

The Connotation and Educational Significance of Aristotle's Happiness Thoughts

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The topic of happiness has been discussed by many thinkers since ancient times. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle elaborated his view of happiness in terms of its connotation and manifestation, and the way it is achieved. Happiness is first of all a realistic activity in accordance with virtue, which can be obtained by people and embodied in their daily life. Happiness is not only personal happiness, but also the highest and broadest "supreme good", which requires the joint efforts of the whole city-state. His profound philosophical exposition provides us with profound theoretical guidance for the development of happiness education today.

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Introduction

Happiness, an eternal common topic of human beings, is still a focus of discussion and concern today. The ancient Greek Aristotle has profoundly elaborated on it in his writings on ethics and political science. "Ethics and politics are an inseparable whole; ethics is the precursor of politics, politics is the completion of ethics" (Bian, 2018, p. 11). 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" (1983, p. 383). Aristotle's many discourses on the happy life not only help us pursue happiness in today's ever-changing world, but also have profound educational significance, helping to cultivate and form the concept of happiness in young people.

The Essence and Acquisition of Happiness

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 (C. G. Wang, Liu, & L. P. Wang, 2010). "Every practice and choice of man is aimed at some good" (Aristotle, 2003, p. 3). 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" (Aristotle, 2003, p. 19). The ancient Greeks believed that good things are divided into three categories:

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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” (Aristotle, 2003, p. 22). There are three states of the soul: feelings, abilities, and qualities, and virtue is neither feelings nor abilities, but 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 (Wang & Liu, 2015). 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.

Since happiness is so sublime, is it possible for a person to attain it? 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” (Aristotle, 2003, p. 34). 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” (Aristotle, 2003, p. 25). 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.

Expression of Happy 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” (2016, p. 2). 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” (Aristotle, 2003, p. 305). 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” (Aristotle, 2003, p. 308). 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" (Aristotle, 2003, p. 310).

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" (Aristotle, 1983, p. 3). 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" (Aristotle, 1983, p. 7). Not only that, he also believes that the happiness of the city-state and the happiness of individual are the same (Aristotle, 1983, p. 348). 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.

The Road to Happiness: Education

On the surface, it seems that contemplative happiness can be accomplished entirely by individuals themselves. But people live in collectives, and therefore require, above all, educational activities that enable people to live happy collective lives. Individuals who wish to pursue a contemplative life may require a more individualized personal education. 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" (Aristotle, 1983, p. 412), 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 construct 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" (Aristotle, 1983, p. 390) 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 (Aristotle, 1983, p. 411), the first from the age of seven 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” (Aristotle, 1983, p. 414), 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 (Zhang, 2004, p. 92). 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 (Liu, 2008). Aristotle's ideas on education are an important theoretical source for the cultivation of a happy outlook on youth today.

The Inspiration of Aristotle's Happiness Thought

Although Aristotle's thought is very far away from us and inevitably carries some limitations of his time, as “first thinkers to attempt an analysis of happiness” (Moran, 2018, p. 91), 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.

Happiness Should Be the Happiness Under Rational Thinking

According to Aristotle, human beings who want to pursue happiness rely on their talents, habits, and reason, and reason should be the keynote of all three and the guideline for behavior. Only through rational thinking can the definition of happiness be rich and profound, rather than simply equal to a certain thing or a certain behavior. In recent years, social trends such as “consumerism” and “hedonism” have emerged and are spreading rapidly. People are indulging in the feast of consumption and pleasure created by the media and businesses, as if the pursuit of consumer goods is the pursuit of happiness, and the enjoyment of the physical senses is infinitely magnified. In Aristotle's view, if one lives a hedonistic life and pursues only physical pleasure, it is undoubtedly an animal life.

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 (Aristotle, 1983, p. 391). To view happiness correctly and pursue it, we need to pass on a scientific worldview and methodology to young people through

education, cultivate their ability to think rationally, learn to use rational thinking to break through the many barriers, and find the true nature of a happy life.

Happiness Must Be Obtained Through Struggle and Effort

In recent years, the term “laying flat” is popular on social media; many young people have said they want to “laying flat” life. However, this “laying flat” is not really giving up the pursuit of happiness, but the “involution”, especially passive ineffective vicious competition in a negative way to fight. Many people cannot bear the pressure of competition and believe that such competition is consuming their lives.

Some scholars argue that the core of “lying flat” is actually cynicism (Wang, 2021), which advocates lowering needs and questioning order, and conflicts with Aristotle's idea of a happy life. In Aristotle's view, the best life is to be “productive”, although he pointed out that “productive” does not simply point to external activities, but also includes the act of contemplation, but this does not mean that there is no need for any condition to obtain happiness, nor does it mean that happiness can be obtained by waiting. It does not mean that happiness can be obtained by waiting. Marx believed that the identity of human beings lies in labor, i.e., “free conscious activity” (Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, 2012a, p. 56). He also emphasized that happiness depends on people's initiative. Young people should be guided to establish the awareness of struggle and the spirit of struggle, to consciously take struggle as an important means to achieve their ideal goals in life, to be determined in their studies and work, and to actively pursue a better life.

Happiness Should Be the Common Happiness of Human Beings

Behind these negative social trends, there is the influence of individualistic values. Whether it is the pursuit of consumer goods or the pursuit of sensual pleasures, it is an infinite amplification of individual desires and an excessive focus on the individual self, ignoring the collective life of people.

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” (Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, 2012a, p. 245). 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” (Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, 1995, p. 460). 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 (Xi, 2017, p. 522). 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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