

Concept of Community: Aristotle's Perspective

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Abstract:- The concept of community differs from one school of thought to another. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the concept of community in accordance with the perspective in which Aristotle postulated the concept. The objectives are not limited to ascertaining the meaning and purpose of community in Aristotle's perspective, enumerating the birth and formation of community, as well as making a succinct discourse on major elements of a community such as: Man as a political animal, slavery, women, wealth, citizenship, and ruler-ship. In order to attain the objectives stated, the paper will adopt qualitative research methodology. The reliance on qualitative methodology will offer the paper the room to explore contents of peer reviewed literatures and journals which are in relation to the concepts and subject matters of the objectives of this paper. However, the paper will also give room for personal opinion of the writer verified on the basis of comparative studies of relative literatures. This paper finds that the *polis* (a city-state such as Athens), is the highest form of community, whose aim is the highest of goods. It is also found that the making of a community is not a free-run thing. A community is built from the Families when much families come together in a considerable extent; they tend to form a village, and a combination of several villages would turn to a state, and the state is the first form of community.

Keywords: philosopher, Aristotle, Perspective, community, politics.

I. INTRODUCTION

Aristotle's perspective about the concept of the community would be well comprehended through his text known as the *Politics*. His text has been tipped as the most important of Aristotle's philosophy. It has been argued that in order to fully appreciate the concept as analysed by Aristotle in his text, a look into *Nicomachean Ethics* will aid full understanding of Aristotle's perspective (Simpson: 1998, 28-30). Aristotle's perspective shows that ethics is knitted with politic; it portends that ethical or virtuous life can only be enjoyed by a person who participates in politics (ibid). He also posits that moral education is the chief priority of any political community.

Aristotle maintained that the goal of a community is to attain the best, and the primary purpose or thrive of community is to imbibe specific character in her communal members and to make them better and able to exhibit or carry out their functions and actions in a dignified manner (Richard, 2002, 30). More than half of the world population would not agree with the postulation of Aristotle above, because they have been exposed to see politics as an ignoble thing meant to serve a selfish interest, thus, people regard the conceptualization that community or politics is concerned with creating a specific character in people as an affront on individual rights

and freedom (Miller; 1995, 27-31). It is an undeniable fact that dynamic nature of the society has changed many things in the world overtime, our way and manner of perceiving community, politics and ethical beliefs vary from that of Aristotle in whole lots of ways. One should not make a hasty conclusion and infer that Aristotle was not right and that our ways today are better than his. The conclusion may be right. However, one must attempt to understand the rationale and the contention between Aristotle's perspectives and ours today. This can help to bring the strengths and weaknesses of our perspectives and make clarifications where need be. The perspectives of Aristotle about the concept of the community would be discussed in several captions below.

a. The Purpose of the City (Community)

According to Aristotle, a community is meant to serve a purpose; it is only when the purpose is served that it can be said to be a community. Aristotle says that a community is built through partnership and the partnership aims at achieving a general good. In Aristotle's view, building a better and stronger community depends on the strength of the existing partnership, thus, if the partnership is stronger, it tends to achieve a more tenacious rate of good for all (Aristotle, as cited in Everson, 1996, 36). According to Aristotle, citizens of a community ought to be partners and pursue a common good. The highest good of all is the happiness and virtue of all citizens. Thus, the community is to create a platform that would make it possible or feasible for the citizens to achieve this happiness and virtue. He opined that a community is excellent if the citizens are excellent; as it is the shared pursuit of virtue that makes a community, a community (Aristotle, as Cited in Reeve, 1998, 106).

b. The Birth of City (Community)

Aristotle postulates how a community is formed. He categorically tells how a community is formed through one form of partnership or the other. The first form of partnership which Aristotle considers as being the inception of community is the pair of a man and woman, with the concerned purpose to reproduce their kinds (Kennedy; 1991, 81-83). He opined that when a man consummates with a woman, they tend to reproduce off-springs, and if the off-springs go on to follow the steps of the first man and woman, while still maintaining the same geographical spheres like, they reproduce their springs (ibid). Furthermore, at each point, values are inculcated, and virtues and specific characters for common goals are passed from one generation of the off-springs to another. Within time over a given period, though, usually long, a community is created by the initial pairing.

The other form of partnership or pairing, which Aristotle identified as being able to create a community is the relationship between the ruled and ruling class. By this, Aristotle was referring to Slave/Master relationship (Ackril; 1981, 101). Aristotle's perspective is that a dignified ruling master and ruled slave need each other for survival. To Aristotle, slavery is a kind of partnership which is of great benefits to both master and slave. He states that the relationship between master/slave caused them to come together to form a household, which helps them in meeting the needs of daily life (Barnes; 2000, 72). The family, according to Aristotle, should be large enough to provide for the necessities of life, sustenance of her members and increase via reproduction (ibid). The expansion of a family causes multiple families. The expansion infers that two or more families being in contact with other families. As such families come together; they form a village and thus, a community. A community is better than families because it is more self-sufficient. Because communities are more extensive than families, people can specialise in a series of tasks and can develop skills which they might not have developed if it were a smaller group (Guthrie; 1981, 59).

Aristotle opined that community life is relevant to make one a complete human. He argues that if anyone incapable of participating in community life or one needs nothing from others and is self-sufficient, thus, not being part of the community; the person is either a god or a beast. Though humans may not become gods, they may become beasts (Ross, 1995, 71). One of his quotes states: "For just as man is the best of the animals when completed and when separated from law and adjudication he is the worst of all". Thus, Aristotle's perspective is that life is in proper shape and form when being lived a well-edified community (ibid). To Aristotle, the community is likened to the human body while the individuals are the parts of the body. The whole body may function but not to its fullest if one or two parts are not in order, are removed or destroyed (Thompson and Marshall; 2000, 48-50). The composure of the body determines how the parts will function. If the body is not in good shape, the parts cannot perform optimally; and if the parts are not in good shape, the body cannot also perform optimally. It follows that both needs the other to perform functionally (Aristotle, 1996, 41-43). However, it seems the individual parts need the body more than the body needs a particular individual part. This is to say that the body may function without a particular part of the body, but no particular part of the body can function without the body. Thus, the destruction of the whole body would also mean the destruction of each of its parts. Thus the individual needs the community more than the community needs any particular individual citizen (Aristotle; Cited in Reeve, 1998, 99).

C. Man as a Political Animal

Aristotle towed the biological belief that there are only two categories of living things in the universe. These are plants and animals. Man does not have the features of plants but that

of animals (Adler, 1978, 76). However, he distinguished man from any other kind of animals. He opined that man has super perception and reasoning, and ability to decipher just and unjust, right or wrong, thus, man's survival is depending on the structure to be formed (Thompson and Marshall; 2000, 48-50). He made an analogy of Locke's state of nature and said in order to maintain a community; man tends to become unlike other animals that live together; a political animal. Other animals can live together without determining what is just and unjust or creating laws to enforce justice among themselves, but human beings cannot live in such a situation. The impulse to co-exist is natural in man. Aristotle posits that human beings must find ways to co-exist through the use of the various distinct features given unto man by nature. Aristotle maintains that only on such condition will human community survive (Richard; 2002, 29).

Aristotle stated clearly

Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god" (Aristotle, 1998, 112)

d. Slavery

Aristotle analyses the issue of slavery and attempts to answer the query whether or not slavery is an ideal part of a community, whether or not slavery is just, whether or not slavery should be abolished (Sadua; 2015, 13). If Aristotle is in our world today, he may have a different opinion following the human rights movement glaring all corners of our world today. However, a voyage into Aristotle's perspective about the community cannot be judiciously discussed without an anchor on slavery (Aristotle; 1996, 41). Perhaps, Aristotle was influenced by the society he lived in. The ancient Mediterranean culture is known for her institution of slavery. Aristotle classified slaves into two forms. To him, slaves can be acquired during war or inter-community clashes; upon the defeat of any person or group of persons, they automatically become inferior to the winners and were taken into captivity (Adler; 1978). Another form of slaves is hereditary slaves. These become slaves because their either or both of their parents are slaves, to wit, inferiority runs in their blood or lineage (ibid). From Aristotle's point of view, the economies of the Greek city-states was built on slavery; since it is only when men have time to engage in intellectual activities, would the society be advanced; and men would not afford such time unless the slaves are used to carry out the productive labour (Otuu; 2014, 28-31).

Aristotle confirms that the great city of Athens would not have achieved the excellent greatness achieved through her Athenian architecture, sculpture, plays, and philosophy

without the roles played the institution of slavery. Regardless of the arguments for or against slavery, it was not going to be abolished in the Greek world. Thus, Aristotle's willingness to consider the justice of slavery was progressive during his time (Robbinson; 1995, 88). Aristotle state once a slave is not always a slave. There shall surely come a time where and when the slave must have attained quality attributes to be deemed able and fit to be anything better than a slave. (ibid) The slaves who have fulfilled their responsibilities wholly and strived towards freedom whether consciously or unconsciously, are freed, after learning virtuous attributes from the master; whereas another who does badly may perpetually remain a slave. To him, slave institution helps in the indoctrination, transformation, reformation and rehabilitation of a person to make him fit and proper for the community, lest, he become a virus to the community (Otuu, 2014, 31-36).

d. Wealth

Of all that Aristotle opined in respect to wealth, one remains ever relevant over the centuries. He said "... the truth is that men's ambition and their desire to male money are among the most frequent causes of deliberate acts of injustice" (Aristotle, Cited in Reeve, 1998, 97). It follows that Aristotle views love for wealth as major issue for any community. To Aristotle, wealth is an attribute of society. A society cannot be built or sustained without wealth. To him, being generous is one of the greatest virtues to be acquired in a community (Philips; 2016, 43). However, one can only be generous if the person has something to give out, which is of value and having something of value embodies wealth. The importance which Aristotle attached to wealth is limited to the fact that wealth should be seen as a means of living a virtuous life, rather than for ostentatious, selfish and avaricious way of living (David and Miller; 1991, 97-99). Aristotle agrees that the act of lending money in return for repayment with interest is evil and selfish for any community to adopt. To him, a community where people places their primary or central importance on money and the satisfactions it may give; has lost the primary purpose of a community and may not be able to engage in the development of happiness and virtue of her people (Nweke; 2013, 33).

e. Women

Aristotle opined that nature has already a strategised way it has the pattern the community to be, and any attempt to alter that would put the community in a bad state. He posits that except where a man is naturally subdued due to physical, mental or biological infirmities, it is always the natural structure that the man rules over the woman and the elder is more complete than the younger who are by nature incomplete (Aristotle; cited in Reeve, 1998, 90). Aristotle states that in an entire community, man is superior to a woman and man is the ruler while the woman is the ruled. He makes a distinction between slaves and females; wherein he said that the slave lacks the deliberative element to rule; the female (if she is not a slave) has the element but lacks authority, and the child who

is not a slave has the element, but his person is incomplete (Richard; 2002, 60).

Aristotle created a problem which he did not solve by explaining the purports of the phrase that women "lack authority". This had opened an expressway for scholarly inputs in the zeal to explain the meaning of "lacks authority" used by Aristotle. The Greeks believed that women are inferior to men. This belief means that women are denied access to certain areas of life, such as leading in a community (Barnes; 2000, 76). Aristotle referred to the husband/wife relationship to demonstrate how a man should be superior over a woman. He said that a husband is not meant to ration nor alternate rule with the wife, it follows that the husband rules consistently and not sometimes. The discretion to treat the wife equally is on the husband, who would not engage in an attempt to give his wife equal treatment loss his power of decisions making and ultimate control (Mulgan; 1977, 48-50). Aristotle perceived that there is an already assigned role to women in the community, given to them by nature. Aristotle seems to reiterate the popular Igbo word of (oriaku and odoziaku) to qualify the roles of women in the family and community at large. He said that women's' role is to preserve acquisitions of men. However, it is clear that Aristotle believes that "as with the master's superiority to the slave, the man's superiority to a woman is dictated by nature and cannot be overcome by human laws, customs, or beliefs" (Richard; 2002, 56).

f. Citizenship

For Aristotle, citizenship is not just the act of living in a given geographical place or actively having an everyday economic activity or being subjected to be under common law, over a given time. In Aristotle's perspective, being a citizen of a given community is a form of interactive activity. A person cannot be said to be a citizen unless he is qualified to participate in the deliberation and be the processes of the community (Nweke; 2013, 34). His meaning of citizenship can only fit into a democrat community and may not score a point in a non-democrat community. His argument on political participation is that each qualified citizen should be able to participate directly in the assembly and not by indirect voting of representatives as is popular today, posing very few opportunities for so-called citizens to participate directly in politics (ibid).

Aristotle in his '*Politics*' stated "One Citizen differs from another, but the salvation of the community is the common business of them all. This community is the constitution; the virtue of the citizen must therefore be relative to the constitution of which he is a member (Aristotle, Cited in Reeve, 1998, 84).

The right of a citizen to participate in deliberation and decision making implies that the citizen ought to be responsible since he is amongst the persons that discuss the advantageous and the harmful, the good and evil, and the just and unjust, and then passes laws and reaches judicial

decisions based on this deliberative process (David & Miller, 1991, 111-113). This process requires that each citizen consider the various possible courses of action on their merits and discuss these options with his fellow citizens. In conclusion, Aristotle posits that all citizens should be allowed to participate in politics, though not all at once. They must take turns, ruling and being ruled in turn. It generally implies that citizenship is not just a set of privileges; it is also a set of duties. The citizen has individual freedoms that non-citizens do not have, and also obligations that non-citizens do not have (Sadau; 2015, 12).

g. Ruler-ship

According to Aristotle (Cited in Reeve, 1998, 66), he identified certain forms of ruler-ship that can exist in any given community. He observed as follows:

- monarchy is a form of rule by one man for the common good of all;
- Aristocracy is the rule by a few elites for the common good, and
- Polity, according to Aristotle, is a form of rule by the many for the common good of all.

All the forgoing, he classified as correct forms of ruler-ship. Aristotle identified that there are also flawed, faulty or deviant regimes; examples of which are:

- tyranny; a rule by one man in his interest;
- Oligarchy; a rule by the few in their interest, and
- Democracy, a rule by the many in their interest.

In order of goodness, Aristotle posits that monarchy is the best of ruler-ship in a community, followed by the aristocracy, polity, and after that, comes democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny. The popular opinion today unless selected tutored Aristotelians are asked; would give democracy the pride of place as a good form or even the best form of government but Aristotle sees democracy as a flawed style of ruler-ship; however, in line with Aristotle's view, it is a lesser evil to compare with other forms of flawed regimes, identified by Aristotle (Sheller; 2012, 55). The real distinction between oligarchy and democracy is, in fact, the distinction between whether the wealthy or the weak rule, not whether the many or the few rules. Since it is always the case that the poor are many while the wealthy are few, it looks like it is the number of the rulers rather than their wealth which distinguishes the two kinds of regimes. In the words of Aristotle in his book *The Politics and Constitution of Athens*; he stated

In laws it is maintained that the best constitution is made up of democracy and tyranny, which are either not constitutions at all, or are the worst of all. But they are nearer the truth who combine many forms; for the constitution is better which is made up of more numerous elements. The constitution proposed in the laws has no

element of monarchy at all; it is nothing but oligarchy and democracy, leaning rather to oligarchy (Aristotle, Cited in Everson, 1996, 42).

In the statement above, Aristotle attempts to show that the best form of ruler-ship in a community may be one that tends to combine the elements of the forms identified above, depending on the circumstances.,

II. CONCLUSION

Aristotle's perspective about the concept of community unveils specific germane points to us. It shows that a community has to exist for the survival of humanity. From his perspective, it can be said that polity is one of the correct forms of ruler-ship. Polity occurs when many rules in the interest of the community as a whole. There is a problem associated with democracy, the many who rule in democracy rule in their interest. As already known, the many are often the less wealthy ones in the community, who tend to use the ruler-ship as a form of revolution against the wealthy or a means to exploit the wealthy and deny them political power. Nevertheless, a democracy in which the interests of the wealthy were taken into account and protected by the laws would be the best since it will be in the general interest of the community as a whole, and it is this that Aristotle believes is the best practical regime. Democracy tends to be more stable than oligarchy, because democracies only have a conflict between rich and poor, while oligarchies also have conflicts within the ruling group of oligarchs to hold power. Besides, democracy is closer to polity than oligarchy is, and this contributes to its more excellent stability. Furthermore, this is an important goal; the more moderate a regime is, the longer it is likely to remain in place.

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