness should be in accordance with the best virtue, that is, the part of us that can think of the noble and divine, the best part of us, "and it is the activity of its realization in accordance with its own virtue that constitutes perfect happiness." ^[4] p³⁰⁵ This best realization is expressed in human life, which is contemplation.

According to Aristotle, contemplation is the highest happiness of man, and "the life that is compatible with other virtues is only the second best." ^[4] p³⁰⁸ Because contemplative activity is the most continuous and pleasurable, it is also the most self-sufficient, and one can accomplish contemplation by oneself. Contemplation does not produce anything other than the question on which it is contemplated. Contemplation is also a kind of leisure, the purpose of our busyness. Aristotle believed that man should go after immortality and eternity, and that the activity of contemplation is the one activity that brings man closest to God, the life of divinity. And all other activities of the realization of virtue are human activities of realization, human affairs, human life, which occur in relation to man. The life of God is regarded as a life of complete happiness, and human contemplation enjoys happiness because it is similar to the activity of God. Animals, on the other hand, are completely incapable of contemplation, and therefore also completely incapable of enjoying happiness. "Happiness is with contemplation." ^[4] p³¹⁰

Yet contemplation seems to be only one part of individual life. Man's life is a complex aggregate, and he has not only his own personal life, but also the political life of the city-state, which is in a collective. The good of the city-state is the highest good when viewed in a broader sense, beyond the limits of the individual. The city-state is the highest and broadest form of social community, and therefore "the good it seeks must also be the highest and broadest." ^[7] p³ Although the city-state precedes the individual, the family, and the village in the process of development, "by nature, the

whole must precede the part. ." The individual is an integral part of the city-state, and each individual, if isolated, would not be able to provide for himself or herself; only by gathering in the city-state as a whole can people's needs be fully satisfied. Thus Aristotle suggests, "Human beings are natural animals that tend to live in the city-state." [7]p7 Not only that, he also believes that the happiness of the city-state and the happiness of individual are the same [7]p348. Thus, a happy life is the unity of the individual life and the collective life of the city-state, which consists of each individual, and only when the individual obtains a happy life can the whole city-state be said to be happy. Aristotle's pursuit is to build an ideal city-state, so that all the people in the city-state can have leisure and contemplation, and all the citizens of the city-state can obtain a happy life, which makes his idea of happiness shine with a light beyond the times.

4. The Road to Happiness: Civic Education

Both individuals and collectives need guidance in education in order to move toward happiness. Individuals who want to pursue a contemplative life may need a more individualized personal education, but everyone needs to live in a collective, so a unified collective education becomes necessary for each individual. At that time, it was popular in society to treat education as a private matter for each family, and the content of education would be based on each family's situation, which Aristotle thought was inappropriate. Since all the citizens of a city-state "have a common purpose" [7]p412, i.e., the pursuit of happiness, all citizens should receive a uniform education. Since the ideal system of government for free men is one in which each citizen is educated both by the ruler and by the ruled, it is all the more important that the education system of the city-state be planned by the public and that uniform standards be set. Aristotle proposed to constructing the ideal city-state by shaping qualified citizens through uniform education. Many scholars have thus categorized Aristotle's educational ideas as civic education, but for its fundamental purpose, it can also be called education for happiness.

Although the concept of eugenics and preschool education did not exist in ancient Greece, Aristotle had already envisioned it from the perspective of the legislator of the ideal city-state before formal education was introduced. People are to "enter into virtue and become good" [7] p390 from three ends: nature, habit, and reason. Because of the biological creation process, the body and lust precede the soul, and the irrational precede the rational, so considering the process of physical and mental development of children, it is necessary to pay attention to the body of the child first, and then to the teaching of the soul. For the sake of the child's healthy body, the age and quality of the two partners in the marriage should not be too different, and the time and environment of the birth should also be taken care of. During the period from birth to the age of five, children should not be taught schoolwork or labor, but should be nurtured in character through play or other forms of recreation. Children under the age of seven are primarily educated in the home, and Aristotle believed that there should be some uniform regulations, such as that evil words and indecent things should be eliminated and that children may observe others engaged in the various activities they will engage in in the future.

Formal collective education was divided into two periods [7]p411, the first from the age of 7 to 14 and the second from 14 to 21. Aristotle believed that the content of education should not make people "degraded and unfit for good virtue" [7]p414, and that what people learned should be used for their own needs, for friends, or for the cultivation of good virtue. The subjects of education at that time included both practical skills and the cultivation of good morals, and were divided into four basic subjects: reading and writing, gymnastics, music, and painting. Reading and writing and painting were practical subjects, gymnastics could cultivate courage and virtue, and there was much controversy over whether music education should be carried out and the purpose of education. At the end of the *Politics*, Aristotle analyzes the role of music in terms of education, recreation, and spiritual training, arguing that music can be useful in all three ways and that it is an important activity for leisure time.

Aristotle's planning of the educational system had a clear biological dimension, which probably originated from the teachings of his father [8]. He divided human education into stages according to

the laws of natural human growth, and also proposed the idea of carrying out different education at different stages, which was regarded by later scholars as the first idea of natural education in the history of Western education^[9]. Aristotle's educational thought is based on the pursuit of happiness for all the city-state, and the theoretical connotation of it is of great significance to our cultivation of youth happiness today.

5. The inspiration of Aristotle's educational thought

Although Aristotle's thought is very far away from us and inevitably carries some limitations of his time, as "one of the first thinkers to study happiness"^[10], his profound exposition of the meaning of happiness and his hope to cultivate qualified citizens and pursue a perfect happy life through education can still bring a lot of inspiration to the cultivation of youth happiness today. The first of these is a study of the concept of happiness.

5.1. Cultivate a rational view of happiness

The rapid development of productivity and globalization have impacted people's spiritual world in a strong manner, and social trends such as "consumerism" and "hedonism" have been created and spread rapidly. Consumerism refers to "consumption behavior and the concept of consumption that considers consumption as the only way to achieve a good life and life's purpose"^[11]. Hedonism refers to the belief in sensual pleasure "as the purpose of life."^[12] The satisfaction of consumer desires is only sensory satisfaction, and although pleasure is a manifestation of happiness, it is undoubtedly an animal life if one only lives a hedonistic life and pursues only physical pleasure.

Both consumerism and hedonism originate from the distortion of human beings and labor by capitalism. Under capitalism, the products of labor become "alienated beings"^[13], which in turn gives rise to an alienated view of happiness in which people blindly pursue material enjoyment. In order to pursue happiness, human beings rely on their own talents, habits and rationality, and rationality should be the keynote of these three and the guideline of behavior^{[7] p391}. The inspiration of rationality needs to rely on education to instill scientific worldview and methodology, and the scientific principles of Marxism should be instilled through ideological and political education, so that young people in the new era can be guided by rationality from their own hearts, consciously identify the various ideas spread in society, and not be influenced by them. They should not be disturbed by wrong thoughts and find a way to be active and enterprising.

5.2. Cultivating a practical view of happiness

In recent years, the term "lying flat" has become popular on the Internet, along with the expression "involution". The term "involution" was originally used to describe the cultural phenomenon of internal refinement, and was later introduced into the field of sociology to describe growth without development. Now the network popular concept of "involution" is mostly used to refer to active and passive competition, passive competition is often difficult for people to withstand competitive pressure. The concept of "lying flat" came from the online article "lying flat is justice", which describes the author's efforts to maintain a low-cost life by lowering his desires, which is considered a way to fight against this life.

Some scholars believe that the core of "laying flat" is actually cynicism^[14], which advocates lowering needs and questioning order, and conflicts with Aristotle's idea of happy life. In Aristotle's view, the best life is to be "practical". Karl Marx went beyond Aristotle's mystical soul and pointed out that human beings are characterized by labor. In order to cultivate a practical view of happiness, through labor education, young people should understand that the living conditions we have today are the result of the work of countless people, and that to continue to create a better life, we must keep our feet on the ground and continue to struggle.

5.3. Cultivating a Shared View of Happiness

Behind the popularity of these negative social trends is the influence of egoism values. The ultimate pursuit of material things is the infinite enlargement of personal desires, "involution"

reflects the competitive mentality of maximizing personal interests, while "lying flat" is the abandonment of struggle after the hopelessness of involution, both of which focus on personal interests and feelings and are the inevitable result of egoism^[15]. This kind of narrow-minded concept will make us fall into the abyss of unsatisfied forever, and we will never be able to reach a happy life.

According to Aristotle, a city-state is a collective of all citizens, each of whom is responsible for the affairs of the city-state. In practice, the deep integration of human beings and society, individual happiness and social happiness are the prerequisites for each other and promote each other. Marx once said, "If a man deals only with himself, his desire for happiness can be satisfied only in very rare cases, and never to the benefit of himself or others."^[16] Not only that, but the labor and struggle that Marx emphasized had as its logical starting point the emancipation of all mankind. In his essay in high school, he wrote that if we choose to be a profession for the sake of humanity, "our happiness will belong to millions of people"^[17]. General Secretary Xi Jinping carries forward this sentiment of taking the cause of all mankind as his own and proposes to build a community of human destiny.^[18] To cultivate a shared view of happiness, youth should realize that the world will not be plagued by a series of disasters such as war and disease until all of humanity is happy. Youth should join the trend of globalization with an open and tolerant mind, participate in foreign exchanges and cooperation with the belief of win-win cooperation, and move toward happiness together with all people.

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