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Aristotle on Soul, Mind, Body and Education

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the Aristotelian distinction between soul, mind, and body. In addition, this investigation will emphasize the importance of education (physical education and education) in Aristotle's mind, as the philosopher believed that a healthy and well-trained body is beneficial to the soul. The philosopher's opinion on the issue of physical exercise and education is widely held among contemporary educators. Nevertheless, very little has been written on the subject for the last fifty years or so. Furthermore, there is an ongoing controversy over this issue, as some writers maintain that Aristotle says almost nothing about physical education and sport. The philosopher, of course, wrote on the subject, not extensively, like Plato, but enough to influence many educators of all levels in our modern world.

INTRODUCTION

Bambrough (1963), in this notable book, *The Philosophy of Aristotle*, wrote:

The importance of Aristotle in the intellectual History of Europe is too well known to need explanation or defense. The range and power of his achievement place him without question in the shortest of short lists of the giants of Western thought. To many generations of thinkers, he was known simply as "The Philosopher". Dante, with reverence but without exaggeration, honored him with the proud title of "Master of those who know". Darwin testified to his huge achievement as a biologist: "Linnaeus and Cuvier have been my two gods, but they were mere schoolboys to old Aristotle".

Aristotle was born at Stageira, a city of Macedonia, in 384 B.C. and died in 322 B.C. He studied in Athens under Plato, on whose death he left, and sometime later became tutor of the young Alexander the Great. When Alexander succeeded to the throne of Macedonia in 335 B.C. Aristotle returned to Athens and established his philosophical school, the Lyceum, where his immense erudition attracted many scholars. Aristotle's intellectual range was vast, encompassing biology, botany, ethics, poetics, political theory, logic, metaphysics, rhetoric, philosophy, chemistry, psychology, and history, among others. His works were of an extraordinary range, and a number of them survived.

Weiss (1969), a modern authority on the philosophy of sport and athletics, thinks that Aristotle wrote brilliantly on many topics, but he says "nothing at all about sport..." (p. 5). An examination, however, of some of Aristotle's writings will show that Professor Weiss is in error. Some other authors (Thurmond, 1977; Davis, 1961; Burke, 1961) wondered why Aristotle did not write more on the subject of physical education and athletics. The philosopher himself answers this question:

Deliberation is not concerned with those branches of knowledge that have precise rules of their own (e.g., writing, for we do not hesitate over how a word should be written). The effects about which we deliberate are those which are produced by our agency but not always in the same way; e.g., the practice of medicine and finance, and navigation, which calls for more deliberation than physical training does... The arts call for deliberation than the sciences, because we feel less confident about them. Thus, the field of deliberation is that which occurs most often, where the result is unclear and the proper course is not clearly defined. (Aristotle, 1112a).

Thurmond (1977), commenting on Aristotle's above explanation, wrote that "it is doubtful that Aristotle would have been much more interested in deliberating about physical exercise than the alphabet, because physical exercise was such a part of Greek culture". Furthermore, he stated that Aristotle, in his endeavor to transmit explicit meanings and clear understandings of his thinking, frequently used the intimate and well-known examples of physical activity (Thurmond, 1977). It is also true that Aristotle often uses the terms gymnastics, bodily exercise, physical activity, and athletics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In developing this study, references were made to primary and secondary sources. With regard to the latter (secondary sources), it is highly likely that, due to oversight, not all research efforts have been included, which is to be expected in a work of this nature. I would like to believe that research studies directly related to the topic under development have not been overlooked. Without the help of the details provided by the primary sources, such an endeavor would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible. Specific references and citations have been made to works by Aristotle and others. I have received

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considerable assistance from the following works by Aristotle, to which I refer: *Ethics*, *On the Soul*, *Politics*, *Rhetoric*, *Problems*, and *Constitution of Athens*. The philosopher's first two works (*Ethics* and *On the Soul*) were of paramount importance for drawing the right conclusions. It is a fact that these two works reveal the philosopher's views on the soul, the mind, and the body. Aristotle's views on the education of young people are set out clearly and concisely in *Politics*. I found valuable information on the education of young people in Athens in another of the philosopher's works, *Constitution of Athens*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is grounded in sources from ancient Greek literature, data from secondary sources, and epigraphic evidence. There are many appropriate secondary sources considered on the bases of their affinity to this study. At the core of this study lies the search for, documentation of, and interpretation of findings that are directly or indirectly related to the main subject under development: Aristotle on soul, mind, body and education. More specifically, the methods employed in this philosophical-historical inquiry to assess the scientific data and to draw valid conclusions include: the Analytical–Synthetic method, the Historical–Critical method, the Descriptive method, the Philological–Comparative method, and the Hermeneutic method.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results, together with the discussion, occupy most of a study, and this one is no exception. Aristotle's position on the relationship between soul, mind, and body has been analyzed, and reliable conclusions have been drawn. Aristotle's position differs from that of Plato in that he introduces a new element, the mind, which is superior to the soul, immortal, and divine. From the discussion that followed, it appears that the philosopher believes that apart from the mind, which constitutes only a small part of the soul, everything else, including the soul, is destroyed. It becomes clear that the body, apart from the mind, also drags a large part of the soul into destruction, something that is certainly foreign to Platonic philosophy. The results of this work show that the soul absolutely needs the body in order to manifest its actions. The soul has no other way to express its feelings. From the discussion that followed, it became clear how important the philosopher thought the general education of young people was. Physical education helps not only the body but also the soul, in the sense that the latter, through exercise, acquires prudence and courage, virtues that are valuable and necessary.

Aristotle on Soul, Mind, Body

Aristotle's statement, "The soul is the form of the body" (*On the Soul*, 412b11), has been and continues to be the cause of various interpretations and opinions. According to Hamlyn (1959), the phrase "the soul is the

form of the body" does not imply anything material or physical, because this would give spiritual events and, in general, spiritual actions and pursuits a physical character, which the author considers incorrect. It is said that "the soul is the form of the body" in the sense that it consists of a series of forces that act only as long as the body is alive. These forces referred to by the philosopher cannot act without the body's help. It is self-evident, for example, that sight cannot be achieved without the help of the body and, in this case, without the help of the physical eye (Mouratidis, 2009). Thus, what the philosopher wants to show with the above statement is that the actions of the soul are based on the body in order to manifest themselves (Hamlyn, 1959; Kosman, 1975). All manifestations and changes of the soul, such as fear, anger, joy, hatred, etc., cannot be understood without the support of the body, which seems to be in complete agreement with the soul. Thus, it is not possible to separate the soul from the body. Although the soul is not separate from the body, it is not the same as the body. It simply needs the body in order to manifest its actions. The soul cannot be a body because it is not matter, but it cannot function or be understood without it (Guthrie, 1975; Parker, 1996; Mouratidis, 2009). Vegetti (2003) also argues that Aristotle, unlike his teacher Plato, does not accept the separation of the soul from the body. Thus, it becomes clear that the soul needs the body for any manifestation. This, of course, applies in cases where the soul wants to express its anger, courage, various desires, and anything else that causes sensation. According to Vegetti (2003), the body and soul are related in terms of matter and form, power and energy, organs and function. The soul is to the body what sight is to the eye: the sum of the functions that make a body a living organism.

An interesting view has been expressed by Russell (1979) about Aristotle's statement that "the soul is the form of the body":

Here it is clear that "form" does not mean "shape"... for the present, I will only observe that, in Aristotle's system, the soul is what makes the body one thing, having unity of purpose and the characteristics that we associate with the word "organism". The purpose of an eye is to see, but it cannot see when it is separated from its body. It is the soul that sees. It would seem, then, that "form" is what gives unity to a portion of matter, and that this unity is usually, if not always, teleological.

It becomes clear that Russell, in interpreting Aristotle's statement, regards the soul as bound up with the body. In his book *On the Soul*, Aristotle distinguishes between soul and mind, making clear that:

The case of mind is different; it seems to be an independent substance implanted with the soul and to be incapable of being destroyed... it seems to be a widely different kind of soul, differing as what is eternal from what is perishable; The mind is the part of us that understands mathematics and philosophy; its objects are timeless, and therefore it is regarded as itself timeless... Hence, the mind can be immortal, though the rest of the

soul cannot. (On the soul, 408b)

Mind is a part of the soul, not bound up with the body; it is immortal, not perishable, and it does not perceive sensible objects. Furthermore, Aristotle makes another distinction between the soul and the mind: the former is irrational, while the latter is rational and divine.

Aristotle continues the discussion on the relationship between the soul and the body in his *Politics* (1254b). He says that there is a rule of subordination in nature, according to which the soul rules the body as its master. For the good of man and the benefit of the body, the latter must be governed by the soul. Both the soul and the body must be in good condition and natural harmony, with the former controlling the latter. This relationship applies not only to the soul and the body, but also to the various parts of the soul, which have one element that is superior and governs the other, which is considered inferior (Aristotle, 1260a). The superior element of the soul to which the philosopher refers is, of course, the mind.

According to Aristotle (*Politics*, 1323a), a person cannot be happy without physical and mental health, i.e., without the external goods of the body and the internal goods of the soul. The philosopher assigns greater importance to the goods of the soul, emphasizing that they are more valuable than those of the body and that the latter exist for the sake of the soul (Aristotle, 1323b). As regards temporal appearance or order of appearance, it is clear that the body precedes the soul, and the irrational part of the soul precedes the rational part. This is proven, according to the philosopher, by the fact that phenomena such as anger or desire appear in children from birth, while reason and thought typically emerge as they grow older. Based on this observation, the philosopher believes that children's bodies have priority and must be cared for before their souls (Aristotle, 1323b).

When referring to human goodness, the philosopher means the goodness of the soul, and when he speaks of happiness, he refers to the happiness of the soul, not the body (Aristotle, 1102a). In the same chapter of *Ethics*, Aristotle discusses the pleasures of both the soul and the body. He places love, the desire for recognition and distinction, and the desire for knowledge among the pleasures of the soul. Thus, when an individual enjoys what he does, it is not the body that is affected by these situations, but his soul (Aristotle, 1102a).

By placing the soul above the body, the philosopher simultaneously distinguishes between spiritual and practical happiness, considering the latter to be inferior. Aristotle's views on the person with a virtuous soul and on the person whose soul seeks worldly distinctions are interesting:

It is disputed whether the intention or the actions have the greater importance in determining the goodness of conduct, assuming that it depends on both. Well, its perfection would clearly involve both, and for the performance of virtuous actions many accessories are required, and the grander and nobler the actions the more

numerous will these accessories be. On the other hand the contemplative has no need of such things for his activity; on the contrary they are almost a hindrance to his contemplation. However, in so far as he is a human being and a member of society he chooses to act in accordance with virtue; therefore he will need external goods to enable him to live as a human being (*Ethics*, 1177b).

Referring to perfect happiness, the philosopher emphasizes that it is a form of theoretical inquiry that characterizes the gods, who indeed enjoy perfect happiness and bliss. Based on the philosopher's thoughts above, one can conclude that the actions of the gods belong to the realm of theoretical thought. Thus, among human actions, those that are akin to the divine are those of theoretical understanding, which are the source of the greatest happiness (*Ethics*, 1178b). Regarding the separation of practical from theoretical happiness, the philosopher says that the person who manages to live by achieving this happiness has something divine within him (*Ethics*, 1177b).

On Physical Education

As mentioned above, Aristotle emphasizes that external goods of the body and internal goods of the soul constitute human happiness. In other words, physical and mental health are elements that characterize a happy person (*Politics*, 1323a). Thus, it is not at all surprising that the philosopher attaches great importance not only to the mental but also to the physical health of young people.

As for Aristotle's position on physical education and sports, although he did not write as extensively as his teacher, he demonstrated a keen interest in the benefits of exercise for health and physical beauty. The philosopher himself, as we saw above, explains convincingly why he did not write much on this subject (Aristotle, 1112a). Aristotle, referring to the legislator who will regulate the subjects taught to young people, says that there are four such subjects: reading, writing, gymnastics, and music. Gymnastics, according to the philosopher, is of great importance for the soul and for the development of young people because, among other things, it promotes courage and moral strength (Aristotle, 1337b). He even suggests that lawmakers regulate the teaching of various sports by providing young people with suitable instructors. The fact that one of the subjects of education for young people is music reveals, among other things, the importance that the philosopher attaches to the rhythmic execution of movements, exercises, and competitions by young people. The various depictions on Athenian vases clearly show that music was closely linked to the exercises and competitions of young people, with the primary aim of ensuring their rhythmic and harmonious performance, and in some cases, achieving greater proficiency. Moreover, the presence of a musician during the training of young people was often as essential as that of their coach (Mouratidis, 2023). Ancient Greek writers such as the poet Pindar (*Pythian Odes*, 5.60-64),

who praised the glory of the victors, the philosopher Plato (Protagoras, 326) and Aristotle (Politics, 1341a, 1337a, 1338a, 1339a, 1340a, 1340b, 1341b, 1342a, 1342b) attach great importance to the learning of music, not only for the harmonious development of young people but also for the rhythmic performance of their exercises and competitions. More recent authors believe that the ancient Greeks by cultivating rhythm help young people perform their athletic competitions harmoniously (Hadas, 1972; Goulaki-Voutira, 2004; McIntosh, 1979). For Aristotle (Politics, 1338a), music is a part of education and of considerable importance for the cultivation of the mind in leisure. At the same time, the cultivation of the soul through music was not ignored by the philosopher. Aristotle's interest in the Pan-Hellenic games is indisputable. It is known from ancient writers and inscriptions found at Delphi that the philosopher, relying on records kept by the priests of Delphi and other sources, compiled a list of athletes who won at the Pythian Games, a challenging and complex task. This list was engraved on marble slabs containing sixty thousand words, according to an inscription found in Delphi at the beginning of the previous century (Mouratidis, 2023). The inhabitants of Delphi, out of gratitude, honored Aristotle with praise and erected a bust of him in Delphi. The philosopher also revised and continued the list of Olympic Games winners. For this great effort, we learn from ancient sources that those responsible for the Olympic Games erected a statue of Aristotle in the sanctuary of Olympia (Pausanias, 6.4.8). Aristotle's descriptions and comments on ancient competitions, events, and winners greatly assist modern researchers in their efforts to solve some complex problems concerning ancient Greek athletics. One such example is his description of the ancient pentathlon jump. This particular event is considered by modern authors of the history of physical education and sport to be the most significant problem they face in their research (Mouratidis, 2012). The only noteworthy ancient testimony comes from Aristotle (Problems, 5.8.88.1b3), who states that athletes can achieve better performance when jumping with dumbbells (small weights) in their hands than without them. Thus, from the middle of the previous century to the present day, researchers' efforts and experiments on this subject have been conducted by the philosopher's description. According to the philosopher, physical exercise is necessary because it helps the soul, promotes courage, and moral strength in young people (Aristotle, 1337b). Among other things, exercises contribute to the promotion of health and enable them to defend their city (Aristotle, 1338a). The philosopher emphasized the importance of moderate forms of exercise and the participation of young people in competitions, but always in moderation. Excess, in any form, never won his favor. He was a philosopher of moderation, recognizing the dangers of excessive exercise and competition in athletic contests, and criticizing the one-sided training of professional athletes of his time. He believed that brutal and one-sided exercise did not

promote health or their actual pursuits (Aristotle, 1106b). Aristotle compares excessive exercise to overeating, which is not conducive to health and the normal development of the body (Ethics, 1104a). Pentathlon athletes, who trained all parts of their bodies, were an exception, since he refers to them as the most handsome athletes due to the form of their training (Aristotle, 1361b). Reid (2019), commenting on this observation by the philosopher, says: When Aristotle praises pentathletes' beauty at Rhetoric 1361b, it is not the idle observation of a sports fan. The balanced and harmonious beauty of athletes' bodies reflects Aristotle's ideal of a virtuous soul, as outlined in the Nicomachean Ethics.

Furthermore, Reid argues that the philosopher's conception of *kalokagathia* is consistent not only with the practice of the athletes but also with an ideal of citizenship that rejects traditional ideas about inborn virtue and superficial beauty (Reid, 2019). The beauty of athletic statues, particularly those of discus throwers, is discussed at some length in Reid (2012). Regarding Aristotle's observation on the beauty of pentathletes, Reid (2010) believes that Aristotle's admiration for the beautiful bodies of pentathletes is not superficial, because ancient pentathletes were distinguished by virtues that characterize the philosopher's Ethics. Another interesting study on sport aimed at the pursuit of excellence considers the Aristotelian principle related to the development of excellence, as a means for human progress (Lopez Frias, 2018).

The philosopher believed that excessive exercise is as bad as its complete absence, because it is the other extreme of excess. He even states that "although none of us blames someone who was born with physical disabilities, we nevertheless blame those whose physical ugliness is due to negligence and lack of exercise" (Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, 1361b). The philosopher criticizes the lack of exercise, especially among young people, but he also criticizes their excessive involvement in competitive sports, as this can be detrimental to their mental and physical well-being. Writing his list of Olympic champions, Aristotle noted that in the adolescent category, there were only two or three winners who managed to do the same in the men's category. According to the philosopher, the reason for this significant failure was the harsh and one-sided training during youth, which prevented the normal development of children (Aristotle, 1338b-1339a). The golden rule of Aristotelian moderation, which applies to all aspects of human life, is also evident in exercise and competition. Russell (1979), referring to Aristotelian moderation, said that "every virtue is a mean between two extremes, each of which is a vice". Furthermore, he said:

Children should practice athletics in moderation, but not to the point of acquiring professional skill; the boys who trained for the Olympic Games suffer in health, as is shown by the fact that those who have been victors as boys are hardly ever victors as men. Children may learn to sing and play musical instruments to the point of enjoying music critically, but not to the extent of being

skilled performers (Russell, 1979).

Reid (2002), in her book *The Philosophical Athlete*, referring to Aristotle's virtue of moderation and the philosopher's definition of courage, writes that "Aristotle defined courage as a midpoint between the extremes of recklessness and cowardice. Reckless athletes heed no fear, whether it is reasonable or not... cowards, on the other extreme, heed all fears - especially the unreasonable ones".

Aristotle believed that virtue and the mean are very closely connected. So the philosopher, about exercise and athletics, is for the middle ground, between excess and defect. Physical education held an important place in Aristotle's thinking. Like his teacher, Plato recommended it even for pregnant women, believing that with the right exercises they could promote the health of their unborn children.

Furthermore, future parents had to exercise regularly, but without engaging in strenuous physical activity (Politics, 1335b). The philosopher attached great importance to teachers, who were responsible for training young people. Aristotle believed that these teachers should be able to perform the exercises themselves, so that they could then teach them to the children. The philosopher was of the opinion that these teachers, and especially the most important of them all, the pedotribes, should work together with doctors to prevent and treat various diseases (Politics, 1286-1287).

On Education

According to the philosopher, the creation of virtuous and creative citizens is the primary duty of the state. This can be achieved through appropriate education and training, which the legislator must regulate. This education must meet the needs of children and also aim to promote their mental and physical health. The philosopher emphasizes that no one should be excluded from this education because of financial hardship or weakness. This view is in line with the general spirit of the time, since Aristotle tells us that the education of orphans was regulated by law so that they could receive the best possible education, just like children whose parents were alive and able to pay for their education (Aristotle, 1268a; Thucydides, 2.46).

Regarding the education of young people, the philosopher believed that there should be a standard education system for all under the supervision of the city, which should also be responsible for organizing this education. Aristotle disagreed with the private education provided to young people in his time, believing that the education of young people was too important to be left in the hands of private individuals. According to the philosopher, after the age of 7, education is divided into two periods. The first begins at the age of 7 and ends at the age of 14, while the second lasts until the age of 21. In other words, the philosopher divides the education of young people into three parts, each lasting seven years, beginning at birth (Aristotle, 1336). The fact that Aristotle suggests the above periods for the education of young people does

not mean that Athens at the time had a similar system, as we learn from Plato (Protagoras, 326) that there was no set duration of education in Athens.

Aristotle (Ethics, 1130b8-32) believed that for most of the acts laid down by law are enjoined from the point of view of virtue as a whole because the law guide us to live in harmony with every virtue, and abstain from every kind of immorality. In addition he says that the things that promote virtue in general are the rules let down by law with a view to education in citizenship. A similar point of view has been expressed by Plato (Laws, 643e). Jaeger (1976) makes an interesting statement about Aristotle's and Plato's opinions on education and law:

Again and again, the great Athenian political philosophers of the fourth century formulate this ideal in the words of education in the spirit of the laws. The words indicate that establishing a legal standard through written law was a common practice among the Greeks and an educational act.

Aristotle believed that lawmakers should regulate the appropriate education and training of young people through legislation to create virtuous and creative citizens. This education should be accessible to all, excluding no one, and not allowing parents to choose their children's educational programs themselves. According to the philosopher, the primary duty of the legislator is to ensure that the education system meets the needs of young people and promotes their mental and physical development. It should be noted that in Aristotle's time, the education of young people in Athens was neither public nor compulsory, but the Athenians never neglected their children's education. The only compulsory and public education was the Ephebia, which was military from the outset, but later included philosophical studies. This program was attended by young people between the ages of 18 and 20, meaning that the education of young people in Athens lasted two years, and the Ephebia were considered higher educational institutions (Mouratidis, 2023). The Athenians were very proud of this institution, attached great importance to its work, and considered young people who had received this education to be persons of honor (Forbes, 1971). Aristotle (Constitution of Athens, 42.1, 42.4) refers to the institution of the Ephebia. He provides information about the enrollment of young people in these schools, the rationale behind their establishment, the duration of their studies, the graduation ceremony held in the presence of city authorities, and other details. The philosopher also worked with other educational programs in various Greek cities, including Crete and Sparta.

Aristotle was most interested in the Spartan education system and, of course, the reasons for the decline of this system and the city in general. As is well known, the Spartan education system aimed to create warriors whose sole occupation was war. This system did not aim to produce wise men, orators, or philosophers, but soldiers with strength, discipline, determination, and faith in victory on the battlefield. In this sense, the Spartan education system

was completely successful, as it fulfilled its purpose. In short, the Spartan education system created the well-known type of Spartan warrior and Spartan mother, an education that was admired by the ancient world, but never imitated. Although Aristotle criticized the Spartan education system, he also found positive aspects to it. His main objection was its one-sided and unilateral nature. Sparta cultivated physical exercise in young people to the exclusion of intellectual development. Sparta's defeat at Leuctra by the well-organized army of Thebes led Greek philosophers to seek the reasons behind Sparta's defeat and decline. This defeat was not the result of a lack of bravery or courage in battle (Plato, 688; Republic, 548). The virtues of bravery and courage are essential, but they must be combined with other virtues that the Spartan education system ignored. Both Aristotle and Plato, who found many positive aspects in this education, concluded that one-sided education led to the downfall of Sparta. Aristotle (Politics, 1334a) criticizes the lawgiver who did not teach the people of Sparta how to live in peace. The lawgiver taught Sparta to always be ready for war, with the result that they did not know how to live in times of peace.

The philosopher will compare not only Sparta but also other cities with the same educational system to a sword that shines during war but loses its shine and rusts during peacetime.

CONCLUSION

In his book *On the Soul*, Aristotle states that "the soul is the form of the body." Aristotle believed that the soul possesses power that moves the body and perceives sensible objects. According to this view, the soul relies on the body to manifest its actions because without it, it would be unable to do so. In order for the soul to express joy, sorrow, anger, or to distinguish between different objects, it can only do so through the body. The question that arises is: What happens to the soul when the body is destroyed? The philosopher answers that a large part of the soul dies with the body and only a small part remains, which is independent and immortal. It is a separate and immortal entity "planted" in a part of the soul, responsible for the individual's thoughts and emotions. Aristotle refers to this entity as the mind.

The relationship between the body and the soul must be harmonious. To achieve this, the body must be in good physical condition, which can be achieved through moderate and balanced exercise. This physical training of the body is considered very important because, among other things, it promotes courage and moral strength. General education occupies a significant place in Aristotle's educational philosophy, as it contributes to the creation of virtuous citizens with courage and determination. According to the philosopher, this education is a very important task and, as such, belongs to the city, which must regulate the educational process by law.

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