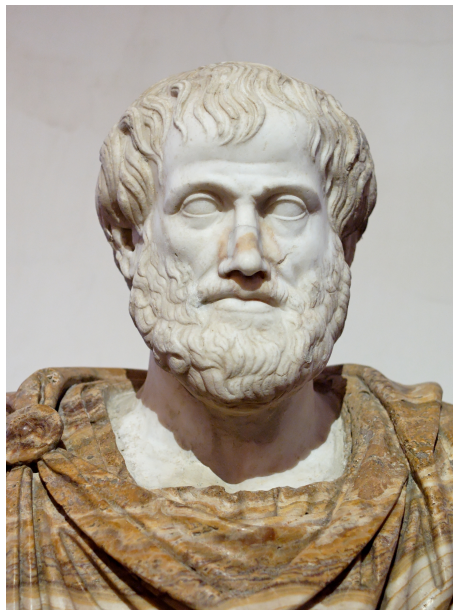


Aristotle's view on Physics and Philosophy

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Abstract: Aristotle, one of renowned Greek philosophers made a huge contribution for the good foundation of symbolic logic and scientific thinking to Western Philosophy in addition to making an advancement in the field of “Metaphysics”. He was probably the first who was serious in “Virtue Ethics” theory. These contributions made him possibly the most important philosopher till 18th century. This article gives a brief overview of his ideas on Physics and Philosophy.



Aristotle (Source: Wikipedia)

Brief overview of his philosophy:

Aristotle was a student of Plato, and remained in his school till his teacher died. Then he was appointed as a teacher to the great “Alexander”. Aristotle's most of the works was destroyed, and also his actual work was never recovered. Only through the notes of his students, we can have the idea of his views on philosophy and life.

In the Medieval times, due to the concern with theological questions contemporary philosophers initially rejected the work of Aristotle.

St. Thomas Aquinas reintroduced the views of Aristotle to the world after combining his views with his own Catholic theology and established the foundation for the scientific advancement of the Enlightenment.

His viewpoint on Science, Metaphysics and Logic:

After rejecting the idealism of his own tutor Plato on the “Theory of the forms”, his thought was that the essence of any physical object must exist within the object itself unlike Plato who stated, essence of the object must exist apart from that object. One of Plato’s thought was, physical things or objects were the representations of perfect forms which exist on another plane of reality. He also opposed the idea that said that the soul of a body exists outside the body, his idea was consciousness of any human being resides inside human being. His way of gaining knowledge was through “natural philosophy”. Much to his credit, nowadays science continuously testing the theories with experiments and replacing theories which cannot hold up strongly. He suggested initially that five elements “earth, air, water, fire, Aether” made up everything. His one of the famous idea was his “four causes”, which essentially explains the nature of change, for instance:

- Material cause for a thing: what this thing is actually made of,
- Formal cause for a thing: how the matter of this thing is arranged,
- Efficient cause for a thing: where does this thing came from,
- Final cause for a thing: what’s the purpose of this thing.

The theory of evolution by Charles Darwin and a huge number of biological experiments and observations proved the idea of life proposed by Aristotle which was, all the life forms are actually originated from sea and the complex life forms which we actually see was gradually developed slowly from less complex forms. One of the beliefs that Aristotle had, is to have basic axioms for the determination of fundamental nature of reality, for example, “Principle of non-contradiction”. He used this important idea to mark the beginning point for natural philosophy and metaphysics in addition to the basis of symbolic logic. An axiom is assumed to be true since it can not be proven as it’s self evident which in turn help us to move forward in making any argument. Symbolic logic gave us the idea to evaluate validity in reasoning, as for example, “all insects are invertebrates” is our 1st condition and “all invertebrates are animals” is 2nd condition, hence, the conclusion which can be drawn is “all insects are animals” which seems valid because it follows from above two conditions.

In this way, it can be proved that reasoning is not linked with the truthfulness of the conditions being considered. One can make a logical argument based on the idea of Aristotle that, false conditions can sometimes lead to a true conclusion, but the true condition will always lead to a true conclusion.

His viewpoint on Ethics:

There is not much difference between Aristotle’s and Plato’s ethics.

Aristotle’s thought of line was, no rules to consequences could give human being any correct guidelines in which the person can respond to all the situations, but his viewpoint was rejected as it was assumed in medieval times that ethics had their basis in God’s will. He thought that the goal of human species for their search of happiness is to reach to the state of flourishing, in addition he believed that to reach the state of flourishing aiming for virtue is important and necessary. For instance, for Aristotle virtues were

temperance, fortitude, courage, justice, liberality, magnificence and magnanimity. There are some objections to Virtue Ethics, for instance, St. Thomas Aquinas favoured Natural Law Ethics and disregarded Virtue Ethics. He also believed chastity to be an absolute virtue and thought that this should be the goal of everyone. Modern philosophers had in mind the fact that virtue depends on society also, for example, virtue in one society may not be considered a virtue in another society, hence, they accuse Virtue Ethics being nothing more than moral relativism.

These philosophers also argued and believed that Virtue Ethics is nothing but a side stepping of the ethical problem and is just advertising the moral norms of any given society than a normative ethical theory based on any reasoning.

His viewpoint on Happiness:

“Happiness depends on ourselves” .

Aristotle believed that happiness is the central purpose of human species and also the goal in itself. His some conclusions were:

The happiness depends mainly on the cultivation of virtue. He truly believed the fact that a genuinely happy and peaceful life required the accomplishment of lot of conditions which includes both physical and mental well-being. His main idea was about to maintain the balance or mean between two extremes.

For him, the mean is the way of achieving virtue which is different from Gautam Buddha’s Middle Path which is the minimal requirement or minimal resources required for a balanced meditative life.

Aristotle’s view of Nature:

While doing biological observations and investigations, he draws some conclusions which says that there are 4 different kinds of things that exist in the world where each one of them is defined by a different purpose:

- Non-living or lifeless things: The goal of these things is to come to rest. As these does not have soul, they are beyond any stupidity.
- Vegetation and Plants: These are living and seek nourishment and growth. They have souls and when they attain their goals, they can even be satisfied.
- Animal beings: These belongs to higher level of life than vegetation and seek pleasure and reproduction. They have emotions and can live a healthy and pleasant life.
- Human beings: So, here arises one important question, which is, why humans are so different than others ?

What Aristotle thought was; These humans are capable of reasoning, make choices, take responsibilities and act accordingly. They have different capacity than animals and vegetation. It is due to reason that we, the humans, can live a better life and think rationally, hence only pleasure can not be a goal for human’s happiness.

The goal of humans is to reason, think rational and help others to lead a better life.

References

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