

Aristotle & meaningful art

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Abstract

This article approaches the philosophical work of Aristotle, given that it is the basis of all later philosophy. The universality that distinguishes Aristotelian thought and the fundamental truths contained in it, make his philosophical view great, universal, timeless and insightful. In this context, this study focuses mainly on Aristotle's work, *Poetics*, which mostly refers to tragedy, and derives some elements regarding the ethical dimension and happiness from his work *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Key words: Aristotle, meaningful art, criteria, transformation, education

Introduction

Aristotle's work is the cornerstone of all later philosophy, having exerted a significant influence on it, due to the elements of timelessness and universality that characterize it. In addition, the essay *Poetics* is the first work that deals with the relationship between qualitative aesthetic experience and learning. In particular, Aristotle advocates the importance of contact with the poetic genre of tragedy, pointing out that it is a source of authentic learning and insight, by presenting situations that people experience in their real lives.

Moreover, Aristotle's philosophical work is an important basis for this paper, because it focuses on the correlation between quality aesthetic experience and transformative learning. Specifically, the present work, approaching the work of the aforementioned thinker, attempts to extract the elements that render a work of art "meaningful". The aim of the study is to determine the criteria that characterize meaningful works of art, for their utilization in the context of a transformative education.

1. Aristotle's contribution

This paper will approach the work *Poetics* of the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, as it is the first theoretical and didactic work, which refers to art (Mandilaras, 1992/1995; Kokkos, 2021). This work is considered unique and one of the most important of its kind, as it has exerted a significant influence on the field of philosophy of art (ibid.). The aforementioned position is confirmed by Cooper (1923), author of *The Poetics of Aristotle: its Meaning and Influence*, who states: «*After twenty-two centuries it remains the most stimulating and helpful of all analytical works dealing with poetry*» (σ. 3). The same view is embraced by other thinkers and academics, such as Ross and Lesky respectively (in Mandilaras, 1992/1995). Consequently,

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Aristotle's philosophical work is the cornerstone of all later philosophy, as it contains essential truths (Kalfas, 2015).

Aristotle's work *Poetics* was probably written between the years 334 - 330 BC and consists of four sections, poetry in general, tragedy, epic and literary criticism issues (Sykoutris, 1991). However, most of the work refers to tragedy, which the philosopher considers the greatest type of poetry (ibid.). According to Aristotle, poetry¹ is a new science. Thus, "poetic art"² is "the greatest, most universal and lasting achievement of human thought" (Mandilaras, 1992/1995, p. 33). For this reason, poetry constitutes the purpose of the world. Poetry, as the "most important achievement of the human spirit" presents "reality" and "truth", which is "perceptible" to the receiver (ibid., p. 40). Therefore, a person's contact with the art of poetry makes them capable of realizing the reality and truth of this world (ibid.).

Next, the Stagirite philosopher points out that poetry as art expresses what philosophical and scientific discourse are unable to express (Mandilaras, 1992/1995). Specifically, he states that "poetry knows where philosophy is unable to know, it is the first philosophy, just as philosophy is the first science, and it knows where science is unable to know" (ibid., p. 40). Therefore, poetry provides man with more important and essential knowledge and teachings compared to nature and history, as it approaches serious issues, concerning real situations of human life (ibid.).

Finally, for the Greek thinker, poetry in the context of literature foreshadows the future, as the poet presents past events. For Aristotle, "poetry ... is a driving force of civilization, an active force of human progress ... it extends the world and promotes it. It doesn't just change the world, it makes it better" (ibid., p. 41). In this way, the philosopher points out and highlights the insightful role of art. The presentation of the past experiences of the heroes in the work of art provokes the reflection of the receiver. Thus, the individual becomes capable of understanding a functional way of dealing with situations, which he is likely to encounter in the future course of his life, contributing to the creation of a better world (ibid.).

1.1 The definition of tragedy

With his work *Poetics*, Aristotle "founded the systematic study of problems" for poetry specifically and for all "artistic creation" in general (Magina, 1979, p. 322). The surviving collection of the Stagirite philosopher deals with tragic and epic poetry and consists of twenty-six chapters (ibid.). The sixth chapter of the work deals with the definition of tragedy:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of a serious and complete act (in itself), which has (sufficient) size, in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in its (various) parts, and carried out by action and not by narration, effecting through pity and fear (which provokes) the katharsis

¹ According to Sykoutris (1991), Aristotle with the term "poetry" refers to "imitation", including visual and musical art (p.44).

² The term "poetic art" in modern Greek refers to "every kind of aesthetic creation", such as theater, music, visual arts, etc. (Mandilaras, 1992/1995, p. 35).

of such (bitter and terrible) sufferings (Aristotle, 1449b in Sykoutris, 1991, p. 52).

At first, it is considered appropriate to approach and focus on the elements of the definition of tragedy and especially on the characteristic of imitation (imitation of an act). It is important to point out that according to scholars of Aristotle, imitation concerns the representation of reality in works of art through symbols (Halliwell, 1992; Kokkos, 2021; Kosman, 1992; Sykoutris, 1991). Furthermore, it is pointed out that the aesthetic imitation has a cognitive character and through contact with the tragedy, learning occurs (Halliwell, 1986/1998. Kokkos, 2021; Nussbaum, 2001). The timelessness and indisputable value of the ancient tragedies lies in the imitation of action, i.e., the representation of the heroes of the work passions, the moral of their actions, etc. by the creator, which is based "on the human soul in general (...)", as well as on "(...) universal laws of thought, feeling, energy" (Sykoutris 1991, p. 55). In conclusion, the timelessness and importance of works of art lies in highlighting the situations that all people experience.

In addition, the attribute "*serious*" refers to the moral dimension of tragedy (Butcher, 1932; Kokkos, 2021; Rorty, 1992; White, 1992). Significant scholars of Aristotle's works (Rorty, 1992; Sherman, 1992; Nussbaum, 1992, 2001) argue that the actions of the protagonists of the works are directly connected to their happiness or misfortune and point out the analogy between the works *Poetics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*¹. Specifically, Rorty (1992) states that "*tragedy presents a dramatic enactment of the view that is philosophically argued in the Nicomachean Ethics: the virtuous can retain their nobility (kalos) in the worse reversals of fortune, the loss of the goods (...)*" (p. 18). Therefore, a meaningful work of art, such as tragedy, is important to touch upon serious moral issues.

Furthermore, the attribute "complete", according to Belfiore (1992) concerns the completion, the perfecting of the act through the realization of the purpose, which concerns katharsis (see subsection 1.2). Next, the term "*sufficient size*" refers to the internal connection of the beginning, middle and end of the work, which needs to be suitable to ensure its comfortable and coherent viewing (Sykoutris, 1991; House, 1964) (see subsection 1.3).

The phrase "*in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in its (various) parts*" is related to the "*three means of imitation*", which are rhythm, harmony and song (Sykoutris, 1991, p. 116). The three above-mentioned means act as embellishments² in the context of the tragedy and offer pleasure to the receiver while watching it (Butcher, 1922 Sykoutris, 1991). Also, rhythm, harmony and song are used separately and, on a case-by-case basis within the poetic work (ibid.). Then, the following expression "and carried out by action and not by narration" in the definition of tragedy refers

¹ *Nicomachean Ethics* is one of Aristotle's works, concerning the approach to moral virtue (Kontos, 2018).

² The term embellishment is interpreted as the addition of substance to food or sweets, to give it flavor and make it more palatable (Babiniotis, 2002).

to the way the imitation is carried out, that is, it is not carried out by narration, but by persons who represent the events (ibid.).

Finally, the definition ends with the sentence "effecting through pity and fear (which provokes) the katharsis of such (bitter and terrible) sufferings". Imitation evokes in the spectators the feelings of pity and fear, which lead to the purpose of tragedy, that is katharsis (Belfiore, 1992). The specific phrase of tragedy remains a controversial issue for many scholars, each of whom gives it their own different interpretation (Magina, 1979).

1.2 The approach to the meaning of katharsis

According to Belfiore (1992), the explanation of the term "*tragic katharsis*" in Aristotle's work, *Poetics*, is missing. Also, in his works there is no detailed reference to the term related to emotional clarification. However, in his work *Politics*, the process of mental katharsis is approached in more detail in the context of musical katharsis (ibid.). She concludes that mental cleansing is related to the tragic katharsis and is similar to allopathic medical detoxification, which removes any material that is harmful to the human body (ibid.).

Subsequently, the American academic argues that the best understanding of the Aristotelian concept of katharsis lies in approaching the biological and moral concepts of the philosopher (Belfiore, 1992). In this context, katharsis refers to "*a process of removing what prevents something from preserving or regaining the excellence, the teleiosis, that is in accord with its nature*" (ibid., p. 340). Thus, "*the tragic katharsis is an allopathic process of removing the shameless emotions that prevent the soul from acquiring, preserving, or regaining the emotional excellence that is in accord with its nature*" (ibid., p. 341). Katharsis, therefore, aims at the healthy emotional state of the individual's soul.

In addition, the emotional discharge (katharsis) of the receiver can occur through the feelings of mercy and fear, which according to Aristotle have a physical and cognitive dimension (Belfiore, 1992; Halliwell, 1986/1998; Nussbaum, 2001). In this context, these two emotions are "*elements in an appropriate practical perception of our situation*" (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 391). Specifically, Nussbaum (2001) states, that "*tragedy contributes to human self-understanding precisely through its exploration of the pitiable and the fearful*" (p. 390). In this light, the elicitation of the appropriate emotions, the elimination of which leads to katharsis, is the catalyst for the identification of the receiver with the hero in terms of ethos, so that reflection and questioning of the spectator's preconceptions can follow (Kokkos, 2021). In this way, the spectator enters a contemplative process, that is, they question – re-evaluate their assumptions and as a result learning occurs through their experience of the tragedy (ibid.). In conclusion, Aristotle pays special attention to the cognitive value of tragedy. In this context of which, the function of katharsis concerns the triggering of the reflective disposition of the receivers, with the aim of learning, through the transformation of their previous dysfunctional assumptions.

Next, it is worth noting that the goal of poetry, according to Aristotle, is "*pleasure*", i.e. the "*aesthetic emotion*", which is defined as the "*pleasure of mercy and fear through imitation*"

(Sykoutris, 1991, p. 76 -77). This particular "*pleasure*" is considered the most essential of other "*embellishments*", equally important, such as "*music accompaniment, scenery, rhythm and harmony*" (Sykoutris, 1991, p. 76-77). According to the philosopher, the feeling of pleasure comes from the energy of imitation (Lypourlis, 2008). Thus, the receiver experiences and is moved by the events of the play, relives the feelings, ponders deeply the reasoning of the characters and - through this in-depth mental process - learns in a pleasant way (Belfiore, 1992; Kokkos, 2021; House, 1964). Therefore, it is concluded that for Aristotle, art that endorses critical reflection, contributes towards learning, which gives pleasure to the recipient.

1.3 The concept of plot in tragedy

For the Greek thinker, tragedy consists of six elements: "*the scenery (opsis), the musical accompaniment (melopoiia), the language and style (lexis), the ideas (dianoia), the ethics (ethe), the premise of the work (myth)*" (Sykoutris, 1991, p. 119). The most important of these is the myth, as it constitutes the "beginning" and the "end" of the tragedy (ibid., p. 129). The term "myth" refers to "the sequence of actions and sufferings, which constitute the content of a dramatic work", that is, the "hypothesis of tragedy" (ibid., p.127). Finally, House (1964) and Belfiore, (1992) interpret similarly to Sykoutris (1991), that the term "*myth*" refers to the plot of the work.

In the context of the tragedy, the plot does not deal with false and fake narratives, but with true events from people's daily lives (ibid.). Furthermore, the elements of plot are "*reversal*", "*recognition*" and "*affection*" (Magina, 1979, p. 396; Sykoutris, 1991, p. 130). "*Reversal*" refers to the change of actions, which take place in tragedy, towards an opposite state, "*recognition*" is related to the transition from ignorance to knowledge and "*affection*" refers to a destructive action, which causes suffering (Magina, 1979). Therefore, Aristotle points out the vulnerability of people and the constant change of the life course from happiness to unhappiness and vice versa, which causes tragic emotions to the spectator (Kokkos, 2021; Nussbaum, 2001).

Consequently, it is worth noting that, through the plot, the feeling of fear and pity is evoked (Magina, 1979). With the term plot, the philosopher gives the meaning "entangled", referring to tragedy, which has adventures and recognitions (ibid., p. 453). The stimulation of the particular feelings of pity and fear will be achieved if the composition of the work is intended to change the situation from good fortune to misery, due to a significant misdeed (coming from ignorance or frivolity) of a person similar to the spectator. These special feelings cause pleasure in the spectator through their identification with the hero, which is the goal of poetry (Magina, 1979; Sykoutris, 1991). This identification lies in the similarity of the morals of the hero and the receiver, who are prone to errors (Kokkos, 2021).

Next, for Aristotle the plot must have four interrelated aesthetic qualities, which concern the morphological structure of the work (Sykoutris, 1991; Maggina, 1979). These qualities, as morphological elements of tragedy, are highlighted by Aristotle as of particular importance in

the context of the plot of the work and concern "completeness, certain magnitude, unity, logical coherence" (Sykoutris, 1991, p. 134). The "completeness" refers to the wholeness of the structure that the poetic work must have, i.e., the beginning, the middle and the end. The "certain magnitude" is expressed by the philosopher in its meaning "concise"¹, which is found in the visual arts and refers to the spectators who have limited receptive endurance (ibid., p. 136). In this way, the work becomes understandable and comprehensible to the spectators. Finally, "unity" relates to uniting all the events of the plot with logical coherence (ibid.).

In conclusion, the above-mentioned views of Aristotle are also supported by the modern Greek writer Georgousopoulos (2018), who claims that the term myth/plot is present in every - visual, musical, political, architectural, philosophical - work. Every creator needs to look for a cause, a problem, a series of actions, a "Myth", in order to give substance to his creation. According to him, the concept of "Myth" corresponds to the concept of "Life", which is an adventure and becomes functional when man has the appropriate reference fields, in order to philosophize about its difficulties and remain resilient (ibid.).

1.4 The moral dimension of the tragedy

According to Nussbaum (2001), tragedy plays a catalytic role in the education of young people, as mentioned in Aristotle's works *Poetics* and *Politics*. Specifically, the philosopher gives tragedy a cognitive value and his philosophical view concerns the moral improvement of individuals based on the representation of stories of "good human activity" (ibid., p. 378). In addition, the philosopher places special emphasis on emotion, both as an element of virtuous people in the context of tragedy, and as a provider of information for the performance of right actions by the audience of the tragedy. In this way, tragedy - through a thorough description of a complex and specific situation - makes known to the spectators or readers elements of the "ethical truth" (ibid., p. 378). Therefore, the role of tragedy is a catalyst for improving people's perceptions (ibid.).

It is considered appropriate to quote a passage from the work *Poetics*, which Nussbaum (2001) has rendered by giving her own translation version² and sufficiently highlighting Aristotle's reasoning, regarding the ethical issues, which she approaches.

The most important element is the arrangement of the events. For tragedy is a representation not of human beings, but of action and a course of life. And *eudaimonia* and its opposite consist in action, and the end is a certain sort of action, not a characteristic (*poiotes*). According to their characters (*ta ethe*) people are of such and such characteristics (*poiotes*). But is according to their actions that they live well (*are eudaimones*) or the reverse (Aristotle, 1450a in Nussbaum, 2001, p. 378).

¹ The term concise is defined as "one who is easily perceived", "comprehensible as a whole" (Babinotis, 2002, p. 696).

² The semantic analysis of the specific passage of *Poetics* by M. Nussbaum (2001) harmonizes to a large extent with that of Sykoutris (1991) (WN).

In the above quote, Aristotle focuses on the importance of tragic action, pointing out that action is inextricably linked to humans' happiness (Nussbaum, 2001). In particular, if a play presented certain kinds of characters of individuals, without presenting their choices and actions, then it would lack values, befitting a tragedy. Therefore, the meaningful tragic plays highlight the important actions of people, which lead them to happiness or misery (ibid.).

Moreover, Nussbaum (2001) considers tragedy as an important work of art, because the values of the work are connected with the moral values of people, that is, the perception about happiness. According to the American philosopher, Aristotle in his *Poetics* argues that tragedy has "practical value", as it highlights the view that a person's good character is not sufficient for his good fortune (ibid., p. 380). For this reason, the philosopher emphasized the reversals that good people encounter in their lives and prevent them from a previous good course of life (ibid.). Finally, it is important to mention that the plot of the tragedy is based on reversals that happen to people who are in an "intermediate moral state", that is, without the heroes of the tragedy having something divine, or invulnerable (unbeatable), however, they are characterized by vulnerability (Kokkos, 2021, p. 53).

In the same context, Nussbaum (2001), argues that the plot of meaningful tragic works examines "(...) *the gap between our goodness and our good life, between what we are (our characters, intentions, aspirations, values) and how humanly well we manage to live*" (p. 382). According to Aristotle, the focus on the aforementioned gap is of salient and real importance to humans (ibid.). Therefore, for the philosopher, tragedy is important and is a "source of genuine learning" and insight by presenting people the truth (ibid., p. 382).

Consequently, according to the American philosopher, "*meaningful*" literature aims to highlight the truth, and to interweave the important moral elements of the work with its form (p. 392) (see subsection 2.1). In this context, Aristotle points out that the approach to truth is mainly achieved in works, which contain poetic elements in terms of style, focus on evoking that particular feeling (see subsection 1.2), have an explanatory style and promote the reflection of the receiver, enabling him to understand his ethical commitments and their interactions (ibid.). For M. Nussbaum (2001), Aristotle emphasizes the understanding of the moral content of the work by the spectator or reader, in order to reflect, with the aim of making his "moral experience" clearer through the experience of pity and of fear.

Finally, Nussbaum (2001) points out the moral dimension of tragedy, and considers it as a great literature, which touches on moral issues about happiness. Through the aesthetic experience of the tragedy, the receiver experiences strong emotions, enters into a contemplative process, understands their own ethical state in pursuit of the truth for a quality life course. Finally, the philosopher argues that great literature must include the elements of tragic poetry in pursuit of moral truth.

1.5 Tragedy, Comedy & entertaining shows

According to Aristotle, tragedy is the greatest form of art, because of the specific plot mentioned above (see subsection 1.3). An important feature that distinguishes tragedy as a

genre is that it does not have a happy ending. However, some people, who are not used to viewing tragedies, which represent the truth, are characterized as "worse" (inferior), from the perspective of "aesthetic weakness", as they prefer a happy ending to the work being watched (Sykoutris, 1991, p. 109).

Next, the philosopher refers to the poetic genre of comedy with a rather negative point of view (ibid.). According to Sykoutris (1991), a brief discussion is made about comedy before the definition of tragedy, in order to carry out a thorough analysis of the former in the second chapter (which is not preserved), as well as its comparison with tragedy. Specifically, in the definition of comedy it is pointed out that the human characters are worse than the average everyday person (ibid.). On the contrary, in tragedy they are in an "intermediate moral state", i.e. as characters they are similar to the receiver (Kokkos, 2021, p. 53). In addition, the heroes of comedy are mainly characterized by some human flaw (physical and mental), such as ugliness, which causes laughter in the audience (Sykoutris, 1991). The flaw in comedy does not result in significant emotional effects ("painless"). In tragedy, however, human error (pathos) is a painful act and evokes feelings of pity and fear in the spectator. Finally, in the same definition it is argued that the feeling of pain cannot be caused by the comic mask (ibid.).

Additionally, Aristotle points out the importance of the work's morphology, which plays a decisive role in evoking the appropriate emotion in the recipient, promoting the process of reflective learning (Kokkos, 2021; Sykoutris, 1991). In particular, the philosopher states in his work, that the directing elements of a play, which present "*bizarre and marvelous spectacles*" are intended to provoke the feeling of surprise and are not related to tragedy (Sykoutris, 1991, p. 112).

On the contrary, as mentioned above, the morphological structure of the tragedy evokes in the spectator the feelings of "fear and pity" (Sykoutris, 1991, p. 112). In this way, the receiver becomes able to enter the process of katharsis (Kokkos, 2021) (see subsection 1.2) Thus, the individual begins a process of revising their previous dysfunctional perceptions about various social issues (ibid.).

Another important element emphasized by Aristotle is the division of poetic art in relation to its morphological structure into important ("most beautiful" according to Aristotle, 1453a in Lypourlis, 2008) and subordinate (Kokkos, 2021; Sykoutris, 1991). The philosopher considers, on the one hand, that the simple plot, that is, the lack of the elements of reversal and recognition (see subsection 1.3) and on the other hand, the actions (scenes) of a poetic work without logical coherence are elements of a work of art of low aesthetic value (Sykoutris, 1991). Therefore, a great poetic work is characterized by the correlation of the morphological elements of the work with its content.

Aristotle criticizes art which hinders the cultivation of imagination. Specifically, he claims that art, which imitates everything, is "fortic", that is, commonplace, dull, unobtrusive (Sykoutris, 1991, p. 254). On the contrary, art, which promotes the spectator's imagination, allows him to think freely and autonomously, without the presentation of a multitude of simple symbolic

movements (Sykoutris, 1991). In particular, the philosopher cites the example of the discus thrower, whose bad actors do not imitate his attitude (so that the spectator thinks of the imitation of throwing the discus), but the very rotation of the discus (ibid.). Finally, Aristotle points out the superiority of tragedy as a poetic work, but opposes its presentation by bad (vicious) actors (Lypourlis, 2008). Therefore, the philosopher considers, that a great play, such as tragedy, can be altered in its quality if it is presented by insufficient actors.

In this context, it is worth pointing out that Sykoutris (1991), approaching the work of Aristotle, emphasizes that the philosopher has proceeded to clarify the superiority of epos over tragedy, based on the popularity of the latter. Consequently, the poetic genre of tragedy, due to its popular acceptance, was adapted, during its presentation to the public, to aesthetic elements, which are popular with the masses (ibid.). This fact had the effect of altering the quality of the tragedy from a directing perspective (ibid.). Therefore, it is found that the popularity of a highly aesthetic work of art may lead to modifications in its quality, resulting in its deterioration.

Taking into account the above, significant differences can be observed between the two types of poetry. Furthermore, Aristotle's emphasis and the superiority of tragedy as a poetic art form becomes clear. It is evident, therefore, that tragedy for Aristotle is the means for the education of the youth of his time, as an art, which is a source of learning and improving the perceptions of individuals. Therefore, considering the specifications that Aristotle set for tragedy as the greatest and most important kind of art, they can be generalized to determine the literary and visual works, which will be used for educational purposes.

1.6 Happiness and moral excellence

According to Aristotle, the purpose of people is happiness¹ (Kontos, 2018; Ross, 1995). To approach the happiness of individuals, Aristotle wrote, among others², the *Nicomachean Ethics* (ibid.), which capture the "fullest image of Aristotelian ethics" (Kontos, 2018, p. 17). In this subsection, a brief reference to this work will be attempted, with the aim of extracting some elements, which are complementary and related to the ethical element, which is a dominant theme in Aristotle's work *Poetics* (Nussbaum, 2001). In this context, the philosopher considers that happiness is "*that sort of action to which virtue is the tendency*", that is, an activity consistent with excellence and then analyzes its character (Ross, 1995, p. 200). Also, the definition of moral excellence and wisdom (*phronesis*), defined by Aristotle, will be mentioned, in order to emphasize the concept of the individual's wisdom. Finally, an attempt will be made to analyze the concept of additive excellence, as a way of approaching great works of art in the wider educational context.

¹ According to Ross (1995), the Aristotelian term *eudaimonia* refers to the word "*prosperity*" (p. 200).

² Aristotle also wrote the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *Magna Moralia/Great Ethics* (it is not certain that this text was written by the philosopher himself), as well as *the Politics*, which concern the well-being of the citizens and their city (Kontos, 2018).

Initially, it is appropriate to quote the definition of moral excellence, through which a person can lead a life with prosperity (Ross, 1995).

Excellence, then, is a habitude (hexis), which a) is freely chosen by the individual, b) lies in the middle, but in the middle is "relative to us"; this middle is determined by reason — more specifically, by reason, I believe, which the wise man determines; (Aristotle, 1106b - 1107a in Lypourlis, 2006).

In particular, excellence is an optional habit, that lies in the middle¹ in relation to us and is determined by the intellectual excellence of wisdom. Finally, according to Ross (1995), a necessary condition for a person to be morally excellent is to have wisdom or implement moral actions similar to those of prudent people.

For a more complete understanding of the definition of moral excellence, it is also important to approach the definition of wisdom (Skaltsas, 1993). In particular, Aristotle mentions in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "*There remains, therefore, nothing but this to be a true (correct) exis (ability), which involves reason and possesses a practical character, for what is good and bad for man*" (Aristotle, 1140b, in Kontos, 2018, p. 175). Wisdom, therefore, is an intellectual and practical habit, which aims at the pursuit of the truth, about the good and bad things for people (Kontos, 2018; Ross, 1995). Finally, the good functioning of the "practical intellect" is related to the existence of addictive excellences (see below) (Kontos, 2018, p. 176)

In this direction, Aristotalian scholar Kontos (2018) argues that there are three ways of reporting moral excellence. Initially, Aristotle's work talks about the "*natural excellences*", i.e., the characteristic that people have by nature to tend towards the acquisition of a moral excellence or the opposite (Kontos, 2018, p. 74). Then, the "*addictive excellence*" is mentioned, with which the person can approach moral excellence with the habit of actions appropriate to it (ibid., p. 74). This excellence is identified in Aristotle's work with the excellence acquired by the learner through the educational process. In particular, the acquisition of excellence by the learner takes place through the imitation of similar actions, following the prompts and instructions of the instructor. In the same way, the person approaches moral excellence, that is, by imitating an excellence, such as justice, and because he now feels pleasure in doing justly, he stabilizes his actions with regard to it (ibid.). It is worth noting that in the context of addictive excellence the learner exactly repeats the instructor's guidelines "*learning to appreciate the value of things (e.g., justice), (...) because he learns to like them*" (ibid., p. 74). Finally, the "*principal excellence*" is noted, in which the person understands the deeper reason for the act in which he performs (ibid., p. 74).

The importance and catalytic role of the addictive excellence in the context of the individual's behavior, given by the philosopher, is noteworthy, without being the greatest excellence of moral education (ibid.). In particular, Aristotle states "*It is therefore of no little importance that one acquires these or those habits as young as possible; it is just as important, or rather means*

¹ With the term middle, Aristotle does not refer to the average, but to the appropriate. On the contrary, extreme excesses constitute "*the bad, the ugly*" (Kontos, 2018, p. 87).

everything" (Aristotle, 1103b in Lypourlis, 2006). With this phrase, the philosopher points out the importance of addictive excellence, noting that the excellence in question is cultivated during the person's youth by performing moral actions. On the contrary, in the event that the young person becomes addicted to wickedness, they implement corresponding actions (Kontos, 2018). In this context, Aristotle considers that the moral character of man can be transformed with great difficulty (ibid.). The modern sociologist and adult educator, Mezirow¹, who developed the Transformation Theory (2000/2007, 1991), reached the same conclusion.

In conclusion, Aristotle's philosophical view asserts that the condition of moral excellence is the existence of wisdom in the individual, assigning to it a prominent importance for the conquest of the truth, regarding a better way of life (happiness). Next, for the good functioning of the mind, the existence of addictive excellences is required, which, for example, can be cultivated in the educational context. Also, addictive excellence is a catalyst for learning the right actions and adopting a morally correct behavior for the sake of individual's well-being. Accordingly, the introduction of the concept of addictive excellence in the educational process aims to teach the trainees to exploit the great art and understand its dynamics and value. In conclusion, constant contact with high art in education will enable future citizens to perceive the insightful role of great works and seek to engage with them in order to cultivate their own moral experience and moral self-improvement.

Concluding thoughts

It is important to point out that this work approaches the philosophical work of Aristotle, because it is the basis of all later philosophy. Also, the universality that distinguishes Aristotelian thought and the fundamental truths contained in it, make his philosophical view great, universal, timeless and full insight. Finally, this study focuses mainly on Aristotle's work, *Poetics*, which mostly refers to tragedy, and derives some elements regarding the ethical dimension and happiness from his work *Nicomachean Ethics*.

In this direction, an attempt is made by the author to determine the specific criteria, which can be extracted from the work of the philosopher and render a work of art suitable to be used in the educational process. Primarily, an important element that is extracted is the element of *truth, which expresses real situations of people's lives with authenticity and completeness*. Finally, the *timelessness*, the *universality* and the *insightful role of art* are extremely important characteristics, which highlight the high aesthetic value of a work of art.

In Aristotle's work, the connection of the morphological structure with its content is highlighted as an important element of tragedy (see subsection 1.3). In this context, the characteristic of *holism* is extracted, i.e., on the one hand, *the wide range of dialectically interconnected elements of form and content*, and on the other, *the subtle and dialectical composition of each individual element of the work*. Finally, a great work of art, such as tragedy, needs to be *conceivable and comprehensible, with attractive and motivating*

¹ The Transformation Theory developed by Mezirow is one of the most important theories worldwide in this field (Nylander & Fejes, 2016).

elements of the receiver's interest aiming to experience a meaningful aesthetic experience and familiarize them with art of high aesthetic value (see subsection 1.2).

Consequently, two important elements emerge in determining appropriate works of art in education, which are (a) presenting the changing life of a hero similar to the spectator and (b) evoking these particular emotions with the aim of eliciting critical reflection in the context of transforming misconceptions. Moreover, the element of the moral dimension plays a decisive role throughout the work of the philosopher (see subsection 1.4). Therefore, the characteristic of the absence of a happy ending can be considered an important criterion on a case-by-case basis for selecting a project for its use in the educational process.

Furthermore, Aristotle points out that the individual's judgment is a condition for the pursuit of a qualitative life. For the cultivation of the intellectual excellence of wisdom, he argues that people can easily understand philosophical issues that affect their well-being through qualitative aesthetic experience. For this reason, the wisdom of the individual can be characterized as an indirect criterion/condition in the context of this thesis.

Aristotle's criticism of comedy and spectacles, which are intended to entertain people, and his defense of tragedy as superior to other poetic genres are emphasized. In particular, an important feature that distinguishes tragedy from comedy is related to its conclusion and is the *absence of a happy ending*. Therefore, the characteristic of the absence of a happy ending is considered an important criterion for selecting a project for its use in the educational process.

Finally, Aristotle's philosophical work is a cornerstone of all later philosophical approaches and an important basis of the present study. In particular, the philosopher attempted to highlight the significant elements of the poetic genre of tragedy, with the aim of improving young people's perceptions in order to have a qualitative life. Finally, these important elements were highlighted above for the determination of criteria for great literary and visual works of art and their utilization in the context of a transformative educational approach.

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