

Connection Between Ethics and Poetics in Aristoteles

İsmet TEKEREK

Ph.D., Aegean University, Izmir.

ABSTRACT

Action and character are two major concepts which called human into being in the past and also for the moment and will render human exist in the future. If action is being executed through the preference of free will of a conscious and prudent person then character of that person can be spoken. Action, character and preference of free will have an important position at the ethical and aesthetical views of Aristotle. He presents his views on the function of action, character and tragedia at his work Poetics in which he composed theatre aesthetics of the era by analysing tragedias originated from rituals and mythology and which are played for thousands of people. According to his views, sciences can be classified as practical and theoretical. Since practical sciences deal with human-character which is the source of action, theatre can be evaluated as practical art by following his views on tragedia and examples. Because tragedia is the imitation of an action which is experienced by a character who is better than the average, and this action orients the person to the good through catharsis which it creates. Aeschylus' "Prometheus Bound" and Sophocles' "Antigone", which are among the most important and mature tragedias, are two examples projecting Aristotle's ideas on action, character, free will, individual preference and average ethics. Only a tragic hero who executes his action by using his individual preference with his free will and carries out this action coherently can create catharsis on the audience. The audience watches the conflict between equal powers developed by the tragedia, gets into catharsis; and the calmness after catharsis serves the view of good-wise citizen which is the target of Aristotle's total views. Thinking once more on this dialectical relation between action, character, free will and individual preference which are also the basis of Aristotle's philosophy is important in terms of interrogating the human and his values, of enriching the human.

Key words: Poetics, ethics, ethos, aesthetics, politics, art, theatre, action, character, virtue, tragedia, imitation, catharsis, Antigone, Prometheus.

Introduction

As in the expression of one of the main principles of Sufi tradition, "only dies the body, the soul is immortal", which renders human human, the characteristic of human being that carries him to the future is undoubtedly, without the separation of good or bad, his individual preferences and his ethical¹ values which shape this individual choice, in other words his ethical understanding and

¹ The word "ethics" is originated from "ethos". According to A. Pieper, this word has two usages. The first usage written as εθος has the meanings of customs, habits, usages. If the person who composes his acts according to the customs of the site through education follows the norms of "ethical right" generally accepted, then he is in accordance with ethics. But in narrower sense and written as ηθος the person acts according to ethics by interrogating the values and norms of acting which is inherited. Further he conceives and thinks over them so that he could make them habit in order to realize the good demanded. Customs, habits and usages in this way receive the meaning of character and get stronger as the main attitude of being virtuous. Latin correspondence of

character. If these values in a way disappear, or the person does not own a positive or negative value, further if he can not act through his free will consciously in the name of his own values; then in an environment and society built on such persons, a practical and theoretical accumulation as well as transformation through such accumulation can not emerge. In such a society we can not speak of prudent characters or individuals even with their weaknesses.

Pieper, as one of the theoreticians who inquire contemporary ethics and consider its importance in daily life, says: "In human's all acting forms and linguistical customs, some sort of adhesion of ethics which depends on certain value designs finds its expression."² In other words, attitudes which render human a member of society, and the person's being not indifferent to the speeches and acts of other society members, moreover his exhibiting acts in the form of praise and critique, tolerance and intolerance, consent and denial are his taking a side as showing what he finds wrong or right. If we continue Pieper's comment we can conclude as follows: In a society in which members speak and act in the name of their interests, their beliefs or a general aim, such a possibility in principle which means the revelation of the person's individualistic attitude is the indicator of freedom founding the total human practice.

Since ancient times, the immediate relation between human, ethics, individual will and also freedom which is the central point of thought systematization of philosophers has been especially the main problematic of Ancient Greek tragedias and has reflected on the action of tragedia hero and naturally on his character. Hundreds of years ago, the noble tragedias that effect audience of Ancient Greek to attain catharsis³, and mighty tragic heros who realize their actions through their free preference and then prepare their own ends by compensating can be examples for modern humanity from the point of free will and conscious act. Prometheus of Aeschylus and Antigone of Sophocles are just two examples which close human and humanity through a noteworthy and always vivid way from the view of the universal and the historical. Prometheus, as semi god semi human, with the name of "the one who knows the future", has acted according to his free will when he, despite Zeus as the representative of order of gods, stole the fire from Zeus in the name of humanity by seeing that the future would develop for the benefit of humanity, thereby set crime against gods and abided Zeus's tortures. Just like Antigone. She was punished to death by Kreon when she, according to Hades, buried Polyneikes, her brother, who betrayed his land, despite the representative of state Kreon's command not to bury. Both of them followed their choices, abided their end, even if it is awful. There is no external necessity that force their actions –also not for their opposites Zeus and Kreon–; both of them followed their free will and faced the end, whatever it is. Therefore, two thousand five hundred years after, because of these preferences and acts we still speak about Prometheus and Antigone. And their actions mean something from the point of modern human rights and values.

In consequence, tragedias of Ancient Greek are contemporary works of art addressing to modern human by their practical functions always containing their universality and actuality. The most important characteristic of tragedias is to take the action of the hero who chooses it with all his prudence and consistency as a subject. The hero has such a characteristic that it helps him to choose his own way. The end he reaches (summit and afterwards unhappy but high final) is death or worse than death. Even though belief system, world of gods or faith is the source of hero's preparing this awful end, the main reason is his conscious choice of action despite faith and gods. Aristotle is the most important philosopher who theorizes these universal characteristics of Ancient Greek tragedias which serve daily life and citizenship through catharsis, and who collects his theories in *Poetics*. Aristotle, analyzing the dialectical relation between mimesis and catharsis from the point of the

these two greek words is "mos" (plural-mores) and means both customs and character. See. Pieper, Annamarie, *Etiğe Giriş [Introduction to Ethics]*, pp. 30-31.

² Pieper, Annamarie, *Etiğe Giriş [Introduction to Ethics]*, p. 34.

³ According to Aristotle, "mission of tragedia is to clean the soul from the passion by the feelings of fear and pity which it evokes" (catharsis), See. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449b.

function of tragedia, reflects his political and ethical views on his aesthetical views. In other words, Aristotle, advising a world view and an ethical understanding to the citizen of Athens through views above and presenting his philosophy and aesthetic view to the citizen's getting wise, puts the tragedias and the philosophy underneath in function for daily life. Consequently, Aristotle's thoughts about ethics-politics-aesthetics are systemmatical, i.e. they present a totality and effect one and other.

Aristotle's View of Tragedia and Its Relation to Practice

According to C. Lord, Aristotle separates knowledge, i.e. theoretical sciences, for the sake of knowledge, from practical sciences that are carried for the sake of utility.⁴ Politics, for Aristotle, is a practical science in all senses. Conceiving the comprehension and direction of practical or political science, as Aristotle does, is important for both considering his ethical and political work and expressing how they integrate with his poetika about art in general and theatre in particular.

Even though theory and practice separation has not been developed systematically by Aristotle, they differ concerning method, necessary intellectual capability, aim and subjects. Subject of theoretical sciences is invariable things, and their method is to analyse principles or reasons of these things. Their aim is demonstrative knowledge. Capability necessary for these sciences comes from the scientific or theoretical part of the intellectual section of the soul. Aristotle defines theoretical sciences as metaphysics, mathematics, physics, biology and psychology.

Practical sciences deal exclusively with human, human as the source of "action-praxis" or as a self-conscious being. Human action is bound to change by nature, in sphere of contingencies, since it depends on human will. Aim of practical sciences is not knowledge, but orientation of the action to "the better", in other words its getting better. Capability necessary for these sciences is the one deliberating and comes from the practical part of the intellectual section of the soul. Aristotle explains this capability as "practical wisdom" or "prudence". Method of practical sciences is not to explore principles or reasons of human action, but to analyse its phenomena; mostly it is dialectical and refining human's views regarding the relevant phenomena.

To C. Lord, dialectical argumentation on which Aristotle depends in his political works –it is a semi-dialogical research which starts from premises in common opinion– has been influenced by the soul of Platonic dialogs, if not their form. Aristotle, like Plato and Socrates, takes ordinary human's langue and views as the starting point of practical and political philosophy. As an example, neither he advances by concluding from fixed principles belonging to human nature, nor he refers a technical jargon out of actual political life. The reason for that is his thought that certainty looked for by theoretical sciences is not to be followed in sphere of practice or politics. Human affairs are by nature changeable, therefore taking them up from the point of a mathematician or physician causes the phenomena concerning these affairs to disappear or to ruin. The essential and most appropriate reasoning for practical, or better political sphere is not the reasoning of scienecman or philosopher, but a prudent reasoning or one which contains citizens' practical wisdom, i.e. it arises from the experience of daily life.

Aristotle's method reflects also his comprehension regarding aim of practical science. Practical science, since it is in service of action, should present its subject in such a way that it must engage in ordinary political people and effect their deeds.

⁴ Lord, Carnes, "Aristotle", in *History of Political Philosophy*, pp. 118-154.

Aristotle's practical science is not for the philosopher or the student of philosophy, or not only for them, but also for the political human. In order to say more definitely, these sciences are for actual or potential directors of the political power or for the rule-makers who are creators of polity capturing all political actors inside.

In this frame, when tragedia theses presented in his *Poetika* are evaluated, theatre can also be considered as a discussion platform targeting firstly citizens, then all political actors, and consequently as an art serving practical sciences. Since, Ancient Greek Theatre, as being a theatre originated from rituals, addresses crowds without doing class separation. Great amphi theatres which were built in each city-state and still stand in our time are concrete indicators of the relevant situation. Definition of tragedia and its elements such as Action, Tragic Hero (Character) and Catharsis directly engage in ordinary political people's views and target their deeds. In other words, catharsis which is the product of prudent action of a tragic hero, of awful results of this action and of fear and pity feelings evoked in the audience by this end is the element that serves practical wisdom of citizens. Wise citizen can be understood as the ordinary one who has weaknesses, but also owns the potential which will eliminates these weaknesses, and who has the ability to set reason-feeling equilibrium. Aristotle mentions,

*"Tragedy is the imitation of an action; and an action implies personal agents, who necessarily possess certain distinctive qualities both of character and thought; for it is by these that we qualify actions themselves, and these—thought and character—are the two natural causes from which actions spring, and on actions again all success or failure depends"*⁵

Therefore, each tragedia is the imitation of an action (story) of the hero who is higher than the average (not only from the point of class, but also from the point of value judgements, i.e. the hero must have values). This action or mimesis starts, develops and ends in a plot (sequence-of-events) which evolves through line of cause-and-effect according to possibility and necessity laws (these laws are maintained by common opinion).⁶ When events reach to final, tragic hero abides the cost of his own action which stems from his humanly weakness or "hybris" but which he chooses through his individual will. Through the tragedia as a fulfilled totality, he changes by his action and gets from good to bad, from happiness to unhappiness, from stability to ruined equilibrium, from crossroads to the road he chooses, in other words from breaking point to "anagnorisis" (getting from ignorance to knowledge)⁷. He meets with a disaster in front of common opinion. While this happens, audience of citizens watches the disaster into which falls the hero, and identifies with him. They reach catharsis when they feel pity for him or when they are frightened. It is catharsis which balances reason and feeling and causes citizens to find the balance by their own conscious. It provides, through theatre, permanence to the unwritten ethical and political constitution of "wise" citizen who is consistent and who conforms with democracy. Aristotle's words about qualities of tragedia fosters the same idea. Tragedia, according to him,

*"is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions"*⁸

⁵ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449b-1450a.

⁶ Ibid., 1450b.

⁷ Ibid., 1452a-1452b.

⁸ Ibid., 1449b.

Şener emphasizes that the function of cleaning-purification which Aristotle attributed on tragedia is also a contribution to rational thinking and calmness which come after it. She puts it in words such as:

“By this way, it must have been thought that audience can control his feelings after his exhausting excitement. Under this comment, catharsis is accepted as a psychological process which opens to healthy thinking without the pressure of feelings. If we take into consideration that in ancient tragedias tragic meaning is significantly important, that it reflects the problems also belonging to our age, that it tests value judgements which lead human relations, we can result that it can be demanded that audience should perceive this meaning without the stress of feelings.”⁹

Aristotle, in the part where elements of tragedia are explained, while listing the qualities of tragedia from the point of essence and form, expresses Thought (Dianoia), an element of essence, as capability of discussion of things that are commanded by conditions and that are suitable to conditions. He mentions also that politics and rhetorics do the same function.¹⁰ Therefore, Şener states that Aristotle indicates “thesis”, “theme” of our time by the element of thought. She says that subject, view, proposition or thesis asserted constitutes content of thought of the play.¹¹ Tragedia is, then, embodiment of this content of thought through the action of the character, and effective expression of the action. Like ethics and politics, it presents a point of view with a thesis.

Consequently, we could conclude that tragedias in the process of catharsis of results of individual and free will under the condition of acting, i.e. from purification to reaching calmness and human temperance through stimulating feelings, living/making-to-live, can be evaluated as practical science-art in Aristotle’s paradigm as well as work of art.

Action, Character, the Good and Happiness in Ethics and Poetics

Aristotle, as stating in the first statement of Nicomachean Ethics that each action and every thing aims at “the good”, explores what kind of good people aim at their actions. People want to do which is good according to them. But this good changes from person to person, even according to one person’s different situations:

“For the former think it is some plain and obvious thing, like pleasure, wealth, or honour; they differ, however, from one another – and often even the same man identifies it with different things, with health when he is ill, with wealth when he is poor.”¹²

Aristotle, after defining “the good” as the one being aimed at by everybody through their actions, as A. Arslan emphasizes, starts to develop a separation which will be important for ethics in the future: Instrument-Aim separation.¹³ For Aristotle, some actions are instruments, some of them are aims: For example, is aim of people who pursue wealth wealth? Or else, they want wealth in order to reach some other things? The good, for Aristotle, is not something as an instrument used to reach another thing, but it is something that is wanted for itself, it is an “aim in itself”. The good which Aristotle looks for, searches for is something that is not instrument to another thing, something that will not be before some other thing:

⁹ Şener, Sevdâ, *Yaşamın Kırılma Noktasında Dram Sanatı [Art of Drama in The Breaking Point of Life]*, p. 97.

¹⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 6th book.

¹¹ Şener, Sevdâ, *Dünden Bugüne Tiyatro Düşüncesi [Theatre Thought from Yesterday to Today]*, p. 39.

¹² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a 20-25.

¹³ Arslan, Ahmet, *İlkçağ Felsefe Tarihi III-Aristoteles [History of Philosophy of Antiquity III – Aristotle]*, pp. 244-245.

*"Therefore, if there is only one final end, this will be what we are seeking, and if there are more than one, the most final of these will be what we are seeking. Now we call that which is in itself worthy of pursuit more final than that which is worthy of pursuit for the sake of something else, and that which is never desirable for the sake of something else more final than the things that are desirable both in themselves and for the sake of that other thing, and therefore we call final without qualification that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else."*¹⁴.

In *Poetics*, the most important tragedian element that Aristotle emphasizes is "story", i.e. action. Aristotle asserts this idea as:

*"But most important of all is the structure of the incidents. For Tragedy is an imitation, not of men, but of an action and of life, and life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action, not a quality. Now character determines men's qualities, but it is by their actions that they are happy or the reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the actions. Hence the incidents and the plot are the end of a tragedy; and the end is the chief thing of all. Again, without action there cannot be a tragedy; there may be without character."*¹⁵.

Prometheus, for this reason, rejects Zeus' unjust attitude that forgets poor mortals, and gives hope to humanity; he ventures to steal fire from Zeus for development of the same humanity. His noble action notifies the new power and prepares the revolution of humanity against Zeus, old power. Nobody forced Prometheus to do this action. With his free will he assumes on behalf of rationality and balances Zeus' injustice by giving fire to people. Despite all heavy punishments of Zeus. Antigone's action is to bury his brother Polyneikes inspite of Kreon's prohibition. She buries her brother in the name of love. She buries him because of Hades' desire of that all humans must be buried without any classification. She defends herself against Kreon as:

<i>Creon</i>	<i>: Hast thou no shame to differ from all these?</i>
<i>Antigone</i>	<i>: To reverence kith and kin can bring no shame.</i>
<i>Creon</i>	<i>: Was his dead foeman not thy kinsman too?</i>
<i>Antigone</i>	<i>: One mother bare them and the self-same sire.</i>
<i>Creon</i>	<i>: Why cast a slur on one by honoring one?</i>
<i>Antigone</i>	<i>: The dead man will not bear thee out in this.</i>
<i>Creon</i>	<i>: Surely, if good and evil fare alive.</i>
<i>Antigone</i>	<i>: The slain man was no villain but a brother.</i>
<i>Creon</i>	<i>: The patriot perished by the outlaw's brand.</i>
<i>Antigone</i>	<i>: Nathless the realms below these rites require.</i>
<i>Creon</i>	<i>: Not that the base should fare as do the brave.</i>
<i>Antigone</i>	<i>: Who knows if this world's crimes are virtues there?</i>
<i>Creon</i>	<i>: Not even death can make a foe a friend.</i>
<i>Antigone</i>	<i>: My nature is for mutual love, not hate.</i>
<i>Creon</i>	<i>: Die then, and love the dead if thou must."</i> ¹⁶

Antigone buries her brother despite Kreon and goes to share her love proudly. By this action she writes history in the eye of people. Since she realizes desire of customs despite Kreon. Ordinary people can not dare to offend Kreon's commands. Only Antigone, who differs from average and decides through her free will, could realize such action. Just like Prometheus.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a 30.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450a.

¹⁶ Sophocles, *Antigone*, pp.29-30

Aristotle touches on “the good” and “aim in itself” again during mentioning tragic character or hero. He says:

“In respect of Character there are four things to be aimed at. First, and most important, it must be good. Now any speech or action that manifests moral purpose of any kind will be expressive of character.”¹⁷

Here, what Aristotle means with the statement that “any speech or action that manifests moral purpose” is “it is not something as instrument used to reach another thing, but it is something that is wanted for itself, it is an ‘aim in itself’”. That is to say that tragic hero -or character in his words- prefers his action not for the sake of any interest or in the name of using it as instrument to reach some other aim, but only according to his prudence and free will or by inner necessity. Such character is appropriate, consistent and decided character.

If we make examples of pivot characters of tragedias of Prometheus and Antigone, we face with Prometheus and Antigone who have weaknesses –these weaknesses are humanly weaknesses such as arrogance and obstinacy–, but who do not get back on the way they advance with their pride and persistency. Both Prometheus and Antigone realize their action under the pressure of inner necessity by their free will and individual preferences. Both of them arrive the level of character since they realize their action, the aim in itself. They reach happiness as they do not make concession, follow their action till its end decidedly and abide the result. Undoubtedly, their end is sorrowful at their time, also in our time compared to an ordinary person. But they are happy. Because they realized their action as aim in itself without the pressure of an external force and used their free choice right till the end. Because they are characters. The action they choose makes them different and honorable characters. Aim of Prometheus who sees the future is too present the fire that he took from the hands of gods to humanity. He acts the necessary way, not for the sake of making the aim a step for another thing. Only a character like Prometheus chooses such an action. Who can stand injustice, even if its actor is Zeus. That’s why he steals fire from Zeus in order to save the future of mortals. He is neither a criminal nor a mortal pursuing his interest. To be sure, according to Zeus, he is a criminal who ruins the absolute hegemony, the order of gods. But he is the one who does what should be done for humanity. Since he is a virtuous character. The words he uses in order to explain Chorus the reasons of his action express how virtuous, brave and decided character he is:

“PROMETHEUS- (...)

*When first the Blessed Ones were filled with wrath
And there arose division in their midst,
These instant to hurl Cronos from his throne
That Zeus might be their king, and these, adverse,
Contending that he ne’er should rule the Gods,
Then I, wise counsel urging to persuade
The Titans, sons of Ouranos and Chthon,
Prevailed not: but, all indirect essays
Despising, they by the strong hand, effortless,
Yet by main force-supposed that they might seize
Supremacy. But me my mother Themis
And Gaia¹⁸, one form called by many names,*

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1454a.

¹⁸ In Hesiodos’ works, which are inspired by Ancient Greek mythology, there was Chaos in the beginning. It gave birth to Gaia (earth) and Eros (love). Gaia gave birth to her spouse: From the union of her and Uranos (sky), Titans (Giants), Kyklops (Top-Eyed) ve Hekatokheirs (Giants with hundred arms and fifty heads) were born.

*Not once alone with voice oracular
Had prophesied how power should be disposed-
That not by strength neither by violence
The mighty should be mastered, but by guile.
Which things by me set forth at large, they scorned,
Nor graced my motion with the least regard.
Then, of all ways that offered, I judged best,
Taking my mother with me, to support,
No backward friend, the not less cordial Zeus.*

*And by my politic counsel Tartarus,
The bottomless and black, old Cronos hides
With his confederates. So helped by me,
The tyrant of the Gods, such service rendered
With ignominious chastisement requites.
But 'tis a common malady of power
Tyrannical never to trust a friend.
And now, what ye inquired, for what arraigned
He shamefully entreats me, ye shall know.
When first upon his high, paternal throne
He took his seat, forthwith to divers Gods
Divers good gifts he gave, and parcelled out
His empire, but of miserable men
Recked not at all; rather it was his wish
To wipe out man and rear another race:
And these designs none contravened but me.
I risked the bold attempt, and saved mankind
From stark destruction and the road to hell.”¹⁹*

Prometheus not only opposes to Zeus, but also presents hope to humanity in order to rescue them from anxiety of death. Most important is his granting fire to them so that they can learn all arts. This means shake of Zeus's power, his sovereignty to the advantage of humanity. What Prometheus did, as most terrible sin according to Zeus, is third revolution for humanity. Therefore, he gets punished rightly by Zeus. Since Zeus's power has been shaken and power of reason has transferred to people. Prometheus knows that one day Zeus's power will diminish. The end he prepares for himself is a tragic one but sublime; death.

Uranos detested these and put them back into Gaia's stomach. Gaia who got enduringly inflated gave scythe made of white steel to the hands of her children and demanded them to revenge on their father. Only Kronos did it. He castrated his father and took Gaia's revenge. This can be called as first revolution of humanity. Because cutting the male organ is a physical action and glory has been earned by physical power and Kronos became the sovereign. Second revolution took place with reasoning and deliberation. First generation Gaia and Uranos understood that physical power gave harmness and became the representative of mind in order to overcome the second generation. She warned Kronos and when Zeus was born she helped him his feeding, growing and hiding. By this, mind defeated physical power. Zeus is the product of union of Kronos and Rhea. Kronos swallowed his children as soon as they were born since he is afraid of that one of his sons would be stronger and defeat him. By the way, Rhea let Zeus escape to Crete by the help of Gaia and Uranos. She caused Kronos to swallow stone. When the day came Zeus made Kronos to vomit all his brothers. He sat on the throne of gods after overturning Kronos by the power of reason and physics. Thereby, ended the sovereignty of Titans. By the third generation's revolution sovereignty of Olympos gods was founded. Prometheus played a very important role in this revolution. His capturing fire from Zeus for humanity is the revolution of humanity. See: Aiskhylos, *Prometheus*, [Turkish ver.] Preface, Sabahattin Eyüboğlu & Azra Erhat, p.8.

¹⁹ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, p. 14.

The woman in Sophocles' tragedia, Antigone, does not beg Kreon, the sovereign, representative of the state. On the contrary, like Prometheus, she defends her action as an aim in itself to death. Nobody forced her, nothing was there to gain for her action. In contrast, she loses her everything, as a cost of burying her brother Polyneikes against Kreon's prohibition. Her beloved fiancée Haimon, her bride room, her wedding-dress, all her life.

The opposeds act as expected. Zeus and Kreon, in the name of gods and state, try to save their powers. Their action is in order to save the power to punish the ones who try to weaken the power. If they do not act in such a way, then their sovereignty will be destroyed and they will become ordinary. Their actions too are not for the sake of interest or earnings, but for the sake of saving the current situation in the name of power-state-society order.

Actions and uncompromising characters of Zeus and Kreon are filled with aims in themselves, even though they defend the existing order. According to them, when an individual overcomes the order of society-state-gods then chaos will emerge. This chaos means the sovereignty of a newly power which is amorphous. For this reason, the two opposing characters defend their actions decidedly. It is essential to balance between free will or individual will and will of society-order-state. In other words, to find the activity of soul in accordance with reason, i.e. to find "what is proper to human". Soul's activity in accordance with reason and the thing that is proper to human is virtuousness, temperance and wisdom; to be good citizen is to have such characters. Catharsis which Aristotle brings forward as function of tragedias, as a result, contributes to the education of citizens who will think of soul's activity in accordance with reason –and that is virtuous, happy and good citizens– through watching competing actions that are chosen by free will.

Aristotle mentions that "the good", the one which is demanded for the sake of itself, which is not demanded for another thing, and not used as instrument in order to reach another thing, is happiness^{20, 21}. However Aristotle does not end his research at this point. He presents happiness in a more concrete form. He interrogates whether people's happiness arising from pleasure, wealth or fame is real happiness or not. In this interrogation he uses concepts of job and function (duty) which he borrows from Plato.²² Living is not only human's job, since other lively things, animals and plants do live too. He continues searching by saying that "we look for what is proper to human". Living on senses is not original to human, since animals have senses too. Job which is proper to human is "action life of a being with mind", in other words "soul's activity in accordance with reason". Since human being differs from others with his mind. If "human's job is soul's activity in accordance with reason, (...) what suits virtuous human is to do this in a good and perfect way"²³ then humanly happiness or the good is soul's activity in accordance with reason. But this activity should be permanent, should be some activity "lasting till the end".

However, such a question can arise: If all humans have mind, then why does not everybody act virtuously or rationally? Aristotle answers this question by returning teaching of soul. He separates soul in two parts as one rational and the other irrational.²⁴ The irrational part, i.e. feeding (vegetative) soul is common at all livings. Aristotle splits the part having mind into two sections, one as "mind in original meaning" and the other as irrational, against mind but "shares in a rational principle". In non-virtuous people who can not control themselves, irrational part conflicts with the ratio and opposes it. But in the ones that control themselves this part obeys the ratio. Consequently, the element which

²⁰ Aristotle, in the 10th book of *NE*, evaluates happiness of contemplation as the highest happiness.

²¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b 5.

²² Ross, David, *Aristoteles*, p. 224.

²³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a 5-10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1102a 25.

causes virtuousness or non-virtuousness in human action is the irrational part which shares in rational principle. This part apart from feeding soul, as irrational but also can obey the mind or oppose it, is “desiring or generally appetite”. As a result, Aristotle expresses that human actions, doing wrong or right, acting virtuously or not do not depend only on mind, on the contrary they arise from a faculty of will which prefers to obey the mind or not, consequently human is responsible for his actions because of the free will. Prometheus and Antigone have free will as well as they are in control of themselves. Thus, they are characters. They are also virtuous characters. Both of them willingly, through their will, ended their actions on the way they thought right. So did their opposites. Zeus and Kreon did not step back and used their power to the end. They too had great losses. Zeus’ unreachable power was acquired by people, human developed himself and civilization by fire; Kreon paid the cost of his uncompromising attitude by losing his wife and son.

Character and Virtue

Aristotle determines the virtues²⁵ according to the separation of soul into parts as the one original, the rational and the other as sharing in rational principle. “Virtue is determined according to this separation”.²⁶ “Virtues of Intellect” which arise from intelligent part of soul, the part which contemplates “objects, principle of which can not be other way”²⁷ are five items²⁸: Science (knowledge of essential and eternal things), Art (knowledge of making), Intuitional Mind (in science, knowledge of things that are beginnings), Practical Wisdom (knowledge of contingent things) and Philosophical Wisdom (union of intuitional mind and science).

Virtues which arise from the part of soul that is irrational but shares in rational principle are “character virtues” and they are various. They are, according to Ross’ classification: 1. Virtues that include right attitude concerning emotions of primitive fear, pleasure and rage. For example, courage, temperance. 2. Virtues concerning aim of human in society from the point of wealth and honor. For example, pride. 3. Virtues concerning social relations. For example, friendship and justice. 4. Some qualities which are not virtue since they are no inclination.²⁹ Aristotle explains why he named these virtues as character virtues as such: When we speak of person’s wisdom and comprehension we do not mention his character, however when we say about him that he is courageous or temperate we mention his character or better his habit:

“For in speaking about a man’s character we do not say that he is wise or has understanding but that he is good-tempered or temperate; yet we praise the wise man also with respect to his state of mind; and of states of mind we call those which merit praise virtues.”³⁰

Aristotle states the difference between Virtue of Intellect and Character Virtue as: “intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and its growth to teaching (for which reason it requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit.” However one point must be

²⁵ Culture of Ancient Greek is a culture of *excellence*. Young men were being encouraged to compete with each other in every aspect of life, in athletics, intellects and aesthetics. Word used for excellence in Ancient Greek was *aretê*. It was originated from anēr “man” against “woman”. Most significant question asked by Socrates was “what is *aretê*?”. The word *aretê* is usually translated as “*virtue*”. But in usage of the word in Ancient Greek they also speak of *aretê* of a fast riding horse or of a good cutting knife. See: Roger Crisp, “Aristotle, Ethics and Politics” in *From Aristotle to Augustine*, p. 110.

²⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a.

²⁷ Ibid, 1139a 5.

²⁸ Ibid, 6th book.

²⁹ Ross, David, *Aristotle*, p. 237.

³⁰ Ibid., 1103a 5.

emphasized: “Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit.”³¹ Consequently, we have an inclination which causes to receive character virtues; character virtues like courage, temperance are virtues that are received by habit, doing. By doing, acting, person receives a character or habit. Person, as receiving a habit, acts gradually easier. As in being a guitarist by playing guitar, “we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts”.³²

As practical sciences, as mentioned in the beginning, are not carried out for the sake of knowledge and what Aristotle searches for in ethics is not theoretical knowledge, we can conclude that there is no relation between ethics and knowledge. In Aristotle’s words: “the present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge like the others (for we are inquiring not in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use)”.³³ Since the person who acts the good, who is good, is good, not the one who knows the good.

Aristotle is aware of that the view about receiving a character virtue by acting can cause a trouble. As in his example, “if men do just and temperate acts, they are already just and temperate”.³⁴ Nevertheless, he eliminates this aporia by not analysing the result of the action, the objectiveness of the result, but by deciding an action is whether ethical or not through taking subjective qualities of the actor into consideration: “But if the acts that are in accordance with the virtues have themselves a certain character it does not follow that they are done justly or temperately. The agent also must be in a certain condition when he does them.”³⁵ These certain qualities or subjective situation of the person is that conscious and desired acting of person, his preference of action and finally his doing it surely. Consequently, for example, what makes a just action just is not its objectiveness but its being carried out by a just person.

Aristotle, defines tragedian character as “something that is expressed by a certain direction of a will”³⁶ and emphasizes that the character must be good from an ethical point. He adds that the goodness of character must be understood through his actions and direction of his will. He mentions this good in his definition of tragedia. According to him, tragedia is the imitation of persons over average; comedia is the imitation of persons under average. The meaning of “good” here is that choice of a calm action from ethical point by a virtuous person who has principles again from ethical point. The virtuous person will prefer his action, performs it consciously and demandingly and fulfills it in a sure manner. In order to fulfill it definitely he must be consistent.

For Aristotle, among subjective conditions that determines the ethicalness of an action, “desiring” the action is ultimately important. In order to praise or criticize the actions willingly performed, and to forgive or better pity for the actions unwillingly performed, we have to determine whether the action is desired or not. Accordingly, Aristotle searches action’s conditions, i.e. willingly or under pressure, through examples. Firstly, he introduces such explanation: “and that is compulsory of which the moving principle is outside, being a principle in which nothing is contributed by the person who is acting or is feeling the passion.”³⁷ However this is not easily determined situation in some cases. For example, it is obvious that the person is under (physical) force when he is carried by wind or by someone other. But in other case of tyrant, it is not. If a tyrant commands someone whose children he puts in jail, whether obeying of the person to the command is under force or not is discussible.

³¹ Ibid., 1103a 25.

³² Ibid., 1103b 10.

³³ Ibid., 1103b 25.

³⁴ Ibid., 1105a 15 and beyond.

³⁵ Ibid., 1105a 30.

³⁶ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450b and beyond.

³⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110a.

Aristotle states that the person in the second case does not obey willingly, yet he is not under some force of the first case. Since while acting he makes a preference, everything other but he desires this action. Aristotle, in order to express actions under force, uses such a formulation: "The compulsory, then, seems to be that whose moving principle is outside, the person compelled contributing nothing."³⁸

Another criterion of determining an action as ethical is whether it is done consciously or not. Aristotle, before presenting his examples, examines the difference between ignorance, desiring and preference. For example he mentions that children, like animals, do something by desiring it, unconsciously. "Both children and the lower animals share in voluntary action, but not in choice"³⁹ Further, acting by ignorance differs from acting unconsciously. For example we can not say that a drunk person or an angry person acts by ignorance but he can do it unknowingly.

Last criterion of accepting an action ethical is preference ("choice"). Aristotle compares preference with similar elements such as desire, passion, wish and doxa and demonstrates that it is not one of them. "Those who say it is appetite or anger or wish or a kind of opinion do not seem to be right."⁴⁰ Preference is not desire, since "beings without mind", animals have desires too, but animals do not prefer. A temperate person acts through preference not by desire. Preference is not passion. Ones who act through passion do not prefer anything but they behave as depending on something. Preference is not wish. For example we wish impossible things for example immortality, but we can not say that we prefer it. Moreover, "person can demand things that he will not be able to do" but prefers things that he can do. Demanding is related to mostly aim, but preference involves instrument. We want to be healthy, but we prefer things that will make us healthy. Preference can not be doxa, since we have doxas about everything, eternal things and impossible things, but we do not have preferences over these things. While criterion of doxa is wrong or right, criterion of preference is good or bad. After giving these details, Aristotle starts defining preference. To him, preference is some desire related to things in our hands, it is not an irrational desire, it is a desire accompanied by deliberation. "Choice will be deliberate desire of things in our own power."⁴¹

As seen, Aristotle does not reduce preference or choice to mind, i.e. preference or choice does not arise from only mind. If preference depends on mind only then there will not be any choice. However, we can not speak of preference that depends on desire only, since absolute desire is irrational and it is not acceptable that an action depending on absolute desire is preferred. As pointed out before, animals have desire too. Finally, Aristotle defines free choice as desire depending on mind. Thus, he mentions a concept as "hamartia" or tragic error while listing qualities of tragic character. This concept is a demonstration of not reducing preference to mind only. Tragic character makes an error while determining his action by his free will. This error is not a conscious one. A weakness-overindulgence (hybris) in his character or habit causes him to make an error. Because of this small error he finds himself in a disaster.⁴² These are properties such as obstinacy, arrogance, uncontrolled anger, deciding quickly, being sure of himself, excess courage that originated from habit. Hero having one or few of them prefers an action through the habit and advances to his end consciously. Even though the preference arises from the habit, the character desires his action deliberately. Because he desires it deliberately he carries it out till the end without compromise. That's why tragedia is calm or serious from the point of ethics. Because there is hero's action preferred through deliberation. Hero's running to his end without any compromise, even though the end is disaster, arouses catharsis in audience. This is the practical function of tragedia and also its ethical property.

³⁸ Ibid., 1110b 15.

³⁹ Ibid., 1111b 8.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1111b 10.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1113a 10.

⁴² ŞENER, Sevdâ, *Dünden Bugüne Tiyatro Düşüncesi [Theatre Thought from Yesterday to Today]*, p.37.

Antigone and Prometheus' proud and obstinacy adds another character quality to them. Ismene or others who witness the injustice of Zeus do not act like Antigone and Prometheus. If they act so, then Antigone and Prometheus do not exist. Antigone and Prometheus are play characters who are consistent and with principles. Their action also proves the so called qualities. By their free will, they rise in revolt against the current will and carry out their action till the end. Their such preference render them different. Their opposites, forming the tragic conflict, oppose them in a similar way, consistently, with principles. Even though chorus warns them to be more compromising, tender and flexible. Disaster occurs since both sides of conflict defend their preference uncompromisingly. This disaster arouses in audience feelings of fear and pity and purgates unwanted feelings.

Aristotle, when examining virtues, mentions about concept of "mean" (or middle state). The moral virtue is mean. What does "mean" means? There are three states, two of them involving excess and deficiency respectively, and the one as a virtue, or the mean, stands between the two. If we take the example of fear, on the first extreme there is excess fear, cowardice, "fear of things that are not frightening", on the second extreme there is rashness, "excess of person's fearlessness against frightening things". The one between these two is courage or fear as required: "Courage is a mean with respect to things that inspire confidence or fear, in the circumstances that have been stated."⁴³ According to Aristotle's this view, the mean is not absolute, it is relative, i.e. people's mean changes according to each other. Besides, it is true that we can not look for the mean in some feelings and actions. For example, for virtues of justice, there is no more or less justice. Being just is already a virtue.

He presents similar views while discussing the story:

*"A perfect tragedy should (...), moreover, imitate actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of tragic imitation. It follows plainly, in the first place, that the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear. Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. A plot of this kind would, doubtless, satisfy the moral sense, but it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves. Such an event, therefore, will be neither pitiful nor terrible. There remains, then, the character between these two extremes – that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty."*⁴⁴

Thus, character should be an average person that will permit identification, i.e. neither so good nor so bad. Certainly, one must not forget that these statements are presented in a society of aristocrat democracy and further by Aristotle, most important of all theory men of the same society. When he mentions good citizen, average man, he means the citizen who conforms with the common sense of the period, temperate and reconciling.

Therefore, Antigone is noble too. She is engaged with Haimon, son of Kreon and dreams of getting married and having a child. She is the daughter of Oedipus, King of Thebai, who killed his father unconsciously in an anger, married his mother and had four children and who made himself blind

⁴³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1116a 5.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453a.

when he learned the truth. Antigone is noble also from the point of virtue. She is aware of her being, has values and average good qualities. She is an Antigone who has character qualities as expected.

One can coincide such a character. As a character she is proud, obstinate, decided and courageous. Ismene is Antigone's sister. She is noble too but does not have a potential of engaging in an action by her free will and carrying it out till the end. Antigone, as her character matches with her preference through her action, prepares her own end by burying her brother Polyneikes. Since she has ethics and virtue as an average person. A girl in the position of Antigone chooses such an action. Her obstinacy and pride is her error. Her action is the one that can be chosen by an average person who has virtue. Obeying the rules of ethics, not the state. Kreon has a similar character. But he is on the side of the state. When these two obstinate and virtuous characters engage in an action, it is possible that the tragic conflict and dispute will bring a disaster for two sides. At the same time, catharsis that the situation awakes is significantly effective and sets one to think. Antigone, Kreon and Haimon are persistent since they have average good qualities concerning character.

Prometheus is from the race of Titans and semi god semi human, but at the same time an average person who can see the future, the future that will be formed by human reason, the real revolution that will be achieved by humanity, by evaluating truly the current conditions. A character who is aware that the unjust power which separates itself from common sense will collapse one day. One average good whose soul is in accordance with his mind can see this reality too. Prometheus is, in this sense, one person who sees the future. The sovereign power one day will lose its power. The one who wants eternal power, but who can not conceive the reality is Zeus. Thus, Prometheus, by his free will, his desire, consciously takes the fire and presents it to humanity. Since human has reason and civilization will be formed in his hands. Indeed, Zeus is average too. Because each sovereign wants to save the power till the end and use it against the powerless. He is the sovereign of Olympus. Thus, in order to rescue his power he punishes Prometheus by giving him terrible pain.

The tragic end in both tragedies in which an action starts as preferred by free will, develops and ends in a way travelled as a way of being a temperate and wise citizen. The audience gets the chance of thinking reasonable and reaches calmness by purification through both tragic character (virtuous, appropriate to his type, real and average good, consistent) and action desired and preferred by free will. Thereby, citizens live the pleasure of achieving to have virtue, to be a temperate person.

Aristotle, as he finds virtue in being mean, is not against pleasure like Platon. Because according to Aristotle, pleasures, passions are natural and there is no need to dismiss them. But overindulgence of these feelings is out of virtue. Like spending money, it is not non-virtuous... But the extreme points of prodigality and meanness are out of virtue where living pleasure, if it is balanced, is virtue. Overindulgent pleasure out of control which is lived by irrational beings and that is not under the direction of practical wisdom is bad. Aristotle is not an hedonist either. Since according to him absolute pleasure can not be the aim of life. Real aim of life is happiness. Pleasure accompanies happiness. Mindful people do not aim pleasure. We can say that Aristotle accepts that person's getting pleasure of developing virtues as habits is an indicator of his being real virtuous.

Regarding the pleasure expected from tragedies, Aristotle says:

*"Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way, and indicates a superior poet (...) And since the pleasure which the poet should afford is that which comes from pity and fear through imitation, it is evident that this quality must be impressed upon the incidents."*⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1453b.

Aristotle mentions about the pleasure of temperance brought by calmness which is achieved through purification that arouses by unwanted feelings which are stimulated by an action preferred and with a terrible end, and sensation, comprehension and learning of this temperance.

Conclusion

Starting out from Aristotle's thoughts, we can define tragedia as story of a conflict of one action preferred by free will and performed consciously of an average good character and another action of the second virtuous character. If we take into consideration that the characters are virtuous and noble ones, besides, the tragic end caused by resistance of these characters who prefer an action for the sake of a value and because of an error in their character, and finally the audience who gets purgation at the end of the play, we can conclude that theatre is a political and practical art as reflection of a thought systematization that aims to raise rational, temperate, purified from overindulgence citizens who develop ethics of being mean through contributing to the society order of Ancient Greek which has democracy with an original class system under sovereignty of aristocrats.

Aristotle's views about art in general and tragedia in particular and his vision about ethics compose a totality. His views of ethics and aesthetics that are originated from the immediate relationship between action and character, and that include other ethical principles derived from this relation, even though serving the philosophical, cultural, political and social construction of the period, can enlighten our time. His theories which he constituted by examining tragedias which are essential element of society and primal actor of dramatic competitions of Ancient Greek, and other works are important for remembering the connections between "action", "character", "virtue" and "ethics" which are also the core of plays.

In our time of average good lacking values, unable to use his free will for the sake of values, and of being unaware of dialectic relationship between character, free will, preference and action or of perceiving them as ordinary, characters that claim their values in such a way seem extraordinary to many of us. In order to be the subject of art and philosophy, to think and make to think an issue from various angles by constituting a discussion platform, one needs to have such a character and to choose such an action through free will.

Infact, we should not forget that social transformations could be realized with such consistent, decided characters whose souls obeys the mind, who have values and can choose an action as an aim in itself with their free will other than daily interests, i.e. average good individuals who have human qualities.

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