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## EDUCATION AND POLITIKON ZOŌN<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Aristotle's definition of humans determines his understanding of education (*paideia*) in Politics as *politikon zoōn*. This definition should always be considered together with the other most important Aristotle's statement about the human being, in which he claims that "man alone of the animals possesses speech (*logós*)". The ability to speak becomes most important within the specific political partnership (*pólis*), which has at last attained the limit of virtually complete "self-sufficiency" (*autarkeías*). Contrary to "every household" where the eldest member "gives the law" (*themisteúei*) to sons and spouses, in the city (*pólis*), the "speech (*logós*) is designed to indicate (*semaineiv*) the advantageous and harmful, and the right and wrong". In sum, justice became political (*dikaio sunē politikón*). It always appears like the outcome of an argument or dispute (*krísis*) on what is just (*toū dikaíou*). We should understand education (*paideia*) in the context of the previous statements. Dispute (*amfisbetéin*), the keyword of Aristotle's understanding of education, appears in the first sentence of Politics VIII. Aristotle states that "they (people) dispute" the question of what "constitutes education and what is the proper way to be educated". There is not one complete, definitive, and standard answer to the question of what is the best way to be educated that we should implement in the educational activities. Based on Aristotle's view, I claim that the first purpose of education is not to determine and constrain the activity of the youth and citizens in general, but to provoke and facilitate the dispute on the essence and aims of education.

### KEYWORDS

education, *zoōn*  
*politikon*, logos, politics,  
dispute

The interpretation of the relationship between education and *politikon zoōn* I will begin with the political nature of human beings. The research on the political nature of human beings I consider the central part of understanding the role of education within the human community. It is directly related to the concept of logos and its critical role in ancient science and culture. I want to

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analyze one of the most representative cites throughout ancient philosophical literature. At the beginning of *Politics*, Aristotle determined the political character of the human-animal as *politikon zoōn*: “...ὁ ἄνθρωπος φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον”/man is by nature a political animal/ (Pol.I.2.1253a2–6).<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Politikon zoōn

At this point, we face Aristotle’s first definition of man. Typically for his way of arguing in the research area of ethics and politics, Aristotle developed his two definitions of the human being neither from a concept nor an idea like Plato, but from the previously established level of partnership practice. At the outset of *Politics*, Aristotle marks and explains the human self-motional tendency toward making partnerships and cites several forms of it: marriage, household, village, *polis*. Urged by this analysis, many researchers were inclined to claim the so-called political naturalism in Aristotle’s theory of politics.<sup>3</sup> In addition, they mark Aristotle as a naturalist.<sup>4</sup> They connect Aristotle’s political theory in many ways with the influence of ancient understanding of nature (*phusis*), but with Aristotle’s previous thoughts on the problem of nature too. We find Aristotle at this particular point in the middle of contemporary debates on the specific ethical views concerning naturalism and non-naturalism.<sup>5</sup> However, *Politics* is neither the writing on naturalism nor non-naturalism; it is simply about the close relationship between a man and politics. That is precisely the point of view I want to shed light on.

What made Timothy Chappell, Fred Miller, and other authors emphasize nature, self-motion, and self-sufficiency within Aristotle’s assertion that “man is a political animal by nature”? Firstly, all of these authors state in one way or another that Aristotle’s interest in natural science, mainly Physics and Biology, is expressed in the naturalism of his politics. In short, they are searching for the foundation of Aristotle’s political theory within his natural science or the general foundation of his theoretical philosophy. Even though we could say that Aristotle rejects Plato’s apriorism in the matters of politics – as he rejects it in metaphysics – we should be more careful if we assert the theoretical foundations of his political theory.

I want to claim something precisely the opposite. Nevertheless, we should pay attention very carefully to Aristotle’s precise statement. The sentence mentioned above reads as follows: “Hence every city-state exists by nature since the first partnership so exists” (Pol.I.8.1252b33). *Polis* is not a unique community that has emerged by nature. The same goes for marriage, household, and

2 Translation by H. Rackham: Aristotle 1959: 9.

3 About Aristotle’s political naturalism see: Ambler 1985; Chappell 2009; Miller 2000; Reeve 2009.

4 The detailed account of the question of whether Aristotle is a naturalist or not we find in Timothy Chappell’s article: Chappell 2009: 562–568.

5 See the details: Chappell 2009: 562–563.

village. They are all “by nature”, but they are not political. I am very inclined to claim that the role of the term “by nature /*fūsei*/” is overestimated and inadequately outlined in this particular context. There is no reason for the particular dilemma on the proper interpretation of the meaning of nature in this context. Apart from all of these particular senses of the term ‘nature’ listed by Chappell, we should simply stress that this term is derived from the verb *phues-thai*, which means that nature has to do something with whatever has grown or come to be. Polis is not natural in a way a plant is natural. The naturality of a polis concerns simply the human inclination toward shaping a partnership, which we share with some other animals. I agree with Fred Miller that we should implement Aristotle’s meaning of this term expressed in Physics II. Above all, polis has something to do with “the phenomenon of self-motion” (Miller 2000: 322).

Nevertheless, I would like to stress that the life of human beings within the *polis* is to some extent natural (*fūsei*), but it is more than natural. Human activity in the *polis* is partly determined by nature. However, it is determined by some exceptionally human activities that other animals cannot practice in a much greater sense. These are the activities to which we have to pay attention when trying to understand the meaning of the *politikon zōon*. Humans are animals, but they are political animals, which we cannot claim for any other animal species. Human beings are only partially realized in the biological process.

Here we come to the main point. Aristotle adds to the sentence about “the union of female and male” something exciting: “and this not of deliberate purpose (*ek proairēseos*) but with a man as with the other animals and with plants there is an natural instinct to desire (*fusikon to efiesthai*) to leave behind one another being of the same sort of oneself”. Here we find out indirectly that the process of making a partnership between the female and the male for the continuance of the species has nothing to do with deliberate choice. As for other kinds of animals, the female and the male are making union by nature, which means by instinct. Hence we accidentally come to the critical point that, in the case of humans, some actions do not occur by nature but by deliberate choice (*proairēseos*). Contrary to the natural (*fusei*) issues which occur through self-motions, now I want to turn to human actions.

The additional argument why we should put the term ‘by nature’ aside is that we are in the middle of Aristotle’s Politics and not Physics or Metaphysics. Considering all the previous, I reject Chappell’s claim that “Aristotle is a political naturalist in that he believes that human nature has to be recognized as a determinant of what is possible and what is ideal in political theory” (Chappell 2009: 567). If we take that being “political naturalist” means having a good sense of real-life objection, we can accept such a statement. However, it would be excessively trivial because each philosopher could be called a naturalist. In addition, if we accept that the fundamental meaning of the term ‘nature’ relates to an intrinsic cause of self-motion in human beings’ whole life, we have to admit that Aristotle is a determinist. The whole issue of politics would be predetermined. We would have to accept such a conclusion if Aristotle’s interpretation

of politics would concern most the human instincts. However, it is precisely the opposite. Aristotle's elaboration of the political character of a human being starts when he steps out of the world of nature and steps into the world of human deliberate choices and action. It is up to humans to decide what is right and wrong, good and bad, useful and useless for a community or an individual. By practicing deliberate choices, they are shaping their lives within the polis. That is what Aristotle meant by *politikon zōon*. By stating that it is up to humans to shape their lives in the polis and shape the polis itself, Aristotle is much more a modernist than a naturalist. Within this context, in the following sections, I will determine the role of education in a polis. Here we come to the point where we realize that polis is something pronouncedly human. Polis is not a gift from nature. It is the outcome of emphatically human endeavor.

Hence I want to reject the central thesis of Chappell and Miller that it is part of human nature to be political. I want to emphasize that being political does not have to do anything with being adapted for life in a community, such as marriage, household, or village. The bees and lions are also adapted for life in partnership, but they are not political. If we want to understand the meaning of Aristotle's term 'political'/politikōs/, we have to step out of the world of nature and natural things. Thus I deny Chappell's and Miller's thesis that political naturalism could be the foundation of Aristotle's political philosophy. *Politikōs* (political) is originally linked to the *polis*. We could even assert that there is no politics outside of the *polis*. To understand the profound meaning of the statement of *politikon zōon*, besides the concept of nature, animals, and politics, we need another one. If we want to understand where we should direct the term 'political', we should recall Aristotle's second definition of man.

## 2. Politikon zōon and logos

Here we should find out the nature of the relationship between politics and logos. Aristotle simply states: "The partnership finally composed of several villages is the city-state (polis)" (Pol.I.2.1252b27). Unlike previous forms of partnership, the city-state represents the only kind of community in which the human being can realize its political character. It is a partnership as well as the previous ones, but "it has at last attained the limit of virtually complete self-sufficiency". However, a condition for establishing a city-state is not just the human tendency for the partnership, which is possessed by other animals, for instance, by bees, but the possession of speech (logos). Here we come to the main point, where Aristotle points out the human possession of speech while establishing the statement about the political character of human beings:

And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech. The mere voice, it is true, is a sign of pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well (for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is

painful and pleasant and to signify those sensations to one another), but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong. (Pol.I.10.1253a8-15)

The animals only possess the mere voice (*fonē*), and therefore they cannot establish a polis, even if they do form a partnership. It is speech (*logos*) that prepares the conditions for the political community (*koinonīa politikē*). Nevertheless, why is a voice not enough for the founding of the polis? Why is this specific sign of pain and pleasure not enough to establish the political community? What does the voice provide to animals and us, and why is it not enough? As Aristotle emphasized, the animal's nature has been developed till that point to have sensations (*aīsthēsis*) about some opposite issues, for instance, what is painful or pleasant. In addition, the voice can give those animals the ability to signify (*semaīvein*) the current problem or danger to each other. The voice can be the call for mating. The sensations like pain and pleasure, sorrow and joy, and many other feelings like fear and loneliness are part of the life of animals. The voice that marks these feelings is the only way they can refer to their sensation. Since we mostly do not understand the meaning of these signs of the animal voices, we understand them as singing and songs, for instance, in the case of birds and whales. These sensations and feelings are also part of human life. We also feel pain and pleasure, sorrow and joy, fear, loneliness, and many other feelings. Sometimes we mark our sensations by voice to signify to people around us that we are in danger or feel very good at a specific moment, but we do have another way to refer to our sensations. Human beings do not just signify (*semaīvein*) the specific sensation to other humans by voice. However, they can indicate and avouch (*tō delouōv ēsti*) what is advantageous (*sumphēron*) and what is harmful (*blaberōv*). Like animals, we are also directed to the opposite sensations, and we also have many different feelings.

Nevertheless, we also can affirm and declare what is right (*dikaion*) and wrong (*ādikon*). This ability is provided to us by logos. The specific feature that makes us human is not just the mere possession of sensations but the ability to refer back to them and establish a relationship with our sensations. Aristotle further continues:

For it is special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has sensation of good and bad and right and wrong, and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state. (Pol.I.11. 1253a16-19)

The human ability of speech enables us to talk about our sensations of pain and pleasure, sorrow and joy. We estimate each of these sensations and evaluate its degree and meaning for ourselves and our partners. We spend our lives arguing about what is good and what is bad, no matter whether we talk about everyday issues or the most critical problems: choice of the school and university, the choice of profession, the choice of our partner, etc. We are invited to make decisions almost every day in our life about this or that: which book to

read, which movie to watch, where to go for dinner, etc. The implications and outcomes of our moral decisions always have good and bad aspects. No moral decision is absolute. The more people are dependent on our decision, the more delicate it is to make a particular decision. Our decision will make some people cry, and at the same time, it will make some people happy. Different people will estimate our actions and decisions as right or wrong. Everything in our moral life concerning our decisions and actions is very relative. Our morality is constantly moving between good and bad, right and wrong.

Concerning Aristotle's understanding of morality, it should be emphasized that two different issues determine human behavior and human life within different kinds of partnerships. On one side, we act naturally (*fūsei*). For instance, the partnership of female and male is made for the continuance of the species as many other animals and plants also do, because they all possess the natural tendency (*fisikōn tō ēfiesthai*) to "leave behind one another being of the sort as oneself" (Pol.I.3.1252a30). The tendency to make a partnership is not exclusively human because other animals also possess this specific feature, for instance, bees and gregarious animals (Pol.I.4.1253a8). Besides "the continuance of the species", there is another reason for the partnership of females and males. They enter into the partnership "for the sake of security" (Pol.I.4.1252a32). The one who is a ruler (*ārhon*) by nature (*fūsei*) and the other one who is just a subject of governance (*ārhōmenon*) also by nature are making the partnership that can preserve both of them. However, Aristotle's use of the term 'naturally' is not as simple as we could expect.

Contrary to expectations, Aristotle did not stress the physical strength of the ruler and the master of the family (*despōte*). However, he pressed his ability, which enabled him that "he can foresee with his mind" (Pol.I.4.1252a33-34). Here is the whole sentence: "For he that can foresee with his mind is naturally ruler and naturally master, and he that can do these things with his body is subject and naturally a slave; so that master and slave have the same interest" (Pol.I.4. 1252a32-35). By the word 'naturally,' Aristotle meant not just the issues concerned the instinctive human actions but all of the kinds of actions and customs established in the polis by the specific practice. The use of the mind (*dianoia*) enables us to foresee (*proorān*) things, and it provides an advantage over the people who do not practice this activity and who "do these things with the body". According to the established practice, the one who acts by the mind is expected to be the ruler. The one who uses his or her body is expected to be the subject of governance. No matter what role they have in a partnership, they have "the same interest" (*taūtō sumfērei*), the continuance of the species, and the security of their partnership. The different kinds of established actions in different partnerships aim to achieve the specific goals of a particular partnership. The continuance of the species and the security of their partnership are particular goals of the union of females and males. Therefore, each kind of established practice that serves the realization of these goals is natural (*fūsei*). Something becomes natural if it brings us to the realization of the goals of the specific partnership. Aristotle's intention was not to present



his value judgment about women and men, and slaves and masters but to describe the specific practice that he found in reality.

Moral life in a polis is relative to our personal moral life. The entire content of Aristotle's most important writings about this kind of problem, *Nicomachean ethics* and *Politics*, testifies to this relativity, fragility, and instability of human moral and political life. We can assert quite the same about the essence of the polis. The political structure of each *polis* is not firm and stable. What is the reason for this?

Here we find proof that Aristotle's main idea at the outset of *Politics* was to stress the difference between the polis and other kinds of community. He claimed that the difference between "statesman, royal ruler, the head of an estate and the master of the family" is not the difference "of greater and smaller numbers", but the difference "in the kind" (*eídei*). Aristotle pointed out that the difference was not in the number of governed people. That would mean that "there was no difference between a large household and a small city". However, the experience was completely different. Aristotle stressed that the polis, whether small or large, was qualitatively different from other kinds of communities, for example, kingdom, household, or family. Aristotle reported here about a different kind of governing. That is the first topic in the whole book of *Politics*. By following his report, we can realize the meaning of 'political'. It first concerns who is ruling the community, that is, who is the head (*ēfestēke*). However, it is neither the person itself nor the number of the people governed that is important, but the way of ruling. Aristotle stressed here that the polis is the whole which consists of elements (family, household, village). What differentiates these different kinds of communities is the way of ruling. Here we come to the main point, which concerns the meaning of 'political' – the way or ruling in the *polis* is different from other communities.

When several families are united, and the community aims at something more than the supply of daily needs, the first community to be formed is a village (*kóme*). The most natural form of the village appears to be that of a colony from the family. Since households were under the royal rule of the eldest member, and the members of the colonies of the families were of the same blood, the villages were under the royal kind of ruling. Aristotle pointed out that the first Greek cities (*polis*) at first were under royal rule, and the people abroad still did so. Here is the point I want to stress. The main difference between the city, on the one hand, and the other hand household and village is in the way of ruling. In the households and the villages, "one giveth (*themisteúei*) law to sons and eke to spouses". That is what Aristotle means by "royal rule". The meaning of the verb *themisteúo* is to deliver justice (*thémis* has the meaning of ethos, custom, law, etc.). The one ruling in this way is somebody who is ruling by respecting the customs and the divine laws. It is up to him to decide what is right and wrong. He makes decisions in the name of all the other community members, whether they live in a household or a village. The way he treats justice and law is that he proclaims it. He is the one who is "in connection" with the gods and the ancestor's customs.

In addition, concerning this section, I would like to stress the following two issues. After Aristotle cited Homer (“And each one giveth law to sons and eke to spouses”), he commented further in an exciting way: “For they lived dispersedly, as was the manner in ancient times”. Aristotle wanted to explain why the Greeks in ancient times were inclined to the royal rule. Since they lived in scattered families, they did not have opportunities to meet each other often and communicate. As they did not talk to each other about their problems and everyday life issues, the royal one was the most convenient way of ruling. The eldest member of the family simply delivered justice and law. The second issue concerns the exciting fact that in explaining the nature of the royal rule, Aristotle mentioned the Gods and how the Greeks imagined God’s way of ruling and their manner of life, which was supposed to be like a human one. So, we can conclude that some humans and Gods are inclined to the royal rule, which means letting the eldest member of the community to deliver justice and law.

Here we can complete Aristotle’s statement about a man as a political animal that possesses speech. The animals that possess the voice can only indicate the sensations of pain and pleasure to one another. The human being goes further. They have a sense of the advantageous and harmful, and therefore, the right and the wrong. However, right and wrong, law and justice are not something that can be given and delivered (*themisteúei*) within the polis. There are not some eldest people in the polis who decide what is right and what is wrong. The role of speech is to enable every citizen to set forth (*deloûn*) what is right and wrong. Law and justice are not matters of delivering but of discussing, investigating, and making decisions. Within the polis, nobody possesses the law and justice so that they could deliver it like the oldest members of the village community. In addition, the law and justice are not something already done and completed so that they could be given to somebody else. Within the polis, they are always something we argue about. Shortly we could conclude that living in polis means arguing all the time about right and wrong.

It is the deeper meaning of the sentence mentioned above: “Justice is political”/ἔ δὲ δίκαιοςὺν πολιτικόν/. For instance, most of the translators, including H. Rackham, interpreted this as “Justice is an element of the state,” which leads us far away from Aristotle’s point. He simply wanted to emphasize that justice always appears as the outcome of arguing, dispute (*krísis*), or judicial procedure on what is right and wrong. Here is the suggestion for translating the last two sentences of this paragraph: “However, the justice is political. The right (judicial procedure) forms the order of the political community, and the justice is a dispute about what is right”. Shortly we could conclude that there is no justice out of disputing and arguing on what is right. The justice within the polis always comes as a result of a dispute on what is right and wrong, no matter whether it is part of the judicial procedure or a common dispute. The term dispute (*krísis*) becomes the most important for Aristotle’s understanding of polis. That is why the term *logos* leads us to the proper understanding of the meaning of the political animal. Justice is not something already done

that could be delivered to all the members of the polis, as is the case within the household or village. Logos is not crucial for the household and village because there is no dispute on anything. The eldest member of these “gives” (*themisteúei*) and delivers the law and justice. Justice appears within the polis due to the particular political culture of using logos to provide arguments while discussing a problem and finding a solution about what is right and wrong. That is why Aristotle so simply stated: “Justice is political”. The way of living like a political animal in polis means to be always part of arguing and disputing what is right and wrong. The natural status of the citizens is disagreement on this question. *Krísis* (arguing) is the keyword of how a political animal lives within the polis. *Krísis* becomes the keyword of man and the polis.

### 3. Conclusion

We should understand Aristotle’s interpretation of education (*paideia*) in the previous context. The general ancient Greek view of education, which we could take over from the first philosophers in the early period of Greek philosophy, and from Plato and Aristoteles, is that education is not something naïve, innocent, and harmless. Dispute (*amfisbetéin*), the keyword of Aristotle’s understanding of education, appears in the first sentence of Politics VIII: “Now nobody would dispute (*āmfisbetēseis*) that education of the young requires the special attention of the lawgiver” (1337a1.1). When he adds that “education ought to be adapted to the particular form of a constitution (*politeías ēkāstes*)”, he stresses that we should have special education for democracy, oligarchy, etc. It appears that education is something that can be determined and resolved by law or the constitution. However, here we come to the key quotation:

It is clear then that there should be legislation about education and that it should be conducted on a public system (*kai tauten koinēn*). But consideration must be given to the question, what constitutes education and what is the proper way to be educated. At present there are differences of opinion (*āmfisbeteítai*) as to the proper tasks to be set; for all peoples do not agree as to the things that the young ought to learn, either with a view to virtue or with a view to the best life, nor is it clear whether their studies should be regulated more with regard to intellect or with regard to character. (1337a1.3)

There is not one complete, definitive, and standard answer to the question of what is the best way to be educated which we should implement in the educational activities. It is not the way we should practice education. There are many opinions about the essence and the purpose of education, and the essential thing regarding education is to dispute it. Hence the purpose of dealing with education is not to determine and constrain the youth and citizens’ activity in general but to provoke and facilitate the dispute on the essence and aims of education. Keywords for both being a human and the essence of education are the same: dispute, arguing, disagreeing, making a decision about different possibilities, crisis, etc.

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### Obrazovanje i politikon zoŏn

#### Apstrakt

Aristotelovo shvatanje obrazovanja (*paideia*) iz *Politike* određeno je njegovom definicijom čovjeka kao zoŏn politikon-a. Ovu definiciju uvijek treba razmatrati zajedno s drugom po važnosti Aristotelovom izjavom o čovjeku u kojoj on tvrdi da „od svih ostalih životinja, jedino čovjek poseduje govor (*logós*)“. Sposobnost govora na taj način postaje najvažnija sposobnost u okviru određenog političkog ustrojstva (*pólis*), koje je konačno dostiglo potpunu „samodovoljnost“ (*autarkeias*). Nasuprot „domaćinstva“ u kojem najstariji član „deli pravdu“ (*themisteúei*) sinovima i supružnicima, stoji grad (*pólis*) u kojem „govor (*logós*) jeste sredstvo osmišljeno tako da ukaže (*semaíneiv*) na korisno i štetno, pa samim tim i na ispravno i pogrešno“. Rečju, pravda je politička stvar (*dikaiousunē politikón*). Ona se uvek pojavljuje kao ishod rasprave, odnosno, kao rezultat spora (*krísis*) oko pitanja šta je pravedno (*toū dikaíou*). Potrebno je da i obrazovanje (*paideia*) razumemo u skladu s izloženim stavom. Kao ključna reč Aristotelovog shvatanja obrazovanja, spor (*amfisbetéin*) se pojavljuje u prvoj rečenici VIII. knjige *Politike*. Aristotel navodi da se „oni (ljudi) spore“ oko pitanja šta „čini obrazovanje i koji je pravi način postajanja obrazovanim“. Na ovo pitanje ne postoji jedan gotov i univerzalno primenljiv odgovor. Ne bi smo ni trebali obrazovanje vršiti isključivo na jedan način. Naprotiv, na osnovu Aristotelovog stava tvrdim da se glavna svrha obrazovanja ne ogleda u utvrđivanju i ograničavanju aktivnosti mladih i građana uopšte, već upravo u pozivu na provociranje građanskih sporova u kojima će se iznova preispitivati i prilagođavati suština i ciljevi obrazovanja.

Ključne reči: obrazovanje, politikon zoŏn, logos, politika, spor.