

**THE ESSENCE OF ARISTOTEL'S WELL-GOVERNING CONCEPT  
PART THREE  
THE MORAL DIMENSION**

**Professor Corina Adriana Dumitrescu, Ph.D**  
*"Dimitrie Cantemir" Christian University, Bucharest*

**rectorucdc@yahoo.com**

**Abstract:** *Our article aims to show the relationship between politics and morals, starting from the Aristotelian writings which represented the paradigm of the ancient Greek thinking. This relationship shows the focus that both Aristotle and his teacher, Platon, make on education. The only real guarantee of the state prosperity and balance is honesty and moral virtue of the citizens and mutually, only when the state is well organized and based on an educational framework that promotes reason, morality and it will be able to make the citizens reach the estate of eudaimonia.*

**Key words:** *politics, ethics, virtue, morals, effective ruling, happiness.*

"As long as the kings do not turn into philosophers, or the philosophers make kings, things will never go well in the world" – Platon asserts forcefully, no one else but the one who influenced Aristotle. By his turn, Platon was the pupil of Socrate who was the father of ethics and the one who embodied morality and the self sacrifice.

Undoubtly, although it was a genuine piece of work, the Stagiritic was strongly influenced all his life by the morale model of Platon. He is the philosopher and author of the well known dialogues on enterprise in Lathes, moderation in Charmides or ethics and education in Protagoras which were well known by Aristotel who took over some of his ideas on morale and government. It is sure that besides the written work of Platon and the direct dialogue that Aristotel took advantage for two decades influenced his thinking. It is also to be noted that Platon life experience that he shared with Aristotle, his young disciple, had its own importance in the theoretical and practical thinking regarding the morale. The journey that Platon had to Syracuza, for instance, the one in which he was appointed tutor of Dionysos II, represented the period in which the philosopher tried to make a philosopher from a king, that is to make a ruler attach a moral side to his measures. Platon was an active philosopher, permanently concerned of the turning into practice his major theories; what to say about Aristotle, that several decades later, found, for almost seven years, his own "Dionysos" in the person of Alexander Macedon? The answer is that, similarly as his forerunner Aristotle, he was deeply dedicated to the theory and philosophical practice and also to the its moral side.

In the context of cultural dominant influence that Aristotle had undergone from Platon, it is worth mentioning a detail which is rarely remembered: the Academy where Platon was the teacher of Aristotle was not only a school of philosophy, but also an institution of high education of some councillors and legislators that determined the history of that time. Platon Academy was that very place where, among others, Chabrios and Phokion, the Athenian strategists, were educated, Aristonymos, the legislator of Megalopolis castle, Euphraiios, the councillor of Perdikkas III of Macedonia, Erastos and Koriskos that were the rulers of Assos, and not the last one, the Stagirit born himself.

Aristotle also studied critically Socrate and he stated that "We do not need to limit our research on what (virtue) is, but to extend it to the way it is produced." Thus, he wanted to develop the contemplative attitude that he noticed at Socrate, by evaluating

the causes generating any of their expressions. It is understandable that his position was nothing else but a clear evidence that the cultural personality of the father of ethics was an important source for his work.

Besides the sources represented by Platon and the account on Socrate, the martyr of philosophy, Aristotle got closer to the works of Pitagora of Samos, the great mathematician and philosopher of the antiquity, the one who used to say: „There is no need to be a genius, to hold secrets or wonders to find the sense of reason: it is enough to have a clear-cut mind and a fair reason”. He settled a colony in Crotona, in the South of Italy, where, it is true, a lot of Greeks lived, and he proved the superiority of a community ruled by philosophers.

Aristotle, who was a genius but also the beneficiary of an extraordinary spiritual heritage, felt like carrying on both the Western and Eastern cultural legacy. He faced this huge responsibility by producing long lasting works as a result of his moral character and philosophy. Thus, Aristotle was convinced that a distinction had to be made between the perfection of character and that one of the intellect. More than that, he appreciated that virtue can be reached only by accomplishing both character and intellect features.

Aristotle was an expert of the oriental culture, mostly of the philosophy and history of this part of the world, and he used and applied some of their results: if we pin down, virtually, the reference moment of Confucius work, we shall understand that the great Greek philosopher kept learning what he had to convey further to the next generations and he behaved as an educated person aspiring to the celestial virtues.

He knew the model that the personality of Hammurapi represented in the Eastern history and he promoted it in his recommendations to Alexander the Great regarding his clear concept on the morale role in good government style.

These statements, which are, obviously, the presentation of the concept showing the relationship between the morale and the good practice of ruling which belongs to Aristotle, have to take into account the social and historic environment which is specific to the time he lived. We are in the IV<sup>th</sup> century, B.C. in Athens which rightfully claims to be the first Greek fortified city in the historical time of the Greek colonies expansion, when each of these small states were differently organized and ruled. But Athens wanted itself to be the model of „government institutions” to be followed that made possible, among others, to draw a great number of scholars within its walls which also made possible the development of the most advanced educational system for its citizens. We are in the very time of the attic so called ”zoon politikon”, which was deeply concerned with the planning and carrying out the ideal society that was meant to bring that kind of full collective happiness. It is also, the last, but not the least, to be mentioned, that we are in Athens which was spiritually dominated by Platon Academy which proved to remain, until nowadays, the most representative intellectual forum of the Western thinking.

Aristotle joins Platon’s opinion that ruling is a profession as any other, and the ones to carry it out effectively should be very few. (Politica). Aristotle considers that the selection criteria for politicians should be nobleness, value or excellency, that is the morale or virtue which is distributed unequally to the people and which belongs only to very few of them (aristoi) in a needed degree that make them able to perform ruling effectively.

According to Aristotle it is not possible for anyone to have a good life unless he lives in a polis ruled by this kind of rulers.

Both Aristotle and Platon consider that the people able to rule and make their ruling effective in an ideal society, are the ones who are trained in the domain of politics. They should represent an educated, chaste and wise minority.

„Cut the nails of your people, but do not wash their heads with their urine, punish them, but do not humiliate them. It is the message that Pitagora conveyed over time to

Aristotle about the attitude that the ruler of the city should have in certain situations. It is sure that Aristotle knew how to use this sort of advice in the course of the educational process he provided to Alexander the Great who was known to have had an authoritative behaviour but also to be closer to his subjects.

The author of the famous Nicomahic Ethics made the basis of the moral theory which was developed by Eudemos in his Ethics and in the Great Ethics of value, if it is to be appreciated only by the time test that it passed successfully.

Aristotle was skilful in making his theory practical in the first millenium b.c. For instance, he stated that „virtue is not to be searched to understand what it is, but to make ourselves virtuous”.

The mankind culture owns, also, to Aristotle the redefinition of the major principle of ancient teleological thinking: Stagirit means a tendency to perfection which must be specific to anyone, and, obviously, to any human being in a high degree. According to Aristotle, there is a final target of human soul – its own happiness. Thus, the ethics of Aristotle is eudemonistic, teleological, as it aims happiness through reason.

It is remarkable the statement that Aristotle makes regarding the full human accomplishment which is based on the rate of knowledge that he is able to reach, which is then characteristic only to the superior type of man who is able to contemplate. According to the aristotelian ethics, contemplation does not belong to transcendency, but to reason, making man to appeal to the divine. Man is admitted to contemplation by his intellect, (nous) which is considered the most elevated part of man, the human being itself. It follows that, according to Aristotle, human life has two dimensions: a theoretical one, which is fulfilled by contemplation, and a practical one which conveys to the polis social life by practicing virtues. In this context, knowledge means a comprehensive education, and a solid knowledge of the updated research and its application. Thus, it appears the need of a social body to make sure the practical development of the process of knowledge. This was called the State and its main goal was to make possible a certain degree of happiness for all its members that agree to follow its rules. From this point of view, Aristotle makes the connection between his theoretical ethics and his political science that leads to a well organized state. This political science was meant to reach its major goal of „the highest wellness for men”.

It is not by chance that Aristotle defined the happy man: „let us call happy the one that is active according to the perfect virtue and is also endowed with the external wellness not only for a short time, but all his full life”. (The Nicomahic Ethics); this what it was a successful ruling supposed to achieve for the members of the society: a full and complex expression of virtue, and a general full welfare.

A social politics is the one that makes possible that human beings have a „good life”, according to the full meaning of the words. (Politics). Aristotle defines the human potential of achievement as being a certain estate of „eudomonia” in his „Nicomahic Ethics”. This word is sometimes translated in a wrong way by „happiness”, or „blossoming”, „achievement” or „excellency” but it has the significance of „moral achievement”. According to Aristotle, the achievement of *eudomonia* needs the existence of moral laws and rules that make the standards of good and wrong for all moral agents, in real life conditions.

Nowadays, such a situation represents a utopia as the politics does not comply with the moral rules and it does not identifies itself with „*the royal art*” or „*the science of ruling*”. Today, more than anytime, it is needed a re-evaluation of all values, as a new objective vision of Aristotle under the new conditions, that might take into account genuine moral criteria.

Our discourse invites to a new interpretation of the aristotelian message, based on a fair historical, political and philosophical understanding of the framework in which the philosopher lived and reasoned at his home place of Stagira.