# Educational Values in the Light of the Philosophy of Aristotle and Plato and their Relevance in Contemporary Times

**Puja Ahuja**
I.E.T.V.E., Panjab University, Chandigarh, Haryana, India

## Abstract

The word philosophy comes from the Greek words for "love" and "wisdom" and generally refer to the pursuit of wisdom, moral discipline and knowledge through logic. However, Philosophy is not just a place for high-minded, abstract thinking and hypothetical irrelevancy. Philosophy is the historical mother of all disciplines, the stomping grounds for exploring ideas too new for testing and observation until a whole new field breaks away dedicated to that particular subject; biology, physics, psychology, and even chemistry all originated as philosophy before becoming fields of their own. Isaac Newton and Sigmund Freud studied philosophy before moving on to their particular fields. Adam Smith and Karl Marx studied and became tenured professors of philosophy in England before pioneering the independent field of economics as we know it today.

In propounding a philosophy of education, educational policy, educational practice and values in general the world today owes much to Plato and Aristotle. The ideas of these ancient scholars have provided the basis for the philosophy, policy and practice of education everywhere. This paper summarizes the educational ideas and values of Plato and Aristotle and a discussion of the relevance of the educational values of these scholars in the contemporary times.

## Introduction

The world today owes much of its current educational, as. well as political thoughts to three major influences in world history, namely, the Greco-Roman influence, characteristic of the classical era; the Renaissance-cum-Reformation influence, which came to light during the closing years of the Middle Ages and the opening years of the modern period respectively and the Revolutionary influence which has often been closely associated with the French Revolution.

The educational theories of Plato and Aristotle belonged to the classical era. Roman artists often depict Plato as pointing to the heaven and Aristotle as pointing to the earth. Metaphorically, this picture is the main difference between them. Plato was the idealist, the dreamer and the lover of myth! Whereas. Aristotle was a realist, a practical man, referred to as 'the hard intellectualist', 'a master of many sciences' and the 'Father of Biology'. These basic differences in their attitudes to life generally account for, the main differences in their educational theories, as in their political philosophies generally indeed, any discussion of 'the educational theories of Plato and Aristotle must take account of the differences in their political thought because they discussed the subject of education only as a part of their wider political philosophy, education being regarded by both as a means of attaining the state's objectives.

This may explain why the two regarded education as the state's responsibility, because any control of educationary rival bodies may tend to disrupt the organic unity of the State. Students of history of political ideas would be well aware of the fact that the family life and upbringing of both Plato and Aristotle greatly influenced their subsequent career and writings. A brief historical background is therefore necessary and relevant to our discussion of the educational theories & hence values therein of these two Greek philosophers.

**Historical Backgrounds of Aristotle and Plato**

Plato was born around 424 B.C. His father was Ariston, descended from kings in Athens and Messenia, and his mother, Perictione, was related to the great Greek statesman, Solon. Plato was given the name Aristocles, a family name, and adopted Plato (meaning "broad" and "strong") later when he was a wrestler. As was typical of upper middle-class families of the time, Plato were educated by tutors, exploring a wide range of topics centered largely on philosophy, what would now be called ethics.

He became a student of Socrates, but his studies with the Greek master were interrupted by the Peloponnesian War, which pit Athens against Sparta. Plato fought as a soldier between 409 and 404 B.C. He left Athens when the city was defeated and its democracy was replaced by a Spartan oligarchy. He considered returning to Athens to pursue a career in politics when the oligarchy was overthrown, but the execution of Socrates in 399 B.C. changed his mind.

For over 12 years, Plato traveled throughout the Mediterranean region and Egypt studying mathematics, geometry, astronomy, and religion. In about 385 B.C., Plato founded his academy, which is often suggested to have been the first university in history. He would preside over it until his death around 348 B.C. Most of his educational theories are contained in, **The Republic** and **The Laws.**

Aristotle, whose name means "the best purpose," was born in 384 B.C. in Stagira, a town in northern Greece. His father was Nicomachus, the court physician to the Macedonian royal family. Tutored privately as all aristocratic children were, Aristotle trained first in medicine. Considered to be a brilliant student, in 367 B.C. he was sent to Athens to study philosophy with Plato. He stayed at Plato's Academy until about 347 B.C.

Although his time at the academy was productive, Aristotle opposed some of Plato's teachings and may have challenged the Master openly. When Plato died, Aristotle was not appointed head of the academy, so he left to pursue his own studies. After leaving Athens, Aristotle spent time traveling and studying in Asia Minor (what is now Turkey) and its islands.

At the request of Philip of Macedon, he returned to Macedonia in 338 B.C. to tutor Alexander the Great, and two other future kings, Ptolemy and Cassander. Aristotle took full charge of Alexander's education and is considered to be the source of Alexander's push to conquer Eastern empires. After Alexander conquered Athens, Aristotle returned

to that city and set up a school of his own, known as the Lyceum. It spawned what was called the "Peripatetic School," for their habit of walking around as part of their lectures and discussions. When Alexander died, Athens took arms and overthrew its Macedonian conquerors. Because of his close ties to Macedonia, Aristotle's situation became dangerous. Seeking to avoid the same fate as Socrates, Aristotle emigrated to the island of Euboea. He died there in 322 B.C.

## Underlying Values in the Philosophy of Idealist Plato and its Implications

- Plato believed that the soul is immortal. Since soul is immortal it enters into the body even before the child is born. Thus knowledge is present in the child before birth. The process of education should refine this knowledge.
- Plato considered the soul is imbibed with virtues.
- Wisdom is the eye of the soul. The aim of the life of man is realize this 'spiritual wisdom'. This wisdom should be awakened through education.
- The philosophy of Plato is known as the 'Theory of ideas' or 'Theory of Forms'. This is on account of the fact that Plato regards the world of ideas above the world of sense perception.
- Plato emphasized the development of qualities of citizenship i.e. *Truth Beauty and Goodness*. He considered education as the most imports instrument to do this task.

## Objectives of Value Education relevant to the Contemporary Times According to Plato:

- Inculcating sentiments of love for truth, beauty and goodness.
- Harmonizing the personality of the child.
- Producing self-governing individual.
- Developing a spirit of harmony among children.
- Developing wisdom.
- Identifying conflicting elements in life and harmonizing them.
- Harmonizing body, mind and soul.
- Protecting the unity and integrity of the State.

- Developing civil efficiency

## Plato's Contribution to Value System emerging out of Educational Thought and Practices

Plato made a deep study of the various aspects of education and keeping view that socio-econo-politico structure of the society formulated his scheme/plan of education. He adopted idealistic approach in this. He was the first Western educator who paid so much attention to educational issues. He fully accepted the need for planning the system according to the various stages of development of the human being.

## Plato's Contribution may be Summed Up As:

1. Plato emphasized the balanced development of the personality.
2. He laid stress on inculcating the values of good citizenship.
3. He advanced moral training.
4. He formulated a definite system of education which included specific curriculum for specific stages.

**Values as Emerging out of Aristotle's Educational Theories Regarding Life**
1. The lowest type is the sensuous life- life of pleasures and gratification.
2. Higher than this is the life of the warrior and the politician. Aristotle considers this type of life praiseworthy if led among a community of freemen.
3. Aristotle criticizes the despotic and tyrannical life which derives pleasure in subjugating people who do not deserve enslavement. He appreciates the political life among equal based on the principle of reciprocity.

Aristotle praises as the highest, the life of the self-sufficient philosopher contemplating eternal truth. "The life of the reasons is the highest because reason is the essence of man and is divine in its nature".

**Underlying Values in the Philosophy of Realist Aristotle and Its Implications**
Aristotle never considered man to be completely evil or wicked. He believed that in man there are elements of both self-love and social instinct.  In case he is not trained in the art of just, decent and socialized existence then the beastly instincts dominate in him but if he gets training, then he can rise. Aristotle divides the soul of man into two parts-the irrational and the rational. The irrational part is trained by the cultivation of **moral virtues or values**. **Moral virtues** are acquired by the repetition of the corresponding acts. Although these acts cannot be prescribed exactly, still they must avoid excess and defect. Thus, Aristotle was a great believes in the ethical mean or moderation ('Madhyam') way: The mean is difficult to achieve but can be grasped by perception.

According to Aristotle a completely happy man is he who acts in accordance with complete virtue and possesses physical prowess, technical competence, mental **virtuosity** and **morality**.

Aristotle wants the development of physical strength by gymnastic training but is opposed to mere athleticism acquired by the neglect of **other virtues**.

According to Aristotle, courage and endurance are needed for business and action, philosophy or wisdom for leisure, and temperance and justice are needed for both action and leisure.

**Meaning and Aim of Education**
According to Aristotle, education is the process of systematic training and instruction whereby the citizen may be enabled to realize the synthesis of the ideals of the best man and the best citizen. Aristotle states that the goods of the mind cannot be attained without an adequate supply of goods of the body. Thus education implies **'creation of a sound mind in a sound body'**.

Education, according to Aristotle is the art of acquiring happiness and not the pursuit of pleasure.

Aristotle, however, lays more emphasis on making an individual good human being**.** *"In the virtue of each, the virtue of all is involved"*. In his book politics Aristotle dealt with the individual rather than social aspect of education.

**Habit Formation**
Training in habit formation must come earlier than rational training from the very early years Aristotle wants the children to be habituated to hard life.

**Moral Education/Training Integrated with Intellectual Growth**
According to Aristotle, the main categories of moral virtues are courage friendliness, justice, liberty, magnificence, magnanimity, temperature and truthfulness.

Aristotle would like to include ready wit as a moral virtue. He calls upon the educators to control the use and circulation of stories etc in order that from the very childhood the future citizens may learn temperance. Temperance is a cardinal virtue in Aristotle book *Ethics* Aristotle states moral training is not complete in itself. It is for the growth of intellectual enlightenment.

**Evaluation of Aristotle Views**

Aristotle was a realist; he observed what education is and emphasized that the way children ought to be instructed should be very clear to the instructor/teaches. Education would differ according to the nature of the state.

Aristotle's views on the ***teaching and training of moral values are relevant even today***. His is fully justified in stressing '**habituation**' for the practice of **moral values.**

Aristotle is mindful of the syntheses of knowledge and happiness

He was a realist and his realism is manifest in his approach to life and educational ideas and practice. He fully took note of the prevailing scenario and accordingly formulate his scheme of education.

**Conclusion**

All of the above discussion is very much pertinent in inculcating such values in today's modern 21st Century generation which is rapidly getting eroded of its values. The erosion of the value system is taking place at a rapid pace. Young people aged 15-24 years are a major force in the contemporary world.

As we go around looking and talking to youths, what we see is not all but a hefty fraction of youth indulging in such gear which takes them to nowhere, but can lead to miserable results and ill effect on their lives, they have their own philosophy, own phrase one of them goes like this *"Na Fikar Na Faqa Aish Kar Kaka"* (No tension. No Starving, just enjoy, Dear uncle).

Majority of the youth today are not disciplined and have little to no idea of what their morals and values should be. Their mind is empty; we live in a society where we see kids disrespecting elders and talk down to them.

Everyone is born with unlimited potential, so the need of the hour is to convert it into realistic, by transforming the mindset through the process of inculcation of values as pointed out by our Great Ancient Philosophers such as Aristotle & Plato.

**References**
- Barker, Ernest (1960). Greek. *Education.*
- Boyd, William (1966). *The History of Western Education,* London : Adams & Charles Black.
- Curtis, S.J. & Boultwood, M.A. (1966). A Short History of Education Ideas. London : University Tutorial Press.
- Jarmal, J.L. (1966). *Land* mark in the History of Education.
- Thompson, A.R. (1981). Education and Development in Africa. London : English Language Book Society.
- Aggarwal JC & Gupta (2014). Great Philosophers and thinkers on Education: Shipra publications.
- http://www.artofmanliness.com/2010/02/04/man-knowledge-the-greek-philosophers/

- http://www.diffen.com/difference/Aristotle_vs_Plato
- http://jameelblr.blogspot.in/2011/12/erosion-of-moral-values-in-todays-youth.html